



## **Financial Counselling Association of Western Australia (FCAWA) Submission to the Electricity Code Consultative Committee on *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers* 2024 Draft Review Report**

### **About this Submission**

[Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia](#) thank the Electricity Code Consultative Committee (ECCC) for this opportunity to contribute and submit our response to the 2024 Draft Review Report of the Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers. We support the recommendations outlined in the Draft Review Report and have included an overview of our considerations for these recommendations in the table below.

### **About Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia (FCAWA)**

FCAWA is a respected peak body with well-developed links and networks to other services and organisations in the public, not for profit, and private realm. They are considered an expert in financial hardship, financial literacy, and financial counselling. They focus on identifying emerging issues, recording current trends and responding to social and systemic issues in the social services sector.

### **What Financial Counsellors Do**

Financial counselling is a free, confidential and independent service, facilitated by trained professionals to help individuals and small businesses experiencing financial hardship. They provide their clients with information, support and advocacy and work with government, banks, utilities, debt collection and other stakeholders, to improve approaches to financial difficulty for vulnerable consumers.

## New Customer Protections

### Recommendations in this Section

#	Draft Recommendation	Section	FCAWA Comment
1	1. Introduce a new provision that prohibits retailers from charging for a paper bill to customers receiving concessions, experiencing financial hardship and vulnerable customers	2.1 Prohibiting paper billing fees for disadvantaged customers	This recommendation is supported, as it recognises that consumers, particularly those at risk of vulnerability, would benefit from receiving a paper bill. Various reasons have been highlight why this option is important for such consumers, and they should not be penalised for choosing this option.
2	2 Introduce a new obligation to advise non[1]contestable customers annually, that the retailer has other tariff plans available.	2.2 Advising customers of available tariff options and product	This recommendation is supported, as it aims to help consumers understand the available options, enabling them to make informed decisions based on their needs. The information should be presented in clear, accessible language. Linking this information to the consumer's usage data would be beneficial, reducing the risk of confusion caused by multiple plans that may not suit their circumstances.

## Strengthening Existing Customer Protections

### Recommendations in this Section

#	Draft Recommendation	Section	FCAWA Comment
3	Require retailers to offer a bill credit for any charges paid, where the meter is tested and found defective	3.1.1 Applying the refund as a bill credit when the meter is found defective	This recommendation is supported.
4	Amend clause 23(3) of the Code to allow an estimate to be based on the longest data series, where an accumulation meter has been exchanged for an interval meter.	3.1.2 Estimating based on the longest available data – post meter exchange	This recommendation is supported.
5	Allow a hardship customer with a payment plan to nominate up to three future bills to be incorporated in their payment plan.	3.2.1 Including future bills in a payment plan	This recommendation is supported, as it establishes a reasonable timeframe for managing utility debt while maintaining connection with the utility provider. We agree with the benefits outlined, mitigating the proposed change. It is essential to emphasise the importance of obtaining consumer consent and ensuring a clear process for what occurs leading up to and after the third bill. Effective engagement between the utility provider and the consumer is crucial to ensure the client can continue proactively managing their utility debt.

6	<p>Allow other medical professionals (such as pharmacists and nurses) in regional areas to provide confirmation of a person's ongoing LSE requirement, for the purpose of the three-yearly periodic review, under clause 85(1)</p>	<p>3.3.1.1 Easier confirmation of ongoing LSE needs in regional areas</p>	<p>We support proactive approaches and recommendations aimed at easing the challenges faced by consumers living in remote and regional areas. It is important that the processes in place minimise the risk of non-GP or specialist professionals incorrectly stating that a consumer does not have an ongoing LSE requirement when they do. We agree with the recommendation, as without it, consumers could face significant costs, including appointment and travel expenses, which could exacerbate financial distress</p>
7	<p>Amend clause 85(1) to allow triennial reconfirmation from a general practitioner that a person in the Perth metropolitan area continues to require LSE if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An appropriately qualified medical practitioner certified the LSE requirements for registration of the address.</li> <li>- An authorised medical practitioner has confirmed that the person's condition is enduring, and that the person will have an enduring need for life</li> </ul>	<p>3.3.1.2 Easier confirmation of ongoing LSE needs in Perth metropolitan areas</p>	<p>We support this recommendation, as it aims to avoid unnecessary medical expenses that could otherwise lead to financial distress</p>

	<p>support equipment to manage the condition.</p> <p>- The GP confirms that it has sighted the specialist report certifying the enduring need for life support equipment</p>		
8	<p>Clarify that where multiple persons require LSE at one supply address, the licensee is only obligated to notify the customer or other nominated person under clause 84.</p>	<p>3.3.2 Clarifying obligations when more than one person requiring LSE resides at a supply address.</p>	<p>No comment</p>
9	<p>a) Amend clause 92(1) of the Code to exempt a retailer from providing the nine-month disconnection protection to a customer when the customer expressly declines the protection. The retailer must obtain the customer's verifiable and informed consent.</p> <p>b) Amend clause 92(1) of the Code to require a retailer, to confirm a</p>	<p>3.4.1 Respecting vulnerable customer's choices</p>	<p>We support this recommendation, provided there is a clear policy in place regarding the retailer's responsibility to obtain the customer's verifiable and informed consent. During the review, potential risks were identified, and retailers must implement policies to mitigate these risks. These policies and procedures should be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including specialists such as family violence advocates.</p>

	customer's vulnerable status with either the customer or authorised contact, once they 'become aware' that the customer is a vulnerable customer.		
10	Increase the service standard payment amounts in clauses 94, 95, 96, 97 and 98 by CPI from 2010	3.5.1 Higher compensation payments to customers	This recommendation is supported.

## Streamlining the Code

Recommendations in this section

#	Draft Recommendation	Section	FCAWA Comment
11	<p>a) Remove acknowledgement times under subclause 88(a) from the Code.</p> <p>b) Remove service standard payments where retailers and distributors fail to meet complaint acknowledgement times in clauses 96(1) and 98(1) of the Code.</p> <p>c) Amend clause 87(2)(c) to include acknowledgement times</p>	<p>c) Amend clause 87(2)(c) to include acknowledgement times</p> <p>4.1 Removing inconsistent complaint acknowledgement times</p>	This recommendation is supported.

12	Remove the requirement to proactively provide the required information in clause 66(2) to the customers who disconnect two or more times in any one month for longer than 120 minutes on each occasion.	4.2 Streamlining information for frequent pre-payment meter disconnections	We support this recommendation provided that retailers maintain a strong focus on proactive measures to assist consumers facing financial hardship.
13	Update the Code for minor amendments as per Appendix 1.	4.3 Minor administrative amendments	This recommendation is supported.

### Other issues seeking feedback

Recommendations in this section

#	Questions	Section	Comment
1	<p>a) How has the current three-day notice period impacted your ability (or any LSE customers that you are aware of) to prepare for planned interruptions?</p> <p>b) What concerns do you have with extending the notice period?</p>	5.2 Notification times of a planned interruption for life support customers	Effective communication is crucial. We recommend that impacted consumers be notified as early as possible, while recognising that planned interruptions may not proceed or that LSE customers may forget if notified too far in advance. To mitigate this risk, we suggest that utility providers consider sending an early alert with a follow-up notification if the interruption is canceled. This would benefit customers who rely on external support or relocation as part of their contingency plans.

2	<p>a) Could the benefits of the 'Knock to stay connected' initiative being trialled in other jurisdictions be replicated in Western Australia? b) What the operational challenges and concerns do you have with this initiative?</p>	5.2 Door knock prior to disconnection	<p>The 'Knock to Stay Connected' initiative would be warmly welcomed by FCAWA if introduced in Western Australia. The Financial Counselling sector nationally supports this program, and promising trial results from other states have shown a significant reduction in customer disconnections.</p> <p>In Western Australia, we have the advantage of learning from these trials and adapting the approach to suit the unique needs of our state and clients. While the operational challenges, such as outreach and community engagement, may be similar to existing efforts, considerations around safety, logistics, and covering vast geographical distances will be key.</p> <p>Overall, we see this as a positive initiative to achieve better outcomes for energy consumers at risk of disconnection, with a strong focus on improving the provision of information and support to help them stay connected.</p>
3	<p>a) Is there a need to amend the Code or can the benefits of a moratorium for disconnecting customers in a heatwave or extreme fire danger be better realised in other ways? b) What are the operational challenges</p>	5.3 Disconnection moratorium in extreme heatwave of fire danger	<p>There must be an inclusion of heatwaves and extreme fire danger in the Code. Heatwaves and bushfires are disasters that require collective responsibility to protect our communities. Our changing seasons are evident, with longer periods during which communities face prolonged severe weather and overlapping disasters. These events can have</p>



	with including this proposal in the Code?		significant health and financial impacts on consumers/communities as they prepare for, respond to, and recover from these events.
4	a) Should the Code be amended to require retailers to pay interest on overcharges? If yes: - What types of overcharges should be eligible for interest payments? - What types of overcharges should be excluded? - Should there be a minimum threshold amount of overpayment before interest is payable? b) What are the potential operational challenges or concerns with this issue	5.4 Paying interest to customers on overcharges	No comment

### **FCAWA Contacts**

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