

Media Release: Energy Hardship Panel report

Published: Friday, 1 Nov 2023

Hardship report offers sensible, practical steps to help those struggling with power bills

New Zealand's electricity watchdog, the Consumer Advocacy Council, hopes decision-makers and regulators have a good hard look at the Energy Hardship Expert Panel report into ways to make life easier for those struggling with power bills.

The Panel recently completed an extensive 2 year project examining the extent of energy hardship in New Zealand and what could be done to alleviate the problem.

Read the Panel's report:

[Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Mārama - Energy Hardship: The challenges and a way forward \[PDF, 3 MB\]\(external link\)](#)

"We know from our own work that many people are doing it tough right now and more can be done to help them," said Consumer Advocacy Council Chair Deborah Hart.

"MBIE estimates that 110,000 households can't afford to keep their homes adequately warm - that's about 300,000 people, so it's high time more was done to ease the burden on so many.

"Electricity is not a nice to have. It's an essential service and often people are terribly impacted when they face disconnection or sacrifice other things to keep the stove on and the house warm."As the report states, 'Without doubt, energy hardship exacerbates social inequalities by disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities, including Māori, Pacific peoples, tenants, disabled people, older people, children, and those living in remote areas.'

"We concur with many of the recommendations which echo what we've been saying for some time, including:

- the Electricity Authority's Consumer Care Guidelines should be a set of enforceable rules with penalties for retailers who don't comply.
- the Electricity Authority should require retailers to notify their residential customers of the most affordable plan.
- data related to the use of prepay accounts and disconnections should be tracked and published.

"This report has been 2 years in the making - the panel has taken a deep dive into the issue of hardship, and we believe its valuable work deserves careful consideration by the incoming government and regulators," said Deborah Hart.