

10 August 2023

Dear Retailer

Better Bills Guideline energy relief rebate message

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) has decided to revoke its previous decision made under section 37 of the Better Bills Guideline version 2¹ and published on 6 July 2023 that requires retailers to include a statement on small customers' bills as part of Tier 1 information².

The AER has made a new decision under section 37 of the Better Bills Guideline version 2 that, effective from 30 September 2023, the following statements must be included as part of Tier 1 information for small customers.

For all retailers who sell electricity in South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania (with the exception of Icon Retail Investments Limited and AGL ACT Retail Investments Pty Ltd (trading as ActewAGL Retail)), the following statement must be included as Tier 1 information on small customers' electricity bills in those states.

The Australian Government and your State Government are supporting customers to reduce bills. Check the understand your bill section to see if you have received a rebate or concession. More information at energy.gov.au

For all retailers who sell electricity in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), with the exception of ActewAGL Retail, the following statement must be included as Tier 1 information on small customers' electricity bills in the ACT:

The Australian and ACT Governments are supporting customers to reduce bills. Check the understand your bill section to see if you have received a rebate or concession. More information at energy.gov.au

For ActewAGL Retail, the following statement must be included as Tier 1 information on small customers' electricity bills:

The Australian Government and your State or Territory government are supporting customers to reduce bills. Check the understand your bill section to see if you have received a rebate or concession. More information at energy.gov.au

¹ See https://www.aer.gov.au/system/files/AER%20-%20Better%20Bills%20Guideline%20%28Version%20%29%20-%20January%202023_0.pdf

² See https://www.aer.gov.au/system/files/Energy%20bill%20relief%20message%20-%20AER%20final%20decision%20letter%20-%2006%20July%202023_0_0.pdf

Background

Since the AER published its previous section 37 decision on 6 July 2023, we have received further feedback from stakeholders about the implementation of the energy rebate message.

Some retailers highlighted that the length of the previous message made it challenging to accommodate in their billing systems.

In response to this feedback, we have reduced the length of the messages to make them as short as possible, while retaining the necessary information to ensure it is useful to customers.

We also received feedback from some jurisdictions, who considered that the generic phrase 'your state or territory government' is likely to be unclear to customers.

To address this concern, we have determined a single message for all states, and a separate message for ACT retailers. This will provide greater clarity for customers in each state and in the ACT.

We acknowledge that the implementation of the revised messages may be less straightforward to implement as a single generic message. However, our view is that the new messages balance relatively simple implementation with usefulness and clear messaging to customers.

Implementation

Retailers must comply with this decision from the commencement of the new arrangements in the Better Bills Guideline on 30 September 2023.

In the interim, they are subject to transitional requirements to include on a small customer bill 'any amount deducted, credited or received under a government-funded energy charge rebate, concession or relief scheme or under a payment plan.'

Retailers may also elect to comply with the Guideline in advance of 30 September.

We recommend that retailers adopt the wording of this section 37 decision as soon as possible to assist customers to understand the concession and rebate elements of their bills.

We note that some retailers will be implementing the wording we set out in our letter of 6 July and placing it on the front page of customers' bills. We understand that these retailers will now need to make further adjustments to bills to accommodate this revised decision. All retailers should adopt the new wording from 30 September when the Tier 1 arrangements take effect.

As stated in our 6 July letter, all retailers are subject to transitional arrangements which include a requirement to include on a small customer bill 'any amount deducted, credited or received under a government-funded energy charge rebate, concession or relief scheme or under a payment plan.'

The section 37 decision has no set expiry date. The AER intends to make a future decision to amend or revoke these Tier 1 messages to the extent that the provision of rebates and concessions changes or ceases, and the messages no longer contribute to the billing objective.

We understand the Queensland Government may be considering alternative rebate messaging for customers. In the event that this occurs, we will amend our decision to ensure retailers are not required to include multiple messages and that their compliance obligations are clear.

If you have any questions or feedback please contact Simon Kidd, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Clare Savage
Chair
Australian Energy Regulator