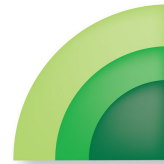




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People on Sydney's swanky North Shore are paying up to \$400 a year less for their power than Riverina residents

ELECTRIC SHOCKER

By **STACEY POST**

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COMPARED to some Sydney residents, Riverina consumers could be paying up to \$400 more in average annual electricity costs.

An energy comparison website has revealed this significant difference which is another example where regional residents are forced to pay higher prices for essential services.

But Country Energy, the Riverina's largest

electricity provider, has brushed off the claims, saying higher operating and distribution costs in regional areas contribute to any price differences.

According to figures released by national price watch company switchselect.com, Riverina families are paying an average of \$1592 per year – putting them at the top end of the pricing scale.

This is about the same amount as being paid by families in the Central

West NSW town of Dubbo.

The research, which is based on a family of two adults and two children using 7500 kilowatts a year at regulated peak prices, shows electricity is as cheap as \$1200 for consumers in Sydney, Canberra and parts of Brisbane.

However, some capital cities face higher annual costs with Adelaide and Melbourne reaching more than \$1700.

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Electric blues for residents paying hundreds more for their power

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Switchselect.com was established in January this year and was the first energy comparison website in Australia.

“What we really want to do is bring comparisons to the forefront and give the customer the option so they can make the final decision on how much they pay for electricity,” switchselect.com managing director, Leon Hayes said.

“We want to remove the smoke and mirrors and start

comparing apples with apples.”

Manager of community relations for Country Energy, Donna McFeeters, said a number of factors between city and country areas will affect bill prices.

“Country Energy operates and maintains Australia's largest power distribution network and, as such, any differences in costs between Country Energy and its metropolitan counterparts reflect the costs associated with operating an electricity network

with vastly different geographical areas, populations and customer densities,” Ms McFeeters said.

However, electricity retailer, and one of Country Energy's competitors, Integral Energy said a number of options for Riverina residents to lower their electricity bills do exist.

“Residents can certainly give us a call and we will endeavour to offer them a rate below their current regulated price,” Integral spokesperson Peter Payne said.