AEMC – in support of ToU tariffs

Comments on Submissions made:

I read with interest many of the submissions that have been made to the AEMC on this issue. At this stage I'm sure that very few of these have taken the AEMC by surprise, but these are my observations:

- Retailers' submissions seek to entrench the position of generators and retailers that rely primarily on fossil fuels.
- They also use the now-ubiquitous delay-tactic that seeks time to run down their aging assets and prolong the entrenched cash-cow market position of these assets.
- The individual submissions contained some soapbox antics – uninformed ranting – easily dismissed using a cursory reference to the facts.
- Interestingly, the shortest of the individual submissions was the best – and I agree that there should be NO leeway for retailers to unilaterally move customers to ToU – not ever. If the customer cannot see the benefit in ToU tariffs, then let them stay on a fixed tariff – I'm quite sure the retailers won't complain!

My Personal Experience of ToU tariffs:

I am a retired Electrical Engineer with experience in power backup systems stretching back to the 1980s. I have rooftop solar and a Tesla Powerwall and I am home most days. This all means I am able to vary the time we use power to take advantage of Time-of-Use (ToU) tariffs. The Powerwall also has a built-in algorithm that adjusts using these tariffs.

I have been following the Smart-Meter debate with interest and it took me many months of detailed research to understand the retailers' view of the system. Finally, I requested the change to a Smart Meter and to ToU tariffs. SolarQuotes has a short article on this that I submitted to them.

The first point here is that, as an electrical engineer, it took me months to work my way through the obscure details provided by my retailer, AGL. Not only were they hard to find, but the language was confused and complicated. The most useful information came from an AGL blogsite, not their official webpages, and from the Energy-Made-Easy website. [redacted]

The second point is that, once the meter was installed, the information I tried to get out of AGL regarding tariffs and how to read the new meter, was just not forthcoming. [redacted] On more than one occasion I raised an official complaint with the SA Ombudsman, who were extremely helpful.

The meter was installed on 12 July 2024. The ToU question I later escalated to the Ombudsman was eventually resolved on 25 September 2024. Again, this is me as a qualified Electrical Engineer trying to get an answer to a really basic ToU question. I also have 30 years' experience as a university lecturer, but I had to turn myself inside-out trying to put my question to AGL in a way that they could understand. God help poor old Joe Blow who is trying to make sense of this all!

In sum, I completely understand the need for ToU tariffs, and it is the only way forward in a power network with significant VRE in it.

BUT

The retailers have made a hash of it. Imposing ToU on customers without notice (let alone without permission!) is just unconscionable – did they really think they could get away with it?
Then they also tried (successfully?) to shift the blame onto the Smart Meters, and away from the central issue of their unilateral imposition of ToU tariffs. I have an opinion that this hash-up was by design, but maybe it just resulted from years of being able to treat customers as they please.

Given all this, I therefore applaud the AEMC's initiative to clean up the way retailers treat their customers. In particular I support:

- The abolition of a Demand-Charge for domestic customers
    - There's no need for it - the MCB limits the demand anyway

- Clear and unequivocal Permission from the customer before moving onto ToU tariffs

- Retailer to give customers simple and clear guidelines on how to benefit from ToU tariffs
    - Turn on dishwashers, washing machines, driers, etc. when tariffs are low
    - Use timers on these appliances to start during off-peak (e.g. 10am)
    - Pre-cook suitable meals (stews, etc.) during off-peak, using inbuilt timers