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Dr Patrick Walsh  
Utilities Commissioner  
Utilities Commission of the Northern Territory  
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Dear Dr Walsh

I understand that in late April 2016, the Utilities Commission provided preliminary advice to the former Treasurer on electricity customer protections, including that consideration should be given to adopting customer protections as consistent as possible with those contained in the National Energy Customer Framework.

The Department of Treasury and Finance is currently working through the Commission's recommendations, including considering the costs and benefits of adopting customer protection aspects of the National Energy Customer Framework. As part of this, and following consultation with the Power and Water Corporation (PWC), customer protections for life support customers has been identified as a priority.

Under the Territory's existing electricity regulatory framework, there are no formal obligations on electricity retailers and/or PWC to keep a register of up to date information about premises requiring life support equipment, such as a kidney dialysis machine or ventilator, or obligations for arranging for disconnection of the premises or interruption of supply.


Despite no formal requirement, I understand that Jacana Energy, Rimfire Energy and PWC provide basic details of the process for customers to advise of special health needs in their customer contracts, with confirmation from a registered medical practitioner required. Further, it is understood that the Department of Health keeps a list of clients on life support equipment, which it shares with PWC.

Notwithstanding the receipt of advice from customers requiring life support equipment, the lack of obligations on retailers and PWC to, among other things, advise each other of life support customer premises and to keep up to date registers introduces a significant risk that a premise with life support equipment could be disconnected without arrangements in place to ensure there is a continuation of supply.

Given the risk to life support customers, and to the Territory Government should a fatality result from a lack of clear obligations on any party in the Territory's electricity regulation framework, I request that the Commission consider including life support customer protection obligations on retailers and PWC, and on the Department of Health if considered appropriate, in the Electricity Retail Supply Code or other suitable instrument.

I acknowledge that there are other gaps in customer protections in the Territory that should be addressed as soon as possible. However, protections for life support customers are considered to be the highest priority given the risk and consequences of a fatality.

Yours sincerely



NICOLE MANISON

12 JUL 2017