



# Energy Comparator Code of Conduct

August 2015

## **PREAMBLE**

1 Competitive and contestable markets require active and informed consumers to succeed.  
2 Consumers need to be able to understand and choose the most appropriate products for them,  
3 while retailers need consumers to be able to find their competitive offerings. Commercial  
4 comparator and switching service organisations (“comparators”) are an important channel for  
5 consumers to get information about market offers and take advantage of competition by engaging  
6 with the market.

7 Recognising the above, this voluntary, self-enforceable Energy Comparator Code of Conduct  
8 (ECCC) has been jointly developed by a working group of commercial energy comparators,  
9 energy retailers, and energy consumer advocates, in consultation with the broader energy sector,  
10 government, regulators, and other related stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

11 For further information on how the ECCC was developed, please contact the Consumer Utilities  
12 Advocacy Centre.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE ECCC**

13 The objectives of the ECCC are to provide comparators’ customers and stakeholders with an  
14 assurance of quality and best practice principles and engender trust and respect between the  
15 parties.

16 By committing to and demonstrating the principles of this code – impartiality, transparency, clarity,  
17 comprehensibility, correctness, accuracy, and accessibility – the signatories aim to deliver inclusive  
18 services that facilitate consumers’ engagement with energy markets (including emerging energy  
19 products and services) and empower consumers to capture the benefits of retail energy competition  
20 while rewarding retailers for offering competitive products.

21 This code does not replace the Privacy Act, Australian Consumer Law, energy laws or other  
22 applicable laws, which the signatories will also honour, but seeks to go above and beyond them.

## **KEY COMMITMENTS**

23 We, the signatories of this code, commit to the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the working group: Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (Chair), Public Interest Advocacy Centre, South Australian Council of Social Service, Origin Energy, Lumo Energy, Energy Assured Limited, iSelect, Energy Deal, Electricity Wizard, Switchwise, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (Observer).

## Impartiality and Transparency

24 We will make recommendations on the needs expressed by the customer.

### Disclosure

- 25 • We will disclose our ownership, the presence of commercial arrangements with retailers,  
26 and that commissions are received by the comparator from retailers.
- 27 • Our disclosures will be transparent to customers so that customers are aware of the basis  
28 on which they are accepting the information we provide.
- 29 • We will disclose that we do not have access to all retailers and offers on the market, and  
30 will not suggest the presence of relationships that don't exist.
- 31 • We will disclose the method by which rankings have been calculated.
- 32 • We will disclose the currency of our information, i.e. the last time it was updated. We will  
33 update the information in a timely manner to correctly reflect prices available on the  
34 market, once any updates are received.
- 35 • Our disclosure will, at a minimum, be online and at a customer's request (without referring  
36 that customer to our website).

### Sponsored offers

37 'Sponsored offers' are offers that, due to commercial relationships with retailers, comparators  
38 present to customers in a more favourable manner than they would without that relationship.

39 An example of a sponsored offer is an offer that appears at the top of a price ranking even though  
40 it doesn't have the lower price; its presentation has been affected by 'sponsorship' by a retailer,  
41 rather than the offer's intrinsic merits.

42 Except where an offer has been clearly and explicitly identified as being sponsored:

- 43 • We will use consistent criteria for the ranking or comparison of all offers that are ranked or  
44 compared.
- 45 • We will not accept payment to present an offer in a more favourable manner than it would  
46 otherwise merit.
- 47 • We will not preferentially market a subset of offers.

### Clarity and Comprehensibility

- 48 • Costs presented during comparisons will be displayed in a way that is clearly understood  
49 by the majority of customers, e.g. *total costs per year* or *c/kWh*.
- 50 • Any discounts displayed will include when the discounts end.
- 51 • Where prices may change during the course of the contract, we will note this.

### Product value

52 The value of an energy offer is in its capability to best meet the customer's needs.

- 53 • We will represent product value clearly and comprehensibly.
- 54 • We will make customers aware that comparisons are occurring on a subset of all offers,  
55 and our recommendation is not necessarily the 'cheapest' or 'best'. (We will not use these  
56 terms without appropriate qualification.)

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- Where possible, we will make comparisons using the specific circumstances and desires of the customer, using actual tariffs and data.
  - Where tailored comparisons are not possible, and e.g. average or generic consumption data are used as the basis of comparison, we will make this clear to customers.
  - We will include conditional or non-price aspects in a comparison only with the customer's assent. (E.g. bill smoothing/monthly billing, online account management, GreenPower, no exit/disconnection fees, discount vouchers, event tickets, free sports guernsey.)

### **Multiple fuels, products, or services**

64 A 'bundle' is two or more fuels, products, or services that a retailer offers together; e.g. a  
65 gas/electricity dual fuel offer, or a solar PV/electricity offer. Combinations that comparators offer  
66 are not referred to as bundles.

67 Some comparators (have the capability to) compare combinations of individual offers with bundled  
68 offers, while others do not.

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- We will make clear to customers whether our comparisons of bundled offers also compare against combinations of individual offers for those fuels, products, or services.
  - If our comparisons of bundled offers do not compare against combinations of individual offers for those fuels, products, or services, we will inform the consumer that such combinations may be more competitive.

## **Correctness and Accuracy**

### **Assumptions**

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- Our assumptions used for the purpose of comparison will be reasonable, clear, transparent to customers, and be consistent across the industry where possible.
  - We will provide customers with access to comparisons made on the assumptions they specify, e.g. with or without conditional payments, rebates, incentives, etc.

### **Accuracy**

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- Our comparisons will be as complete and accurate as possible, including the use of actual customer consumption or billing data where available.
  - Where actual customer data are unavailable, we will make customers aware that the comparisons will be a less accurate estimate than otherwise.
  - We will tell customers if assumptions have been made that may affect the accuracy of our calculations (e.g. assumptions about their seasonal consumption patterns).
  - We will display only products provided to us by a retailer with whom we have a commercial relationship.
  - Where customers request a comparison with a retailer with whom the comparator does not have a commercial relationship, we will state that.

### **Consistency**

88 We will apply a consistent approach when making our recommendations.

## **Complaint handling**

89 We will have effective complaint handling procedures that comply with the current Australian  
90 standards of complaint handling. If we do not resolve the complaint, we will refer the customer to  
91 the appropriate jurisdictional body.

## **Customer empowerment**

92 We will empower and engage with customers and provide a great level of customer service.

93 Examples of customer empowerment include:

- 94 • Comparators will work with customers to establish their needs and plan the right response.
- 95 • Customers will have influence over all aspects of the services they receive.
- 96 • Customers will be aware of how they can have an influence.
- 97 • Information about the comparators' services will be provided.
- 98 • Each customer will be considered as a unique individual.
- 99 • Customers will not feel like they are being judged by comparators.
- 100 • Customer will be provided with background information on market functioning and market  
101 issues such as price developments, or advised where the information can be located.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

102 Membership of this code is voluntary.

103 Code signatories will advertise their membership of the code (e.g. through use of a logo and links  
104 to the code) to promote customer and industry awareness of and trust in the code and its members.

## **REVIEW**

105 This code will be reviewed annually.

### **ECCC SECRETARIAT**

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