SEC
Smart Energy Code

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Smart Energy Code

DP163

‘T3 Aerials Requirements Removal’

Modification Report

Version 0.2

20 July 2021

Corporate member of Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication
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About this document

This document is a draft Modification Report. It currently sets out the background, issue, and progression timetable for this modification, along with any relevant discussions, views and conclusions. This document will be updated as this modification progresses.

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1. Summary

This proposal has been raised by Rochelle Harrison from Centrica.

The Smart Energy Code (SEC) currently states that in the event of the Data Communications Company (DCC) being unable to provide Smart Meter Wide Area Network (SM WAN) coverage to a Supplier Party, a T3 aerial is deployed and installed to improve the coverage so that smart metering functionality is available. The Proposer believes that the T3 aerials have a variety of problems which include additional processing costs, the logistics of organising the installation, time spent on site in order to install the unit, and that there is no guarantee that the T3 aerials will solve the coverage issue.

2. Issue

What are the current arrangements?

The SEC currently states that in the event of the DCC being unable to provide SM WAN coverage to a Supplier Party, a T3 aerial is deployed and installed at the affected premise to improve the coverage so that smart metering functionality is available.

Obligations surrounding using the T3 aerials sit within SEC Appendix H 'CH Handover Support Materials', in Sections 1.4 and 7.4, and broadly throughout SEC Appendix I 'CH Installation and Maintenance Support', where a Special Installation Mesh Communications Hub (CH) is required for installation. These Special Installation Mesh CHs can use any of a T1/T2/T3 aerial and an M1/M2 aerial.

What is the issue?

The Proposer believes that the T3 aerials have a variety of problems which include:

- additional processing costs;
- time spent on site in order to install the unit whilst simultaneously having a Telefonica engineer present to do so presenting logistical difficulty; and
- there is no guarantee that the T3 aerial will solve the coverage issue.

These combined issues call into question the suitability of the T3 aerials. Suppliers have to undertake significant efforts to address the SM WAN coverage issue and are looking for an alternative that would present fewer challenges logistically and financially.

What is the impact this is having?

The Proposer has stated that the large amount of effort to install a T3 aerial with no guarantee that the coverage would be improved is a significant barrier when marketing this to customers as a solution to signal issues. According to the Proposer, there have only been two known cases of installing T3 aerials, where one was successful, and the other didn't solve the connectivity issue. The

installation requires drilling into walls; if the installation doesn't provide additional coverage the site has then been potentially damaged or altered for no benefit.

Impact on consumers

The Proposer believes that consumers could be adversely affected by having to install Devices that, although potentially solving coverage issues, could contradict planning laws and could negatively impact area of outstanding natural beauty. This would be likely as the areas that would need improved coverage are areas such as national heritage sites and premises close to national parks.

3. Assessment of the proposal

Observations on the issue

This modification was presented to the Change Sub Committee (CSC) on 25 May 2021, who recognised that the installation of T3 aerials does present an issue. Members agreed that other alternatives to T3 aerials needed to be explored, as the current approach is not practical.

One member noted the process for installing one is very resource-intensive, and if it fails there is no 'Plan B'. These aerials are seen as a stopgap until a resilient Wide Area Network (WAN) is in place. They queried if T3 aerials are seen as part of the 'no-WAN' solution, noting these did not seem to be supported by the industry. They also noted a lot of sites that currently have working SMETS1 meters which may need a T3 aerial, which the member felt would be difficult to explain to the customer.

The consumer representative agreed with the concerns over customer experience and noted questions over risk and liability if installation goes wrong. They also noted Suppliers cannot engage with leaseholders or renters to gain permission to install these aerials. They noted that Ofcom is consulting over indoor repeaters and wondered if the Communications Service Providers (CSPs) could look at this.

The CSC agreed that further development is required to fully define and understand the issue, citing several existing and historical industry workshops and initiatives which have so far been inconclusive. The DCC has provided some feedback on the potential impact of implementing alternative solutions to network coverage issues; the CSP for the South and Central regions has noted there is a particularly high impact that would be experienced. The DCC has cited a prior consultation which found that preliminary deployment costs for an alternative solution would be in the range of £100m – £200m.

The Operations Group and the Technical Architecture and Business Architecture Sub-Committee (TABASC) expressed an interest in this modification.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is currently conducting a trial on the effectiveness of T3 aerials in improving coverage, which is scheduled to conclude in December 2021. The Proposer is content to await the results of this trial before seeking to implement a solution. However, they are keen to progress this modification to the Refinement Process as they believe the issue is clear, and to avoid delays once the BEIS trial is complete.

Appendix 1: Progression timetable

The Draft Proposal was raised on 12 May 2021. The Proposer has requested this be presented to the CSC on 27 July 2021 for conversion to a Modification Proposal. However, SECAS considers that the results of the BEIS trial will provide further information that will help to fully define the issue and the impacts it is having. It recommends DP163 remains in the Development Stage during this trial so that this information can be accounted for within the problem statement.

If the CSC approves the conversion of this Draft Proposal to a Modification Proposal, this will then be put on hold pending the results of the BEIS trial, after which SECAS will review alongside the relevant Panel Sub-Committees.

Timetable	
Event/Action	**Date**
Draft Proposal raised	12 May 2021
Presented to CSC for initial comment	25 May 2021
Presented to CSC for conversion to Modification Proposal	27 Jul 2021
Results of BEIS trial – modification placed on hold until then	13 Dec 2021

Appendix 2: Glossary

This table lists all the acronyms used in this document and the full term they are an abbreviation for.

Glossary	
Acronym	**Full term**
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
CH	Communications Hub
CSC	Change Sub Committee
CSP	Communications Service Provider
DCC	Data Communications Company
SEC	Smart Energy Code
SECAS	Smart Energy Code Administrator and Secretariat
SM WAN	Smart Metering Wide Area Network
TABASC	Technical Architecture and Business Architecture Sub-Committee