

10 November 2020



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Dear Jonathon,

**Consultation Paper – Guidelines for raising consumer awareness of Utilities Disputes and Powerswitch**

Wellington Electricity Lines Limited (WELL) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the above Electricity Authority consultation.

While we understand that the Electricity Industry Participation Code was amended in relation to this on 7 October 2020 (effective 1 April 2021), we wish to express our concerns around the fact that the amendment and accompanying guidelines are not aligned with Utilities Disputes' General and Energy Complaints Scheme rules.

This is on the basis that, although we are happy to increase consumer awareness of Utilities Disputes, we are of the opinion that this should be reserved for scenarios that have or are likely to fall within Utilities Disputes' definition of a complaint (as opposed to the EA guidelines definition of a query, which is of course much broader).

We believe that the Code amendment could 'invite' unnecessary complaint referrals to Utilities Disputes, which may not necessarily be in the best interests of any party; given that we are able to satisfactorily resolve the majority of complaints directly. We would therefore ask that the Code amendment is reconsidered in this respect.

In the meantime, please find below our response to this consultation, in the format requested:

**Question 1: Do you agree or disagree that guidelines to support the implementation of 11.30A to 11.30E are needed?**

Wellington Electricity Lines Limited (WELL) agrees that guidelines are needed.

We believe the guidelines need to be clearer as to what specifically is in scope around outbound communications, as the guidelines do not align with the Code in this respect, and this particular requirement has the potential to involve significant changes.

The guidelines state that the Code will require distributors to provide clear and prominent information about Utilities Disputes "in outbound communications directed to consumers about electricity services [specifically in our case, "the transport of electricity to the premises"] and bills".

However, notwithstanding the bills requirement, the Code itself states that, regarding such communications, this information only needs to be provided about "the terms and conditions for the supply of electricity or line function services to the consumer".

As the EA noted in an email dated 28 October 2020, "most distributors don't have direct contracts with most customers so [this] shouldn't be covered".

We would recommend that, for the avoidance of doubt, the guidelines explicitly state what forms of communication are in and out of scope for each of the Code's requirements.

**Question 2: Do you agree or disagree these guidelines should include information on how compliance could be achieved and visual examples? If no, what information should the guidelines provide?**

We agree that the guidelines should use all the information needed and the best tools available to provide clear, unambiguous guidance on how the EA expects the Code to be applied.

WELL, like other distributors, is concerned about the potential for delays to be caused in responding to emergency situations, as a result of the requirement to clearly and prominently provide Utilities Disputes information during phone calls. Providing this additional information could impact the ability of callers to report potentially life-threatening scenarios.

Clarification is required about the details of the information that should be provided – for example, if there is any option for Utilities Disputes' contact details to be omitted in emergency situations, and instead replaced with a short form version (such as a website reference) that could be used as a time-saving alternative.

Urgent safety disconnection requests from the emergency services are just one example of where clarification is needed in the guidelines. Another is reports of hazards from members of the public that can be as equally time-critical.

Both a recorded message in itself, plus any further dialogue generated as a result of the recorded message, could affect our ability to arrange for field crews to be dispatched to emergency incidents at the earliest possible opportunity.

In terms of reactive communications in a major event situation, it may not be practical to provide Utilities Disputes information in such circumstances.

**Question 3: Are there any additional questions that should be included in the FAQ section?**

We would ask that any questions which arise from the submissions made are incorporated into the FAQs section.

**Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed guidelines and examples provided?**

We would like the guidelines to detail how distributors can apply for exemptions to the Code, as this was noted by the EA as a possibility during the 15 October 2020 workshop.

An exception to clearly and prominently providing Utilities Disputes information "in association with or in the course of any telephone call from a consumer" for emergency calls would be an ideal solution to the issues described in our response to question 2.

If you have any questions or there are aspects of this submission that you would like to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact Ben Jenkinson, Customer Resolutions Coordinator, at [BJenkinson@welectricity.co.nz](mailto:BJenkinson@welectricity.co.nz).

Yours sincerely,



Greg Skelton  
**Chief Executive Officer**