



# Bright SPARKS

Ways to reduce our energy  
use and save

## HANDBOOK

**This Bright Sparks Handbook was designed  
by and for people with disability.**

It has five steps for learning how to save on energy to reduce everyday costs of living. Each step includes helpful information and guidance.

It is important to remember that everyone is different and that you can use this handbook to tailor energy saving to you and your needs.



### **About QDN**

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is an organisation of, by and for people with disability. QDN is a state-wide network of members and supporters who provide information, feedback and views based on their lived experience.

We believe there should be ‘nothing about us without us.’

### **Acknowledgements:**

The Bright Sparks handbook was first co-designed in 2017 as part of the Switched on Communities Project coordinated by QCOSS.

We acknowledge the contributions of QDN members, QDN project staff and project partners who helped design the original handbook. Their efforts laid the foundation for this updated version, developed by the QDN Energy Champion 2024 team.

Bright Sparks would not be possible without the support of the Queensland Government.

**For more information about Bright Sparks, please go to  
Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)  
at [qdn.org.au](http://qdn.org.au) or call 1300 363 783.**

# Bright Sparks Handbook Contents



Throughout the book, you will also see Lee the lightbulb. Lee will share tips and tricks to help you save energy.

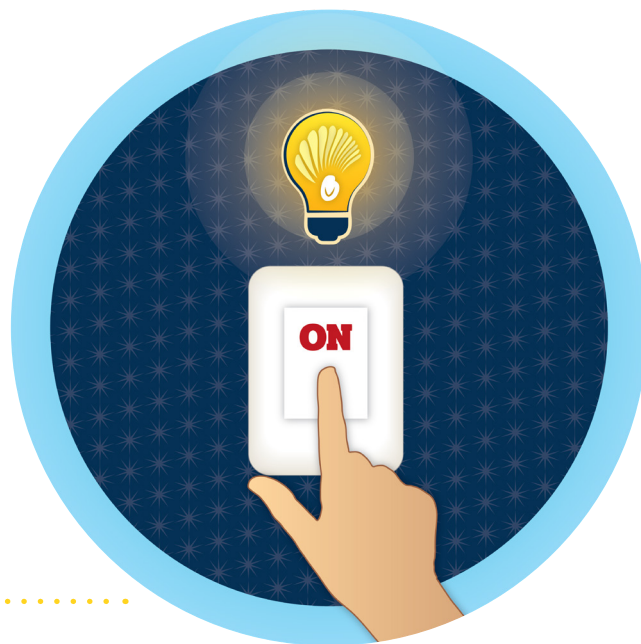
Lee likes to learn and ask questions to make sure they are switched on and making the best energy choices.

# Bright Sparks Checklist

## How do we switch on our lightbulbs and make good energy saving choices?

Here is a checklist to help as you go. You could choose to come back to this page and tick off each statement as you move through each step.

**REMEMBER:** Everyone is different, and you can use the information in this handbook in the way that best suits you.



### 1. Switching on to your options

- ☐ I understand how electricity gets to my home.
- ☐ I know that the energy retailer market is competitive.
- ☐ I understand that I have energy consumer rights and I know who I can contact if I need help.

### 2. Reading your Electricity Bill

- ☐ I have learned how to read and understand my electricity bill.
- ☐ I understand the details of my electricity contract and what is involved in breaking it.

### 3. Developing good energy habits – Reduce your Juice!

- ☐ I have found ways to reduce the electricity I use to lower my bills.
- ☐ I know what appliances use the most energy at home.

### 4. Extra Assistance

- ☐ I know what energy concessions and rebates I'm eligible for.
- ☐ I can talk to people I trust—neighbours, friends, family, or an advocate—who can help me to understand the energy market better and share their experiences.

### 5. How to Switch Electricity Offers

- ☐ I know the steps to take if I'm not satisfied with my current retailer.

# 1 Switching on to your Options

Let's explore how electricity gets to your home in Queensland.

We can think of it as 3 main stages.

## 1. Generating the electricity

Electricity comes from a range of sources including non-renewable sources (coal, oil and gas) and renewable (wind, solar and hydro) options.

## 2. Delivering electricity

Electricity then travels large distances through transmission and distribution networks, often called "poles and wires".

**Distributors** are responsible for making sure their networks are safe, fix power after outages, and help during emergencies like storms or floods.

## 3. Selling electricity

**Retailers** or **providers** buy the generated electricity on the wholesale market and sell it to customers.

**If you live in South-East Queensland - Energex** is your distributor in South-East Queensland areas, including Brisbane, the Gold and Sunshine Coasts, and Ipswich.

A wide range of energy retailers compete for customers, offering various discounts and benefits. This can make a significant difference in your electricity costs.

**If you live in Regional or Rural Queensland - Ergon Energy** is your distributor.

Essential energy is also a distributor in Goondiwindi and in areas near the Queensland-New South Wales border.

Regional and rural areas are often served by the single retailer, Ergon Energy, which is subsidised by the Queensland Government to offer regulated prices comparable to those in South-East Queensland.



**HINT:** The electricity supply system can be complex. Our Energy Champion team suggests visiting the library or watching videos to learn more. You don't need to be an expert—just have fun learning!

## Switching on to your options means you understand your choices and rights as an energy customer.

### Energy retailer market

The Energy retailer market in Queensland is competitive, especially in South-East Queensland, where many retailers offer a variety of plans.

This competition can lead to better deals for you – the energy consumer!



**HINT:** To find the best plan, think about your energy usage by looking at your recent electricity bills. Use the website [energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://energymadeeasy.gov.au) to compare plans. We talk about how to do this more in step 5 (page 20).

### Your type of home may also change how you pay for your electricity.

Do you live in an apartment block, townhouse complex, caravan park or retirement village?

- These places may have one main connection point to the electricity grid called an “embedded electricity network”. Your landlord or body corporate is your “on-supplier”. This means they have an account with an electricity retailer, and you will get your electricity bill from them.
- Your on-supplier must meet the same obligations as an energy retailer, by providing you with a payment plan and access to government concessions.
- You are not locked into any agreement with the site owner for electricity. You can switch to an electricity retailer if a retailer is willing to make an offer. Make sure to research these options, as there might be extra charges.



**HINT:** Ask your landlord, body corporate or site owner how you get your electricity bill if you are not sure. You can also ask them to provide a copy of the original invoice from the utility company to confirm your charges.

### Where can I get help?

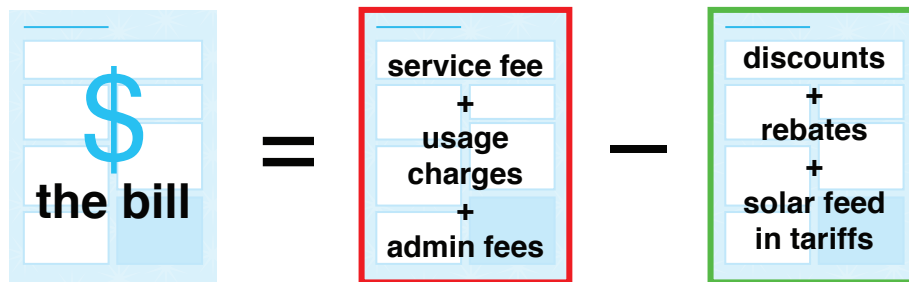
You have electricity consumer rights and may be eligible to energy concessions (See step 4).

- **The Energy and Water Ombudsman** if you have issues with your electricity retailer at 1800 662 837.
- **Office of Fair Trading** for information about your consumer rights at 13QGOV (13 74 68).
- **Tenants Queensland** for free tenancy advice and support at 1300 744 263.



## 2 Reading your Electricity Bill

Each residential electricity bill is made up of different charges and discounts.



### 1. Service fee

- **This is the cost of getting power to your home** such as the cost of wires, poles and administration costs.
- A service fee is charged every day, regardless of the amount of electricity you use.
- Different electricity offers do have different service fees.
- It is normally shown on the bill as cents per day charge (c/day).
- It can also be called a service charge, fixed charge, daily supply charge, or service to property charge. All of these terms mean the same thing so check what your retailer calls it on your bill.
- Another fixed cost (the cost of getting power to your home) is a **metering fee**, which is the cost of providing and maintaining a meter. Some retailers include this in the service fee; others show this on the bill as a separate item. Check your bill to see how the retailer charges you and consider this cost if comparing electricity offers.

### 2. Usage charges

With usage charges, the amount you pay depends on:

- **how much power you use, and**
- **the rate or tariff you pay for the power used**

The different usage charges are called **Tariffs** and will be shown on your bill in cents per kilowatt hour (c/kWh). In Queensland, usage charges may depend on what type of electricity meter(s) you have at your home.

## What is an electricity meter?

**Accumulation meter or flat meter** – only keeps track of the total electricity usage. This means, you are charged the same amount for the electricity you use regardless of the time of the day. A meter reader will attempt to come to your property every three months to check how much electricity you have used. If they are unable to access your property or if you pay your electricity bill monthly, they will do an estimate of that month's bill, based on older meter readings. Most retailers now allow you to submit a self-meter read to keep your bill 100% accurate. Meter readings appear on your bill as a 5-digit number.

**Smart Meter** – a device that measures your electricity digitally and sends data directly to your retailer. Your retailer will bill you for your exact use (not an estimate). Smart meters record electricity in kilowatt (kWh) every 5 to 30 minutes. From Dec 2017 in QLD, all new and replacement meters are Smart Meters.

## Choosing the right tariff for you can help reduce what you pay for your energy.

To help you work out what's best for you, let's learn about:

- What the main different tariffs are.
- How they work.

**Tariff 11** is also called **peak, standard, flat rate or anytime** tariffs. It is:

- Always available at any time of the night or day.
- Most expensive tariff available.
- Every home has Tariff 11 supplied.
- You do not need a smart meter to have Tariff 11.

### **Time-of-use Tariffs**

- A time-of-use tariff means that the price of electricity changes at different times of the day.
- Higher usage charges that apply during peak period, with lower usage charges for the rest of the time, plus a daily supply charge. This incentivises customers to shift their usage to non-peak time to save on their bills.
- You need a smart meter to be on a time-of-use tariff.

### **Demand tariffs**

- Charges are based on the rate electricity is used rather than the amount used. The demand charge can be based on the single highest demand during the billing period. Generally, demand tariffs have lower daily supply and usage charges.
- Listed as dollars per kilowatt (\$/kW) per month.
- You need a smart meter to be on a demand tariff.



### **Controlled load (interruptible supply) tariffs**

**Tariff 33** is also called off-peak, economy or controlled load or shoulder on your bill. It is:

- A cheaper tariff that provides a maximum of 18 hours a day of power, only switching off during peak periods.
- Often connected to appliances you don't need to run all the time such as smaller water heater tanks and pool heaters.

**Tariff 31** is also called off-peak, economy or controlled load. It is:

- The cheapest tariff because it only provides power for a maximum of 8 hours a day, normally between 10pm-7am when there is low demand for power.
- Often used to heat hot water storage cylinders or run pool pumps that don't need a constant supply of power.



**HINT:** Check your bill to see what your retailer calls the different tariffs. If you want to get an appliance connected to tariff 31 or 33, you need to talk to your electricity retailer and understand the costs involved in having a new meter and connecting the appliance and the new meter.

For more information about Tariffs, go to <https://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au/article/electricity-tariffs>.

### **3. Administration fees:**

Each offer will have different fees and charges. Examples include late payment fees, direct debit dishonour fee, paper bill fees and cancellation fees.



**HINT:** Check your bill to see if you are being charged fees. Maybe you can avoid some of them by changing how and when you pay.

## 4. Discounts:

Each offer will offer certain discounts. Examples include pay on time discounts or special one-off discounts to encourage you to sign up to a new offer.



**HINT:** If you are being offered a sign-up discount, make sure the offer is still the best offer for you, and the discount is a bonus!

## 5. Rebates:

Depending on circumstances, some people are eligible to apply for certain government support to help cover the cost of energy. Information on these is available in Section 4: Extra Assistance.

## 6. Solar feed-in tariff:

If your home has solar panels, the retailer will pay you for the excess electricity you send back to the grid through a feed-in tariff. The amount you receive is paid per unit of electricity (kilowatt hour as kWh) and appears as a credit on your bill.


# Words used on your electricity bill

**Usage history** – this is normally provided on your bill as a graph.




**HINT:** If there has been a sudden increase in usage, think about what changed to make the bill go up. Also think about trying to limit the use of certain appliances - the old heater you pull out every winter might be really inefficient!





**Bright Sparks Power Company**  
**Bill 1**



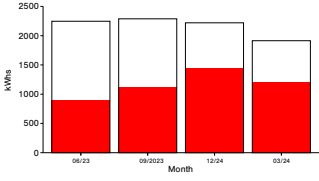
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**John & Joan Chaching**  
 1 Saver Avenue  
 Brightsparksville  
 Queensland 4101

**TAX INVOICE NUMBER** 999998  
**ISSUED DATE** 15 March 2024  
**ELECTRICITY ACCOUNT NUMBER** 67235  
**TOTAL AMOUNT DUE** \$450.00  
Please consider the environment before printing this bill

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**Your electricity usage**



Average cost per day \$5.00  
 Average daily usage 11.90 kWh

**Outstanding Balance**

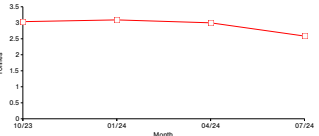
\$0.00

**Outstanding Balance Due Date**

N/A

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**Your greenhouse gas emissions**



Your pre-ClickNatural greenhouse gas emissions for this account were 2.90 tonnes.

If you do not already have Click Natural and want to reduce your environmental footprint see [www.brightsparksenergy.com.au](http://www.brightsparksenergy.com.au) or call us on 1300 363 783.

**Total Amount this bill (inc. GST)**

\$450.00

**Current Amount Due Date**

22/03/24

**Total Amount Owed**

\$450.00

**Your Bright Sparks Power online reward**

\$19.36

(to be credited to your next bill when you pay on time)

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Compare your electricity usage with benchmarks for similar households within Queensland

Number of people in your household	1	2	3	4	5	Your average daily consumption (kWh)
Average daily consumption (kWh)*	8.1	12.8	14.3	18.0	19.3	11.90

\*No Pool  
 To find out more about how the average household energy usage is calculated and get some energy efficiency tips visit [www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au)

**Are you moving house?**  
 Take us with you! Call **1300 363 783** and we'll help you transfer your electricity and gas connections to your new home!

**Faults and outages (24 hours)**  
 Call your distributor (Energex) on 13 62 62

**Concessions**  
 You may be eligible for concession or rebates, please call us on **1300 363 783** to find out more.


**Got feedback?**  
 We'd love to hear from you! If you have any feedback, please feel free to call us on **1300 363 783**.

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Tax Invoice. Bright Sparks Power Company Pty Ltd. Page 1 of 2.

**Date Due** – paying by the due date ensures you get any bonuses or rewards from your retailer for doing so.

**HINT:** If you can't make the payment by the due date, contact your retailer and let them know. They may extend the on-time payment discount or provide other types of support.



# Bright Sparks Power Company



**National Meter Identifier (NMI)**

**QB662351**

**Meter number**

**1620339:01**

**Reading Type**

**Actual**

**Previous Reading**

**2353**

**Plan Type**

**Connect (Peak)**

**Current Reading**

**3437**

**Supply Address**

1 Saver Avenue, Brightsparkville, Queensland 4101

**Your Billing Period**

15 Dec 2023 - 15 March 2024 (91 days)

**Life Support Registered**

**Concession Registered**


**Next Schedule Read**

No

No

11 June 2024

	Usage	Rate (Ex. GST)	Total \$(Ex. GST)	GST Total \$(Inc. GST)
Tariff 11 -Peak Only (1620339:01) (15 December to 15 March)	1083.5kWh	\$0.260760	\$282.54	\$28.25 \$310.79
Daily Supply Charge (15 December to 15 March)	91 days	\$1.390800	\$126.56	\$12.65 \$139.21
GST this bill				\$40.90
<b>Charges this bill</b>				\$450.00
<b>Total Adjustments</b>				\$0.00
<b>Total Bill</b>				<b>\$450.00</b>

 You can compare plans from other retailers on the energy made easy website at [energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://energymadeeasy.gov.au)

**Assistance and support services**

**Payment Assistance: Call us on 1300 363 783**

We can help you pay your energy account including:

- Extended time to pay
- Regular pay instalment plan
- Help with hardship or payment difficulty
- Information about concessions and rebates

**Hearing and Speech Services**

Telephone Typing (TTY) service is available for the cost of a local call, please call **13 36 77**. To use Speak and Listen service, please call **1300 555 727**.

**Interpreter Services: 131 450**

خدمة الترجمة الشفهية

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傳譯服務

Υπηρεσία Διαμετρήσεων

Dịch vụ Thông dịch

Servicio de intérpretes

**PAYMENT OPTIONS**

**Your Payment Options**

**Direct Debit**

Direct Debit Pay directly from your bank account or credit card by completing the direct debit form found at forms at [www.brightsparksenergy.com.au](http://www.brightsparksenergy.com.au)

**Online Payment** using our online payment facility at [www.brightsparksenergy.com.au/paynow](http://www.brightsparksenergy.com.au/paynow)

**POST billpay** In Person At any Post Office

**Telephone payment**

just contact any one of the friendly Click team and we can help you pay your bill over the phone. Just call **1800 77 59 29**

**Telephone and Internet Banking**

BPAY Contact your bank, credit union or building society to make this payment from your cheque, savings or credit card account.

Bill code **26682**

Customer Reference number **99998**

**Account Number**

**67235**

**Amount Due (inc. GST)**

**\$450.00**

Tax Invoice. Bright Sparks Power Company Pty Ltd. Page 2 of 2.

**Reading Type** – estimate (E) or actual (A) will be written on the bill. Energex will attempt to read your meter every 3 months, although are only required to read your meter at least 1 time per year.

In between, you may receive estimate bills. If the estimate bill is higher or lower than your actual usage, when the next actual bill arrives, you may have a high or low bill depending on how accurate the estimate was.



**HINT:** If you receive an estimate bill, it is a good idea to read your meter and check if the estimate is close to your actual use, so you can budget for the next actual bill.

**NMI is a National Meter Identifier**, and each household in Australia has a unique number.

Check your bill has the right NMI on it, so you are being billed for the correct usage, especially if you live in a block of units, where lots of meters might be close to each other.

**Meter Number** – if you have more than 1 meter, your bill will show the different meters.

### 3 Developing good energy habits – Reduce your Juice!!

## Electricity

We can always try to find ways to reduce the power we use. In Queensland, all retailers must show on your bill how much energy your home uses and how much other homes in your area use. If your bill is more than other similar households in your area, think about ways to reduce your household usage.

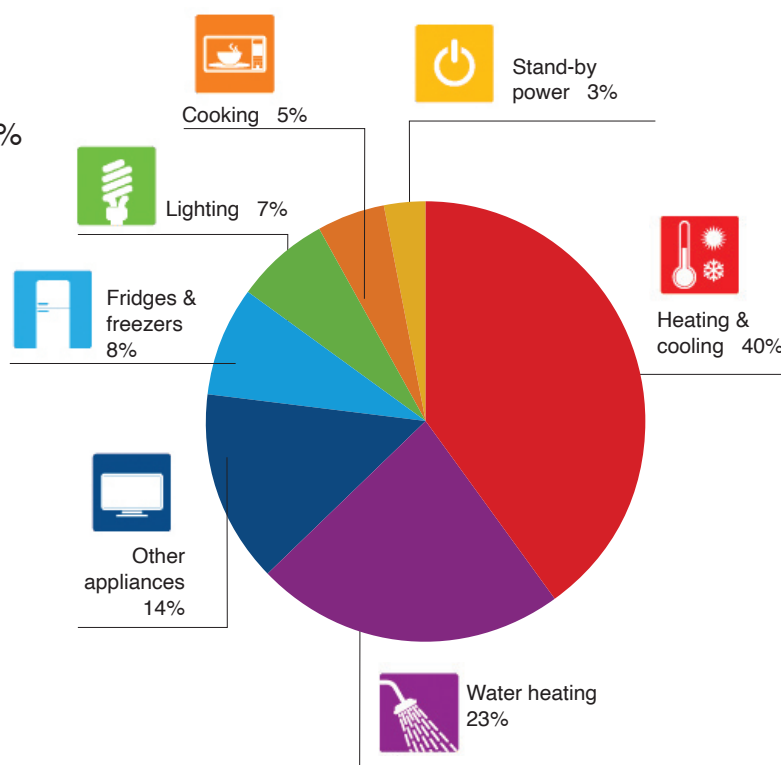
Some people with disability have specialist electrical equipment that results in higher power usage than the average household. If you have specialist equipment, rebates are available in certain circumstances (see section 4).

It can be helpful to think about how you use energy around your home. This can help you think about where you might want to 'reduce your juice' and save on electricity.

There are many factors that influence your energy usage breakdown. These include the size and features of your home, the number of people living there, how you use energy, how efficient your appliances are, and the climate.

According to a report by the Australian Government the average household's energy usage breakdown typically looks something like this:

- Heating and cooling 40%
- Water Heating 23%
- Refrigerators and freezers 8%
- Lighting 7%
- Cooking 5%
- Standby power 3%
- Other 14%  
(laundry, entertaining, small appliances etc.)



Source: Australian Department of Energy and SA Department of Energy and Mining.

Here are some very simple steps you can take to save energy around the house:

### Ways to keep cool at home in summer on a budget:

- Close windows, doors, curtains and blinds in areas you want to air condition, to ensure the cool air stays inside.
- If you are in tropical areas of Queensland, you might want to keep cool by opening the windows to let the breeze flow. This is only possible when the outside air is cooler than inside.
- Use fans instead of air conditioners; placing a bowl of ice in front of a fan can really cool down the local air temperature as much as an air conditioner.
- If you use the air conditioner:
  - set the thermostat to 26°C or as close to that as comfortable.
  - make sure the filters are kept clean so it runs at its best.
  - close doors to rooms that don't get used often, such as bathrooms, to reduce the size of the room(s) being cooled.



### Ways to keep warm at home in winter on a budget:

- Reduce draughts by closing windows, doors and curtains and block drafts under doors with draft stoppers or old towels.
- Rug up! It's cheaper and cosier in winter to put on extra layers of clothing or blankets rather than using a heater or electric blanket.



### Ways to reduce the cost of lighting:

- Turn lights off when not needed.
- Energy efficient bulbs or LED bulbs use much less power than normal bulbs.
- A single lamp is often also cheaper to use than overhead lighting.

### Ways to save power in the bathroom and laundry

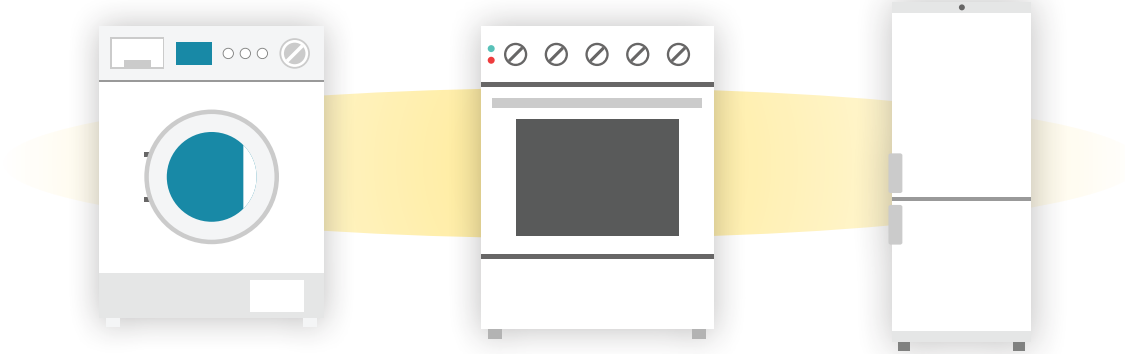
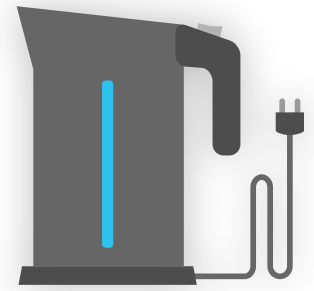
- Use cold water for washing.
- Use a clothes line instead of the tumble dryer whenever possible. Tumble dryers are big consumers of power.
- Set your hot water tank to 50°C if it has a thermostat. It doesn't need to be set higher than this.
- Don't do part loads of washing, wait until the washing machine is full of dirty clothes and then put it on.
- Put in low-flow showerheads—this can reduce the water flow from 22L to 9L per minute, saving on average \$70 on hot water costs every year.
- Have shorter showers—no more than 4 minutes.
- When the time comes to replace your old hot water system, consider energy efficient options including a heat pump, solar or combined solar hot water storage system.





## Ways to save power in the kitchen

- Thaw food in the fridge first to reduce cooking time.
- The oven: check the oven seals – as they get hot all the time they can wear out regularly. Turn off the oven before the food is ready – the oven will stay at cooking temperature for a short time even after it is off.
- Keep lids on pots when cooking on the stove top to reduce the amount of time and energy used. Dinner will be cooked faster too.
- Use an electric kettle rather than the stove to boil water. The stove isn't very efficient. Fill the kettle up only to the level of boiled water needed.
- If you have a dishwasher, only run it when full and use the economy cycle. This helps save water too.
- Keep fridges and freezers in a cool, well-ventilated spot away from the oven and the sun to save electricity. Keep a five-centimetre gap around your fridge so air can circulate freely.
- Repair or replace faulty door seals and avoid leaving the door open, especially in summer.



## Ways to save in the rest of your house

- Switch off appliances at the wall - many applications keep using energy if you don't switch them off at the wall, such as the TV, DVD player, games consoles, air conditioner, microwaves, computers, printers and modems. For hard to reach plugs, such as behind the TV area, there are so many Eco-switches that cost as little as \$20 that can cut the power to everything on a power board with a remote switch. They are available from most hardware shops.
- If you are going to be away from home for a bit of time such as a holiday, turn everything off, including the power to hot water system. That way you have more money to spend on your holiday!



**HINT:** Standby power is estimated to be \$100 per household per year, so some people may think buying an Eco-switch is a good idea.



**HINT:** Have an energy conversation with your household. Ask your family or roommates how they use energy and talk about some ways together you can agree on saving energy.

- New appliances generally are more efficient than older appliances. If your appliances are old and inefficient, the NILS (no interest loan scheme) can be a cheap and affordable way of accessing money to buy new appliances if needed. To find out more information <http://nils.com.au/>
- Desktop computers use more power than laptops, which also use more power than tablets. Think about this if purchasing a new device in addition to your accessibility needs and intended use.



## Ways to know if your appliances are energy-efficient

**Energy Rating Labels** can help you make choices about the appliances you buy.

- Star rating – the more stars, the more energy-efficient the product is compared to other models in its category.
- Energy consumption figure – shows an estimate of how much energy the appliance uses each year in kilowatt hours (kWh).



Most products are given between 1 and 6 stars. However, some new technology which is super-efficient may go up to 10 stars.

This means, the more stars shown on the Energy Rating Label, the less energy the product will use and the more money you will save on your energy bills.

In stores, it is required for the Energy Rating Label to be on appliances, such as a fridge, freezer, clothes washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher, televisions, non-ducted household air conditioner, computers and pool pumps.



**HINT:** If you are in store or purchasing a product online and do not see the energy rating label, check what the energy rating is with your seller before you buy it.

## 4 Extra Assistance

This section is about knowing what extra help is available for energy consumers. Some of the options available include:

- Registering as a life support customer
- Bill spreading options such as Centrepay or fortnightly/monthly direct debits
- Support from the retailer: Payment plans, financial counselling and hardship options
- Government rebates and concessions
- Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ)

### Life Support Customer

Tell your retailer or distributor about your life support equipment needs. This will put extra protections in place, so if they are planning to turn off the power for works or another reason, they will tell you before it happens so you can make other arrangements to power your equipment. You will need to complete a medical confirmation form with your doctor.



**HINT:** Having a backup power plan is still important even if you are a registered life support customer. Unexpected power outages can happen from severe weather events and other emergencies. If you need peace of mind, speak to a licensed electrician about your back up supply options.

### Bill spreading

Some of the retailers have bill spreading offers, although they normally come with higher usage and supply charges. A simpler and cheaper way for most people, is to set up your own way of paying more regularly, such as through Centrepay (for people on income support) or by direct debit. If you want to use Centrepay or direct debits, talk to your retailer. Some people find smaller and more regular payments easier to manage.

### Support from the Retailers

If you are having difficulties paying your energy bills, talk to your retailer! They have people whose job it is to support you to make the right decisions to get back on top of your bills. Many people get behind on bills, so they know how to help people in this situation.



**HINT:** Stay clear of the pay day lenders offering small loans or the budget schemes we see advertised on TV. These are schemes that are trying to make money. They often charge high interest rates, administration and set up fees. These products will only add to the stress of being a bit behind with bills. The best thing you can do is talk to your retailer!

## Payment Plans

If you are having problems paying bills for the first time, consider asking for a payment extension or payment plan. A payment plan is an arrangement between a retailer and you to help pay the electricity and/or gas bills.

It is important when agreeing to a payment plan that you can stick to the agreed payments or contact your retailer if you need to renegotiate.

## Financial Counselling

As part of getting back on track with your bills, the retailer might suggest you see a financial counsellor. You can also refer yourself to a financial counsellor if you feel you could benefit from getting help to manage your money.

Financial Counselling Australia has a network of counsellors all over Australia that provide free, independent and confidential services to help people who need help with their money. Call 1800 007 007 or visit the Financial Counselling Australia website <https://ndh.org.au/financial-counselling/find-a-financial-counsellor/> to find a Financial Counsellor in your area.

## Hardship Options

A hardship program is designed to help people with low incomes who are having difficulty paying their electricity and/or gas bills, if there has been:

- A recent reduction in income or
- Recent expenses that have made bill paying difficult.

What support each person gets will be different, depending on the circumstances. It may include incentive payments (such as removing late payment fees or matching payments the person makes) or financial counselling advice. To access this support, contact your retailer and ask to speak to their hardship team.

## Government Rebates

There are many government rebates available to help people with low incomes in certain circumstances. Following are the details of each of the options available. The options and the rates are current as of November 2024, and are reviewed regularly by the government.



**HINT:** Knowing which option(s) are available to you can sometimes be difficult to understand. Talk to your retailer, a trusted family member or friend, an advocate, your housing officer or neighbourhood centre to help you get the right support.

What	How much	Eligibility	How paid	How to apply
<b>Electricity Rebate</b>	\$372.20 per year	Pensioners, seniors and health care card holders	Shows as a discount off the electricity bill	Through your retailer's customer service team
<b>Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate (not bottled gas)</b>	\$89.70 per year	Pensioners, seniors and health care card holders	Shows as a discount off the gas bill	Through your retailer's customer service team
<b>Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Concession Scheme</b>	\$502.98 per year	Pensioners and health care card holders with certain medical conditions who need thermal regulation to reduce symptoms	Paid direct to your bank account	Qld Government Concession Services on (07) 3247 5907
<b>Electricity Life Support Concession</b>	\$1,024.38 per year for each oxygen concentrator \$686.01 per year for each kidney dialysis machine	A concession card holder and have an oxygen concentrator provided through MASS or a kidney dialysis machine provided by Queensland Health	Paid direct to your bank account	Qld Government Concession Services on (07) 3247 5907
<b>Essential Medical Equipment Payment</b>	\$191 per year <u>per piece</u> of essential equipment or medical condition	Only for certain medical conditions or equipment that has been prescribed for home use	Paid direct to your bank account	Apply through Centrelink (Tel: 132 468, My Gov website or in person)
<b>Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme</b>	One-off payment up to \$720 every 2 years	For low income earners with bill (electricity or gas) or income shock	Paid to the active energy account that is in arrears	Apply through your retailer's hardship program
<b>South East Queensland Water Subsidy</b>	\$120 per year	Pensioners and veterans. You must be the owner or life tenant of the property.	Shows as a discount off the water bill	Apply through your water retailer

\* Correct as at 12/11/2024

## Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland

If you don't feel like your energy retailer or wholesaler has supported you properly, or haven't provided the assistance you need, the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ) is run by the government and helps people to resolve complaints. You can contact EWOQ on 1800 662 837 or visit the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland website at <http://www.ewoq.com.au/>

## 5 How to Switch Electricity Offers

### Before Switching

Before deciding to switch offers or retailers, there are a few simple things to think about to know if it will be better for your household. People choose different products for different reasons such as it is cheapest, it is from a trusted brand, it comes with a rewards program, it is convenient or they like how/where it is produced. This is much the same as electricity, however the key is to get informed to work out what is best for you.

When it comes to electricity though, most people want the cheapest price. Contact your current retailer and ask if they can provide a better offer for your circumstances. Sometimes they can offer a better deal.



**HINT: Make sure you are up to date with payments with your current retailer. If you are behind on your bill and switch away from the current provider, you will lose access to the retailer's payment plans, hardship programs and the Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme. It is often best to switch only when the electricity bills are up to date.**

### Comparing Offers

Once you've understood the best deal you can get with your current retailer, grab your recent bills and jump on <https://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au> to see what offers are available from the retailers who provide power in your area. If you don't have web access, ask someone to help you.

<https://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au>

The screenshot shows the Energy Made Easy website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Australian Government logo, the 'ENERGYMADE easy' logo, and links for 'Compare', 'Get energy smart', and 'Control your costs'. A search bar is also present. The main heading says 'We want to help you find the right energy plan.' Below this, a paragraph states: 'With Energy Made Easy you can compare the different energy companies and choose the best plan for you. It's a free, independent government service.' A prominent red arrow points to a form field labeled 'Enter your suburb or postcode'. To the right of the field is a 'Start Comparing' button. At the bottom of the form, a note says: 'You can use Energy Made Easy if you live in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.'



**HINT: If possible, it is best to compare 1 full years' worth of electricity use (4 bills). Many people use different amounts of power in summer and winter depending on where they live and the appliances they use.**



When comparing offers, it is worth thinking about the following things in the offers you are comparing:

**1. The price of electricity, both the supply and usage charges (see section 2 – reading your electricity bill)**

**2. Fees, terms and conditions, such as exit fees and the length of the contract**

**3. Incentives or bonuses offered, such as pay on time discounts or dual fuel offers (if you also have gas)**

**4. Customer service or reputation of the company**

**5. Solar feed-in tariffs (if you have solar)**

The Energy Made Easy site makes it easy to compare these things.

The Energy Made Easy site also has a few advantages over other price comparison websites that are often advertised on TV, such as:

- It is **completely anonymous** - you only have to put in your postcode to complete a search, so you won't end up getting those follow up sales calls and emails from sales people.
- It is the only website that **compares all the electricity** offers for your postcode. The other comparison websites often get certain commissions or third party payments for recommending you to their products and so they may only show the ones that suit them best.
- The offers are always the most **current offers**, for the other sites this may not always be the case.

The Energy Made Easy Website allows you to easily compare up to 3 offers at any one time. Once you've got some offers that you are comparing, before making a final decision of who to go with, some of the following questions should be thought about:



If there are discounts, which tariffs does the discount apply to?



Does the discount apply to the whole tariff price or just part of it?










Is the discount applied before or after concessions are deducted?



Does the discount or quoted price refer to prices before or after GST?



Are there special conditions and can you meet them?

-  Do you have to pay your bills on time to get the discount?
-  Are there any late fees or other charges?
-  Can you pay by your preferred payment method and is there a transaction cost?
-  Will you be locked into a fixed term contract and if so, how much is the exit fee?
-  Do you have any debt you need to pay off with your current retailer first?
-  What kind of customer service are you looking for?
-  What is offered under the retailer's financial hardship policy?

Not all of these questions will be important to every person; the questions are just a guide to help you think about what is best for you.

## Deciding to Switch

Once you find an offer you are happy with, simply contact the retailer to make the switch.

Each retailer will have a different sign-up process, some will ask you to do everything over the internet/email, and others will talk you through the sign-up process.

You will be required to provide photographic ID and your recent bill (as proof of who you are and your responsibility to be the bill payer) and to sign some documents.



**HINT: Make sure you read the documents before you sign, or get a friend or family member or advocate to help if required.**

The switch to your new retailer will normally occur on the date of your next meter reading, so the old retailer can accurately charge you for the last of the usage with them, and the new retailer has a start read to begin your new account with. You can ask for a special meter read to occur sooner if you prefer, although you would be expected to pay the fee for that service.



**HINT: You will get a “cooling off period” if you switch plans. This means if you change your mind, you have 10-days to tell the energy retailer.**



## 1. Before signing a lease



**HINT:** Before moving in – before you sign a lease, check how electricity is managed in the building. Ask about the electricity provider, any embedded networks, and how bills are calculated. It is also a good idea to compare potential costs with other electricity retailers to make sure you are getting a good deal. This preparation can help you avoid surprises.



## 2. Moving house



**HINT:** Moving house? Contact your energy retailer at least a week before your move out date and let them know to disconnect the power for the day after you move out. You could also ask your current energy retailer to set up a new connection at your new home. Moving house may also be an opportunity to shop around and choose a deal that best suits you. The energy retailer may charge a connection fee.



## 3. Scams



**HINT:** A phishing scam can occur when a scammer pretends to be a legitimate business, such as your energy retailer, to try to trick you into giving personal information. These scams could come via mail, phone text message or email. It is important that you contact your energy provider retailer to confirm it is them. Never click on suspicious links or give personal information unless you are 100% sure you are speaking to your actual retailer. And remember – if something seems too good to be true, it is probably fake.

## Other Utility Services

### Gas Retailers

If you have reticulated natural gas (gas that isn't stored in bottles at your home), there is only a choice of two retailers in South East Queensland; AGL and Origin. If you live in a house that has both reticulated natural gas and electricity, you can also use the [www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au) website to compare the best offer for you. Gas supply is also governed by the Energy & Water Ombudsman Qld.

### Water Retailers

Water supply across Queensland is managed by water retailers or local councils, depending on your location. In South-East Queensland, there is a single retailer for each area, so there is no choice over who provides the water to your home. The supply is governed by the Energy and Water Ombudsman Qld. Outside of South-East Queensland, local councils are responsible for providing water to home and businesses. Your water bill is based on how much water you use. You can find your water provider by visiting this link at <https://explorer.water.qld.gov.au/explore-providers>.

# List of Other Resources

## Plain and Easy English Fact Sheets

The Australian Government has produced a suite of publications in plain English, easy English and resources translated into multiple languages.

<https://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au/article/publications#easy-english-publications>

## Australian Energy Regulator

The Australian Energy Regulator produces a range of energy related fact sheets for consumers that you can download, view and print.

Includes fact sheets on: Energy and essential medical equipment, financial hardship, and understanding the Queensland landscape.

[www.aer.gov.au/consumers/resources/consumer-fact-sheets](http://www.aer.gov.au/consumers/resources/consumer-fact-sheets)

## QCOSS Energy Fact Sheets

QCOSS have made some fact sheets to help those who are facing difficulties paying their energy bills or who need information on how to reduce their energy costs. The fact sheets include tips on saving energy, what concessions and assistance are available and what to do if you can't pay an energy bill.

[www.qcoss.org.au/publication/energy-fact-sheets/](http://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/energy-fact-sheets/)

QCOSS Community Door is for Queensland's community services sector with resources and training on energy and water.

<https://communitydoor.org.au/resources/energy-and-water>

# Glossary of Electricity Terms

**Cooling off period:** By law, you have a 10 business day cooling off period, which means if you sign up to a new energy contract and decide to cancel it, you don't pay any exit fees.

**Electricity Grid:** is the network of infrastructure that gets power to the home. It consists of power stations, distribution centres, wires and poles.

**Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ):** is run by the government and helps customers to resolve problems with an energy retailer or distributor. Their number is 1800 662 837.

**Energy retailer:** is the company you pay for the gas and/or electricity you use. Some customers have the same retailer for both electricity and gas.

**Energy wholesaler:** An electricity or gas wholesaler owns the power lines, poles and gas pipes that supply electricity and gas to your home. In South East Queensland the electricity wholesaler is Energex.

**Hardship program:** A program to help customers who are having difficulty paying their electricity and/or gas bills. All energy retailers must have a customer hardship policy.

**Kilowatt hour (kWh):** A measure of electricity equal to 1000 watt hours. An electricity bill will show the power used in kilowatt hours.

**Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG):** Liquefied natural gas is bottled gas. It is often used in homes for heating hot water and cooking.

**Offer:** or energy plan is the contract between the energy retailer and you. The retailer must tell you all the costs involved in the offer so you can work out if it is the best one for you.

**Off-peak tariffs:** A cheaper price for electricity. Off-peak times are when the demand for electricity is at its lowest.

**Payment plan:** An arrangement between a retailer and a customer to help the customer pay their electricity and/or gas bills.

**Renewable energy:** Energy from natural sources, such as the sun, water or wind. It normally costs a little more to have an offer that uses renewable energy, although some people prefer to do this to help the environment.

**Reticulated Natural Gas:** is gas that is supplied by pipes to a house. It isn't stored in bottles. It is sometimes also called mains gas, and is often used to heat hot water and for cooking.

**Switching:** When a customer signs up to a new offer for their electricity and/or gas supply, usually with a different energy retailer.

**Solar Feed-in tariff:** The price that customers get for the solar energy their solar panels put into the electricity grid.



## Notes

[illegible]



# Bright SPARKS

The purpose of Bright Sparks is to enhance the capacity of people with disability to be informed consumers in the electricity market. To continue learning about ways to save on electricity bills and to compare offers, please find information at

**[www.energymadeeasy.gov.au](http://www.energymadeeasy.gov.au)**

For more information or questions in relation to Bright Sparks  
or information about QDN, please contact



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