

Submission form: Comparing and switching electricity plans

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Questions

1. **What barriers have you experienced when comparing electricity companies? What would make it easier for you to compare and switch?**

i) The differences between plans offered by one power company are excessively difficult to understand, making it basically impossible to compare those plans.

Bills seem designed to be deliberately confusing.

ii) Over the last three years I've received bills from three different power companies.

Information offered by different companies about their plans on their websites, and as listed on their bills, are all different.

They seem designed to make it too difficult to compare how various plans offer better or worse pricing options as compared with "similar" plans from other companies.

Are companies cooperating to make comparisons of their own, and each others' pricing plans, and monthly power bills, impossible?

2. **The Electricity Authority is proposing:**

- To support an existing or new, externally run, website(s).
- To require retailers to provide their existing consumers with best plan information.
- Community advisers to support comparison and switching.
- Promotional activity and campaigns for comparison and switching services.

Do you support their approach?

I would like to support all the ideas listed above, but at this stage, no, I do not support them, because they all ought to come AFTER pricing plans and bills are both presented in a uniform way, allowing ease of comparison for the average consumer.

None of the ideas listed above are in any way adequate replacement for companies providing a uniform set of information about their pricing plans allowing side-by-side comparison between plans within a company, and between companies, in a way that the average citizen with lower secondary school mathematics can understand.

Once easy comparison is established, and ease of changing electricity provider is enabled (without the current punitive fees some gentailers charge), then there'll actually be genuine competition, unlike the embarrassing charade that is now offered.

3. **Do you think it's important for the Authority to fund and support a comparison and switching website? Why?**

Yes, it is vital and crucial that the EA funds and supports a website for comparing and switching between companies.

This is because without significant and meaningful changes in providing uniformity of presentation of monthly bills and company pricing plans, the EA should be recognised as being essentially complicit in the suppressing of genuine competition between power companies, and so also in the fleecing of all citizens and residents.

Even when the above sham of a competition is finally ended (and hopefully this calendar year), apart from nationalising the power stations and ending the profiteering off average household consumers, the next most useful thing the EA could do to make up for how badly served the public has been over recent past years is oversee a top quality comparison and switching website.

4. What problems, if any, do you see with current comparison and switching websites, such as Powerswitch?

I want to trust Powerswitch, and basically do, but it's more difficult to trust something we don't understand, and Powerswitch seems to simply offer one single data point of output in its expected average power bill total for a year for the plans available at an address.

That is problematic because: (1) we pay power bills monthly, not annually; (2) the workings are not made clear; and so (3) there's no detailed explanation of potential advantages or disadvantages of each company *in direct comparison with other companies' plans* other than the general statement of price.

The details of the individual plans offered are helpfully informative in themselves, however, that's still not the same as offering side-by-side comparison of, for example, which plans are best for working from home during the day, or charging a pure electric car before midnight, etc.

5. Do you support the proposal that companies must regularly tell customers which plan would be best for them? How often should they do this?

Yes, companies that provide the most competitive service to customers WILL seek their customers' loyalty by telling them when they could be on better plans as per their electricity use patterns.

Customers ought to be able to choose how frequently their bills are reviewed as appropriate for their current use patterns: quarterly, half yearly, or annually. With so many people's lives changing due to work circumstances or having family or friends staying over in between finding somewhere new to live, power use patterns will be changing within households more frequently.

Given the era of modern smart metering and other technological capabilities such as AI, it ought to be exceedingly easy for trained professionals to review power use patterns and relate best options of power plans offered to customer households.

Such regular reviews ought to be seen simply as part of good service provided by responsible companies at no extra charge to the individual consumer, on a quarterly basis, even if customers choose to stay with their current plan.

6. What do you think about the idea of requiring companies to *automatically* switch customers to the best plan? (The customers could then switch back to the old plan if they preferred.)

Yes, automatic switching ought to be a feasible standard procedure, with two provisos: that customers are effectively notified of the plan to switch plans starting with the next month's cycle; and, that with that notification, a comparison of their power use patterns for that upcoming month of the previous year, and the previous month of that year are offered as evidence of their potential savings on the suggested new plan.

The inclusion of the upcoming month from the previous year – when available – will be useful given the seasonal changes in power usage.

7. Do you think companies should be required to include standard information on power bills, so customers can compare easily?

Yes.

It's utterly astounding that this is not the situation already.

It's beyond peculiar that the current ridiculous situation has been allowed to continue unchallenged for so long already.

How many different ways can we spell the word "rort"?!

8. How else could the Electricity Authority support people to compare and switch power plans?

The EA ought to have overseen the end the era of NZ electricity companies' use of coal at peak periods to keep overall prices artificially high decades ago.

The ongoing use of coal – and methane gas, too – is not only grossly unfair on all citizens, it's shockingly unjust for our most vulnerable neighbours within and beyond Aotearoa NZ; and, that the use of coal and gas by any companies is still tolerated by any individual or oversight committee of any sort in the middle of our industrial climate crisis seems the most traitorous betrayal of trust of current and future generations.

Therefore, the EA should support people's ability to compare and switch power plans by helping citizens understand which power companies and power plans are better for them in terms of the future, not only for that month or year's total power bill.

Whether that's via the EA paying for mainstream media advertising on a regular basis highlighting the companies that are genuinely working to convert the grid to 100% fossil fuel free as soon as possible, or giving companies environmentally friendly ratings of some sort and mandating those scores appearing prominently on bills and websites, or a combination of those ideas and others, I don't know which method is most effective, but, given the severity of our industrial climate crisis, it's probably beyond time to start another "all the above" emergency response approach.

Finally, the EA ought to do more to promote – or at least highlight – the companies that are best for facilitating the transition to a home or company's own electricity generation (that also ought to have happened many decades ago, eg. when Jimmy Carter had solar panels on the West Wing roof):

If I buy solar panels, which companies will pay me the most money for my feeding power back into the grid? Which offers discounts for investing my own money into battery storage, that helps the rest of the grid in times of stress on the grid, and reduces the company's dependence upon coal?

Or does the EA already provide this information in a clear and obvious manner, and I've just not noticed it, yet?