

SECURING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
through appropriate technology

**Centre for
Appropriate
Technology**

Mr Paul Kelly

ECCC Chairman

eccc@era.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Kelly,

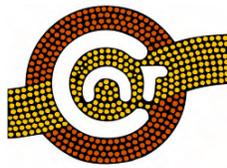
RE: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY TO SMALL USE CUSTOMERS 2008 RELATED TO PRE-PAYMENT METERS

Early in 2008 a brief study was undertaken by the Derby office of the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT). This study investigated the types of prepaid card meters (PPMs) being used in Aboriginal communities (from here on referred to as 'communities') in the Fitzroy Valley region. The study was to gather information on whether CAT would recommend the installation of PPMs in communities under the CAT powerhouse fuel program and to include community member's reactions to this new technology. A key part of the study was based on interviews conducted with community members.

We suggest that the outcomes of this study should form a part of the discussion for these proposed changes. A brief summary of the relevant points is outlined below.

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Acceptance of the new technology

Community members were not enthusiastic about the installation of the PPMs when they were informed that they would be installed in their community. In general, however, once they were installed and the community members were comfortable with the system they were either positive or neutral about the PPMs.

Cost to consumer

In most cases the households managed the sharing of the cost of power effectively.

When asked if they felt that they were paying more or less for electricity, community members were unsure.

Power demand

Community members believed that the use of the PPMs led to an increased awareness of power use and many thought it was fair system as those community members that use more power paid more rather than all community members paying for aggressive power consumers.

Access

Having a member of the community responsible for the distribution of the cards was not considered a good idea, as any community member with this responsibility could then be subject to 'humbug'. Not giving in to requests for cards at midnight or free cards might lead to the community member being ostracised and giving in to these requests would not be acceptable either. This situation might set up the community to fail. Cards need to be available very nearby from a reliable store, available for a substantial amount of the week at regular hours that community members can depend on.

Coupled with appropriate access, all systems should have a good warning system that allows enough time to purchase a new card and that it takes into account access to card sales.

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Other considerations and recommendations

For community members to use a PPM system properly there must be sufficient community engagement and education beforehand to ensure that the community understands the system and what it involves. This avoids problems such as running out of power which result in losing items in the fridge when community members leave for a few days or weeks.

Major elements of the community engagement need to include details on appliance power usage to help community members manage their power use. There should also be a shift by community members away from power hungry devices such as refrigerative air conditioners and electric stoves.

Another consideration and point for discussion during any community engagement is the introduction of a PPM in community buildings. This is an important step as it should be recognised that it is a common building and an agreement on power supply to the community buildings must be sought prior to the introduction of any PPM within such a facility.

Conclusions

The study concluded that in communities with a reliable store, the installation of PPMs in remote communities would be a positive move but community engagement before, during and after their installation is an important part of any changes proposed for a community.

In light of any proposed changes Mr Kelly, we believe it is important to understand the need for a consultative approach to the introduction of Pre-Paid card Meters in to Aboriginal Communities, so that we can ensure that any benefits from these changes can be sustained by the community long after these new systems have been introduced.

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If you need further clarification or would like to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,

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Centre for Appropriate Technology

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