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Date of submission: Wednesday, 6 June 2018

Submission: Along with the Retail metering services, main switchboard approval is linked to this. The attached memo is to highlight the issues in shifting the responsibilities, including review and approval of main switchboards, that connect customers to the distribution network. Our concern relates to the checking and approval process of main switchboards, and the connection to the Distributor's network. Currently this approval process is tied into the metering arrangements. With the connection and metering process changing and moving away from the Distributor, so has the approval process for main switchboards. There are a couple of concerns here that relate to the network protection and our business operation.



Date 06/06/2018

Author Mid Coast Switchboards – Tim Smead (owner & engineer)

Topic **Main Switchboard & Distribution Network Connection**

Purpose To highlight the issues in shifting the responsibilities, including review and approval of main switchboards, that connect customers to the distribution network.

Background

Our concern relates to the checking and approval process of main switchboards, and the connection to the Distributor's network. Currently this approval process is tied into the metering arrangements. With the connection and metering process changing and moving away from the Distributor, so has the approval process for main switchboards. There are a couple of concerns here that relate to the network protection and our business operation.

The Australian Government – Australian Energy Regulator has introduced reforms. One is the Power of Choice program, which has shift the power and control of consumers away from the Distributor, and now onto the Retailers. A Distributor, like Essential Energy & Endeavour, has had control over the network, connections, equipment and customer metering. This has changed with the connection process and metering moving over to Retailers; noting that Retailers outsource the meter provision and installation to an approved third party.

Previously there has been an approval process that involved the Distributor when connecting onto their network. A representative within the network has reviewed the design and main switchboard detail prior to manufacture. This is to ensure the connection between the network and customer is provided with the correct, and proper and safe gear. This has a two-fold function of protecting both the network upstream, and the customer downstream. This review includes checking;

- The safe and proper switchboard layout;
- Correctly sized and graded circuit breakers;
- All the correct gear and protection devices;
- Proper labelling and details for safe operation; and
- Compliance with the current Australian Standards and Service & Installation Rules of NSW.

There are a couple of concerns here that relate to the network protection and our business operation.

Network Impact

I believe there is a need to appropriately protect the network upstream of main switchboards. Correctly built switchboard with the right gear and settings will protect the upstream network. An incorrectly built switchboards with the wrongs setup, may see a customer fault damage the network, causing loss of power for local areas and neighbouring properties.

I believe where a customer is connecting to an authority and distribution network there needs to be an approval process that remains with the Distributor and NOT outsourced to a third party. For us the review and approval process has been provided by the Distributor, typically being Essential Energy. They have approved submitted details within 2 weeks, although this is getting harder to chase and taking longer.

With this approval process potentially shifting over to the Retailers, who outsource to third party meter providers and installers, we see there are number of impacts;

- Meter installers lacking technical knowledge of the network and switchboard standards to adequately review & approve switchboard; and
- No access to network information to ensure main switchboard gear is set up to grade & protect network.

Business Impact

As the business owner and manufacturer of main switchboards the review process shifting away from the network has several impacts for us. This delay means we can't commence manufacturing switchboards and affects utilisation, staffing, turnover, deadlines, etc. I don't believe we are isolated in this with our business. This will be affecting other switchboard manufacturers. The main impacts include;

- Unknown meter providers at the time of manufacture;
- Delayed and prolonged approval process stalling the manufacturing timing;
- A site where multiple meters are required in a single switchboard, & seeking multiple approvals;
- Meter installers with a lack of technical knowledge; and
- No access to network information to ensure main switchboard gear is set up to grade & protect network.

Currently we are using our contacts within the Distributor to maintain a review process that enables us to continue business as usual. This typically takes 2-3 weeks, which we accommodate in our build program. Distributors like Essential Energy have started to step back from this process.

This uncertain future has now started to impact our business. We have no clear, or concise nor appropriate process to switchboard reviews. We have no certainty as to who will be, nor how long a review may take. Clients and customers often haven't completed their power connections and accounts sorted by the time we need approvals, so we don't know who the meter provider is, and meter providers are not interested unless it's their meters being installed.

Recommendation

Main switchboard review and approval process must remain with the Distributor. It must not be novated over to Retailers or third-party meter suppliers.

In this process there should be a couple of clear expectations;

- The submission and review process should be an online process, so design and details can be uploaded and tracked;
- The review process should take no longer than 10 working days; and
- That Network device details to be made available. That is, devices that need to be taken into consideration in the setup of the switchboards, like fuses, are readily available in the Distributors response.

End