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**Ecotricity Response to Supplier Objections – a Call for Evidence**

**Introduction**

Ecotricity is a renewable energy generator and supplier with over 158,000 customer accounts and 71.9MWh generating capacity across the UK. We pride ourselves on the professional, transparent and personalised service that we offer, which is consistently recognised by our customers and third party surveys. For example, we have recently topped the Which? Energy Customer Satisfaction Survey for the second year running. This recognises our transparency and focus on the ethical treatment of our customers. We support any measure that aims at improving transparency for consumers and simplifies the industry.

We believe that the current practise of using objections should be abolished. The core of our argument does not come from a position of self interest or even to improve competition: it is a moral position, because the status quo is unfair on the most vulnerable and should end.

**Vulnerable Customers**

There is an inherent problem with objections in the energy industry. As it stands the objections process is abused by suppliers in both the domestic and non-domestic markets. Within the domestic market, the ability to object can leave vulnerable customers with debts, trapped into more expensive tariffs and unable to take advantage of the cheaper ones that are on offer from other suppliers.

The process of objecting is unique to the energy industry. Preventing customers from accessing cheaper tariffs is preventing a potential aid to their debt problems. If indebted customers were allowed to leave, this would incentivise suppliers to innovate and provide better services for vulnerable customers.

Limiting a customer’s freedom to choose their supplier is draconian, representing a disproportionate sanction on debt, which is a normal part of everyday life. Ethically it is impossible to argue in favour of retaining objections.

Ofgem have recently expressed concern over the treatment of vulnerable customers and removing objections would be a measure to help them. It is also consistent with Ofgem’s Standards of Conduct as it ensures customers are treated fairly. Currently, objections are of significant interest to the supplier and give rise to detriment to the customer. Therefore, in order to treat customers fairly, respect their decision to leave and not unfairly penalise them, objections should be removed.

Supplier Risk

Whilst there is an argument that objections are a method of mitigating risk for suppliers, there are alternative measures available. County Courts and debt collection agencies are two such examples.

Removing objections also allows suppliers to save time. Rather than using various measures to arrange payment plans and chase payments with customers, they can respect the customers’ wishes to leave and it simply becomes a debt to chase.

Abuse

Objections are currently abused by suppliers in the market. Customers are being held against their will. This abuse of power only worsens the already tarnished reputation of the energy industry. A recent example is Spark Energy, who amongst several offences, were found to have blocked over 20,000 customers’ requests to switch. This clear disregard for the customers’ wellbeing would not be possible if objections were removed.

Conclusion

Objections are unnecessary. They prevent a consumer’s right to chose a preferred supplier and take advantage of cheaper tariffs. Where suppliers explain objections are a means to mitigate risk, there are clearly alternative measures available. Using objections is an unethical position. They should therefore be abolished.

We welcome this opportunity to respond and we hope you will take our comments on board. We also welcome any further contact in response to this submission. Please contact me on the above and Cc in Regulation and Compliance Analyst Ryan Wilkins on ryan.wilkins@ecotricity.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Dale Vince

Funder & CEO