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ENERGY INDUSTRY BUSHFIRE DISASTER SUPPORT PACKAGE

The energy industry conveys its deep sympathy and concern for Australian families impacted by the current bushfire crisis.

Energy generators, retailers and networks have detailed measures to support bushfire affected communities at the Federal Government's Electricity Sector Bushfire Response and Recovery Roundtable today.

The Australian Energy Council and Energy Networks Australia confirmed their members have been working proactively since the bushfires began to maintain the safety and security of the network and its assets, and to support customers who are experiencing loss and difficult circumstances.

Australian Energy Council Chief Executive Sarah McNamara and Energy Networks Australia CEO Andrew Dillon said the energy industry's focus is on supporting those communities to ensure they can get back on their feet as quickly as possible.

"Safety is always our top priority. Energy companies have undertaken a range of measures to prepare for the bushfire season and ensure its workforce, assets and electricity supply are protected," Ms McNamara said.

Mr Dillon said energy companies had hundreds of support personnel on the ground in fire affected areas, in many cases rebuilding large sections of network from the ground up.

"More than 5000 power poles have been destroyed and are being replaced. Networks have restored power to thousands of people and have deployed generators to as many homes and businesses as possible where power reconnection has been delayed," he said.

Energy retailers and networks also confirmed a range of support measures to assist affected customers, including the temporary suspension of collection activities in bushfire impacted areas, until the emergency situation has been resolved.

This is in addition to retailers' existing hardship programmes. Customers are encouraged to contact their retailer or distributor directly and find out what assistance is available. Many retailers are also offering financial assistance to registered volunteer firefighters.

Likewise, networks in bushfire affected areas will either waive the Network Access Charge for customers who have been without power for more than seven consecutive days or are backdating network charges to the last meter read for destroyed homes. This will be done by working through electricity retailers who have committed to pass this benefit onto customers.

Many Australians working in the energy sector have also been fighting the bushfires as volunteer members of fire services or assisting communities as part of the Army Reserve.

The Australian Energy Council and Energy Networks Australia outlined to the Government today a range of measures being undertaken by the sector. These include:

- The suspension of collection activities for affected customers whilst emergency warnings are in place.
- Retailers will provide advice to affected customers on the assistance available to them – customers will also be encouraged to have an early conversation with their retailer, if they need assistance.
- Waiving of outstanding debts, meter replacement charges and reconnection fees for homes or small businesses lost as a result of this natural disaster.

- When natural disasters occur specific assistance will be made available for volunteer and emergency services workers – customers are encouraged to contact their retailer and find out what assistance is available.

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About the Australian Energy Council

The Council represents 23 major electricity and downstream natural gas businesses operating in competitive wholesale and retail energy markets. These businesses collectively generate the overwhelming majority of electricity in Australia and sell gas and electricity to over 10 million homes and businesses.

About Energy Networks Australia

Energy Networks Australia is the national industry body representing Australia's electricity transmission and distribution and gas distribution networks. Our members provide more than 16 million electricity and gas connections to almost every home and business across Australia.