

MEDIA RELEASE

Consumers need reassurance over smart meter data collection – Privacy Commissioner

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Electricity retailers and distributors can do more to reassure consumers that the information being collected by smart meters is being handled safely with a minimal risk of infringing individual privacy, says Privacy Commissioner John Edwards.

Mr Edwards says discussions with sector stakeholders revealed that bulk disclosure of household level smart meter information is taking place under the sector's existing Use of System (UoS) Agreements.

In an open letter to electricity retailers and distributors this week, Mr Edwards recommends the industry bodies:

- review their privacy statements and consider updating them to include assurances regarding the use of smart meter data;
- review whether the individual household level data currently being provided by retailers could be aggregated and still meet network planning needs;
- ensure that personal information is not collected unnecessarily, or held for longer than necessary; and
- aggregate meter data, for example, through amalgamating data from small groups of households, or by receiving the data at the street level.

Aggregating the data would alleviate the privacy concerns, allowing for provision of rich data for research and innovation while still protecting consumers' reasonable expectations of privacy.

"In order for distributors to carry out their role efficiently and cost effectively, they require a certain level of detail about the network. However, based on my investigations, it does not appear that they require household level data for network planning," Mr Edwards said.

"Loss of trust from deliberate or accidental disclosure is likely to impact strongly on retailers. Finding a privacy-friendly solution is in the interests of both consumers and businesses."

ENDS

A copy of the open letter to electricity retailers and distributors is available [here](#).

Note for Editors

About 70 percent of New Zealand households currently have smart meters and this is likely to increase to 90 percent within two years.

Electricity usage tracks closely with house occupancy. If detailed usage information became publicly available, it would be possible to track and anticipate a household's movements.

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