

Consumer protection for energy customers

Protections for every small energy customer

The Queensland Government has built strong protections into the regulatory framework for small electricity and natural gas customers in the competitive retail market.

Guaranteed access to 'safety-net' electricity prices

As a householder or small business operator, you can stay on the regulated 'safety-net' electricity prices – or return to them at a later date – if you wish.

This means, even if you try a market contract with your electricity retailer, you can choose to go back to a standard contract with the regulated prices at the end of your market contract. (For more information about reversion rights, see the fact sheet *Which customers can access the regulated Statewide uniform tariffs*).

The regulated electricity prices, called 'the notified prices', are set by the independent regulator, the Queensland Competition Authority, under a formula and process set out in the *Electricity Act 1994*.

The regulated electricity prices will continue to be set annually by the Queensland Competition Authority and are available to all small electricity customers in Queensland, no matter who their retailer is or where they live.

Minimum contract standards

Minimum terms and conditions apply to all electricity and natural gas contracts, to ensure small customers' rights are protected.

Your retailer must give you a Customer Charter or contract summary that clearly outlines these minimum terms and conditions, which cover things like:

- billing
- connections and disconnections
- instalment plans for electricity customers having difficulty paying their bills, and
- special arrangements for electricity customers on life support systems.

These requirements are set out in the Electricity and Gas Industry Codes administered by the Queensland Competition Authority.



Marketing Code of Conduct

Electricity and natural gas retailers and their contract marketers are governed by a strict Code of Conduct (included in the Electricity and Gas Industry Codes) about how and when they can contact you to promote their services.

For example, they must clearly identify who they are, which retailer they represent and why they are contacting you. They can only contact you, whether by telephone or in person, at reasonable times.

Also, retailers and their marketers can not mislead, exert pressure, or otherwise harass customers.

Further details can be found on the Department of Mines and Energy website at www.dme.qld.gov.au/energy/electricity_industr_retail_marketing_and_conduct_rules.cfm

Any complaints about improper marketing behaviour can be investigated by the Energy Ombudsman on 1800 662 837 or www.eoq.com.au

10 business-day cooling-off

A 10 business-day cooling-off period applies to all electricity and natural gas market contracts from the date you sign.

During the cooling-off period you can cancel the contract if you change your mind, without incurring any penalties. Details are set out in the Electricity and Gas Industry Codes.

What happens if your retailer goes out of business?

While it is not expected that retailers will go out of business, the Queensland Government has put arrangements in place to ensure your electricity or natural gas supply is not affected.

If your electricity retailer does go out of business, your electricity account will be automatically transferred to another retailer under the 'retailer of last resort' arrangements, so your electricity supply will not be interrupted.

If you are a small customer, the new retailer will charge you for your electricity at the regulated 'safety-net' prices, plus a one-off fee approved by the Queensland Competition Authority to cover the new retailer's unexpected administrative and incremental costs.

If your gas retailer goes out of business, the Minister for Mines and Energy has the power to direct another retailer to sell you gas and make sure your supply is not interrupted.

Energy Ombudsman

An independent Energy Ombudsman was established by the Queensland Government on 1 July 2007 to provide a free service for small customers who have been unable to resolve a dispute with their electricity or gas supplier directly.

The Energy Ombudsman is empowered to resolve complaints and disputes between small electricity and reticulated natural gas customers and their energy retailers and distributors.

As well as being able to investigate complaints and mediate in disputes, the Energy Ombudsman may decide to make a determination (a binding decision) against an energy supplier to resolve a matter. Importantly, the services of the Energy Ombudsman are **free** for small customers.

The Energy Ombudsman, which replaced the Energy Consumer Protection Office (ECPO), may be contacted on 1800 662 837 or www.eoq.com.au

Where are the electricity and gas industry codes?

Further details about the electricity and gas industry codes, including downloadable versions, are available on the Department of Mines and Energy website.

Electricity industry code

www.dme.qld.gov.au/energy/electricity_industry_code.cfm

Gas industry code

www.dme.qld.gov.au/energy/gas_industry_code.cfm

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