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## MP169 ‘Managing SEC Obligations and the Consumers right to refuse a Smart Meter’

### February 2024 Working Group – meeting summary

#### Attendees

Attendee	Organisation
Rachel Black (RBL)	SECAS
Ben Giblin (BG)	SECAS
Alison Beard (AB)	SECAS
Elizabeth Woods (EW)	SECAS
Anik Abdullah (AA)	SECAS
Kev Duddy (KD)	SECAS
Rainer Lischetzki (RL)	SECAS
Tim Newton (TN)	SECAS
Mohammedanwar Sumro (MS)	SECAS
Bradley Baker (BB)	DCC
David Walsh (DW)	DCC
Robin Seaby (RS)	DCC
Nick Rodgers (NR)	DCC
Patricia Massey (PM)	BEAMA
Emma Johnson (EJ)	British Gas
Rochelle Harrison (RH)	British Gas
Beth Tatton (BT)	Calisen Metering
Alex Hurcombe (AH)	EDF
Sharon Armitage (SA)	EON
Ian Turner (IA)	EON
Graham Wiles (GW)	EON
Daniel Davies (DD)	ESG
Kelly Kinsman (KK)	National Grid Electricity Distribution
Ralph Baxter (RB)	Octopus Energy
Jamie Flaherty (JF)	Ofgem
Emslie Law (EL)	OVO
Eric Fowler (EF)	Power Data Consultants
Jeff Studholme (JS)	Smart Meter Assets
Shuba Khatun (SK)	SSEN

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Attendee	Organisation
Mahfuzar Rahman (MF)	SSEN
Kevin Clark (KC)	Utilita

## Overview

The Smart Energy Code Administrator and Secretariat (SECAS) provided an overview of the issue, impact, the Proposed Solution and the Preliminary Assessment.

## Issue

- Suppliers are receiving an increasing number of requests from Consumers to have Smart Meters installed in 'dumb' mode.
- Suppliers have obligations to ensure the Smart Metering System is installed and communicating.
- Therefore, consumer demands for a Smart Meter to be installed in 'dumb' mode cannot be met.

## Proposed Solution

- Introduce a Restricted Mode on Devices which are SMETS2+ only, limiting the number of Service Request Variants (SRVs) which can be delivered to or from the Device.
- Set by the installing Supplier via the Self-Service Interface (SSI).
- This solution would act as an additional step to Suppliers 'all reasonable steps' obligations.

## Preliminary Assessment summary

- Costs for Design, Build and Pre-Integration Testing (PIT) of between £351,000 and £750,000.
- Costs for a full Impact Assessment are £16,684.
- Six month lead time.

## **Working Group Discussion**

SECAS (BG) provided an overview of the modification, noting the issue, Proposed Solution, Preliminary Assessment and the actions which had been investigated following the November Working Group meeting.

### **Messaging to Consumers from Citizens Advice and Energy Ombudsman**

SECAS (BG) explained that discussions had taken place with Citizens Advice and the Energy Ombudsman about the wording on their websites which suggest consumers can request a Smart Meter with functionality turned off. (BG) noted that the Energy Ombudsman are assessing whether to alter their wording, however Citizens Advice provided an update to SECAS which stated that they would not change the wording on their website. Citizens Advice clarified that due to the low availability of heritage meters, Smart Meters are effectively mandatory. Due to this, if they removed the existing messaging about the Device working in non-smart mode this would mean that fully operational Smart Meters have become mandatory, which would create negative media attention.

A Working Group member (JS) acknowledged this, adding their view that they believe the messaging from Citizens Advice implies that smart functionality is negative. The Proposer (EL) noted they still receive rulings from the Energy Ombudsman about installing Devices in ways which mean the Supplier is deliberately breaking their obligations.

### **When will the Restricted Mode be applied to the Device?**

A Working Group member (EJ) questioned whether the Restricted Mode could only be applied to Devices being newly installed, or to all Devices currently operating. The DCC (RS) confirmed that the Restricted Mode can be applied at any time. The Proposer (EL) noted from a policy perspective it should only be applicable to new Devices, rather than retrospectively.

### **How will Restricted Mode be communicated to Consumers?**

A Working Group member (IT) noted that the messaging regarding the introduction of Restricted Mode should be discussed, as there is lots of existing misinformation about Smart Meters. The Proposer (EL) agreed, noting that they have been frustrated with information from the Energy Ombudsman about having parts of the Smart Metering System 'turned off', which has led to more confusion for consumers.

Another Working Group member (BT) questioned whether there would be any guidance provided to Parties as part of this modification about how to communicate the new Restricted Mode with Consumers. SECAS (BG) noted that this modification will deliver a technical solution, with no guidance being provided in the SEC about how it should be communicated to Consumers. Another Working Group member (RB) added that Suppliers are working competitively against one another and there should be no guidance in the SEC as to how each Supplier should communicate with their customers.

### **Will this modification introduce a new Device status for Restricted Mode?**

A Working Group member (SK) questioned how Parties would be able to identify a Device in Restricted Mode. SECAS (BG) clarified that Restricted Mode will be introduced as a new status on the Device, similar to what currently exists for a Device in 'suspended' mode.

### **Will this modification increase the number of Smart Meter installations?**

A Working Group member (KC) commented that this modification will cause Parties to incur costs and may not convince consumers to have a Smart Meter installed. The Proposer (EL) noted that this modification was raised as a consequence of consumers having the right to refuse, but Suppliers not having legacy meters to install, leading to an impasse of what to do. They added that they believed the current situation, where consumers are requesting Smart Meters to be installed in non-smart mode had not been adequately considered when the Smart Metering Implementation Programme began.

### **Does the Consumer have a right to refuse a Smart Meter?**

A Working Group member (DD) questioned whether there is a source which confirms that the consumer has a right to refuse a Smart Meter, as without confirmation then this may allow Suppliers to install Smart Meters in all installations. The Proposer (EL) noted that the Energy Minister at the time had been asked whether Smart Meters would be mandatory in Parliament. The Minister replied that the UK Government would not be forcing Energy Consumers to have Smart Meters installed. They added that they had discussed this at length with the Consumer Reference Group, who noted that the Supplier is responsible for arrangements for the consumer when they refuse a Smart Meter.

## **Next Steps**

The following actions were recorded from the meeting:

- SECAS (BG) to request the Impact Assessment at Change Board.
- SECAS (BG) to work with the Proposer to investigate whether Restricted Mode should only be applied to newly installed Devices.