





Customer Assistance Framework



Ausgrid recognises there are members of the community who may be experiencing challenging life circumstances. These people may require assistance and support to meet their obligation to comply with Ausgrid directions for network maintenance or rectification work on private property and liability for damages to our network.

	Bushfire mitigation works	See section 2.1 of this guideline
	Third Party Damage	See Section 2.2 of this guideline
	Tiger Tails Rental	See section 2.3 of this guideline
	Defect rectification	See section 2.4 of this guideline

1. Eligibility

Ausgrid defines customers as being vulnerable, in financial hardship or stress and they are willing to meet their financial obligation to Ausgrid but do not have the capacity to do so.

We understand the cost of complying with our directions for maintenance or rectification works on privately owned electricity infrastructure, under our bushfire risk mitigation program, payment of damages to Ausgrid, rental of tiger tail safety equipment and defect rectification, can all amount to an added burden during an already challenging time.

As we typically do not have a regular payment history from customers who are liable for these costs, we do not know their capacity to pay. As a result, customers often need to self-identify as being in vulnerable circumstances, such as financial hardship.

To assist customers, identify as being eligible for support from Ausgrid, Ausgrid has defined the following factors as indicators that could be self-assessed. The customer may be experiencing one or more of these factors:

- reliance on government assistance or Centrelink payments such as a pension;
- unemployment;
- medical illness/injury, mental health, or addictive behavioural issues of the customer or a dependent, affecting their capacity to pay;
- physical or intellectual disability of the customer or dependent affecting their capacity to pay;
- death in the family affecting capacity to pay;
- change in the family unit affecting capacity to pay;
- domestic or family violence;
- sudden loss of income or substantial reduction in income, long term fixed low income;
- natural calamity such as fire, flood, drought, or storm damage, or
- the amount you are required to pay is greater than you can afford to pay.

The indicators defined in this framework to assist self-identification are not exhaustive, and customers experiencing personal circumstances affecting their capacity to pay are encouraged to contact Ausgrid directly.

2. Types of support available

If you are eligible for support, Ausgrid will aim to contact you within 10 business days to provide access to meaningful and appropriate assistance based on the customer's circumstances.

Advice and Information

Customers can contact Ausgrid to seek further information regarding maintenance or rectification works. Ausgrid will provide information on technicality, cost, and time periods in which works need to be completed.

Advice may also include referral to welfare and financial counselling organisations who can assist customers in suggesting ways to improve their financial situation as well as providing [information](#) and assistance with concessions, grant eligibility and referrals for material aid.

Flexible payment options

Ausgrid will negotiate and agree to interest-free payment plans for customers allowing them to pay off outstanding debts/damages costs over an agreed period.

When developing a payment plan, Ausgrid recognises that customers individual situations and needs are considered, requiring negotiation and flexibility. When assessing a customer's capacity to pay, Ausgrid will take into consideration the amount of the debt, and the ability for the customer to make repayments based on their individual circumstances. Payment plan arrangements will not compromise the customers' ability to maintain a basic standard of living for themselves and their dependents.

Assistance with rectification works

In instances where a customer has been issued with a bushfire or a private installation defect notice which requires the customer to engage a third party (such as an electrician or accredited service provider) to complete the work, we may consider providing the customer with financial assistance to enable works to be completed, and implement an agreed flexible payment plan.

In addition to offering flexible payment plans Ausgrid may, in exceptional circumstances, waive part or all the rectification costs.

3. Government concession programs and financial counselling services

Ausgrid will maintain a list of Welfare Organisations and Financial Counselling Services to refer customers seeking assistance. Ausgrid will refer customers to the appropriate Government Department and their Energy Retailer to ensure they are aware of relevant assistance available in the form of Government concessions.

Support resources can be found on our [website](#).

4. Natural Disasters

If a customer has been impacted by a natural disaster, they may be eligible for [Disaster relief assistance](#) and support from the NSW Government. A disaster declaration is a frequently updated list of Local Government Areas (LGAs) that have been impacted by a natural disaster. With a disaster declaration for their area, affected communities and individuals can access a range of special assistance measures.

In such events Ausgrid may also introduce Assistance Packages to offer financial relief to customers who have incurred unforeseen costs from electrical repairs.

5. Customer rights and obligations

Customer's rights

- To be treated in a respectful and professional manner;
- Confidentiality is maintained at all times;
- To have options, information and support clearly explained;
- To have the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves and their dependents foremost in the negotiation of payment arrangements; and
- To be protected from debt recovery or legal action while meeting agreed arrangements.

Customer's obligations

- To acknowledge the debt and obligation to repay;
- To provide Ausgrid any reasonable evidence, as requested, to assist with the assessment of financial hardship and capacity to pay;
- To advise Ausgrid if your contact details or financial circumstances materially change; and
- To notify Ausgrid if you are unable to meet agreed payments or terms.

Complaint resolution

We want to do everything we can to make sure our support mechanisms work for our customers and will do what we can to resolve your concerns.

If a customer is not satisfied with the assessment, they may request a review or make a complaint in accordance with Ausgrid's *Standard complaint and dispute resolution procedure* which may be found on Ausgrid's [website](#).

6. Protection from disconnection

Disconnection of supply to customers in our network due to a private asset defect, is a last resort to protect public safety or when all other remedies under this framework have been exhausted.

Where there is an immediate risk to public safety or network security, Ausgrid may be required to immediately disconnect supply to eliminate this risk. Where a vulnerable customer is identified in these circumstances, Ausgrid may at our discretion provide alternative assistance these customers to assist them in seeking alternative supply arrangements or maintain supply to life support equipment, lighting circuits or other equipment that we deem critical. These alternative assistance options will not apply in a declared network incident situation.

Where the risk to public safety or network security is assessed as not requiring immediate disconnection and a customer is deemed to be in financial hardship, Ausgrid will seek agreement of a payment plan with the customer and proceed to rectify the bushfire defect, safety defect or damage to the network, and not disconnect supply.

7. Communication and promotion

Ausgrid encourages self-identification of financial hardship and vulnerability by:

- referencing information regarding the Customer Assistance Framework in the notification documentation to customers regarding bushfire hazard reduction activity or network damage to be rectified;
- referencing information regarding the Customer Assistance Framework in the notification of cost of network damages to the liable party;
- publishing the Customer Assistance Framework on Ausgrid's website; and
- ensuring that employees who address queries from customers who have received network defect rectification or damages notices are skilled in identifying potential financial hardship.

For more information visit our [website](#) or call our Contact Centre on 13 13 65.



Interpreter service 131 450