

Regulator rebuilding trust in energy market by holding companies to account

Victoria's energy regulator says it is rebuilding trust in the energy market by upholding consumer rights when energy companies fail to follow the rules.

The Essential Services Commission has issued \$5 million in penalty notices since October 2018 with energy businesses paying a record \$2.5 million last financial year alone.

Lead enforcement commissioner Sitesh Bhojani says acting against misbehaving energy companies ensures a level playing field for those who do play by the rules.

"We've taken action against energy companies for a range of misbehaviour including failing to stop dodgy sales agents from switching people without their consent or putting up barriers to payment assistance for those who need support," he said.

Commissioner Bhojani says when all businesses abide by the rules, both consumers and energy businesses can have confidence in the energy sector.

"We have zero tolerance for unethical or fraudulent conduct because that's the only way to rebuild trust in the market," he said.

Last financial year, the commission issued more than 150 penalty notices to four energy businesses for alleged misbehaviour including fraud by sales agents, putting up barriers to payment assistance, confusing billing practices and solar discrimination.

The commission has unveiled six energy compliance and enforcement priorities for 2021–22 with a continuing emphasis on consumer protection. The six priorities are:

- Ensuring explicit informed consent is obtained before signing a customer to a new deal
- Ensuring disconnections always follow the rules
- Ensuring customers are offered help as required by the payment difficulty framework
- Ensuring customers are billed appropriately for their energy use
- Ensuring embedded network operators comply with the Energy Retail Code
- Protecting people experiencing vulnerability especially those affected by family violence or who rely on energy for their life support.

Commissioner Bhojani says the commission will restore trust in the energy market by promoting and enforcing compliance in these areas.

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