

Energy Minister must secure review of electricity price rises

The South Australian Council of Social Service has formally written to SA Energy Minister Patrick Conlon, asking the Minister to use his powers under the *Essential Services Commission Act* to obtain a review of yesterday's decision from the Essential Services Commission allowing a 12% increase in the price of electricity.

SACOSS Executive Director, Ross Womersley said,

“Like many South Australians, SACOSS was alarmed by the extraordinary price rise announced yesterday. A 12% increase, which for an average electricity user will add \$35 to the quarterly bill, will hit many people hard, particularly low income earners. This comes on top of a \$15 increase in August this year. These increases will make life especially difficult for those who are working part-time, on social security, or who have special needs around electricity usage, for instance those with medical conditions that make them heat intolerant and reliant on air-conditioning.”

“We believe that there are several grounds on which the Essential Services Commission's price determination should be reviewed, including that they have failed to give adequate weight to the needs of consumers as required under the Act. Questions have also been raised about the accuracy of their consideration of long-term wholesale electricity costs – a key driver of the retail price increases.”

“There is no doubt that the government should act to protect the interests of South Australian energy consumers. The first step would be for Minister Conlon to immediately seek a review of yesterday's decision.”

“The government should also seek to urgently increase energy concessions for low income earners and move to index them in future in line with price increases.”

“SACOSS also believes that it is imperative that the government move to protect its most vulnerable community members from spiralling energy costs. This could include establishing a high level task force to examine long term issues of energy affordability. This would include looking at the design regulations for new buildings to ensure greater levels of energy efficiency, and providing further assistance with retrofitting existing buildings.”

SACOSS understands that the government has 10 working days to lodge an application for a review of the determination.

A copy of SACOSS' letter to Minister Conlon is available on request.