



NEWS

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Farmers oppose electricity sell-off

The NSW Farmers' Association Executive Council has voted to oppose the privatisation of the electricity market, unless the NSW Government puts in place rock solid guarantees for rural customers.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie said service, price and availability of electricity are all critical issues that need to be addressed.

"This Government must ensure a structure is put in place to guarantee equitable prices and servicing is available for rural customers once the energy companies are privatised," Mr Laurie said.

"People need to know that problems will be fixed if the power goes out, and their location won't be disadvantage," Mr Laurie said.

The NSW Government is currently considering the sell-off of the retail arm of the state-owned Energy Australia, Country Energy and Integral Energy to private operators. It is understood that distribution assets such as poles and lines will remain government owned.

State owned electricity generators Macquarie Generation, Delta Energy and Eraring Energy would be leased to private operators.

"The Association wants standard electricity contracts made available to all customers in NSW, that contains an agreed universal standard of service and a maximum price determined by an independent regulator.

"Rural customers must also have a guarantee that electricity will be available, where-ever they live, once the market is privatised," Jock Laurie said.

The Association is also calling for assurances that maintenance of equipment will be carried out and development of the networks continue post the sale.

"If there are only a few customers living on a road in outback NSW, it may not be profitable for a private company to maintain the line – but this has to be guaranteed for the sake of rural customers," Mr Laurie said.

The NSW Government has guaranteed that retail price caps will remain until 2013.

"The Association wants that assurance to continue after 2013, so rural customers can expect to have the same service and equitable pricing beyond that date," Mr Laurie concluded.

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