

16 February 2009

Ms Beth Bear
Institution of Civil Engineers
One Great George Street
Westminster London SW1P 3AA

Dear Ms Bear

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your inquiry into the resilience of UK infrastructure networks. Given our limited responsibilities in this area we would like to address three issues in our response, as follows:

1. Consumer Focus's statutory role and responsibilities;
2. Our involvement in the Energy Emergencies Committee; and
3. Our position on security of supply issues.

Consumer Focus is the new statutory organisation campaigning for a fair deal for consumers in England, Wales, Scotland, and, for postal services, Northern Ireland. We are the voice of the consumer, and work to secure a fair deal on their behalf. We were created through the merger of three consumer organisations – energywatch, Postwatch and the National Consumer Council (including the Welsh and Scottish Consumer Councils). The new approach allows for more joined-up consumer advocacy, with a single organisation speaking with a powerful voice and able to more readily bring cross-sector expertise to issues of concern.

While our remit includes energy we have limited involvement in the ensuring the security and resilience of the energy infrastructure. This responsibility lies primarily with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. It in part fulfils this responsibility through the Energy Emergencies Executive. Consumer Focus attends meetings of the Energy Emergencies Executive Committee (E3C). This committee undertakes detailed emergency planning, including testing. Membership of the group includes experts from the gas and electricity industries as well as government,

regulators and other stakeholders. The E3C considers any issue that may impact on major loss of energy supply such as adverse weather, potential or actual threat of terrorist attack, industrial relations emergencies or failure of a major electricity or gas market participant.

Our role in attending these meetings is to satisfy ourselves that the interests of energy consumers are being safeguarded and that companies are taking the necessary action to deal with emergencies or to mitigate risks. We also have a specific interest in ensuring communications are clear and timely.

One of our main concerns is that all consumers, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to safe, secure and reliable supplies of energy over networks which are effectively, efficiently and economically managed keeping costs of operation fair. There are significant challenges facing the energy industry in coming years, requiring a considerable level of investment. These challenges include the need for improvements to assets and meeting the climate change targets.

There are however a number of actions being undertaken by government and industry to address these concerns. For example we are involved in the Distribution Price Control Review which is currently underway. Consumer Focus will continue to work with the energy industry to ensure our concerns are addressed.

I hope these comments are helpful and would be pleased to follow them up with you either in person or via telephone (020 7799 7936).

Yours sincerely



Robert Hammond
Head of Regulated Industries