

Monday 28 September 2009



Anna Brakey
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)
PO Box Q290
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NSW 1230

Dear Ms Brakey,

Online electricity prices

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss miscellaneous charges and consumer impacts at the Working Party meeting on 11 September.

In the week following this meeting, PIAC sought and received advice from consumers on the adequacy of online information about energy prices. PIAC offers the following comments as a supplementary submission to the *Review of regulated electricity retail tariffs and charges 2010 to 2013*.

- It is extremely difficult to compare prices and impossible to determine the best deal based on information available on energy retailer websites.
- Integral Energy offers limited information on plans including the *inhome easysaver* and *inhome smartsaver* but the website does not clearly explain the price of electricity under each of these offers. The *inhome easysaver* had no information about price - just a link to get a quote where you then have to enter name, date of birth, address, email, and phone in order to then be contacted by Integral. The information about the *inhome smartsaver* suggests you can get a 4 per cent saving off the standard regulated electricity rate but then doesn't tell you what that rate is. If you search a different part of their website you can find a 26 page document that includes information on prices but it doesn't overtly suggest what the standard regulated electricity tariff is - it lists the domestic tariff and domestic time-of-use and general supply tariff etc. It's not clear which of these is the standard regulated tariff.
- The AGL website suggests you can get 5 per cent discount by joining AGL but it doesn't tell you what the discount is on -- 5 per cent off your bill? 5 per cent off the regulated price? It also doesn't tell you the price you pay per kilowatt. You need enter your details - name, number, email and postcode -- and someone will then contact you with the price. It would be better if the price was available on the website.
- The EnergyAustralia website says online offers are unavailable right now. EnergyAustralia does however have a document that outlines their regulated and market based prices. Presumably the latter is for existing customers only because by phone they suggest they have no market offers at this time.
- The Origin site does not have a price guide you can look at and there is no online quote function. You can sign up online but there is concern that by pursuing this option, just as it sounds, you will end up being signed up rather than just finding out the price. If you do follow through with this sign up section of the website you need to give a lot of very personal information including your name, address, phone, email address, and licence number if you have a drivers licence. There is concern that this information might be used for marketing purposes in future. Only on the very last step - 6 of 6 - do you get information on the price per kilowatt.

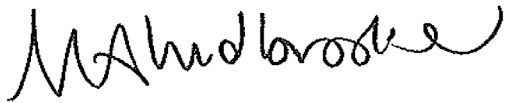
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- TRUenergy has a quote function on their website which looks good but as you go along the language used suggests you will be signing up (rather than just getting a quote) and it also asks for some personal details but not, oddly, your name. At least at the end of the process you can print out a quote which is useful.

Acknowledging that this information was gleaned from a small sample of consumers and has not been verified, it does suggest to PIAC that, at this time, information about electricity prices on retailer websites often fails to adequately inform consumers of the price they would pay if they accepted the advertised offer. PIAC is particularly concerned by references to percentage discounts that do not indicate the tariff on which the discount is applied.

In light of these concerns, PIAC urges IPART to examine this issue and recommend improvements to the availability and presentation of information about prices on electricity retailer websites.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Ludbrooke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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