

Our ref: 0743-1608241381-163

3 August 2020

Governance Project Team Secretariat
Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
GPO Box 2013
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email GPTSecretariat@industry.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Proposed Classification of Tiers for the reform of the Australian Energy Regulator Civil Penalty Regime – draft for consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed classification of tiers for the reform of the Australian Energy Regulator civil penalty regime (the **Reform**).

Background to EWOQ

The Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (**EWOQ**) provides a free, fair and independent dispute resolution service for small electricity and gas customers across Queensland and water customers in South East Queensland who are unable to resolve a dispute with their supplier.

This submission is based on our experience as an external dispute resolution scheme dealing with residential and small business energy customer complaints in Queensland.

Feedback on the Reform

EWOQ welcomes the proposed reforms to the existing civil penalty regime, and specifically the proposed classification of tiers for such penalties. The elevation of issues directly affecting customers to the highest tier of penalties reflects the seriousness of breaches of the National Energy Laws when these affect consumers.

EWOQ supports, in principle, changes which elevate consumer issues to a higher state of recognition.

We endorse the draft Reform in its emphases on the significance of:

- a. rights to health and safety;
- b. consumer rights to access essential electricity and gas services;
- c. the impacts of vulnerability and hardship;
- d. the potential for financial hardship with consumers; and
- e. notification and informing obligations (including informing customers of the existence of Ombudsman services).

EWOQ does not comment specifically on the grading of issues listed but supports the strengthening of consumer protections which flows from higher penalties for entities breaching their legal obligations.

If you require any further information regarding our submission, please contact Ms Lyndal Bubke, Principal Policy Officer on 07 3087 9423 or lyndal.bubke@ewoq.com.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Pires', written in a cursive style.

Jane Pires

Energy and Water Ombudsman