

Electricity Retailers look to provide more transparency about how customers' data is used and shared

By Jenny Cameron, Chief Executive, Electricity Retailers' Association of NZ

Over the past decade, digital technology has transformed the way New Zealanders communicate, shop, work, and get around.

This technology is now also enabling us to do more with how we use energy and run our homes and appliances. Technologies are already available to enable us to remotely control our heating, lighting and security systems using our smart phones. This is just scratching the surface of the potential that can come from connecting and automating many of the technologies and services to bring comfort, control, and convenience to people's lives. How the market for innovation and new services will develop over the coming years is unclear, but exciting.

Energy has a central role to play. Not only is it essential to power our smart technologies (smart phones still need to be charged), but it will also be a platform in itself for connected products and services that make our lives more convenient.

Electricity smart meters are a prime example of this. New Zealand has one of the most advanced, industry-led smart meter roll-outs in the world with over 75 per cent of connections covered. Smart meters record the amount of electricity a customer has used on a half-hourly, daily, or monthly basis.

As technology develops, becomes cheaper and more available, there is the potential for smart meters and smart appliances to help customers better understand what electricity they use, or produce, or store. The data they produce is also useful for other services, to enable them to improve and manage use of household appliances, and for the whole system to become more efficient as electricity usage becomes more visible. This could mean, for example, being able to see how much specific appliances were costing, such as lighting or heating, showing people the benefit of switching to LEDs or fitting insulation. New technologies might mean that automation could be at the heart of a connected home, so that a dishwasher could be set to switch on automatically when the price is cheapest overnight, or an electric vehicle might automatically charge smartly to draw power to recharge its battery when demand on the grid is at its lowest and when the price is cheapest.

Electricity customers in New Zealand already can easily get their electricity consumption and connection data from their electricity retailer at any time, or to authorise someone else to do so on their behalf. There is much value for customers and others that might come from unlocking this data, but it's essential this is balanced with ensuring there are adequate

safeguards and protections in place, from a cyber-security, privacy and informed consent perspective.

Responsible and ethical collection, use, and management of their data are matters of increasing interest for customers across many sectors, and electricity is no different. But people can also be willing to share their data if benefits flow to them or society, of which Facebook is one prime example. Privacy, security, and driving innovation from customer data are all important considerations, and retailers, as a trusted part of New Zealand's electricity system, are adamant that their customers' data must be safely managed and shared in an informed and confident way.

To demonstrate the commitment by retailers to a culture of best practice and enhancement of customer confidence and trust in data practices, the Electricity Retailers' Association (ERANZ) has set out Core Data Values to first of all set out what data is collected, why it is necessary, how it is stored, used and what considerations are made when it is shared.

These give an insight into how retail companies work with other agencies and organisations to comply with the law and also to keep customer data trusted and safe. They emphasise obligations that ERANZ members already have under the Privacy Act and the Electricity Industry Participation Code.

ERANZ has worked with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the New Zealand Data Futures Partnership in the development of these Core Data Values. We realised there is a need to talk about data and data use more, so New Zealanders can understand their perspectives on data use, understand how it can be of value to them, and to help organisations build and maintain the trust of those whose data they collect or wish to use. This is part of that process for electricity retailers.

The retailers do not automatically release customer information when they receive a request. Every time they receive a request they assess it to see if it's consistent with the Privacy Act, the retailer's policies, and the terms and conditions agreed to with the customer.

Customers are always encouraged to talk to their electricity retailer if they have any questions about their electricity data.

The Core Data Values are available on the ERANZ website:

<https://www.eranz.org.nz/for-customers/your-electricity-consumption-data/>

Further information about electricity consumption data is available on the Electricity Authority website: <https://www.ea.govt.nz/consumers/your-power-data-in-your-hands/>