



9 August 2024

Mr Paul Brownlee  
Principal Engineer  
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
PO Box K35  
Haymarket Post Shop NSW 1240

Dear Mr Brownlee

**ACERREZ Partnership - Draft Transmission Operator's Licence under the *Electricity Supply Act 1995***

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on IPART's review of the ACERREZ Partnership – Draft Transmission Operator's Licence under the *Electricity Supply Act 1995*.

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) investigates and resolves complaints from customers of electricity and gas providers in NSW, and some water providers. Our comments are informed by our investigations into these complaints, and through our community outreach and stakeholder engagement activities.

**External Dispute Resolution**

Currently there is no external independent complaint body for the NSW renewable energy zones. The NSW Government has indicated to EWON that complaints about renewable infrastructure planning and development are currently being received and managed across a wide range of authorities such as DCCEE, EnergyCo and Transgrid.

EWON supports ensuring all consumers, including those directly affected by energy and water services, have access to free, fair and independent dispute resolution, at every stage of the supply chain.

We also recognise the importance that this process needs to be simple and transparent for those directly affected. We strongly support the proposed conditions outlined in Section 15 of the Draft Transmission Operator's Licence – Conditions relating to External Dispute Resolution. In particular, condition 15.4 outlining that external dispute resolution scheme means (1) the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, being an approved energy scheme under the Act.

EWON was established in 1998, is recognised as the NSW Government approved EDR scheme in accordance with the *Electricity Supply Act 1995* and the *Water Industry Competition Act 2006*.

Further, EWON has been found, through independent reviews throughout its history, to adhere with the Commonwealth [Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution](#).

### Proposed licence condition 15.3

We support the proposed condition 15.3 outlining that the Licence Holder must publish and maintain on its website a document that explains the right to have a complaint or dispute referred to the External Dispute Resolution Scheme; lists the dispute resolution services provided by the External Dispute Resolution Scheme, and explains how to contact the External Dispute Resolution Scheme.

Similar provisions in Sydney Water's Operating Licence also require it to notify all residential customers about EDR options at least once each financial year. We do not believe digital access is sufficient, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of New South Wales, given the fact that connectivity in these areas can be very poor or non-existent. Non digital mechanisms must be introduced, including that providers must, at the time a complaint is registered with them, and when they finalise / resolve the complaint, advise the customer verbally or in writing – letter or email as per the customer's preferred method of communicating – of how to access External Dispute Resolution and its role. This will ensure the effective promotion of External Dispute Resolution, including for those customers and community members who may not have access to, or have limited understanding, of the internet.

This approach will work towards establishing an effective community consultation process as well as building trust in the energy sector overall.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Polly Porteous, General Manager, Governance, Awareness & Policy on (02) 8218 5225.

Yours sincerely



**Janine Young**  
**Ombudsman**  
**Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW**