

Life Support Customers explainer

A summary of the terminology ‘life support customer’ and the challenges between general understanding and technical definitions.

The Australia Energy Market Commission (AEMC) created the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF) across the National Energy Market. NSW commenced the NECF from 1 July 2013. National laws, rules and regulations are replicated into each jurisdiction’s laws, rules and regulations.

Under the National Electricity Rules, notice of planned outages must be provided at least four days prior to affected customers. This notice may be given by the distributor (Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy or Essential Energy) or an Accredited Service Provider (ASP). Life Support customers are required to make their own arrangements for planned outages.

History

In December 2017, the AEMC published a final rule determination to strengthen protections for customers requiring life support equipment residing at their premises. Implementation commenced from February 2018, with transitional arrangements, before February 2019 when the final rule was applied.

New obligations came into effect on 1 August 2021, via the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).

What does Life Support Equipment mean?

Under the National Energy Rules (NER), Rule 123A defines Life Support Equipment as

- Oxygen concentrators
- Intermittent peritoneal dialysis machines
- Kidney dialysis machines
- Continuous positive airways pressure respirators (CPAP)
- Crigler najjar syndrome phototherapy equipment
- Ventilators for life support

In relation to particular customers - any other equipment that a registered medical practitioner certifies is required for a person residing at the customer’s premises for life support.

It sets additional requirements for notification. Disconnection due to failure to pay cannot occur. A rebate may be available from the NSW government.

Medical Confirmation Form

A defined term in the NER, relating to a written form that includes the details of the type of equipment required and is completed by a medical practitioner.

It must be signed and dated within the past four (4) years to remain current. This is submitted to either the retailer or the distributor. This data is shared between retailers and distributors in accordance with the rules.

Distributor's obligations

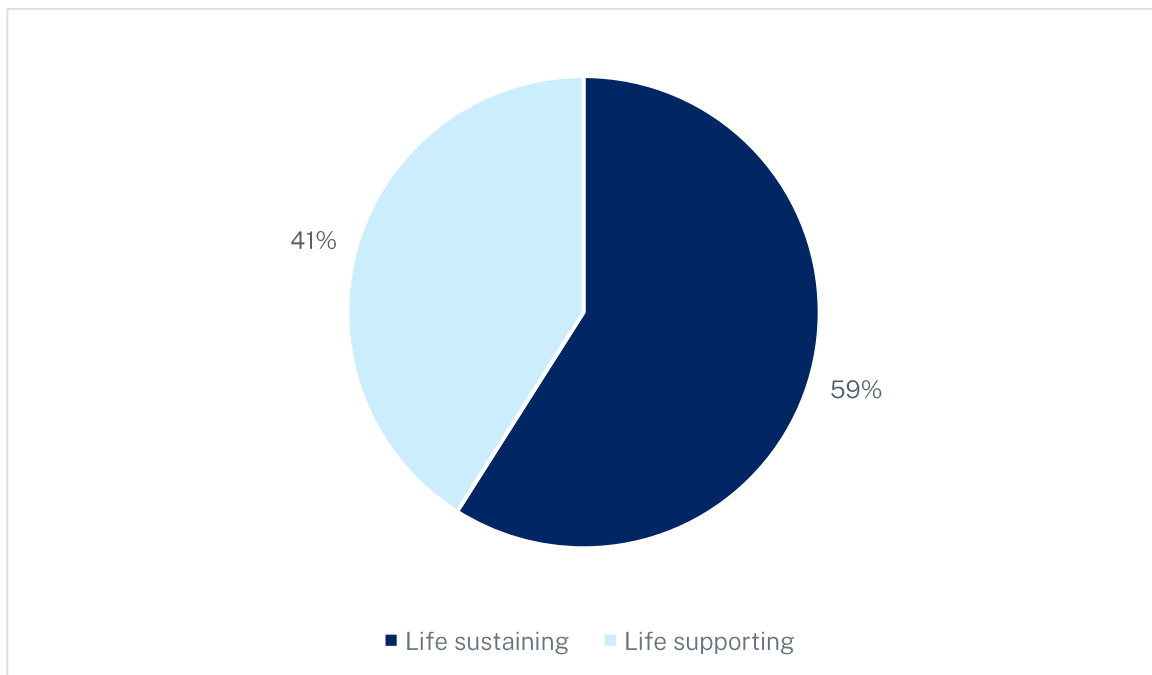
- Notify of planned interruptions at least 4 business day prior
- Provide information to assist the customer to prepare a plan of action in case of an unplanned interruption, including an emergency contact number for the distributor

Rule Change Proposal

In August 2024, Essential Energy and SA Power Networks submitted a rule change proposal made to the AMEC. There is no date for this to be reviewed, but when it is reviewed, there will be an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback.

The use of Life Support Equipment ranges from life enhancing equipment (Assistive Life Support Equipment) to the more critical needs customers using life-sustaining equipment (Critical Life Support Equipment). Energy providers do not hold information about which of their customers on the life support register have critical needs for life-sustaining equipment that requires continuous power and therefore cannot target support to them during and in preparation of power outages. Furthermore, there is an aging population, with those 65+ years old doubling in the past 20 years to six million people.

The Australia Energy Foundation (AEF) report identified 59 percent of Life Support Customers used their Life Support Equipment to sustain their life, while 41 percent use equipment to make their life more comfortable.



This research found many customers registered for life support were underprepared for outages: 54 percent did not have a plan in place if the power were to go out, 68 percent mistakenly expected priority power restoration within two hours and only 7 percent had access to back-up power.

The proposed Rule Change request introduces a Critical Life Support Customer definition, where critical energy-based life support needs are determined by a Registered Medical Professional, non-critical Life Support Customers are then defined as an Assistive Life Support Customer. Importantly, energy retailers and distributors would then be able to identify the subset of registered Critical Life Support Customer premises for whom power is critical to sustaining their life or mitigating lifelong irreversible injury affecting their lives. Providing visibility of this subset of Critical Life Support Customer premises will allow energy providers to more effectively triage customers during unplanned power outages and appropriately target service enhancements.

Additional features of this rule change include the creation of a Nominated Contact Person in addition to the customer/account holder; templated Medical Confirmation Form hosted on AER's website to allow for inter-jurisdictional validity and reuse when moving house within four years and annualised reconfirmation at four year interval (unless identified as permanent and critical need); collection of email and mobile phone contacts for more timely, modern communication.

Additional content shared by Distributors

[Life support - Ausgrid](#)

[Life-Support-Factsheet.pdf](#)

[Information for life support customers | Endeavour Energy](#)

[Life-Support-Information.pdf](#) Endeavour Energy

[Life Support](#) Essential Energy

[Life Support FAQs](#) Essential Energy

Proposed Rule change, lodged August 2024 by Essential Energy & SA Power Networks: [Rule Change Request](#)