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Regulator sets clear expectations for energy companies to protect consumers

Energy Consumers Australia CEO Lynne Gallagher has called for energy companies to move swiftly and enact measures to protect consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the Australian Energy Regulator's release of expectations for the sector.

Ms Gallagher said the industry regulator had made it clear that people needed to come first during this difficult period.

"We expect all energy companies to step up and make urgent changes so all households and businesses can keep the lights on without anxiety about being disconnected or building up a debt," she said.

"The Australian Energy Regulator has set clear benchmarks for companies about measures to protect consumers who are under unprecedented pressure.

"The regulator expects energy companies to put their customers first by scaling-up hardship arrangements to meet the new need, stopping debt collection and disconnection actions until next financial year, and recognising many small businesses have closed unexpectedly and should not be charged fees.

"Strong leadership and a proactive approach from all energy companies is needed to address the financial crisis many of their customers are facing. We are seeing positive moves by some companies and are looking for others to follow and follow fast."

Ms Gallagher commended the Regulator's call for energy companies' response to be guided by the social contract with their customers.

"Many Australians have suddenly lost their livelihoods and businesses have been thrust into financially perilous situations through no fault of their own," she said.

"We have to pull together as a community and do whatever we can to support each other like we did during the bushfires. Access to essential energy services will be vital to getting us through the crisis and building a foundation for recovery."

Ms Gallagher said energy industry players needed to continue to work together and with governments to ensure all available and reasonable measures were put in place to support households and businesses, including additional, sector-wide other mechanisms to support economic recovery.

"We will continue to support the response by engaging with consumers and the community to monitor outcomes and bring issues to the attention of governments and industry," she said.

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