



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

**Annual Report
2022/2023**





Our mission

To provide high quality, independent dispute resolution and raise customer service standards in the energy and water industries.

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About EWON



EWON acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across New South Wales. We respect Elders past and present and we thank the many Aboriginal communities who welcome us onto their land.

ngara ngwiya yudi — listen, give, guide

About this report

This Annual Report is published in accordance with the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) Charter and the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution. The benchmarks are accessibility, independence, fairness, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

About our data

The data in this report is drawn from complaints received by EWON in the 2022/2023 financial year, unless otherwise specified. EWON's open complaint data varies in accordance with complaint progression, and figures in this report reflect complaint status at 12 July 2023. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number so may not always add up to 100%.

About our case studies

Personal information about our customers has been changed to protect their privacy.

About EWON

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) is a not for profit, industry-based ombudsman scheme that provides free and independent dispute resolution services to all NSW energy and some water customers. We seek to achieve fair and reasonable outcomes for all parties. We are neither a consumer advocate nor an industry representative.

EWON was established 25 years ago as the Energy Industry Ombudsman NSW (EION). Initially comprising the six government-owned electricity providers and one transmission company, our jurisdiction expanded in 1999 to include some water providers, initiating the change to EWON. The following year, the first gas member joined the scheme and in 2018 our membership expanded further to include exempt entities.

Our principal Charter responsibilities are to:

- Handle energy and water complaints independently, fairly, informally, efficiently and free of charge to the customer.
- Promote EWON to consumers and small businesses.
- Encourage and advise members on good complaint-handling practices to help reduce and avoid complaints.

We investigate a broad range of complaints including billing, credit, customer service, transfer, digital meter exchange, supply, land, provision, marketing and privacy issues.

Our purpose

- Provide high quality, independent advice, information and dispute resolution to NSW energy and water customers.
- Use our unique complaints data to enable energy and water providers to improve their customer service, systemically reduce the drivers of complaints and to inform the development of regulations, codes and policy.
- Engage effectively with NSW consumers, promote our service and the complaints processes of energy and water providers through our community outreach and stakeholder engagement program.

2022/2023 Highlights



17,852

complaints received

up 22%

on previous year



See next page for complaints received from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023

25 years

of dispute resolution



77%

electricity complaints



18%

gas complaints



4%

water complaints

<1% of complaints were non energy/non water (67)



94% of complaints closed within 30 days



\$1.16 million

in customer outcomes



17,844

complaints closed, up 22% from 2021/2022



See next page for complaints received by level



See next page for all complaint issues for 2022/2023



67%

billing complaints



10%

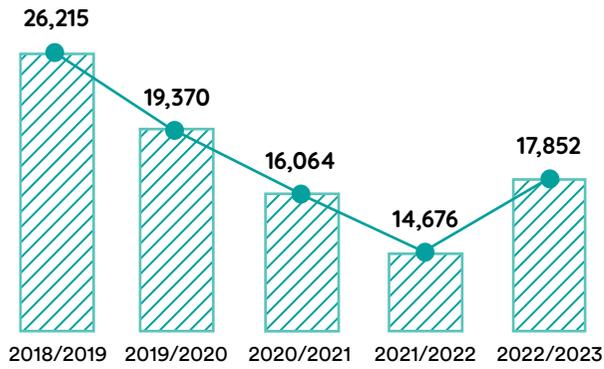
credit complaints



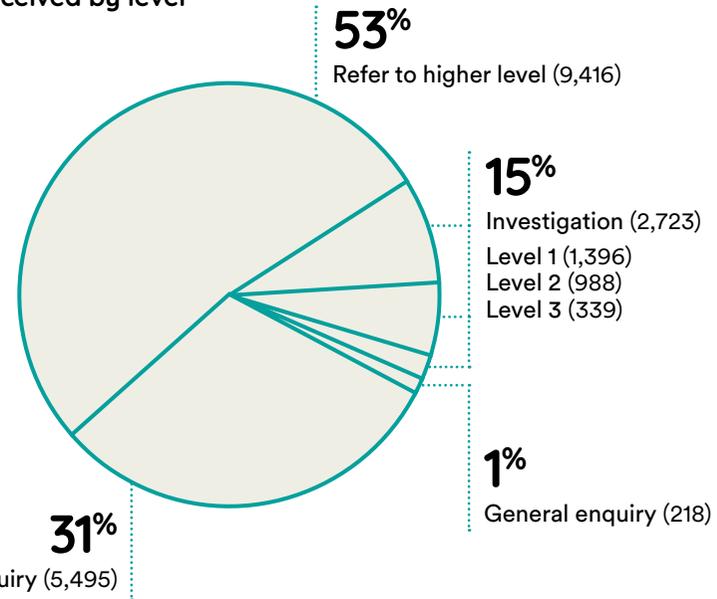
5%

transfer complaints

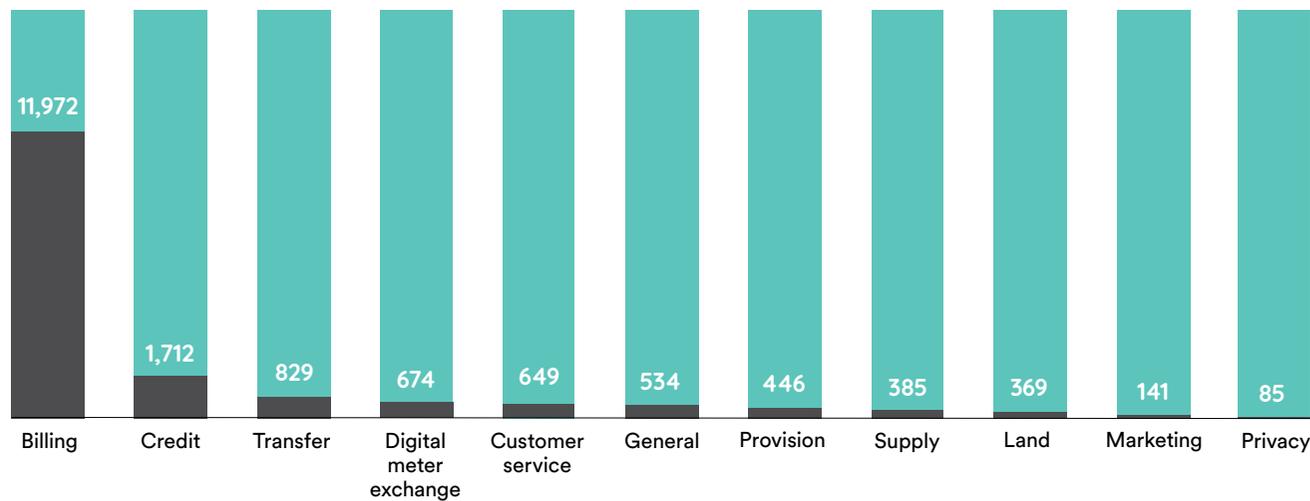
Complaints received from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023



Complaints received by level



Complaints received by issue



Chair's report

I feel deeply proud to be writing this message as EWON celebrates its 25th year and the remarkable milestone of managing over 365,000 complaints.



Our 25-year journey has been tested by change over the years, embedding both resilience and responsiveness into EWON's culture.

The transition to renewables presents more challenges than we have previously experienced as a sector, but strategically and operationally EWON is proactively ensuring its ongoing effectiveness. Our annual Chair and Ombudsman meeting in Adelaide allowed us to join our South Australian, Queensland and Victorian peers to witness transition in action at Adelaide's hydrogen plant and local energy distributor's innovation centre.

EWON started in 1998 with seven energy members – today 376 energy and water providers form EWON's membership. The value to NSW customers of having access to EWON's free, fair and independent dispute resolution service has never diminished and arguably, given current cost of living pressures on consumers, and the energy sector transition has never been more critical. I'd like to congratulate all EWON staff both past and present for their commitment to providing this important service.

It's again been a productive year in which the EWON Team completed several major projects as part of EWON's Strategic Plan.

New funding model

As our membership increases and the utility sector evolves, it is essential that EWON's funding model remains 'fit for purpose' to ensure consumers continue to have access to free and independent dispute resolution. After engaging independent consultants and communicating extensively with our members, the new funding model was launched in July 2023. Based on the user pays principle, the new model is designed to be equitable, transparent and affordable.

Cybersecurity

EWON has always been committed to ensuring our data and customer information is safe, but the current environment has sharpened our focus even further. We have rolled out our Cyber Security Roadmap, which involves working closely with external consultants to embed the appropriate level of protection against cyber threats. We will continue being vigilant to ensure protection for our customers and stakeholders.

Progressing our Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) demonstrates our commitment to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other Australians.

I had the pleasure this year of joining EWON staff to participate in cultural awareness training with training provider Mirri Mirri. The training was insightful and helped improve EWON's collective understanding of the history and contemporary experience of Indigenous cultures. In June EWON publicly declared its support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Voice to Parliament. This is a natural continuation of our RAP, our work in Aboriginal communities over many years, and it aligns with EWON's values, especially respect, social justice and integrity.

Consultative Council Meetings

Twice a year I have the pleasure of hosting EWON's Consultative Council Meetings.

In November 2022, an ANZ Bank representative shared insights from its Financial Wellbeing survey and the NSW Council of Social Service highlighted key findings from its Tough Times and Hard Choices report. Our May 2023 meeting focused on the future of energy and water systems. We heard from the Australian Energy Council, Water Services Association of Australia and the Clean Energy Council about their approaches to ensuring the sustainability and reliability of energy and water in Australia.

This year we farewelled two Board directors, Anne Pearson (Energy Australia) and Theo Whitmont (Kincumber Nautical Village), and warmly welcomed John Bowie (Origin Energy) and Candice Suttor (Altogether). I'd like to thank Anne and Theo for their contribution to EWON's Board.

In closing, I thank my Board colleagues for their support and contribution to the strong and effective governance of EWON's affairs. I would also like to thank the Ombudsman, the management team and EWON's staff for their significant effort and commitment to deliver EWON's vision and purpose each year. Together they ensure that EWON continues to demonstrate the hallmarks of a strong and effective ombudsman scheme.



Tony Crawford

Chair
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Biography

Tony Crawford is a board chair and non-executive director across the health, energy, insurance, professional services, sport and not for profit sectors. He had an extensive legal career over 30 years at national law firm DLA Phillips Fox including as the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board.

Tony is currently the Chair of Queensland Country Health Fund Limited, Heart Research Australia, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW and New South Wales Rugby Union Limited and a non-executive director of Bolton Clarke and HBF Health Limited. He has previously been a member of the boards of Konekt Limited (a workplace occupational, health, risk, rehabilitation, and training provider), Chair of national accounting and advisory firm, Grant Thornton Australia, and Thrifty Western Australia and President of the Northern Suburbs Rugby Football Club.

Ombudsman's report

It has been a particularly challenging year for NSW consumers.



Significant energy price rises, mortgage and rent increases and overall cost of living impacts have affected a growing cohort of energy and water customers, with many facing affordability challenges for the first time. The resulting stress is evident in our complaints which increased by 22% compared with last year.

This has strengthened my focus on driving terminology change across the energy and water sectors. The word 'hardship' is frequently used to describe people who cannot afford their energy and water bills, mortgages and rent. It's a stigmatising word that suggests the customers' inability to pay their bill is their fault, when in fact, energy hasn't been affordable for many people for a long time.

Against this backdrop, our work to influence the energy and water sectors, contribute to policy change and provide equitable access to energy and water consumers has never been stronger. We are committed to ensuring consumer voices are heard.

I'm extremely proud of EWON's involvement in the Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) [Towards energy equity – a strategy for an inclusive energy market](#) published in October 2022, where EWON's submissions and Spotlight On reports were referenced multiple times in the development of the strategy as well as the final publication. I also deeply value my involvement in the AER's Game Changer Design Group as an Australian and New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network

representative, where our collective focus is directed towards providing equitable access to affordable energy for consumers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing financial vulnerability.

Expanded awareness

One in ten Australians live in embedded networks (including residential complexes, apartments and retirement villages) but have less consumer protections compared to other customers. This year, we collaborated with the AER on a co-branded, multilingual [awareness campaign](#) to reach embedded network customers and remind them of their right to contact EWON.

We were privileged to have the AER Chair Clare Savage as our keynote speaker at EWON's Recharge and Energise Community Workers Forum in the Northern Rivers which led to an invitation for EWON to speak alongside the AER at NSW Legal Aid's webinar 'Financial vulnerability in the energy sector'.

Together with my ombudsman colleagues from the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Energy & Water Ombudsman Queensland and Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria, we again facilitated an External Dispute Resolution Forum at the Financial Counsellors Association annual conference in Canberra. The event provided a valuable opportunity to collaborate with

financial counsellors and collectively share customer and complaints insights. The forum culminated in the filming of our ['What's an Ombudsman?' video](#). The value of financial counsellors to consumers across Australia can't be overstated – we contributed a [submission](#) to the Department of Social Services in support of an industry funding model to boost financial counselling services so that their work can be expanded.

Valued membership

In a joint initiative with our state-based energy and water ombudsman counterparts, we developed resources and guidelines to help our 376 members promote External Dispute Resolution services to their customers. The release of the AER's revised Better Bills Guideline this October will support our efforts, with its mandate that ombudsman contact details are visible on the front page of energy bills. This will build confidence in member complaint processes and ensure customers are aware of their right to access our service. We will continue to advise customers to approach their retailer first - EWON should be the last resort, not the first for customers.

We've increased our engagement with the water sector including water industry peak bodies to better understand issues that affect our water members. Our Policy & Systemic Issues team initiated meetings with the Water Service Association of Australia (WSAA) and its Manager

Customer and Community joined our May Consultative Council Meeting as a guest speaker. EWON and WSAA have committed to supporting and consulting each other on future submissions particularly around the proposed industry funding model for financial counsellors.

Valued membership was front of mind when we developed EWON's new funding model. We have introduced industry sector differentiation in fixed fees, so they are apportioned across based on demand for our services. We have also increased predictability for our members by initiating an annual cost reflective fee schedule for the delivery of all EWON services, and billing members on actual closed complaints in arrears.

Best practice dispute resolution

Our Dispute Resolution team managed a gradual rise in complaints with a total of 17,852 complaints received, up from 14,676 in 2021/2022.

In addition to the increase in demand for our services, like other ombudsman offices, our Dispute Resolution staff have responded to an increase in customers presenting with challenging behaviours. A decline in customer resilience is notable post COVID and has been exacerbated by the economic climate. To support and protect staff we have implemented a range of measures including an ombudsman workshop on managing challenging behaviours. It is an ongoing program of work to ensure our staff, working from the office or home, have a safe working environment.

Despite the added pressure and increased complexity of complaints, I'm proud that our team effectively managed the increased complaints without a backlog and finished the year with a decrease in the age of complaint investigations overall. Customers expressed their satisfaction with our service through positive feedback and we received a 71% customer satisfaction rating this year.

Influential policy contribution

Embedded networks have been a focus for EWON over the past decade. Customer detriment experienced by residents of embedded networks first came to our attention in 2013, culminating in our presentation to the NSW Legislative Assembly Committee's Law and Safety's review into Embedded Networks last year. In November 2022, the committee released its report, [Embedded Networks in NSW](#) which included substantial references to EWON's work. This was followed by the release of the NSW Government [Embedded Networks Action Plan](#) in March 2023. The plan aims to align consumer protections for embedded network customers with those of other energy customers who have the right to choose their retailer. I'm pleased that after ten years of work we've played a key role in addressing some of the issues embedded network customers have been navigating.

We have also influenced numerous processes relating to the evolving energy market and the uptake of Consumer Energy Resources (CER) including rooftop solar, batteries and electric vehicles. We made a detailed submission to

the AER's [Retailer authorisation and exemption review](#) in 2021/2022 where we emphasised the increased need for EDR in an evolving energy market. This was followed by our submission to the AER's [Review of consumer protections for future energy services](#) which highlighted the need for energy entity, retailer and network rules to be reviewed to protect customers experiencing financial vulnerability.

Our strong support of the NSW Department of Planning and Environment's consultation on the [Water Industry Competition \(General\) Regulation 2022](#) also focused on creating a level playing field and equal consumer protections for customers of licensees with those of public utilities customers. Consumers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, affordability difficulties, critical health needs or family violence need to receive proactive support from the water and energy sectors – social license responsibilities of the energy and water sector are just as critical.

In light of the above influential policy work, it's no surprise that the Board and Management Team welcomed the opportunity to warmly congratulate our Policy & Systemic Issues team who were awarded the 2022 Constellation Achievement Award at the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Symposium in August 2022. The award recognised EWON's collective effort in developing our influential [Spotlight On reports](#) which focuses on not only identifying but also addressing sector wide systemic issues.

Looking ahead

Keeping energy and water ombudsman schemes fit for purpose in the evolving energy market was one of the key topics I discussed with the NSW Energy Minister when we met earlier this year.

Dispute resolution has become more complex as consumers adopt new energy products and services. Australia's transition to renewable energy will require a strong consumer protection framework and including access to free, fair and independent external dispute resolution. Ensuring this is achieved will be a continuing focus for EWON this year.

We will continue observing the cost of living and how it is impacting customers while continuing to look to the future and international examples of best practice. We're excited to have joined an International Community of Practice which will allow us to share insights with ombudsman schemes in the UK, US and Canada.

EWON's Management Team are a constant source of support year after year. We farewelled Bernadette Or, General Manager Finance & Corporate earlier this year and welcomed David Kneeshaw who took up the role at EWON in May – welcome Dave.

Finally, I again thank EWON Chair, Tony Crawford, and the Board for their excellent governance and strategic leadership. Their encouragement, support and guidance is exceptional, and their recognition of EWON's team inspires our continued work.



Janine Young
Ombudsman
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Biography

Janine Young was appointed Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW in November 2014, having gained extensive experience providing independent dispute resolution service as the Deputy Ombudsman at the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (2003-2010) and the Ombudsman at the Public Transport Ombudsman Victoria (2010-2014).

Janine is passionate about social justice and ensuring essential services are accessible, especially for those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability. Across her career, Janine has focused on improving social inclusion and community connectedness and delivering innovative, accessible, and equitable services.

Our Board



Tony Crawford
Chair

EWON's Board is responsible for corporate governance, budget approval and strategic direction. The Board comprises an independent chair, five industry directors and five community directors.

In 2022/2023, we welcomed two new industry directors: John Bowie from Origin Energy who brings energy retail experience, and Candice Suttor from Altogether, who brings experience in exempt entities and embedded networks.

Joanna Quilty
Community Director
NSW Council of Social Service, Chief Executive Officer



Rod Stowe
Community Director
Super Consumers Australia, Board Chair



Kate Temby
Community Director
Social Outcomes, Specialist Consultant



Craig Memery
Community Director
Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Senior Advisor Energy



April Blair
Community Director
Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Senior Ombudsman



David Stockler
Industry Director
Water NSW, Executive Manager Customer Service



Candice Suttor
Industry Director
Altogether, Executive Manager Retail



Rob Amphlett Lewis
Industry Director
Ausgrid, Group Executive Distributed Services



Jane Mills
Industry Director
Alinta Energy, General Manager Sales and Marketing (to May 2023)



John Bowie
Industry Director
Origin Energy, General Manager Retail X



Our strategic objectives and benchmarks

Strategic objectives

Our strategic objectives set our direction and enable us to provide high quality, independent advice, information and dispute resolution to NSW energy and some water consumers. They ensure we achieve fair and reasonable outcomes for all conciliated and investigated complaints; identify and address systemic issues, expand our reach across NSW, work effectively with members and influence evolving and emerging energy and water policy and regulation.

Our strategic objectives are:

- best practice dispute resolution
- influential policy contribution
- valued membership
- expanded awareness.

Our benchmarks

EWON develops its policies and processes in accordance with the Australian government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution; and is independently reviewed against those benchmarks every five years. The benchmarks encourage best-practice, industry-based customer dispute resolution and set standards regarding:

- accessibility
- independence
- fairness
- accountability
- efficiency
- effectiveness.

EWON's benchmarks



Accessibility



Independence



Fairness



Accountability



Efficiency



Effectiveness

Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Reflect RAP demonstrates our commitment to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other Australians and provides a clear roadmap to guide our contribution to reconciliation. Launched in 2021, it records our progress to date and outlines how we plan to extend our support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the future. Our RAP is firmly embedded in all our day-to-day operations.

Our actions:

All staff, the Board Chair and available directors completed cultural awareness training with Mirri Mirri, an Aboriginal-owned training provider.

- 91% of participants indicated an improvement in knowledge after participating in the training.
- 90% of participants agreed/strongly agreed that the content was relevant to their role.
- 98% of participants felt confident they could apply what they learned.

The training is now included in the induction program for all new staff.

The Dispute Resolution team received training from Anti-Discrimination NSW on how to effectively manage complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers.

We progressed our relationship with Essential Energy and Endeavour Energy to identify practical initiatives for collaboration on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused outreach events. Essential Energy joined EWON on outreach with Murdi Paaki in October 2022 in far western NSW and has agreed to be on a working group with the Tenant Support and Education Project to scope coming outreach activities.

We committed to acknowledging the Indigenous country name on all promotional materials and social media posts when naming outreach locations.

We introduced a dedicated phone queue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers. The queue allows customers to self-identify, so we can understand the volume, need and location of complaints to target our outreach activities. It also allows staff to ensure they are mindful of cultural sensitivities and expectations. In its first three months of operation, we saw a steady increase in customers self-identifying, with 20 calls in April 2023, 30 in May and 49 in June.

We organised a staff Reconciliation Week screening of a documentary on Professor Megan Davis, co-chair of the Uluru Dialogues followed by an Indigenous-catered morning tea.

As part of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention strategy, the People & Culture team developed a recruitment brochure using language and design to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is distributed at all outreach events.

Next step:
To develop our Innovate RAP.

Always Was Always Will Be
—Maddison Gibbs, Barkindji woman

Our management team



Janine Young
Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is also the Chief Executive Officer of EWON Limited and is responsible to the Board for the overall strategic direction and management of EWON. The Ombudsman’s consideration and resolution of individual disputes is conducted independently of the Board.

EWON has three core teams responsible for delivering EWON’s Charter responsibilities under the leadership of the Ombudsman. They work collaboratively and effectively, ensuring we achieve service excellence, and are responsive to the evolving energy and water landscapes.

The Governance, Awareness & Policy team oversees our governance, quality, member relations, communication, community outreach and policy and systemic issues functions.

The Finance & Corporate Services team manages our infrastructure and service delivery, including overseeing our finances, information technology and data analytics, people and culture and general administration.



The Dispute Resolution team manages all customer complaints about energy and water providers. This includes receiving, assessing, referring, investigating and reviewing complaints to ensure that EWON achieves its key objective of fair, reasonable and independent complaints management.

Helen Ford
Deputy Ombudsman



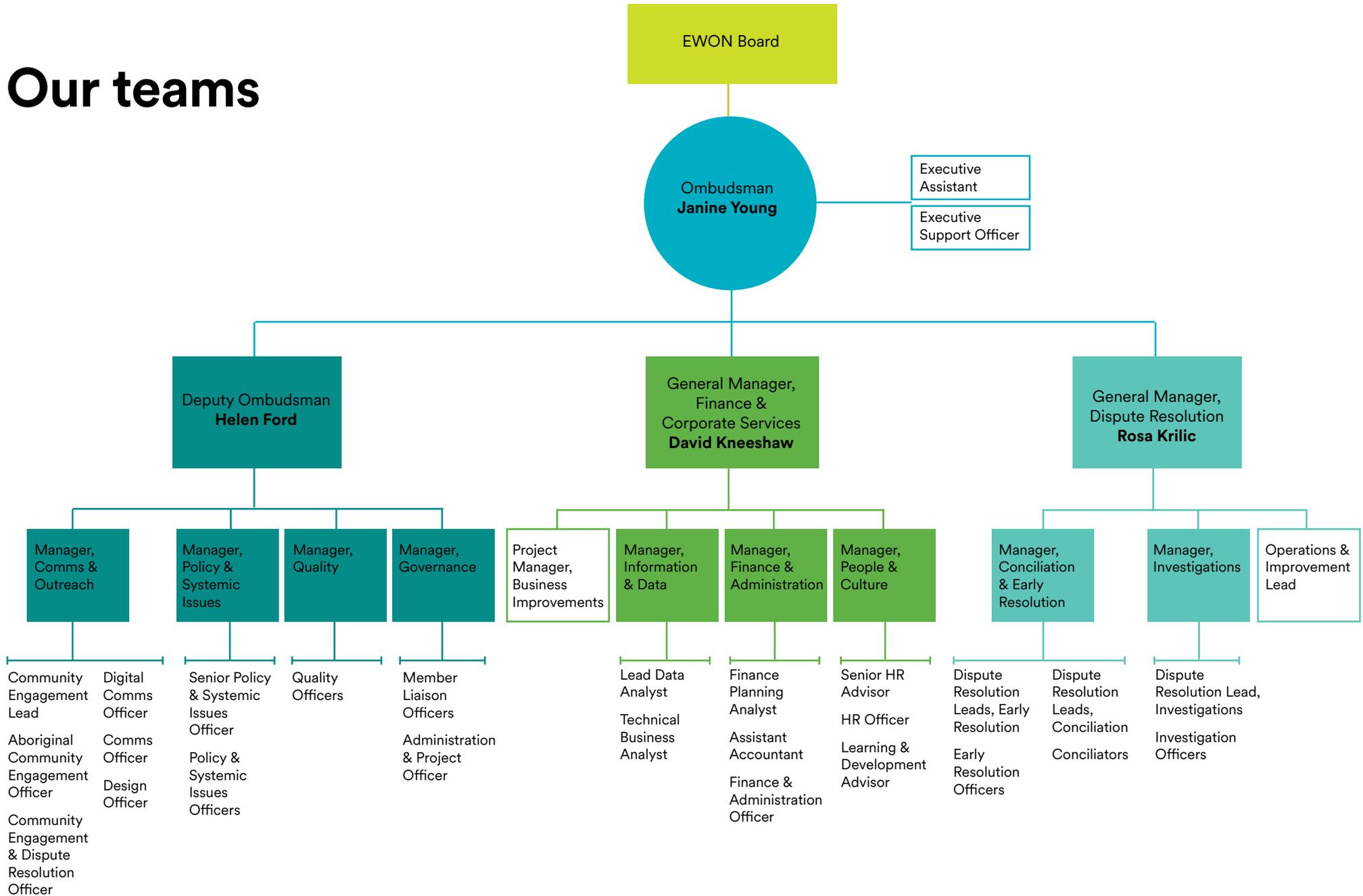
David Kneeshaw
General Manager
Finance and Corporate
Services



Rosa Krilic
General Manager
Dispute Resolution



Our teams



EWON Consultative Council

EWON Consultative Council

Consultative Council meetings are part of EWON's constitutional framework. They offer an open forum for consumer and small business representatives, our members and other stakeholders to raise issues and put forward their views. Consultative Council meetings also allow EWON to consult stakeholders and use the outcomes to shape our planning.

Held twice yearly, these meetings are hosted by the Board Chair and the Ombudsman who provide an update on EWON's activities, current initiatives, complaint trends and current issues. In 2022/2023 the meetings were held in November 2022 and May 2023.

November 2022: Financial wellbeing

The cost of living continues to be a major issue for households, with many feeling the pressure of increased energy prices as well as other household bills. We explored the impact this is having and what assistance is available.

Natalie Paine, ANZ Bank's Social Impact and Reporting Lead, shared the results of ANZ's Financial Wellbeing survey, the socio-economic factors that affect financial wellbeing, and how people coped during the pandemic.

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) Policy lead, Neha Shah, highlighted interesting results from its report, *Tough Times and Hard Choices — the rising cost of living pressures*, and outlined NCOSS' recommendations to government for improvement.

May 2023: Continuous improvement – the future of our energy and water systems

This meeting focused on the future of our energy and water systems including what peak bodies are doing to continuously improve our essential services. On the panel were:

- Sarah McNamara, Chief Executive, the Australian Energy Council
- Evelyn Rodrigues, Manager Customer and Community, Water Services Association of Australia
- Mindy Lim, Compliance Programs Manager, the Clean Energy Council.

Our speakers gave more than 70 participants insights into their organisations' roles, and how they aim to ensure the sustainability and reliability of energy and water in Australia. They also discussed how they support the industry, their members and customers.

Always well run and great to allow consumers/community to have their say. Sometimes their comments are the gems that inspire us!

Provider feedback

EWON Chair (back) and Ombudsman (second from left) with panel speakers Sarah McNamara, Evelyn Rodrigues and Mindy Lim at the May 2023 Consultative Council Meeting.



EWON Operational Advisory Group

The Exempt Entity and Water Industry Competition Act Operational Advisory Group gives embedded networks and small water providers a voice within EWON. It was established in accordance with EWON's constitutional changes in June 2018. The group met in September 2022 and March 2023.

September 2022

The Deputy Ombudsman addressed the group about our initiatives affecting embedded networks and the implementation of EWON's new funding model.

Speakers from the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), NSW Fair Trading, and the Office of Energy and Climate Change (OECC) updated the group on their work with embedded networks, including the revised Exempt Selling Guideline, and the NSW parliamentary inquiry into embedded networks.

Ausgrid's Network Pricing Manager was a guest speaker and outlined Ausgrid's proposed 2024 pricing reforms for embedded networks.

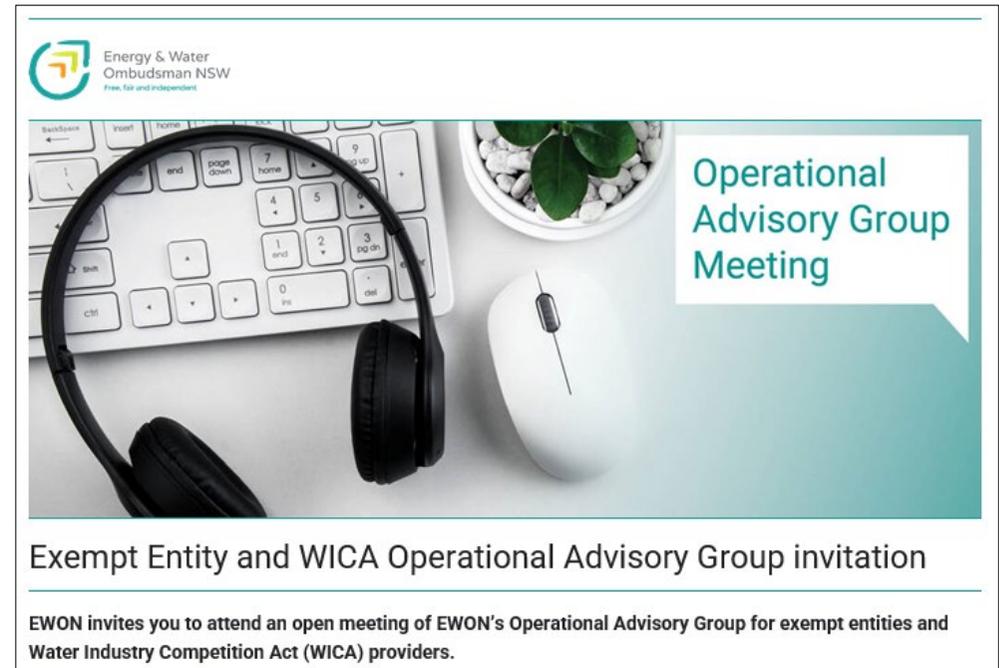
March 2023

After the release of the NSW Embedded Network Action Plan, the OECC outlined the minister's response to the legislative inquiry and shared more information about the action plan and how the group can get involved.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) updated the group on receiving the draft terms of reference from the NSW government on embedded networks, and its request for submissions.

The AER discussed the consumer protection review, and the review of the network exemption guidelines.

The Department of Planning and Environment — Water Utilities also provided an update on the review and the release of the revised Water Industry Competition Act and Regulations.



The graphic features the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW logo in the top left corner, with the text 'Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW' and 'Free, fair and independent' below it. The background shows a desk setup with a white keyboard, a white mouse, a small potted plant, and a pair of black headphones. A teal speech bubble on the right contains the text 'Operational Advisory Group Meeting'. Below the image, the text reads: 'Exempt Entity and WICA Operational Advisory Group invitation' and 'EWON invites you to attend an open meeting of EWON's Operational Advisory Group for exempt entities and Water Industry Competition Act (WICA) providers.'

Collaborating with our peers

ANZOA

Ombudsman, Janine Young, continued as a member of the Executive and Secretary/Treasurer of the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA). As the ombudsman peak body in Australia and New Zealand, ANZOA ensures its members continue their professional development and support each other in upholding high standards of independence, effectiveness and impartiality. All ANZOA members are bound to the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution.

Interest groups

ANZOA has eight interest groups that EWON staff participate in or facilitate. These groups provide a valuable opportunity to collaborate with staff working in similar roles in other ombudsman offices. Interest groups cover complaints management, customers vulnerability, policy, communications, Indigenous engagement, corporate affairs, human resources and data analytics. This year, interest groups hosted webinars focused on cultural engagement and communications with First Nations peoples, and approaches to post-pandemic outreach and hybrid working.



EWON Ombudsman (front left) at the ANZOA Meeting of the Minds Conference, July 2022.

Meeting of the Minds

ANZOA's annual Meeting of the Minds conference brings together industry and parliamentary ombudsman members from across Australia and New Zealand. The July 2022 conference continued ANZOA's forward focus, with discussion on how to improve effectiveness as offices, individuals and leaders, as the expectations of ombudsman offices change. Focusing on the themes of fairness and accessibility in a changing world, attendees discussed work exploring how modern-day ombudsman functions including external dispute resolution (EDR) need to evolve to ensure we are fit for the future.

AGM

At the ANZOA AGM, guest speaker Professor Edward Santow presented on the increased use of artificial intelligence and the challenges this may present to ombudsman offices.

Collaborating with our peers (continued)

ANZEWON

The Ombudsman is a member of the Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON). Quarterly forums provide Australia's energy and water ombudsman and New Zealand's Utilities Disputes Complaints Commissioner opportunities to work together to develop effective ways of addressing industry and policy issues that affect consumers.

Looking to the future of renewables

In 2022/2023, ANZEWON meetings focused on the future of renewable energy. Attendees participated in site visits to explore the new ways energy is being delivered to consumers.

At the Ombudsman/Chair forum in South Australia in March 2023, EWON's Ombudsman and Chair toured the Hydrogen Park SA at Tonsley Innovation District, a plant delivering blended hydrogen/natural gas to an adjacent housing development. They also visited the SA Power Networks Innovation Centre, a working display of new and emerging distribution technologies for the supply and management of electricity to residential and commercial customers.

The Perth ANZEWON meeting in June 2023 expanded our knowledge further by including a visit to the Synergy Big Battery project that helps support WA's electricity system by enabling the uptake of more renewables.



EWON Chair and Ombudsman with ANZEWON colleagues at the Australian Gas Networks Hydrogen Park, SA.

EDR in an evolving energy market

As an ANZEWON member we are collaborating with our Queensland, South Australian and Victorian counterparts to ensure customers are aware of their right to access EDR. The focus was on complaints related to Consumer Energy Resources (CER), including behind the meter products and services, microgrids and virtual power plants. This project is aimed at identifying and closing consumer protection gaps for customers using new energy products and services not covered by existing protection frameworks. It also seeks to ensure our schemes are relevant and effective. The benefits of this joint approach are a stronger voice, a clear message, a consistent approach and effective use of resources. See page 48 for more information.

AER Game Changer

The Ombudsman represents ANZEWON on the AER's Game Changer Design Group and is also a member of the Game Changer Leadership Group. The Design Group

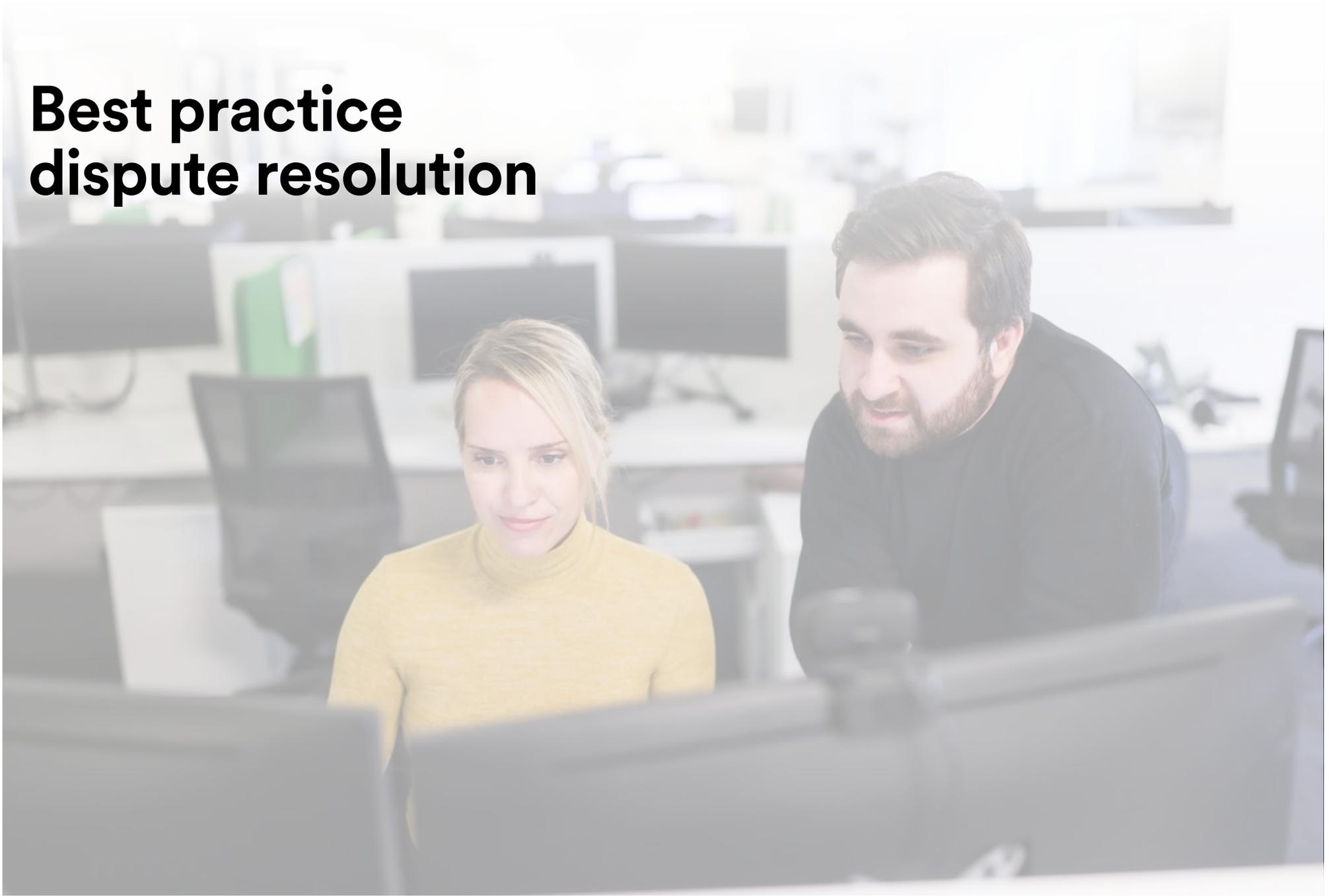
comprises senior stakeholders from industry, government, market bodies, ombudsman schemes and consumer advocates. Its aim is to develop potential approaches to improve outcomes for vulnerable consumers for consideration and endorsement by the Leadership Group. This will enable the AER to engage with state and commonwealth ministers to bring game changing energy affordability initiatives to life.

The Game Changer vision is to create a set of energy sector supported initiatives, funded by equitable and efficient sharing of costs across the sector which deliver affordable energy for consumers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, financial vulnerability.

Vale Graeme Neate

EWON acknowledges the passing of valued ANZEWON member, Graeme Neate, former president of the ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal. Graeme's expertise, generosity and kindness will be missed.

Best practice dispute resolution



Complaints this year



24% increase in electricity retail complaints



88% increase in complaints about electricity exempt entities

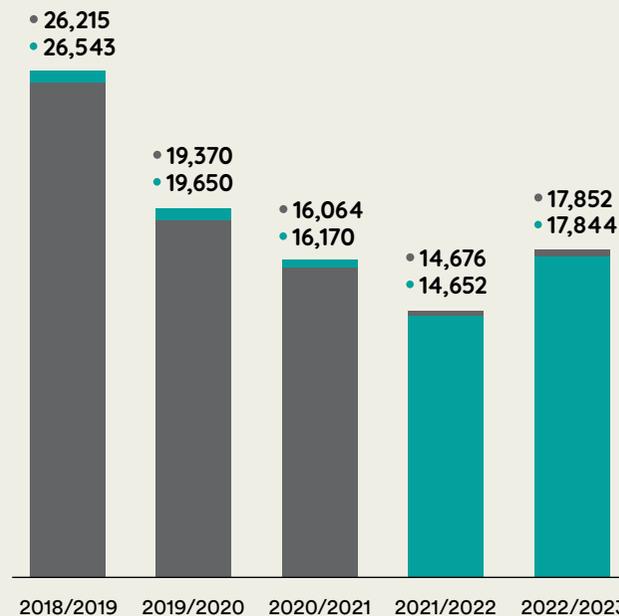
We received 17,852 complaints in 2022/2023, a 22% increase from 14,676 received in 2021/2022. The rise can be largely attributed to external cost of living pressures, with 406 complaints about price increases, nearly four times higher than 2021/2022 and 5,359 complaints about disputed high bills, a 35% uptick from last year.

NSW consumers have navigated increasing costs of living, interest rates, rent and energy prices since June 2022. The June 2023 [Energy Consumer Sentiment Survey](#) found that concerns about energy affordability are front of mind for most Australians, with 52% of households more concerned about paying their electricity bills than they were a year ago. Furthermore, retailers announced price increases from around 20% to 55% from 1 July 2023, significantly above what the Australian Energy Regulator had approved for the default market offer. With costs rising in every aspect of life, more and more consumers are experiencing financial vulnerability and seeking EWON's support.

This year we received 218 general enquiries and 5,495 complaint enquiries. There were 2,723 investigated complaints, up 8% from 2,514 in 2021/2022. Level 3 complaints remain low in 2022/2023 with only 12% of investigations falling into this highest category. This reflects the effectiveness of our Dispute Resolution team and their increased focus on fairness and timely outcomes. This focus also contributed to the fact that the Ombudsman was not called upon to make any binding decisions.

Complaints received and resolved

● Complaints received ● Complaints resolved



Complaints closed

Provider service	2022/2023	2021/2022	% change
Retail	12,756	10,252	24%
Network	753	748	1%
Not allocated	173	152	14%
Exempt entity	109	58	88%
Retail	2,979	2,470	21%
Network	176	168	5%
Not allocated	55	43	28%
Exempt entity	2	-	-
Retail	411	370	11%
Network	256	221	16%
Not allocated	107	102	5%
Non energy/non water	67	68	-1%
Total	17,844	14,652	22%

How we categorise complaints



219

General enquiry

A customer seeking information or help about an energy or water concern that is out of EWON jurisdiction.

Sometimes customers contact us about something outside EWON jurisdiction such as problems with solar installer, phone provider or energy and water appliances. When this occurs, we note their call and refer them to other external dispute resolution organisations including Fair Trading or another ombudsman office.



5,497

Complaint enquiry

When a customer contacts us to request information or a complaint resolution before approaching their provider, we classify it as a complaint enquiry. We refer the customer to the energy or water provider's contact centre to ensure procedural fairness.

Customers may contact us about enquiries or complaints that they have not yet raised with their energy or water provider. We provide general advice and information about their rights and responsibilities and refer these customers to their energy or water provider. We also advise them that they can contact us again if they are not satisfied with their provider's response. These complaints may also require us to provide advice and/or a referral for further assistance, for example to seek Energy Accounts Payment Assistance vouchers or to access a financial counsellor for broader affordability support.



9,424

Refer to higher level (RHL)

A complaint referred to the provider's specialist dispute resolution team.

Often customers contact us about complaints they have unsuccessfully tried to resolve with their energy or water providers, usually at contact centre level. We offer to refer them to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team. If the customer agrees to this, we share advice and information about their rights and responsibilities and advise the customer that their energy or water provider will contact them within five days.

The provider's specialist team is required to resolve the complaint within 28 days through direct contact with the customer. We inform the customer verbally and in writing, that if this does not occur, for example if the complaint is not resolved, or they do not receive contact within five days, they should return to us.

This approach gives the provider another opportunity to resolve the customer's problem directly — and the customer a chance to have their complaint reviewed by senior staff in the provider's specialist complaints area.

Introduced in 2022/2023, customers also receive a follow up SMS message about their provider's responsibility and further access to EWON.



Level 1 1,278
Level 2 1,008
Level 3 418

Investigations

EWON investigates complaints that cannot be resolved between the customer and their energy or water provider. These are categorised as level 1, 2 and 3 based on the time taken for EWON to resolve the complaint.

Investigated complaints include instances when customers return to us after their complaint had been referred to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team (RHL) because the customer remained dissatisfied or was not contacted by their provider.

Investigations involve speaking to both parties to determine the facts and circumstances from both points of view. We analyse information from both the customer and their provider including billing information, metering data, telephone records, and energy contracts. We also review relevant legislative provisions, conduct research and, in some cases, undertake site visits, and consult independent experts. Some investigations also involve referring the customer to other services such as welfare agencies, financial counselling and tenant advisory services.

continued over

How we categorise complaints (continued)

Level 1 investigations are most often resolved with conciliated outcomes in four to six weeks because they are generally not complex. In 2022/2023, 89% of level 1 complaints were resolved in fewer than 30 days. They involve collecting information from the provider and customer and talking through the issues and resolution options with both parties to reach an agreed outcome.

Level 2 investigations involve more in-depth research, investigation and analysis. Providers are often asked to supply detailed billing and metering information or reports from engineers or asset repairers. Customers need to provide supporting information for their position including appliance receipts where a damage claim is made or records relating to interactions with their providers, for example text messages or emails. Such complaints require the investigator to provide a detailed assessment for the customer to review, to inform their position about accepting a provider resolution offer or position, that the customer may challenge based on their experience. Most of these investigations are resolved with a fair and reasonable negotiated outcome agreed to by both parties.

Level 3 investigations involve detailed information requests to the provider and the customer and may require independent expert advice to reach an outcome. Occasionally these complaints are discussed with the General Manager Dispute Resolution or the Deputy Ombudsman to inform the investigation and provide guidance about the steps needed to progress to resolution or binding decision. Most are resolved and finalised within six months - some complex investigations can take up to 12 months.

Outcomes

Facilitated resolutions

Facilitated resolutions are achieved when EWON receives non-complex complaints that meet investigation criteria, including dissatisfied customers returning from the RHL process. After collecting relevant information from the customer and their energy/water provider, an EWON Conciliation Officer works with both parties to identify the issues needing resolution. The conciliator helps both parties to develop options, consider resolution alternatives and ultimately reach a fair and reasonable outcome agreed by both parties.

Negotiated resolutions

Negotiated resolutions involve a full investigation into a complex complaint. An EWON Investigations Officer receives all relevant information from the customer and provider including, when necessary, independent technical/expert advice. Customers are asked about their expectations and, where necessary, are required to substantiate financial loss or impacts.

Equally, energy/water providers are asked to substantiate their position. The Investigations Officer involves both parties in negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome having regard to relevant laws, codes and regulations, good industry practice, and the individual circumstances of the complaint.

No further investigation

When our investigation finds no basis to further investigate the complaint and in our view, the provider's resolution offer is fair and reasonable (i.e. it addresses all aspects of the complaint and how the customer was affected), the complaint is finalised on a no further investigation basis.

Before deciding a complaint requires no further investigation, we send the customer a complaint assessment detailing all aspects of our investigation, the provider's resolution offer and any other actions it is taking to address the complaint, and an outline of our preliminary view about the content of the assessment. The customer is provided with the opportunity to provide further

information to support their position, agree with the proposed outcome, or request our final decision. The time frame for the customer to respond is within 10 business days of receiving our assessment – extended up to a further 10 days when a customer requests further time to consider the report.

When a no further investigation decision has been made, the customer has the right to request an internal review within 28 days of complaint closure. Grounds for an internal review are bias, error or omission, or provision of new information not previously provided to EWON.

Binding decisions

An investigation is escalated to the Ombudsman for a binding decision when it remains unresolved and the Dispute Resolution Manager is of the view that the energy or water provider's resolution offer does not fully meet the merits of the complaint.

In 2022/2023 the Ombudsman made no binding decisions.

Customer diversity

EWON's diverse customer base is reflected in the complaints we receive. While we do not routinely collect information about our customers' backgrounds, we record it when it is offered. For this reason, these figures may under-represent the demographics of our customers.

Our outreach and engagement program, in community and online had an increased focus on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across 2022/2023. This led to a 43% increase in complaints from CALD customers and a 35% rise in complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers. We also saw a 28% increase in customers on pensions or benefits coming to EWON, and a 17% rise in complaints from social housing tenants. Demographic reporting is inclusive – a customer with a CALD background may receive a pension and reside in social housing.



16,751

Residential
up 21%



980

Small business
up 37%



121

Other
up 38%

(including educational institutions, government, not-for-profit, primary producer and strata schemes)



35%

of customers heard about us through EWON promotions



See next page for how people heard about us



Top 5 languages

- Chinese (Mandarin)
- Arabic
- Chinese (Cantonese)
- Vietnamese
- Korean

515

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse customers



417

complaints from embedded network customers



+17%

497 complaints from customers living in social housing



314

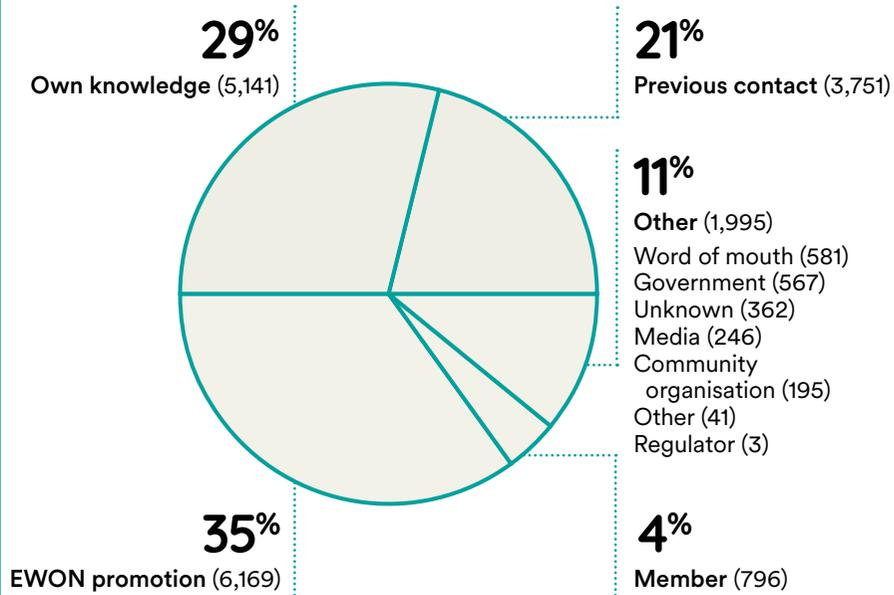
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers



+28%

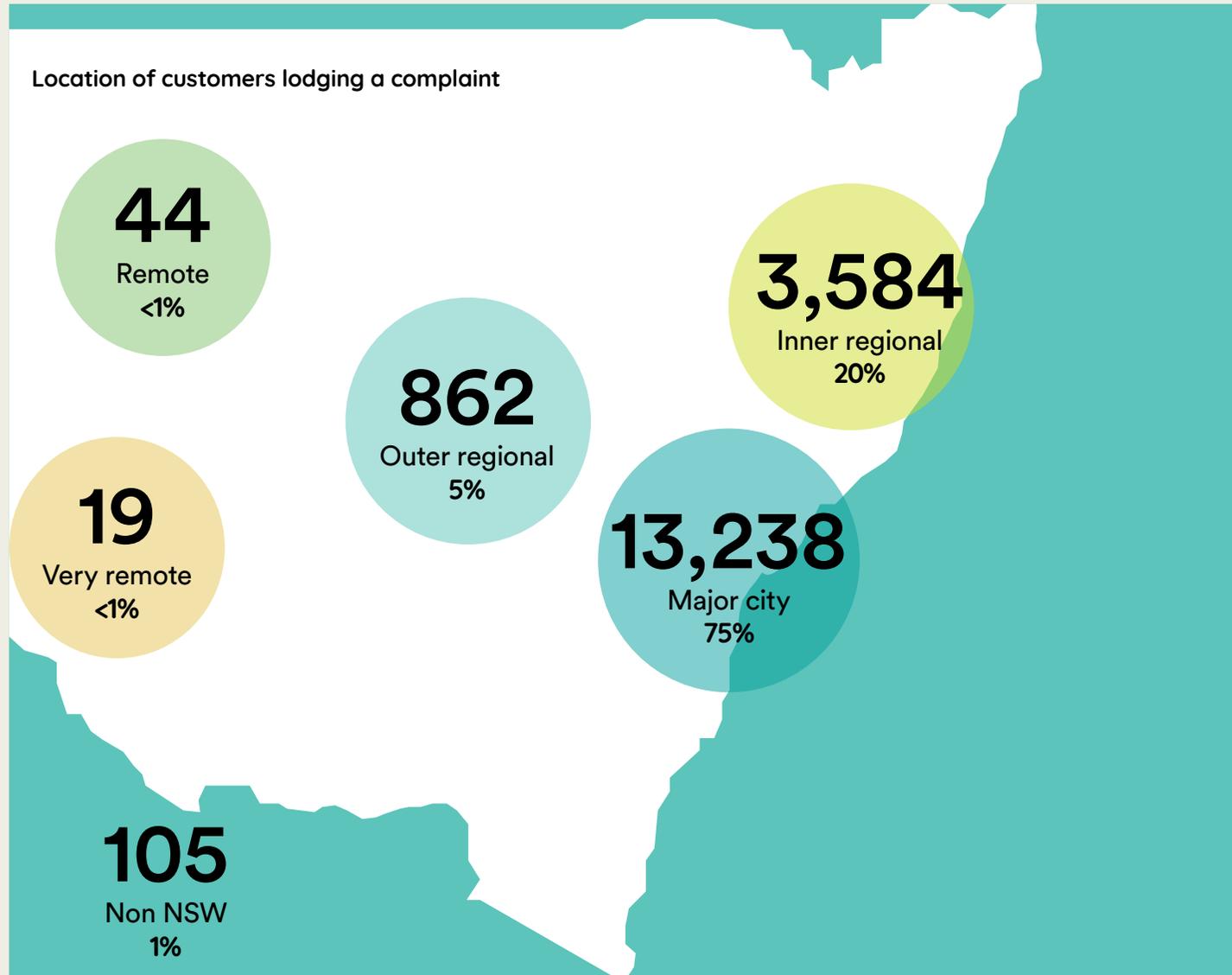
2,879 complaints from customers on a pension or benefit

How customers heard about us



Customer diversity (continued)

Location of customers lodging a complaint



How we received complaints



Telephone: 9,698
Up 17%



Website: 6,121
Up 27%



Email: 1,875
Up 27%



Other: 158
Letter: 71
Outreach: 59
In person: 26
Fax: 2

Electricity complaints



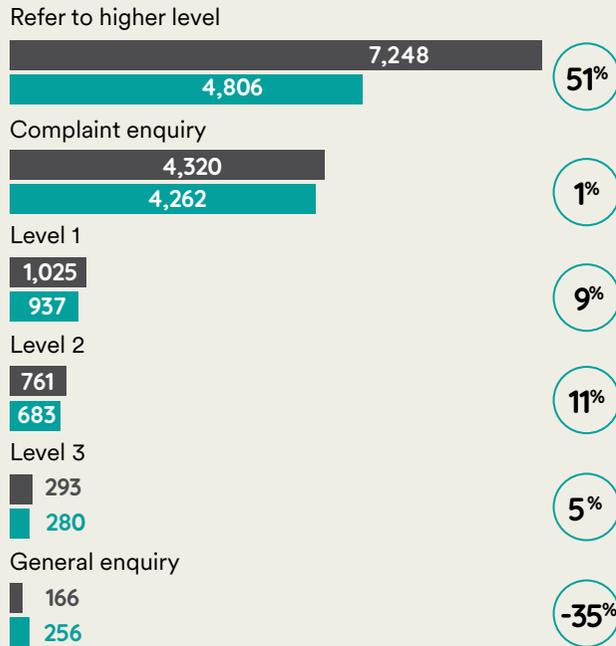
13,813 electricity complaints received, up 23%

Electricity complaints continued to dominate in 2022/2023, with 13,813 received, an increase of 23% compared to 11,224 last year. General enquiries accounted for 4,486, while 7,248 were referred to a

higher level and 2,079 were investigated. Billing remains the main driver of electricity complaints, with 9,416 complaints received, a 29% increase from the prior year.

Total electricity complaints

● 2022/2023 ● 2021/2022 ○ % change



Electricity trends

● Retailer ● Distributor ○ Exempt entity ● Not allocated



Electricity complaints by core issue

Issue	Complaints	% change
Billing	9,416	29%
Credit	1,375	13%
Digital meter exchange	674	23%
Transfer	571	12%
Customer service	491	12%
Supply	320	-4%
General	287	-1%
Land	216	15%
Provision	214	8%
Marketing	130	10%
Privacy	72	125%
Unspecified*	47	52%
Total	13,813	23%

*Issue not selected at time of reporting

REFER TO HIGHER LEVEL

Case study

Faulty solar inverter increases bill



Mr Booth received a bill from his energy provider for \$4,811. He lives in a three bedroom house with two adults and two children. The bill for the same period last year was about \$1,600. He contacted his provider to question this and was told it was correct and payable.

Mr Booth emailed EWON saying he wanted his provider to review the bill, explain the charges, and consider reducing the bill in line with historic usage. We referred his complaint back to the provider at a higher level for resolution. We gave Mr Booth information on the referral process, his rights and responsibilities, including that he could contact us again if he remained unsatisfied.

This was EWON's last contact with the customer. The provider had kept us informed about its investigation, called to provide an update and emailed us with the outcome, confirming Mr Booth's satisfaction.

The referral

After EWON's referral, the provider contacted Mr Booth to discuss his usage, access issues and to tell him that for nine months the provider had not been able to do an actual reading from the meter. It gave a breakdown of usage for each period and Mr Booth sent a photo of the meter, as requested. The provider noticed the solar register had not moved in almost two months, indicating there may be a

meter fault. It ordered a meter test without charging Mr Booth.

The test showed the meter was working properly but the solar inverter needed to be replaced. The provider asked the distributor if the faulty inverter might have affected the metering. The distributor could not confirm this but said if the inverter was not exporting the energy, it might record as peak usage.

After three failed appointments with installers, the inverter was replaced in February 2023. The provider also offered to replace the customer's meter to prevent any further access issues and rebilled the customer for the affected period using the data from the new meter.

The provider passed the new data to the distributor to rebill the customer from February 2022 to March 2023. This reduced his bill by \$5,137. The provider applied an extra \$750 credit to the account to cover the cost of the 'permission to connect' letter (which was needed to have the meter exchanged) and a \$500 customer service gesture. Mr Booth was satisfied with the outcome.

Issues

Disputed high bill

Outcome

Referred to higher level

Gas complaints



3,204 gas complaints received, up 20%

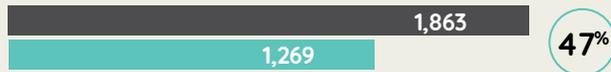
EWON received 3,204 complaints about gas, a rise of 20% compared to 2,680 last year. While 785 were general enquiries, most were referred to a higher level (1,863) and 556 were investigated.

We received 2,233 complaints about gas billing issues, an increase of 21% from last year. There was also a 4% increase in gas credit complaints (290 complaints) and a 41% rise in gas transfer complaints (258).

Total gas complaints

● 2022/2023 ● 2021/2022 ○ % change

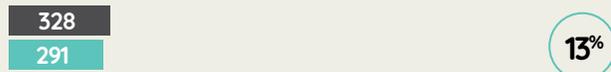
Refer to higher level



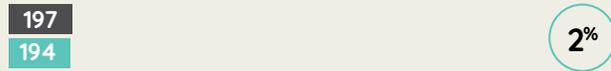
Complaint enquiry



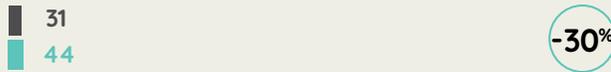
Level 1



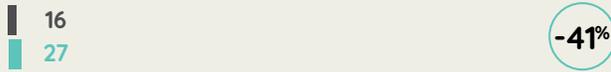
Level 2



Level 3

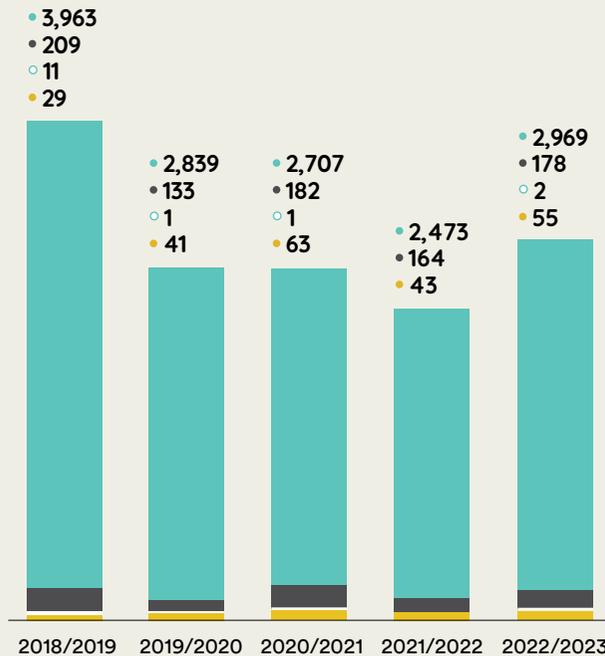


General enquiry



Gas trends

● Retailer ● Distributor ○ Exempt entity ● Not allocated



Gas complaints by core issue

Issue	Complaints	% change
Billing	2,233	21%
Credit	290	4%
Transfer	258	41%
Provision	150	6%
Customer service	135	5%
General	64	23%
Land	39	105%
Marketing	11	38%
Privacy	10	100%
Supply	8	-
Unspecified*	6	-14%
Total	3,204	20%

*Issue not selected at time of reporting

NEGOTIATED OUTCOME

Case study

EWON helps customer negotiate new gas connection



When Mr Qasim bought his property, he contacted his gas retailer to set up an account. The retailer advised that the meter had been removed six years before so the network provider needed to inspect the pipes before a gas connection could be established. Mr Qasim received a quote for \$14,500 to reconnect gas but did not understand why the cost was so high, given that the pipe was capped and required only a meter.

Mr Qasim contacted EWON to find out whether the connection cost was reasonable. He said the retailer had told him the quote was to extend the mains from across the road because the existing infrastructure at his property was outdated and had been disconnected from the mains. The network offered to reduce the fee from \$14,500 to \$9,450, which he rejected.

EWON contacted Mr Qasim’s retailer and shared photos of his connection with the retailer and network provider. The network provider said the old gas installation could not be used, given its age and lack of pipework integrity, and organised an inspection to consider options for a new connection.

After the inspection, the network provider offered Mr Qasim a dual service using a gas line servicing a neighbouring property. This would be at no cost to him. Mr Qasim accepted this resolution.

Issues
Provision, new connection, cost
 Outcome
Negotiated outcome

Water complaints



768 water complaints received, up 9%

EWON received 768 complaints about water, an increase of 9% compared to 704 last year. Most were complaint enquiries or general enquiries (375) with 305 referred to a higher level and only 88 required investigation.

Water complaints about provision rose by 52% and land related complaints by 25%. There was a 64% fall in complaints about water customer service, a positive reflection on the internal dispute resolution processes of EWON's water members.

Total water complaints

● 2022/2023 ● 2021/2022 ○ % change

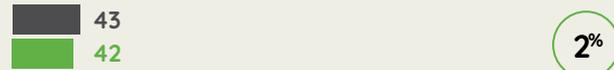
Refer to higher level



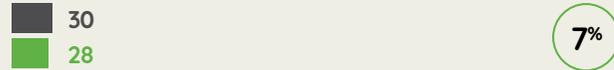
Complaint enquiry



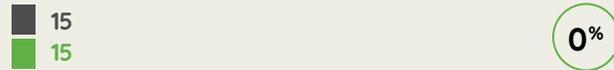
Level 1



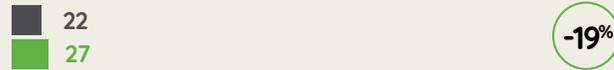
Level 2



Level 3

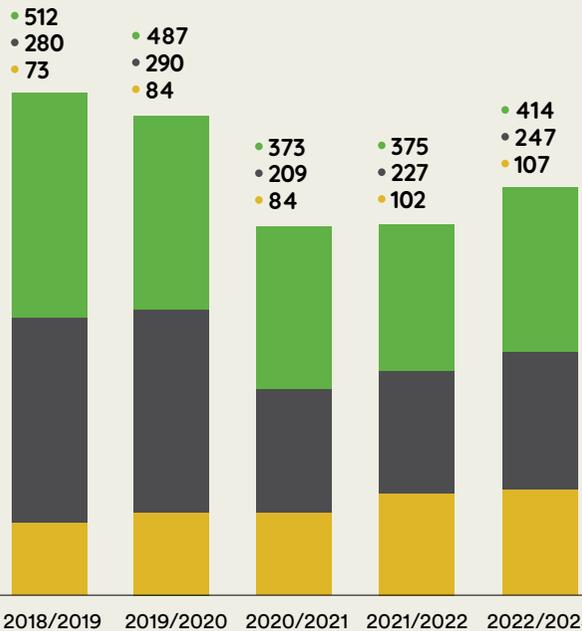


General enquiry



Water trends

● Retailer ● Distributor ● Not allocated



Water complaints by core issue

Issue	Complaints	% change
Billing	323	11%
General	118	36%
Land	114	25%
Provision	82	52%
Supply	57	-11%
Credit	47	-10%
Customer service	21	-64%
Privacy	3	50%
Unspecified*	3	-25%
Total	768	9%

*Issue not selected at time of reporting

NO FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Case study

Compliance certificate for new build delayed



Mr Jonas bought a vacant block of land hoping to subdivide it and build duplexes for rental. He applied to the network for a compliance certificate before any building had started. When the work was nearly finished, he contacted the network to get his compliance certificate, but was told his initial application had been withdrawn. Mr Jonas made another application but was concerned the delay had led to a loss of rental income. The network told Mr Jonas that his development depended on the construction of a water main in an adjoining street, that another developer had not yet begun.

Mr Jonas sought loss of rental income of \$14,785 for the delay in issuing a certificate, and \$3,289 in extra fees to submit a second application. When the network

declined Mr Jonas’s claim, he contacted EWON for assistance. He noted it was the responsibility of the water servicing coordinator, whom he had appointed, to explain the servicing options to the developer. The water servicing coordinator was given information for the other developer and should have been following up the progress of the main extension. The delays in construction of the water main, and the issuing of the compliance certificate, are therefore not the network’s responsibility.

EWON investigated to determine whether the network was responsible for the delay in issuing the certificate. We identified that Mr Jonas’s land, once subdivided, had only one lot with direct access to a water main. The second lot faced a side street, where

no water main existed. This meant Mr Jonas could extend the main and pay for the extension or wait for another developer to pay to extend the main. The issue was that the other developer had not started construction when Mr Jonas’s properties were nearly complete. This was not the network’s responsibility.

Further, the water servicing coordinator never submitted the original application for the certificate to the network. It was submitted only towards the completion of the duplexes. Had enquiries been made sooner, the lack of construction of the water main in the side street would have been identified and alternative water servicing arrangements could have been made sooner. We provided a detailed complaint assessment report outlining our investigation.

Mr Jonas did not respond to our complaint assessment report, which gave him the opportunity to accept the outcome of our investigation or, if not, to provide more information that would warrant further investigation. No extra information was provided and the complaint was closed.

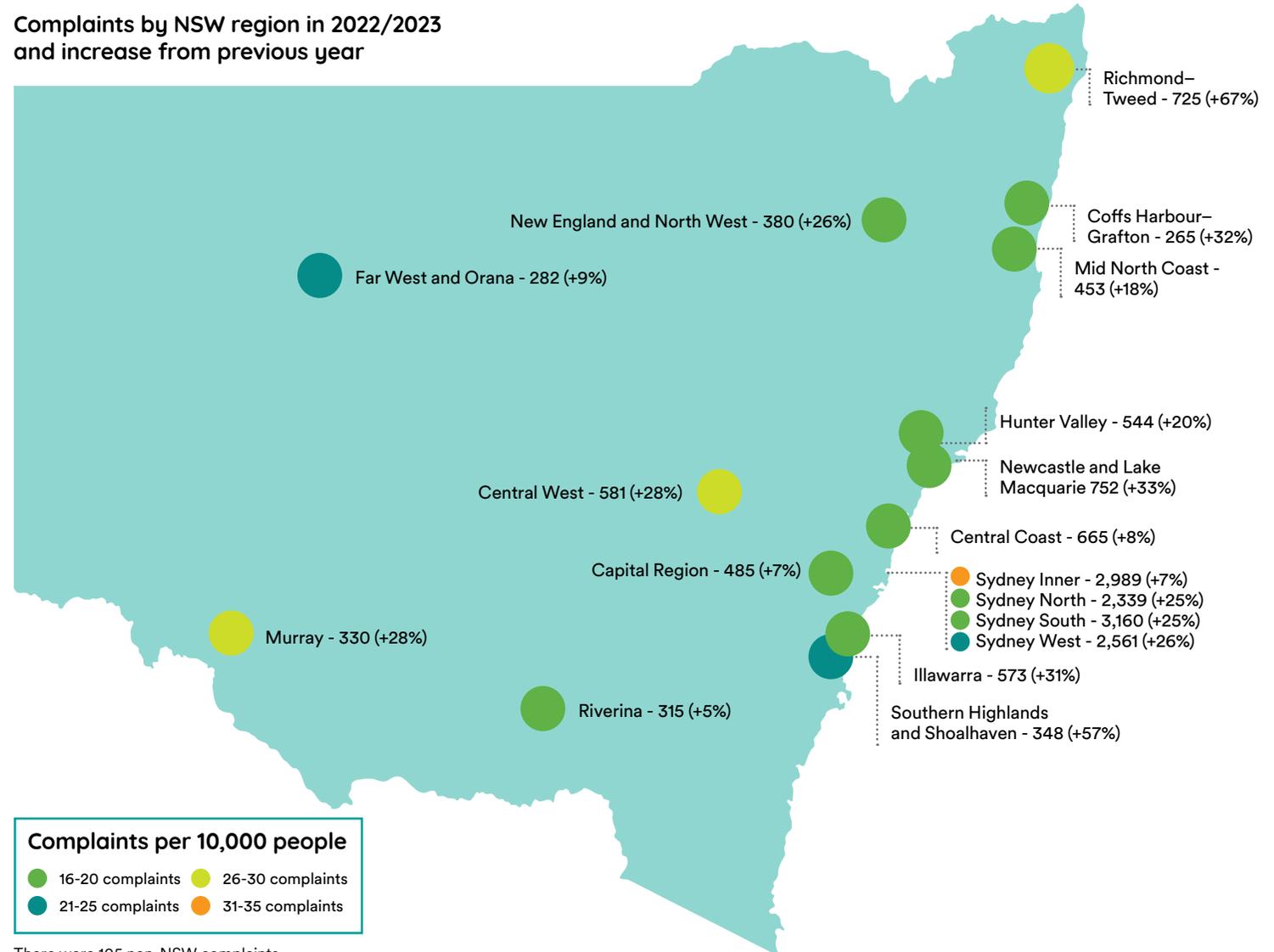
Issues
Provision, new connection delay
 Outcome
No further investigation

Complaints by area

The majority (75%) of our complaints came from customers in metropolitan areas, 20% coming from inner regional locations, and the remaining 5% coming from outer regional, rural or remote NSW communities.

Complaints from the Richmond-Tweed region increased by 67%. This increase was largely driven by the impacts of flooding across the region, which prompted EWON to hold local outreach events to support the community, generating widespread media coverage and increased awareness of EWON.

Complaints by NSW region in 2022/2023 and increase from previous year



Managing unreasonable customer behaviours

EWON operates an accessible dispute resolution service, and all customers have the right to seek our advice and help. However, in the past 18 months, EWON staff, like staff from our members and other ombudsman offices, have experienced an increase in customers presenting with unreasonable behaviour, including in person, on the phone and in writing. COVID-19, cost of living pressures and housing stress are impacting an increased number of customers who present with behaviours ranging from challenging frustration to extreme anger. We've also identified that more customers are less willing to move from their initial position in order to accept, what we consider based on many years of experience, is a fair and reasonable outcome. This had led to an increase in internal reviews and complaint escalations.

Our dispute resolution staff understand the stress on households and are trained to identify behaviours early and work with customers to communicate effectively and de-escalate unreasonable behaviours.

It is critical that EWON staff have a safe environment to work in – whether this is in the office or in their home. We do not accept or tolerate customer behaviour that raises health, safety, resource or equity issues for example

customers demanding that we prioritise their complaint and operate within unreasonable timeframes which negatively impact our service to other customers.

We have introduced the following measures to support our frontline staff:

- a buddy system so colleagues can support each other after a challenging phone call or customer interaction
- provided regular team reminders about the importance of asking for support via our Employee Assistance Program
- additional training and support to team leaders so they are better equipped to support their staff
- workshops by Black Dog Institute on building staff resilience
- 'managing unreasonable complainant conduct' training for all staff
- team 'stand-ups' to encourage discussion, sharing and debriefing
- policy and procedure reviews to further empower staff to provide appropriate responses

- collaborated with other ombudsman offices to share insights and ideas on how to better support staff
- carried out an environmental scan and review of the wider community issues affecting customer behaviour
- introduced Ombudsman workshops to discuss and reinforce the importance of
 - appropriate response measures
 - asking for support
 - supporting colleagues.



Complaint issues



35% increase in disputed high bill complaints

We use 11 categories to identify the key driver of each complaint and associated issues. We open one case when a customer contacts us, but as most complaints involve multiple issues, we register more complaint issues than cases.

Billing

Problems with managing bills and contracts, including high and estimated bills, tariffs and fees.

Credit

Payment difficulties and the actions providers take to address unpaid bills including debt collection and disconnection.

Transfer

Problems associated with switching to a new energy provider.

Customer service

The level of service customers receive, including problems with contacting providers i.e. long on-hold times and lack of readily available contact information.

Digital meter exchange

Delays, faults and other problems with smart meter installations or follow-on issues including tariffs or billing.

General

Complaints that are not related to energy or water or are not covered by other specified issues.

Supply

The delivery and quality of energy and water, including outages and protection for customers on life support equipment.

Land

The impact of the provider's assets, maintenance and activity on a customer's property or environment.

Provision

Problems with new or existing connections to energy and water networks.

Marketing

Marketing and sales conduct via door to door, online, phone or other channels.

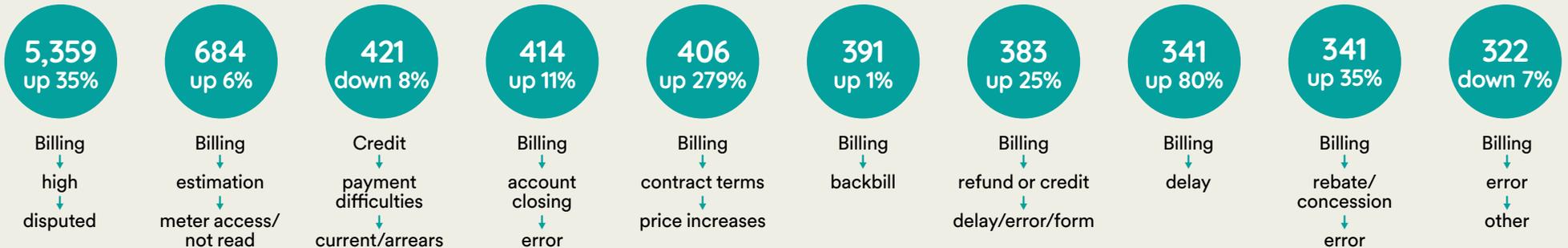
Privacy

Collection and use of a customer's personal details including issues relating to the Consumer Data Right.

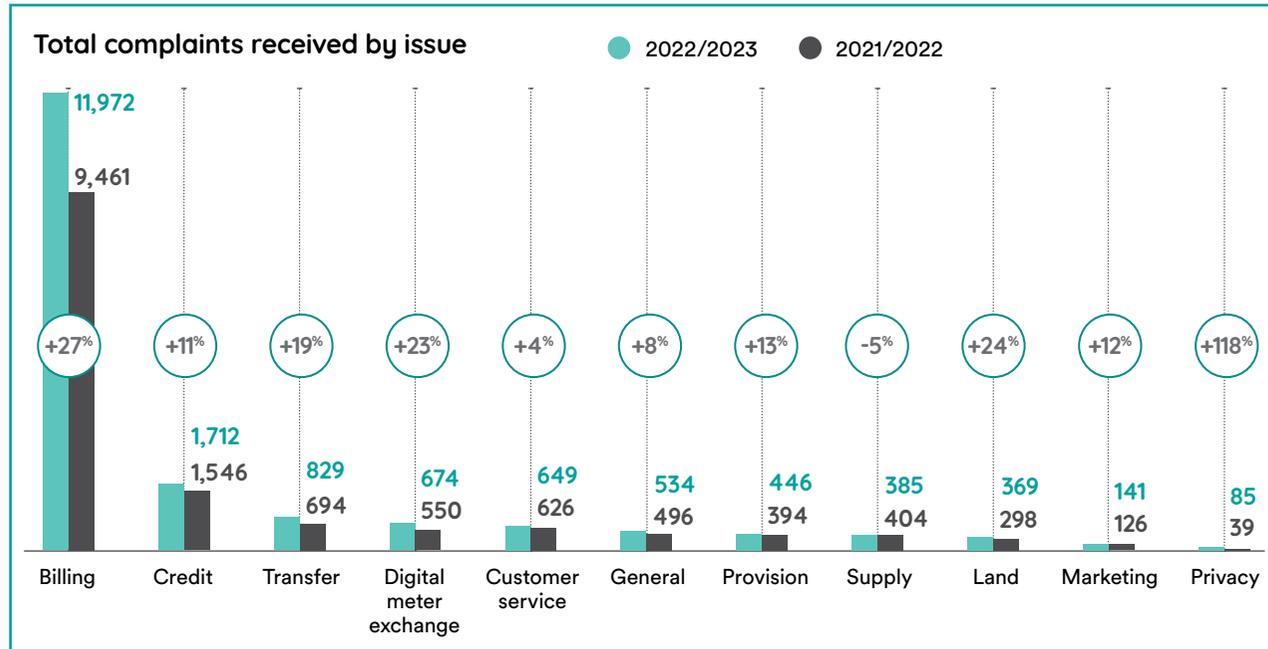


See next page for total complaints by issue

Top 10 reasons people complain to EWON



469 general enquiries about energy/water were also raised.



Complaint issues (continued)

Billing

Issue	No. complaints
High	5,359
Estimation	1,011
Error	966
Contract terms	938
Tariff	568
Account closing	489
Rebate/concession	439
Backbill	391
Refund or credit	383
Delay	341
Account opening	339
Fees & charges	290
Other	287
Period	138
Format	24
Debt transfer	9

Credit

Issue	No. complaints
Disconnection/restriction	713
Payment difficulties	617
Collection	382

Transfer

Issue	No. complaints
Site ownership	250
In error	203
Delay	144
Without consent	106
Cooling off rights	51
Error correction	50
Rejected	25

Digital meter exchange

Issue	No. complaints
Delay	161
Fault	138
Billing	125
Not installed	52
Other	46
Opt in/opt out	42
Incorrect advice/information	36
Terms and conditions	26
Damage to property/appliances	25
Failure to notify	17
Failure to respond	6

Customer service

Issue	No. complaints
Poor service	288
Failure to respond	115
Incorrect advice/information	75
B2B/third parties	53
Accessibility	40
Failure to consult/inform	35
Online/application	29
Unprofessional attitude	14

General

Issue	No. complaints
Energy/water	469
Non energy/non water	65

Provision

Issue	No. complaints
Existing connection	275
New connection	141
Disconnection/restriction	30

Supply

Issue	No. complaints
Off supply (unplanned)	196
Off supply (planned)	122
Sewer overflow/blockage	25
Variation	17
Quality	10
Water licensing	9
Life Support protections	6

Land

Issue	No. complaints
Network assets	171
Property damage/restoration	139
Vegetation management	22
Street lighting	17
Other	11
Easement	9

Marketing

Issue	No. complaints
Misleading	80
Information	26
Other	16
Pressure	10
Method	7
Non account holder	2

Privacy

Issue	No. complaints
Other	38
Details released	18
Details requested by provider	13
Details obtained without consent	9
Disclosure refused by provider	4
Details correction refused	3

Complaint issues

(continued)



406 complaints about price increases, up from 107 last year

Deep dive – billing

Billing continues to be our biggest issue, with 67% of all complaints involving a billing issue as the main reason for a complaint. We received 11,972 complaints about billing, a 27% rise from the 9,461 last year. Cost of living pressures appear to be a driving force behind the increases, with complaints about price rises quadrupling to 406 complaints. Disputed high bill complaints rose by 35% and complaints about errors with rebates and concessions by 35%. Complaints about estimated bills, including bill smoothing, meter access issues, faults and remote readings have risen by 15%. These increases indicate customers are paying closer attention to their bills because of the higher cost of living.



See next page for two year comparison of billing sub issues

NEGOTIATED OUTCOME

Billing case study

Small business owner disputes estimated bills

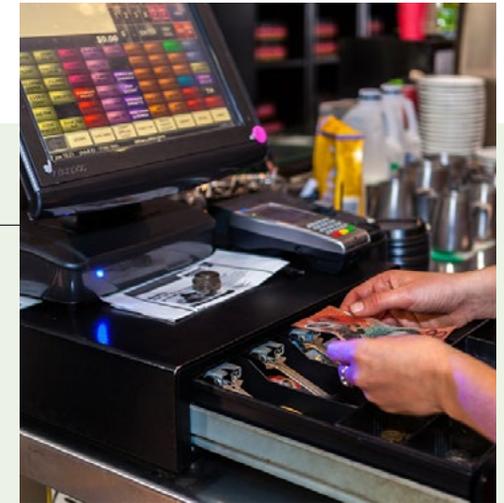
During the COVID-19 lockdown, Mr Leary closed his business. When he closed his energy account, he disputed the accuracy of the estimated bills, including the final meter reading. He raised his concern with his retailer. The retailer asked the network provider to adjust the readings but the network declined. The retailer offered a \$600 credit to reduce the \$3,620 bill but Mr Leary rejected the offer. Dissatisfied with the outcome, he contacted EWON.

We investigated Mr Leary’s complaint and noted his account was closed in early 2022 and the meter removed in March 2022. The meter was inside the building and had not been read due to lack of access. But the retailer considered the estimated consumption was consistent with the

actual consumption recorded before the disputed period.

Our investigation identified that before April 2021, Mr Leary had been billed on actual consumption. During the first COVID-19 lockdown, he was billed 82.79 kWh per day based on actual meter data. During the second lockdown his consumption was estimated at 229 kWh per day. As the account was closed, before a new actual reading could be taken, there was no reconciliation of meter data to a final reading.

EWON asked the retailer to adjust the estimated data for the second period to match the first but the retailer declined. We asked the retailer to contact the meter



provider, who had replaced the meter, to find out if data was taken from the old meter when it was removed. As a result, the retailer received the adjusted meter data from the meter provider and Mr Leary’s account was re-billed in line with actual consumption. The retailer gave a refund to Mr Leary and his account was now \$1,611 in credit.

Issues
Disputed high bill
Outcome
Negotiated outcome

Two year comparison of secondary billing issues

Secondary issue	2022/2023	2021/2022	% change
High	5,359	3,973	35%
Estimation	1,011	879	15%
Error	966	827	17%
Contract terms	938	462	103%
Tariff	568	519	9%
Account closing	489	465	5%
Rebate/concession	439	342	28%
Backbill	391	388	1%
Refund or credit	383	307	25%
Delay	341	189	80%
Account opening	339	331	2%
Fees & charges	290	261	11%
Other	287	299	-4%
Period	138	165	-16%
Format	24	36	-33%
Debt transfer	9	18	-50%
Total	11,972	9,461	27%

Two year comparison of secondary credit issues

Secondary issue	2022/2023	2021/2022	% change
Disconnection/ restriction	713	572	25%
Payment difficulties	617	629	-2%
Collection	382	345	11%
Total	1,712	1,546	11%

Complaint issues

(continued)

Disconnection



390

actual disconnection complaints



323

impending disconnection complaints

Deep dive — credit

Energy affordability and increased costs of living are key policy items, as detailed on page 52 of this report. Credit related complaints, which include disconnection, payment difficulties and debt collection, have increased by 11% in 2022/2023, with 1,712 complaints received.

The increase in credit complaints is largely driven by impending and completed disconnection figures. When the AER’s Statement of Expectations was lifted in October 2021, it removed extra protections for people experiencing payment difficulties due to COVID-19. But many retailers didn’t move to reintroduce disconnection to the same degree it had been used pre-COVID-19. In 2022/2023, disconnection rates rose and EWON’s disconnection complaint figures (713) increased by 25% compared to the 572 complaints last year.

See previous page for two year comparison of credit sub issues

CONCILIATED OUTCOME

Credit case study

Customer with affordability issues declined payment arrangement



Mr Teo experienced affordability issues during the COVID-19 lockdown and was placed on a payment plan for his energy account. He later moved from his supply address and lived in his car for a short period so did not realise he had been removed from the payment plan and referred to a debt collection agency.

After moving into a new property, Mr Teo received a bill at his new address that seemed higher than expected. He called his provider to arrange a payment plan and was told he had outstanding arrears for his previous address and would need to pay \$300 per fortnight for both his current consumption and the previous debt. He was also told he could not pay his account

with Centrepay payments unless he first paid the debt from the previous address. Mr Teo escalated his complaint with his provider but received no response.

Mr Teo contacted EWON to set up an affordable payment plan. We contacted his provider who agreed to review his account. We questioned why Mr Teo had not been referred to the provider’s affordability program.

The provider acknowledged Mr Teo’s circumstances and apologised for the way his complaint had been handled. It offered to waive the balance of the finalised account for \$1,269 and agreed to set up a payment plan for Mr Teo’s current premises based on his capacity to pay.

Mr Teo accepted the offer and agreed to be contacted by the provider’s affordability team for ongoing account management.

Issues
Credit, payment difficulties, arrangement declined

Outcome
Conciliated outcome

Complaint resolutions

We resolved 17,844 complaints, a 22% rise compared to the 14,652 last year. Despite the increased complexity and higher number of complaints, we only received eight more complaints than were closed – and this was due to a late surge of complaints received at the end of the financial year after energy price increases were announced.

See next page for complaints closures by level from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023

Time taken to resolve complaints



94%
0 < 30 days (16,760)

5%
30 < 90 days (834)

1%
> 90 days (250)

See next page for investigated and non investigated complaints

2,704
investigated complaints



2,112
referrals to provider contact centres or affordability teams

See next page for referrals provided by EWON



94%
of complaints resolved in under 30 days



72%
of calls answered within 30 seconds



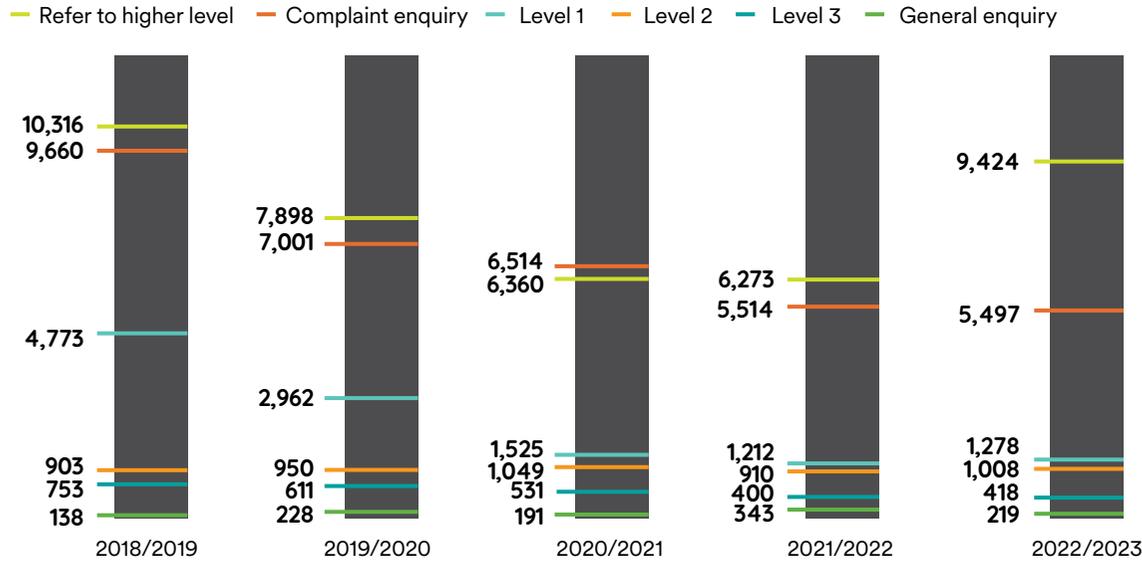
\$1.16 million
in financial outcomes

47%
billing adjustments

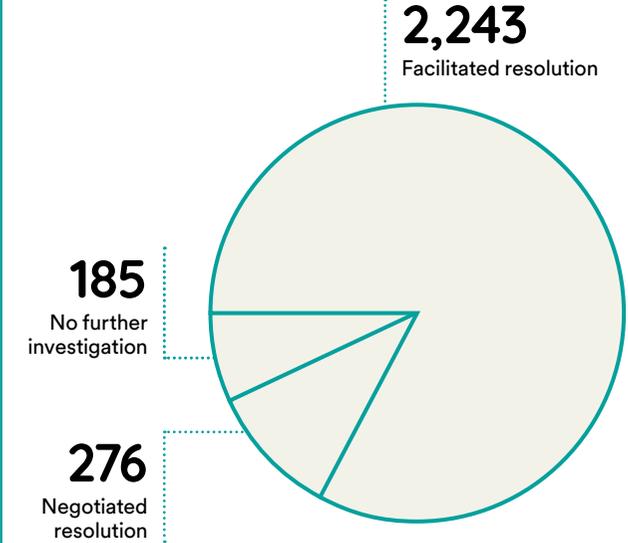
21%
resolution offers

17%
goodwill gestures

Complaint closures by complaint level from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023



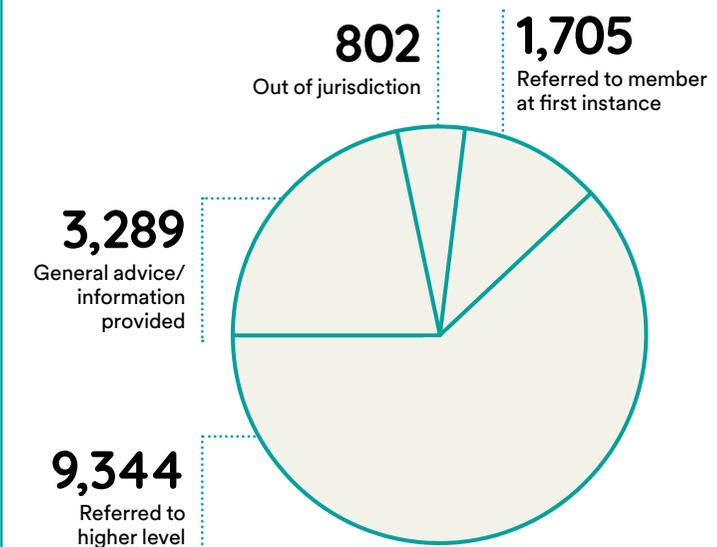
Investigated complaints



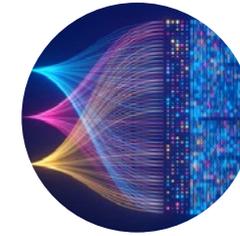
Referrals provided by EWON

No wrong door referrals	No. complaints
Member at first instance	1,804
EAPA/PAS/community agency	761
AER/energymadeeasy	682
Fair Trading/NCAT	519
Other government agency	413
Legal/tenancy advisor	284
Another ombudsman	260
Financial counsellor	215
Private contractor	213
IPART	46
DPE (Resources & Energy)/Minister	29

Non investigated complaints



Quality of our work



3,553 monthly data integrity checks, representing 20% of resolved complaints.

A focal point of EWON's quality framework is continuous improvement. The methodologies we have developed to assess the quality of our dispute resolution service include internal reviews, data integrity checks, case management reviews and reviews of complaints about EWON. We apply what we learn from our reviews to improve our systems, communication and processes.

Internal reviews

In our internal review process, we independently review EWON's investigation work, considering further information or an alternative interpretation of available information. Customers can ask for a review of our decision if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and they:

- identify bias in our investigation, or
- provide new/relevant information that was not previously available and that may change the outcome, or
- identify an error or omission in our investigation, including where we have not followed our case handling policies and procedures.

In 2022/2023 we received 23 formal requests for internal review from 17,852 complaints received. Our reviews identified the majority to be high standard investigations with fair and reasonable outcomes, and three required further investigation.

Of those three cases, one was due to the customer providing extra information that had not been available earlier, but after consideration, it confirmed the outcome of the initial investigation. The new information helped the

customer understand what had occurred and as a result, they accepted the resolution outcome.

In the second case, the customer claimed appliances were damaged because of an overhead service wire. EWON's review resulted in the provider paying the customer increased compensation which had been assessed by EWON as being fair and reasonable, considering the age of the appliance and depreciation.

In the final case, a small business customer requested a review because they considered delays by the provider were detrimental to the business' billing, as it took more than 12 months to open an electricity account. The customer provided records that showed the business regularly contacted the provider over the period. The new investigation found the provider's delayed responses affected the customer's ability to receive, understand and accept quotes at a time of uncertainty and volatility in the energy market. We asked the provider to address the impact of the delays on the customer. The energy provider responded with a detailed explanation for the delays, acknowledging the service did not meet its customer service standards, and it provided an apology to the customer. The provider declined the full amount the customer sought but offered a credit of \$14,275 and extra time to pay the arrears.

EWON assessed the provider's new resolution offer and found that it did not fully address the merits of the complaint. EWON's investigation identified that the actual financial impact required to address contract pricing variations for the nine month delay was \$18,775. The energy provider did not accept EWON's assessment, however it agreed to increase its resolution offer to this

amount. The customer remained dissatisfied with the revised offer and after further review, EWON finalised the investigation on the basis that a fair and reasonable offer had been made to address all aspects of the complaint.

Data integrity checks

Each week, month, and quarter we check the accuracy of complaint information and data captured in our complaints management system. In 2022/2023 we carried out:

- **941 monthly exception report checks**
- **3,553 monthly data integrity checks, representing a 20% sample of resolved complaints.**

Complaint management

We undertake comprehensive reviews of closed complaints to assess the quality of our complaint handling. Quality assurance feedback to the Dispute Resolution Officer and their team leader is shared verbally and in person, one-to-one. We also use a monthly complaint management meeting to explore continual improvement initiatives in our complaint handling and the outcomes achieved.

Complaints about EWON

Complaints about our service give us valuable feedback and an opportunity to review and improve our systems, communication and processes.

This year we received seven complaints about EWON, out of 17,852 complaints received. An independent investigation of each complaint is undertaken, and a written response given to the customer. An apology is provided, and staff training is undertaken when required.

INTERNAL REVIEW

Case study

Internal review on power surge claim



Mr Russell experienced a power surge at his property and reported it to his electricity network provider because of extensive damage to his appliances. An emergency service officer from the network attended and said the cause of the voltage variation was the barge fuses at the connection. He needed a level 2 electrician to replace them. Mr Russell called an electrician who said there were safety issues from the network's side. This was reported to the network and a different officer attended who confirmed a fault with the overhead service wire, which was then replaced.

Mr Russell's claim to his personal insurer was declined so he made a claim with the network for \$40,392. The network provider denied the claim as it considered that an intermittent fault with the customer's

wiring had compromised the integrity of the service wire connection. The network offered \$699 — the cost of the service fuses — as a customer service gesture. Mr Russell did not accept this and asked EWON for help.

Our investigation was unable to verify if it was Mr Russell's barge fuses or the network service wire that caused the voltage variation. The provider made an ex gratia offer of \$3,000 as a customer service gesture to replace the hot water system and air conditioning unit.

Mr Russell did not accept the investigation's findings. He asked us to conduct an internal review saying we had not addressed his concerns about the network officer falsely recording that he had carried out testing when he attended the property.

Our review found that aspects of our investigation warranted a reinvestigation. These included obtaining clear information about the safety of the service wire connection, the timing, details of the appliances damaged, and the source of the data in the electricity network's test results.

The new investigation found the fault was most likely to have been with the overhead service wire, rather than the barge fuses. This implied the network was liable. A detailed inventory of the damaged appliances was undertaken and, based on that information, the value of the claim was determined to be about \$6,000 considering appliance age and depreciated value. The network provider proposed a settlement of \$6,000 without admitting liability. Mr Russell accepted this outcome and signed a deed of release.

Our internal review process is a critical part of quality assurance. It enables us to independently review our investigation work and continually improve our complaints management.

Issues
Provision, existing connection, defect/fault/maintenance
 Outcome
Internal review, request upheld

Customer satisfaction

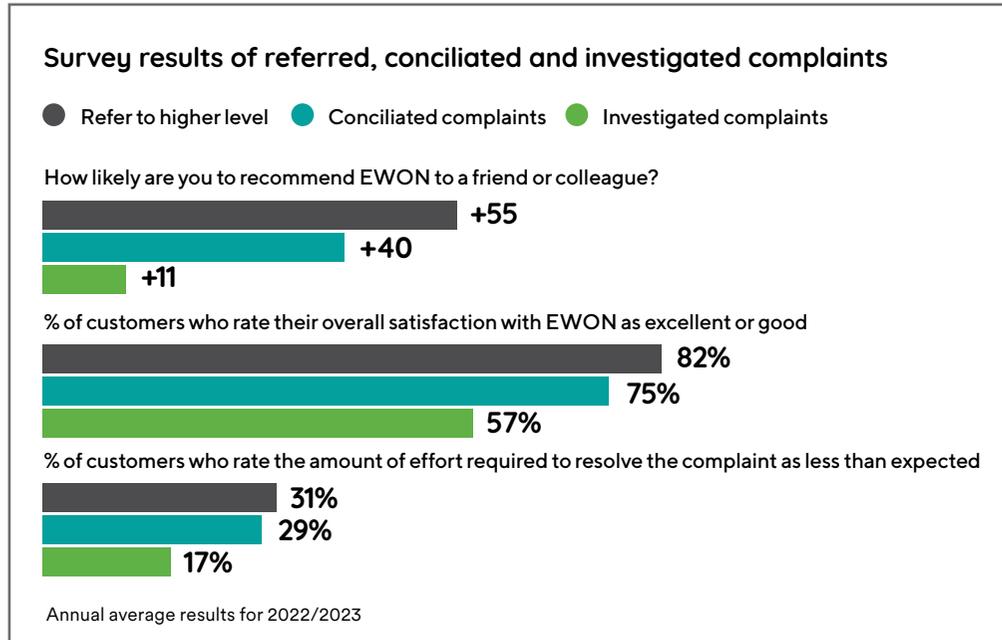
To measure the quality of our work, we ask customers to provide feedback about their experience. We send a Customer Satisfaction Survey to all customers with investigated complaints and to a sample of customers whose complaints we referred to their provider’s specialist dispute resolution teams (RHL). The results, including free text comments, are used to monitor EWON’s performance and inform our continuous improvement program.

As part of our Customer Satisfaction Survey program review, we refreshed and refined the survey questions and measures to streamline the format, enhance accessibility and ensure consistency and efficiency in launching the survey and collating the results.

Survey results

How likely are you to recommend EWON to a friend or colleague?

The first question is based on a Net Promoter Score (NPS) which measures if the service experienced by EWON customers resulted in them becoming advocates and promoters of EWON. We received a commendable NPS of +55 for referred complaints and +40 for conciliated complaints. We received an NPS of +11 for investigated complaints, up from -6 in 2021/2022. Investigated complaints take longer to resolve, which can impact a customer's view of our service.



Percentage of customers who rate their overall satisfaction with EWON as excellent or good

Eighty two percent of customers with a referred complaint and 75% with a conciliated complaint rated their overall satisfaction as excellent or good. These scores are the result of our focus on training to ensure all staff, especially the Early Resolution team, provide quality advice and guidance. We increased our engagement with providers to drive more efficient resolution timeframes and introduced messages to all customers referred to providers, reminding them to return to EWON if their complaint remained unresolved. The customers who returned experienced more satisfaction.

Timeliness is a critical issue from a customer satisfaction perspective. Referred and conciliated complaints received a higher score than investigated complaints at 57% as these complex complaints often take longer to resolve. The free text questions showed a strong connection between cost of living pressures and investigated outcomes that were not fully in the customer’s favour.

This is reflected in the high number of internal reviews this year, however 20 out of 23 reviews found EWON’s investigation aligned with procedural fairness and the dispute resolution benchmarks.

Percentage of customers who rate the amount of effort required to resolve the complaint as less than expected

This year, we introduced a new measure to rate the effort required by customers to resolve their complaint. Referred complaints again scored higher at 31%, with conciliated complaints at 29%. This reflects our improved RHL experience which has reduced the amount of customer effort required. Only 17% of customers with investigated complaints rated the effort required as less than expected. Investigated complaints require active participation from customers and those who did this had their complaint resolved more quickly. We aim to investigate ways to improve these outcomes by communicating our expectations of customer involvement early in the complaint process.

Influential policy contribution



Our policy influence

New energy services

The Australian energy market's move from carbon-intensive, non-renewable energy sources towards renewable energy has accelerated. Residential and small business customers are playing a key role in this change with the uptake of Consumer Energy Resources (CER) including rooftop solar, batteries and electric vehicles.

In 2022/2023, we built on our previous work exploring consumer issues related to CER alongside the consumer protection framework. This included our [Spotlight On Dispute resolution in the evolving energy market](#). We did this by:

- Holding workshops with our ombudsman peers to predict how the energy transition would interact with existing consumer protections. We identified new consumer protection issues and drivers for improved access to external dispute resolution (EDR).
- Exploring ways to influence reforms and ensure consumer protections and EDR were developed alongside, not in response to, issues identified now which will emerge after reforms.
- Engaging with the NSW Office of Energy and Climate Change (OECC). The Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman met the former energy minister in August 2022 to discuss issues including EDR in an evolving energy market.
- Meeting stakeholders including NSW Fair Trading, the Clean Energy Council, the Clean Energy Regulator and the Electric Vehicle Council to better understand customer complaint experiences with CER.

- Participating in the Energy Security Board's (ESB) workshops and working groups about its CER implementation plan, which includes a range of technical, market and regulatory reforms to unlock value for all consumers through the effective integration of CER and flexible demand.

AER

We participated in two key AER processes related to the changing energy market.

- Following our detailed submission on the AER's [retailer authorisation and exemption review](#) in 2021/2022, we participated in an AER-led workshop to provide feedback on the review. Our insights focused on energy as an essential service, the need for EDR in an evolving energy market, and the fragmentation of energy services.
- Jointly with the Queensland and South Australia ombudsman for energy and water, we made a detailed submission to the AER [review of consumer protections for future energy services](#). We explored the complexity of applying EDR to future energy services and explored options for EDR in an evolving energy market under a new energy customer framework. After this, we met with the AER directly and participated in workshops and forums with other key stakeholders.

AEMC

Reviewing the regulatory framework for metering services is another key process in the energy transition. In collaboration with the Queensland and South Australian

ombudsmen offices, [our response to the AEMC's draft report](#) looked at the importance of educating and supporting customers through an accelerated smart meter rollout and beyond, to enable the energy transition while maintaining consumer trust.

AEMO

In further collaboration with the Queensland, South Australian and Victorian energy and water ombudsmen offices, we made a detailed submission to the AEMO's consultation on [unlocking CER benefits through a flexible trading rule change](#). Our submission looked at the consumer protection and metering issues with the proposed model which is intended to foster the integration of CER into the energy market.

Our knowledge and understanding of what EDR needs to look like in an evolving energy market also informed submissions to:

- The ESB's review of [Electric Vehicle Smart Charging](#) where we focused on consumer protections.
- The ESB's [Data Strategy Initial Reforms Consultation Paper](#) where we supported the comprehensive plan to take Australia's energy system into the future, and provided insights into EWON's data use.
- The [AER's Draft Network Exemption Guideline review](#) where we recommended that customers and operators include guidance on charging embedded network customers for the cost of metering and network upgrades associated with installing solar PV systems.

Our policy influence (continued)

Embedded networks

EWON's expertise in understanding the issues that embedded network customers experience began more than a decade ago.

2013

Electricity Supply Act 1995 (NSW) amended, allowing EWON to accept complaints from customers of exempt sellers. However, EWON's power to resolve these complaints is limited as embedded network retailers and operators are not required to be members of our scheme.

2016

EWON publishes the first public report on consumer protection gaps for embedded network customers.

2019

The AEMC publishes final report Updating the Regulatory Framework for Embedded Networks.

2022

NSW Legislative Assembly committee initiates inquiry into law and safety in embedded networks.

2015

Gas distributor, Jemena Gas Networks, introduces a network tariff designed for boundary metering that allows third party providers to take over the installation, maintenance and billing of the gas and hot water meters in new apartment buildings. In effect, this creates gas embedded networks.

2018

AER requires NSW embedded network retailers and operators to join EWON. Supreme Court of NSW decision rules that residential park operators cannot charge residents more for usage than the park operator is charged by its energy retailer.

2021

EWON publishes Spotlight on Hot Water Embedded Networks.
EWON hosts first of two workshops with key regulatory and government stakeholders to discuss solutions for hot water embedded networks.
EWON publishes Spotlight on Embedded Networks — it's time for change.
EWON hosts second of two workshops with key regulatory and government stakeholders to discuss solutions for hot water embedded networks.
The Department of Customer Service publishes its Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013 Statutory Review including recommendations on charging of electricity in embedded networks.

Our policy influence (continued)

EWON's embedded network contributions in 2022/2023

July 2022: EWON made a submission to the [Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety inquiry into embedded networks in NSW](#), highlighting the need for embedded network residents and small businesses to have clarity, transparency, accountability and, ultimately, consumer protection aligned with that of mass market energy residential and small business customers.

August 2022: EWON Policy & Systemic Issues staff briefed and educated the committee about the regulatory landscape of embedded networks, including why customer numbers are growing and the consumer protections gaps that are creating increased consumer detriment. The Ombudsman appeared as an expert witness before the committee and presented EWON's view on what needs to change.

November 2022: The Committee released its [Inquiry Report No 3/57 — Embedded Networks in NSW](#), which included substantial references to EWON's evidence, publications and case studies. Many of the report's recommendations directly or indirectly aligned with EWON's contributions to the inquiry or initiatives proposed in our Spotlight On reports, including our position that charges for hot water should be based on the energy used to heat the water and not be based on litres of hot water used.

February 2023: The NSW government [responded to the report](#) and later released its March 2023 [Embedded Network Action Plan](#) aimed at aligning outcomes for embedded network customers with those of on market customers. Key actions that align with EWON's suggested initiatives and proposals include:

- release a ministerial statement of expectations (to receive legal effect) requesting that hot and chilled embedded network operators bill customers in the underlying energy source, to enable protections under the National Energy Customer Framework to apply to hot and chilled water
- have the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) determine the maximum price for hot and chilled water services and gas services in embedded networks
- initiate an IPART review on whether a maximum price below the default market offer (DMO) is required for embedded networks.

We strongly support the action plan and recommend it is implemented by the current NSW government. Our work to make this a reality is an ongoing key focus for 2023/2024.

Pricing protections for embedded network customers

We continue to support initiatives to improve pricing protection for customers in all types of embedded networks, including recommendations in the NSW Department of Customer Service's [Residential \(Land Lease\) Communities Act 2013 Statutory Review](#) published in November 2021.

One of the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly inquiry report into embedded networks is that the NSW government urgently implement recommendations of this statutory review relating to the charging of electricity in residential (land lease) communities. The government's response to the inquiry report indicates it intends to implement the recommendations in 2023, and we look forward to this progress.

We further explored embedded network issues in our submissions to the following processes:

- The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's [Default Market Offer Post-review consultation](#), where we strongly supported the proposal to extend the price cap protections provided by the DMO to customers of authorised retailers in embedded networks.
- The AER's [Review of consumer protections for future energy services](#) where, alongside our examination of future energy services and external dispute resolution, we explored the need for regulated centralised hot water services within embedded networks.
- The AER's [Draft Network Exemption Guideline review](#) where, alongside our recommendation on solar upgrade guidance, we explored proposals to make EWON membership easier for exempt entities; recommendations for compliance and engagement activities with embedded network operators, and support for improved protections in disconnection and payment difficulties.
- The NSW Department of Customer Service's [Statutory Review of the Strata Schemes Development Act 2015 and the Strata Schemes Management Act 2015](#), where we examined how essential a service was when defining utilities, and the importance of giving sufficient information to owners and tenants.
- The AER's [2024-2029 electricity distribution determinations](#), where we raised potential issues with the proposal by some networks to introduce specific embedded network tariffs.

NEGOTIATED OUTCOME

Case study

Incorrect wiring leads to high bills



When Mr Angelos moved to a retirement village his electricity bills were about \$64 a month. A year later, after the village changed meter providers and new meters were installed, his monthly bills rose to \$365. The village manager organised an electrician to inspect the property and meter but he was unable to find any issues.

Dissatisfied with the response, Mr Angelos contacted EWON requesting a review of his account and a check of his meter.

We requested information from the village manager. The new meters were a single three-phase set-up that supplied three villas with a single phase set up to record each villa's consumption individually. NSW Fair Trading confirmed this meter set-up was compliant with the National Measurement Act.

We reviewed Mr Angelos's meter readings, usage habits and information about changes to appliances within the village. We found his meter was significantly higher compared with the consumption of the other two villas.

At our request, the village manager organised an independent electrician to do a site inspection accompanied by an inspector from NSW Fair Trading and EWON. The inspection identified that two air conditioning units had been wired incorrectly and Mr Angelos was paying for his neighbour's air conditioning use, and a third neighbour was paying for his.

The village rectified the wiring issue and reviewed past billing. It offered Mr Angelos a \$3,000 refund and waived the \$1,500 balance owing on his account.

Issues

Disputed high bill

Outcome

Negotiated outcome

Our policy influence (continued)

Energy affordability

Energy affordability has always been a significant challenge for many NSW consumers. Price increases from 1 July 2022 increased this challenge exponentially. Announcements in late June 2023 about further steep rises in market energy prices and increases in the Default Market Offer from July 2023 mean consumers are facing energy affordability challenges never experienced in the past.

Behind these price increases are other significant impacts; energy retailer failures, extreme weather events, increased cost of living and housing stress including increased interest rate and rental costs. As explored on page 39-41 of this report, billing and credit complaints, including affordability and disconnections, increased in comparison to previous years.

Building on our work in [Spotlight On the National Energy Affordability Framework](#) and [Spotlight On Consumer and small business energy debt solutions](#), we continued to push for action from governments, regulators and our members to improve energy affordability. For example, our systemic issues investigations with EWON members often focus specifically on issues related to affordability — see page 57 for examples.

The AER's [Towards energy equity — a strategy for an inclusive energy market](#) was published in October 2022, and EWON's submissions and Spotlight On reports were referenced multiple times in the development of the strategy as well as in the final publication. We participated in workshops throughout its development, and the Ombudsman continues to be involved in the Game Changer Design Group work that is aimed at introducing initiatives that address energy affordability for customers experiencing financial vulnerability. We also continue to provide the AER with key insights about the impact of floods and other natural disasters on communities across NSW. These insights inform the AER's focus on introducing, when needed, extra consumer protection requirements from energy retailers and networks for communities facing crisis situations.

Family violence

EWON made several submissions about providing better support to customers who have experienced, are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, family violence. We made a final [submission](#) with Energy & Water Ombudsman South Australia (EWOSA) and Energy & Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ) to the AEMC draft rule determination protecting customers affected by family violence. The final determination in September 2022 aligned with our various submissions, including by:

- extending the definition of family violence to cover family-like relationships by adopting a broad definition of 'family'
- extending the definition of 'affected customer' to former (closed) account holders and to small business customers
- not requiring (or allowing retailers to require) victim-survivors to provide documentary evidence as a precondition for receiving family violence support, including in relation to disconnections
- recommending the AER consider extending protections to customers in embedded networks.

The rule came into effect on 1 May 2023. EWON monitors complaints where customers courageously inform us that they are impacted by family violence and will report on the impact of the rule change to key stakeholders including the AEMC, as well as compliance breaches to the AER.

Financial counselling

EWON has supported the introduction of an industry funding model to bolster financial counselling services since the publication of the [Sylvan report in 2019](#). Along with EWOSA, EWOQ and the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV), we confirmed this support in our [submission](#) to the Department of Social Services' process to develop an efficient and fair industry funding model.

Our policy influence (continued)

The need for adequately funded financial counselling services has become even more pressing since the social and economic impact of COVID-19. We discussed evaluating and refining the voluntary nature of the proposed funding model, which has the potential to result in insufficient and/or inequitable funding.

Since this submission, we have worked with the Water Services Association of Australia, the peak water sector body, and have agreed with their position that while the water sector should also be part of new financial counselling funding arrangements, more work is needed to identify what this sector's share should be. We will take this position forward in future submissions.

Further contribution

We also influenced decision making on energy affordability in other settings, including:

- The AER's [review of consumer protections for future energy services](#) where we highlighted the fact that if the energy consumer protection framework becomes more outcomes- or principle-based, there still need to be rules and obligations for retailers managing customers experiencing vulnerability.
- The AEMC's [unlocking CER benefits through flexible trading rule change](#) where we discussed the importance of ensuring a secondary connection point is covered by the same consumer protections as the primary connection point, particularly for customers struggling to gain access to affordability programs.
- The AEMC's [review of the regulatory framework for metering services](#) where we emphasised the importance of a smart meter rollout that is equitable, not only accelerated.
- The NSW Department of Planning and Environment's (DPE) [consultation on the Water Industry Competition \(General\) Regulation 2022](#) where we strongly supported, where practical, making the protections for customers of licensees the same as for customers of public utilities, particularly for those experiencing financial difficulties, those with critical health needs and those affected by family violence.

COMPLAINT ENQUIRY

Case study

Claim denied after extensive fire damage

Ms Draper’s home suffered significant fire damage that was deemed to have originated from the fuse box. Her electrician concluded both the high voltage and low voltage fuses on the transformer had blown. Soon after, the network provider’s website noted that two transformer/pole substations had failed, leading to a large surge, at the same time as the fire.

As Ms Draper’s home was uninhabitable, she had to live in a rental property. She claimed damages via her insurer and received a financial settlement. However, the cost of repairs was significantly more than her insurance cover. As a result, she claimed the extra \$300,000 from the network provider. The provider investigated and found that the damage from Ms Draper’s fuse box had caused damage to its network rather than network issues causing the fuse box damage. As a result, the claim was declined.

We told Ms Draper that our binding decision limit is about \$50,000 and,

as her insurance company had accepted her claim to some extent, this supported the network’s position.

On that basis, EWON advised Ms Draper to pursue her \$300,000 claim with the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, whose jurisdiction covers home and general insurance, or to seek legal advice.

Issues
Supply, off supply (unplanned), damage/loss
 Outcome
Complaint enquiry, out of jurisdiction

COMPLAINT ENQUIRY

Case study

Customer confused by high bill

Ms Madigan received a bill from her electricity provider of \$538 for the July to October 2022 quarter. She contacted EWON because her bills were usually less than \$200. She wanted her provider to review the bill as the house had been vacant for several weeks during the period.

Ms Madigan contacted EWON before speaking with her provider, hoping we could provide some information first. We discussed what may cause an unexpectedly high bill, such as increased usage, faulty appliances, faulty meters, human/clerical errors, and incorrect wiring. We told Ms Madigan that if the high bill was caused by a faulty appliance, the figure would be appropriate.

We told Ms Madigan to contact her retailer in the first instance to give them the opportunity to resolve it. If it remained unresolved, we would investigate. The retailer should be able to review the billing and advise whether it is correct and the consumption is based on actual meter data. We also advised Ms Madigan to pay a

reasonable amount towards the bill (based on previous bills) and, if required, to discuss any payment assistance with the retailer.

Ms Madigan said she now felt empowered to discuss the matter with her retailer. We invited Ms Madigan to contact us again if she required more help.

Issues
Disputed high bill
 Outcome
Resolved as complaint enquiry

Influence and collaboration



138

potential privacy breaches by providers
182 complaints about credit reporting

Regulators and statutory bodies

EWON met quarterly with regulators and statutory bodies to inform them of industry trends and issues identified through our complaint handling, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities, including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), AER, AEMC, IPART and the Clean Energy Regulator.

We submitted quarterly compliance and complaints insight reports to the AER. We also provided the ACCC, AER and IPART with complaint statistics and case studies on topics they were interested in investigating. We made significant contributions to consultations about energy and water policy, detailed above, and made submissions to the following processes:

- IPART's Draft Water Regulatory Framework: we supported its focus on delivering better customer value and a higher level of consumer protection. We welcomed the move towards more customer engagement, and recommended that water providers be encouraged to engage with all consumers, including tenants.
- IPART's Water Regulation Draft Handbook: we supported the way it provides clear guidance to water businesses about IPART's expectations under the new Regulatory Framework.

Office of the Australian Information Commission (OAIC)

As an approved external dispute resolution scheme under the Privacy Act 1988, EWON reports to the OAIC on complaints relating to privacy and credit reporting. In 2022/2023, we reported:

- 182 complaints related to customers' concerns about credit reporting
- 138 potential privacy breaches by providers.

Under the Information Sharing Arrangement agreed in August 2021, we have continued to engage regularly with the OAIC. We participated in both its officer-level and executive level liaison meetings with all energy and water ombudsman schemes, to discuss privacy issues, current reviews, and complaints. We participated in the OAIC's Australian Privacy Principles training in April 2023 and credit reporting training in June 2023.

In September 2022, the OAIC released the final report on its 2021 Independent review of the Privacy (Credit Reporting) Code 2014. EWON made multiple submissions to this process leading up to the final report.

NSW Government

We met regularly with NSW Fair Trading to discuss issues facing customers in residential parks; CER complaints; complaint referral between our organisations, and opportunities for collaboration with outreach events.

We met quarterly with the OECC to inform it of issues identified through our complaint handling, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities. We also attended its quarterly Energy Consumer Reference Group and Energy Retailer Working Group meetings.

The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) released an updated [Water Usage Charging: Ministerial Guidelines for Aboriginal Community Housing Providers](#) in September 2022, with updates to ensure the guidelines are relevant and effective for both tenants and Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs). In the [Frequently Asked Questions](#), the AHO noted the review and update to the guidelines was triggered by EWON through the Department of Communities and Justice as a result of the rise in complaints received from AHO tenants managed by ACHPs in the Far and Central West region of NSW.

Influence and collaboration (continued)

We made a submission to the NSW DPE's [consultation on the draft Water Industry Competition \(General\) Regulation 2022](#), and met with them to discuss it. The regulation includes the introduction of a standard deemed customer contract for private water utilities, which EWON has strongly supported since at least 2014 when participating in discussions that developed an initial draft contract. Along with our comments on affordability and vulnerability as discussed on page 52 of this report, we supported the overall intent of the proposed regulation to:

- formalise and/or improve practices that are already business as usual for many licensees
- provide certainty for licensees and their customers about what is required of them
- align protections for customers of licensees with customers of public utilities where practicable.

We highlighted ways the current draft could go further to align protections for customers of licensees with protections for those of public utilities, such as expanding which provisions apply to tenants. We also provided insights about ensuring customers clearly understand their internal and external dispute resolution options.

Australian government

We met with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to provide complaint insights to inform its resources for customers installing CERs.

In collaboration with EWOV, EWOSA and EWOQ, we made a [submission](#) to the Attorney General's review of the Privacy Act 1988 which supported measures to clarify the purpose of the Act, modernise it and strengthen individual privacy protections. We also emphasised the value of EDR schemes in the privacy complaints framework.

Consumer Data Right (CDR)

We continued to engage with Commonwealth Treasury, ACCC and OAIC in relation to the energy CDR. We participated in workshops hosted by the OAIC and ACCC, which also included the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA), to discuss matters including how to distinguish a CDR complaint from a traditional privacy complaint.

We collaborated with AFCA to develop a 'no wrong door' policy allowing customers to deal with either of our organisations when complaining about energy or finance CDR issues. AFCA shared insights into CDR complaints management based on its experiences since 2019 – noting that is very limited to date.

We published quarterly [EWON Insights reports](#) to provide an overview of complaint figures, current energy and water issues and our activities. In 2022/2023, EWON Insights reports covered issues relating to consumer energy resources, tariff assignment, customer service, access to rebates, high bills for customers experiencing vulnerability, impacts of complaints following incarceration, two day switching and more.

Systemic issues

The EWON Charter requires us to use real-time insights from our complaints data to identify systemic issues with our members and investigate them where appropriate.

In relation to EWON’s members, in 2022/2023 there were:

- 24 systemic issue investigations opened
- 29 systemic issue investigations closed
- 7 systemic issues investigations remain under investigation.

Systemic issues can arise from providers’ policies, practices or processes that negatively affect numerous customers and lead to complaints and disputes. Systemic issues can also arise from regulatory issues that result in confusion, conflicting interpretations and/or unforeseen circumstances, or from issues beyond the control of providers or the industry generally.

Our focus in meeting EWON’s systemic issue responsibilities under the Charter is three-fold: to reduce complaints, strengthen consumer protection frameworks, and improve public trust in the energy and water sectors.



The success of our Spotlight On reports, which highlight consumer and sector-wide systemic issues, led to the Policy & Systemic Issues team winning the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals (SOCAP) Symposium 2022 Constellation Achievement Award. It acknowledges EWON’s significant contribution to the status of consumer affairs and complaint prevention and handling across the energy sector.



24

systemic issue investigations opened

29 investigations closed

7 ongoing

See next page for more information on each systemic issue



Low Income Household Rebate not applied



Payment arrangements ceased



Bill barcode error



Switching providers



Gas disconnection confusion



Low Income Household Rebate not applied

EWON investigated a complaint from a customer who realised the NSW government's Low Income Household Rebate had not been applied to her bills for an extended period. EWON's review confirmed that the retailer did not notify the customer when the rebate stopped, and the retailer applied a credit for the full period the customer had not received the rebate. We wrote to the retailer for more information to understand whether there might be a systemic issue about compliance with the NSW Social Programs for Energy Code.

The retailer identified that due to an administrative error with the way expiry dates were entered, about 200 customers were at risk of not being captured by the retailer's monthly verification checks that would send a letter if their card was not validated. The retailer addressed the error, ensured all affected customers were receiving the appropriate rebate and that no customers suffered financially.



Payment arrangements ceased

We received complaints from multiple customers who had agreed to a payment arrangement under their retailer's affordability program but found that the arrangements were ended despite their not missing any payments. The retailer told them they had successfully completed the payment arrangement, but the customers' view was that they had not been made aware that the payment arrangement was completed.

EWON liaised with the retailer as it appeared there may be a systemic communication or customer service issue driving complaints. The retailer reviewed the matter internally and changed several internal processes, including increasing communications at the start and completion of agreed affordable payment arrangement plans.



Bill barcode error

A customer complained to EWON about an unusual situation where they paid their bills in person at the post office but found their payment had gone to a different entity, not their energy retailer. The retailer identified an error with the barcode on the bill, which caused the payment to go to the wrong entity. The retailer gave the customer a credit for the payment plus an extra goodwill credit of \$50. The retailer noted that until the barcode issue was resolved, the customer should tell the post office to use another method other than scanning the barcode.

EWON contacted the retailer to determine the extent of the barcode error and whether other customers might be affected. These included those most likely to pay at the post office, such as elderly people or those with limited computer literacy and access. The retailer confirmed that while the barcode was incorrect on all bills, only a few customers had used it as a payment method before the error was identified. The retailer temporarily removed the barcode from bills until it could be fixed and later confirmed that the barcode had been corrected and would be reintroduced on all customer bills.



Switching providers

In March 2023, we published [Spotlight On Challenges in the new world of switching energy providers](#). This report focused on customer experiences after a 2019 rule change that was intended to make switching retailers quicker and easier. While the changes were working for many retailers and customers, our complaints data told us that many customers were confused, struggling to get answers, paying more than expected, and finding switching experiences inconsistent. We called on providers to analyse their complaints data to identify how the switching process could be improved for customers.

Since the report's publication, we have met with our Ombudsman peers, AER, AEMC, Australian Energy Council, and AEMO. We have also been collating information from our members to gain further insights into switching processes. We will continue to engage with stakeholders to use industry knowledge and experience to address the issues we identified in our complaints.



Gas disconnection confusion

A government agency advised us of conflicting industry information about the option to disconnect gas supply without fully abolishing the gas connection. Our complaints data showed customers were receiving conflicting information about whether to completely disconnect the gas supply because of high cost, being a tenant without the authority to make changes to gas supply, and the lack of flexibility to again elect to use gas appliances in the future.

We liaised with the gas network about the options. It confirmed that customers can disconnect the gas supply at a lower cost rather than having to fully abolish the gas connection at a higher cost. The gas network updated its website to include information about this option and advised that it would work with retailers to improve their knowledge about options for customers.

Valued membership



Our members

NSW electricity and gas networks and retailers, as well as exempt sellers and networks that supply residential customers in embedded networks, must be members of EWON. Water providers including Sydney Water, Hunter Water, Water NSW and licensees under the Water Industry Competition Act 2006 are required to join EWON. Councils that provide water to their residents can join voluntarily.

As an independent organisation, we work closely with our members to provide insights about their customer service and complaint handling processes. We also provide information and advice about key industry issues, common customer problems, and effective complaints management aimed at reducing complaints to EWON.

Current members (30 June 2023)

Provider type	Total
Authorised energy retailers	63
Licensed energy networks	10
Licensed water providers	5*
WICA entities	10
Exempt entities:	298**
Residential complex	89
Retirement village	46
Residential park	164
Total	376

* Includes Altogether which is an authorised energy retailer, water provider and exempt entity, and Essential Energy which is a licensed energy network and for Broken Hill, a water provider.

** Includes Altogether, Arc Energy, OC Energy, Origin Energy, Real Utilities, Savant Energy, The Embedded Networks Company (seene) and WINConnect, which are also authorised energy retailers, and Narara Eco Village which is also a water provider.

New members

Provider type	Total
Authorised retailers	1
Water	1
Exempt entities:	34
Residential complex	9
Retirement village	3
Residential park	22
Total	36

Terminated memberships

Bright Spark Power Pty Ltd	
Kelrush Pty Ltd TA Moss Vale Village Caravan Park	
The Trustee for Gray Family Trust	
The Trustee for The Harley Kismet Unit Trust	
Loulach Developments Pty Ltd	
The Trustee for Camilleri Unit Trust	
GM Catto Investments Pty Ltd	
Dennien Pty Ltd	
Grange Lifestyle Village Pty Ltd	
Total	9

The Australian Energy Regulator has revoked authorisation (which negates EWON membership) for the following entities to retail energy in NSW:

- Power Club
- People Energy
- Social Energy
- Elysian Energy
- Mojo Power
- QEnergy
- Sanctuary Energy.

EWON's new funding model



Equity and fairness



Transparency and efficiency



Consistency and predictability



Simplicity and affordability

As the diversity of EWON's membership increased and the utility sector evolved, it became essential that EWON's funding model evolved to ensure it was 'fit for purpose'. Accordingly, in 2022/2023 our funding model was reviewed so that consumers continue to have access to free, fair and independent dispute resolution.

The new model is the result of extensive consultation and options development, underpinned by analytical modelling and testing against agreed principles.

Background

In 2018, EWON's jurisdiction expanded to include exempt entities. The EWON Board committed to a funding model review within three years. EWON's 2019 independent review also recommended a review.

In early 2021, the Board established a working group to support the in-house project team. By December 2021, after a competitive tender process, the Board engaged KPMG to develop options and consult members and stakeholders. The Board met regularly with KPMG and the project team, leading to a board governance workshop in August 2022, when impacts, risks and KPMG's recommendations were fully explored. The Board considered KPMG's options and preferred model, detailed member impact analysis, as well as risk/sensitivity and cashflow impacts on EWON.

The Ombudsman engaged directly with a cross section of members in response to the Board's initial review of the emerging funding model bringing that information back to inform the Board's final decision.

In October 2022, the Board approved the new funding model, to begin in July 2023 and committed to a review within three years. The Ombudsman met again with those members to share the outcome and how it related to their advice.

The model

EWON funding remains based on the user pays principle and is underpinned by:

- equity and fairness
- transparency and efficiency
- consistency and predictability
- simplicity and affordability.

Change management and engagement

To ensure widespread understanding of the new model and to support implementation, we developed an extensive Change Management and Engagement Strategy.

Our webinar in April 2023 enabled members to hear from and question EWON's Chair, the Ombudsman, and two EWON Board directors about the new funding model. In June 2023, members were given tools to improve their understanding and allow them to embed the model in their work. This included an overview of the model and simplified fee schedule.

We will continue to engage closely with members as the funding model is implemented during 2023/2024.

Promotion of dispute resolution

EWON continued a joint initiative with the Energy & Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ), Energy & Water Ombudsman South Australia (EWOSA) and Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV) to ensure customers are aware of their right to external dispute resolution (EDR). We developed a brochure that outlines how energy and water ombudsman members can review their commitment to regulatory requirements, promote EDR services to their customers, and enhance their overall customer service.



Webinar

In September 2022, we hosted the first joint energy and water ombudsman member webinar. In addition to hearing from representatives from each ombudsman scheme, the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA) outlined its work with members, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) and the Australian Banking Association in response to ASIC Regulatory Guide RG271. This brought in similar requirements, to promote dispute resolution to customers in the banking and finance sector.

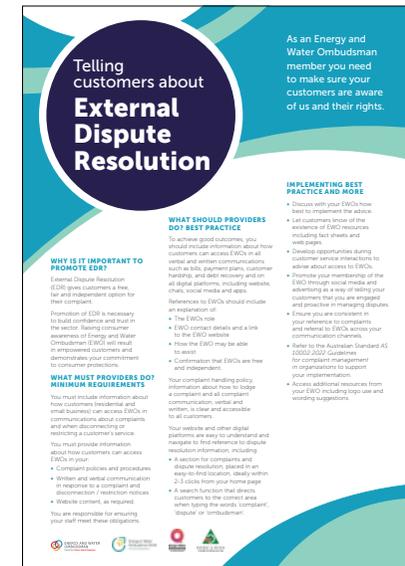


Desktop audit

In early 2023, EWON and EWOSA completed a desktop review of 30 member websites to provide a baseline for the project. Member selection focused on those with a high number of customers and those with more than 50 complaints in the previous financial year. It assessed compliance with minimum requirements and best practice principles. Best practice requires members to explain simply how energy and water ombudsman offices can help and that we are free and independent. Of concern is that only one member received 100% on the audit. Many members lacked consistency in the information available to customers about EDR and most failed to include information about the role of the ombudsman. This information is vital to building consumer awareness, confidence and trust.

Next steps

The project will continue in 2023/2024 with increased engagement with members to improve promotion across all channels, including bills, notices, phone scripts and information in apps and chats. We are also exploring opportunities to collaborate with The Energy Charter, AER and others, to reinforce our shared commitment to ensuring providers fulfil their obligations when communicating with customers.



CONCILIATED OUTCOME

Case study

House fire delays new meter



Mr Herbert, an elderly man, was living in a caravan at his property after a fire destroyed his meter box in July 2022. He lodged a claim with his insurance company and the meter box was replaced the next month. He then applied to his provider for a new smart meter.

Mr Herbert called EWON for help because of the delay in getting a new meter installed. The provider told him an order for a meter exchange was raised on 9 November 2022 after it received a meter fault notification from the distributor on 4 November. The installation scheduled for 24 November 2022 did not happen because the meter board contained asbestos and needed to be replaced. The provider was waiting for confirmation from Mr Herbert that the work had been completed.

We contacted the provider about the delays and to discuss options to resolve the issue. We found that even though a new meter board had been installed at the house, the National Meter Identifier (NMI) associated with the address had two meters, one for the house and one for the shed. When a meter needs to be replaced or upgraded, all meters associated with the NMI must be replaced. This explained why the meter on the shed also needed to be replaced, even though it appeared to be operating correctly.

We reviewed records and confirmed that this information had been given to the customer's electrician/builder several times but no action had been taken. With the customer's permission, EWON contacted the electrician/builder to discuss the work and ensure it complied with the

NSW Service and Installation Rules. Mr Herbert asked for the builder to act as an advocate to deal with the complaint as he found the situation very stressful. The builder agreed to discuss the work required with the customer and inform EWON and the provider when the meter board in the shed had been replaced.

We followed up with the builder six days later on the status of the work. He said he did not agree with the information previously discussed and was going to move the shed meter to the house. We told him this would breach the rules. It was clear to EWON that the advocate was not acting in the best interests of the customer. We contacted Mr Herbert who put us in touch with his son who said his father had received a quote from the builder for \$4,200 to replace the meter board, which he could not afford.

Given Mr Herbert's vulnerabilities, affordability issues, living situation and worsening relationship with the builder, we contacted the provider. The provider shared our concerns and, although it wasn't at fault, agreed to have Mr Herbert's power connected so he could move back into the premises without further delay. On 24 December 2022 the provider arranged for its contractors to rectify the non-compliant meter board and install new electricity meters at no cost.

Issues
Digital meter exchange, delay
 Outcome
Conciliated outcome

Member involvement in outreach

More members are joining EWON at outreach events because of the mutual benefits for energy and water providers and their customers. We find members who attend events learn more about the challenges customers face and the impacts of some of their processes. Customers can resolve issues with their provider on the spot, knowing that EWON can help if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

Some members give EWON a dedicated team member to call if they are unable to physically attend events so that customer complaints can still be addressed on the spot.

Endeavour Energy, Origin Energy, Sydney Water, Jemena, Simply Energy and Red Energy joined EWON at our Community Assist Day in **Richmond**. Essential Energy and Alinta Energy took part in our Community Assist Day in Lismore.

If your organisation is interested in partnering with us for outreach, email community@ewon.com.au



Clockwise: EWON staff and stall holders at our Hawkesbury Community Assist Day. Alinta Energy at our Recharge and Energise forum in Ballina. EWON Ombudsman with Essential Energy at a TSEP Family Fun Day in Walgett.

Member complaints

Top three issues by provider

Authorised and licensed providers only

Provider	First issue	%	Second issue	%	Third issue	%
1st Energy	Billing > high > disputed	23%	Customer service > poor service	11%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	9%
ActewAGL Retail	Billing > high > disputed	16%	Customer service > poor service	13%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	7%
AGL	Billing > high > disputed	23%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	6%
Alinta Energy	Billing > high > disputed	21%	Customer service > poor service	16%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	6%
Altogether	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > high > disputed	14%	Provision > new connection > information	7%
Amber Electric	Billing > high > disputed	23%	Customer service > poor service	23%	Billing > delay	10%
Ampol Energy	Customer service > poor service	30%	Customer service > unprofessional attitude	20%	General > energy/water	20%
Arc Energy	Billing > high > disputed	21%	Customer service > poor service	9%	Billing > backbill	8%
Ausgrid	Customer service > poor service	14%	Supply > off supply (unplanned) > damage/loss	11%	Land > network assets > placement	6%
Australian Gas Networks (Albury)	Land > network assets > health/safety	25%	Land > property damage/restoration	25%	Provision > existing connection > defect/fault	25%
Australian Gas Networks (NSW)	Provision > existing connection > maintenance	50%	Customer service > failure to respond	50%	-	-
BlueNRG	Billing > high > disputed	20%	Customer service > poor service	12%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	11%
CleanPeak Energy	Billing > period	17%	Customer service > accessibility	17%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	17%
CovaU	Billing > high > disputed	31%	Customer service > poor service	13%	Billing > contract terms > price increases	11%
Diamond Energy	Billing > high > disputed	22%	Customer service > poor service	22%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	15%
Discover Energy	Billing > high > disputed	36%	Billing > contract terms > price increases	18%	Customer service > poor service	9%
Electricity in a Box	Billing > high > disputed	42%	Credit > collection > debt collector	17%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	17%
Elysian Energy (in administration)	Billing > high > disputed	28%	Billing > contract terms > price increases	12%	Credit > collection > debt collector	11%
Endeavour Energy	Supply > off supply (unplanned) > damage/loss	17%	Customer service > poor service	10%	Land > property damage/restoration	6%
Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)	Billing > high > disputed	17%	Customer service > poor service	9%	Billing > high > disputed	6%
EnergyAustralia	Billing > high > disputed	21%	Customer service > poor service	15%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	4%
Essential Energy	Customer service > poor service	12%	Land > network assets > maintenance	7%	Supply > off supply (unplanned) > damage/loss	7%
Evergy	Billing > high > disputed	35%	Customer service > poor service	19%	Billing > error > other	10%
Evoenergy	General > energy/water	100%	-	-	-	-
Flow Power	Customer service > failure to respond	17%	Credit > payment difficulties > other	17%	Billing > contract terms > termination fee/cost	17%
Future X Power	Billing > high > disputed	24%	Customer service > poor service	12%	Transfer > without consent	12%
GEE Energy	Credit > disconnection /restriction > impending	17%	Billing > contract terms > price increases	17%	Billing > high > disputed	17%
GloBird Energy	Billing > high > disputed	21%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	6%
Glow Power	Billing > high > disputed	42%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	11%	Customer service > poor service	9%

Provider	First issue	%	Second issue	%	Third issue	%
Humenergy	Billing > high > disputed	24%	Customer service > poor service	19%	Credit > disconnection/restriction > impending	10%
Hunter Water	Billing > high > disputed	24%	Customer service > poor service	18%	Land > network assets > maintenance	9%
Jemena	Customer service > poor service	23%	Provision > new connection > delay	11%	Land > property damage/restoration	8%
Locality Planning Energy	Billing > high > disputed	14%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > account closing > error	14%
Lumo Energy	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	25%	Transfer > cooling off rights	25%	Customer service > incorrect advice/information	25%
M2 Energy	Billing > high > disputed	19%	Customer service > poor service	16%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	5%
Microgrid Power	Billing > high > disputed	40%	Customer service > incorrect advice/information	20%	Billing > tariff > rate	20%
Mojo Power (in administration)	Billing > high > disputed	16%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	9%	Customer service > incorrect advice/information	9%
Momentum Energy	Billing > high > disputed	25%	Customer service > poor service	11%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	4%
Nectr	Billing > high > disputed	18%	Customer service > poor service	13%	Credit > payment difficulties > current/arrears	8%
Next Business Energy	Billing > high > disputed	26%	Billing > fees & charges > other	18%	Customer service > poor service	18%
Origin Energy	Billing > high > disputed	23%	Customer service > poor service	15%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	5%
OVO Energy	Billing > high > disputed	13%	Customer service > poor service	11%	Transfer > in error	10%
People Energy (Mojo Power East) (RoLR)	Credit > collection > debt collector	25%	Billing > contract terms > conditional discounts	25%	Billing > high > disputed	25%
Power Club (in administration)	Billing > high > disputed	33%	Billing > refund or credit > delay/error/form	33%	Billing > fees & charges > other	33%
Powerdirect	Billing > high > disputed	14%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > error > payment	8%
Powershop (includes Kogan Energy)	Billing > high > disputed	19%	Customer service > poor service	10%	Billing > tariff > feed-in	5%
QEnergy (in administration)	Billing > high > disputed	20%	Customer service > poor service	11%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	9%
Real Utilities	Billing > high > disputed	30%	Customer service > poor service	20%	Billing > error > cross-metering	10%
ReAmped Energy	Billing > high > disputed	22%	Customer service > poor service	12%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	6%
Red Energy	Billing > high > disputed	19%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	5%
Sanctuary Energy (in administration)	Customer service > failure to respond	50%	Marketing > misleading	50%	-	-
Savant Energy	Customer service > poor service	17%	Billing > fees & charges > service availability	17%	Billing > error > payment	17%
seene	Transfer > site ownership > other	33%	Billing > high > disputed	33%	Credit > disconnection/restriction > impending/ move-in	33%
Shell Energy	Billing > fees & charges > other	11%	Billing > error > payment	11%	Digital meter exchange > other	11%
Shoalhaven Water	Billing > high > disputed	63%	Customer service > incorrect advice/information	13%	Provision > existing connection > maintenance	13%
Simply Energy	Billing > high > disputed	25%	Customer service > poor service	16%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	5%
Smart Energy	Customer service > poor service	18%	Customer service > incorrect advice/information	10%	Billing > high > disputed	7%
Social Energy (in administration)	Billing > tariff > rate	14%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Transfer > site ownership > other	14%
Sumo	Billing > high > disputed	23%	Customer service > poor service	11%	Billing > estimation > meter access/not read	10%
Sydney Water	Billing > high > disputed	16%	Customer service > poor service	14%	Land > property damage/restoration	7%
Tango Energy	Billing > high > disputed	32%	Billing > contract terms > price increases	21%	Customer service > poor service	13%
Telstra Energy	General > energy/water	33%	Customer service > accessibility	17%	Billing > error > other	17%
TransGrid	Land > easement	23%	Land > vegetation management	20%	Land > network assets > health/safety	14%
Water NSW	Supply > water licensing	19%	Customer service > poor service	15%	Billing > high > disputed	13%
WINconnect	Billing > high > disputed	32%	Customer service > poor service	12%	Billing > account closing > error	9%

Electricity providers

Electricity customer numbers [^]	Electricity provider	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2022/2023	Complaints received 2021/2022	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level			
									1	2	3	
Retailer												
>1,000,000	Origin Energy	30	3,258	2,644	614	26	865	1,877	241	177	72	
500,001–1,000,000	EnergyAustralia	31	2,836	2,274	562	22	779	1,567	228	180	60	
	AGL	23	2,082	1,831	251	18	654	1,131	175	82	22	
100,001–500,000	Red Energy	21	689	557	132	5	193	419	35	29	8	
	Alinta Energy	60	691	524	167	5	148	411	58	52	17	
	Poweshop (includes Kogan Energy)	17	177	88	89	2	71	83	11	6	4	
10,001–100,000	M2 Energy	46	444	270	174	3	101	243	48	39	10	
	Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)	14	100	136	-36	-	30	54	7	6	3	
	Simply Energy	89	558	387	171	1	114	358	48	27	10	
	ActewAGL Retail	23	78	62	16	-	32	24	10	9	3	
	Momentum Energy	42	102	112	-10	-	32	49	11	6	4	
	Sumo	114	211	142	69	3	55	101	24	19	9	
	GloBird Energy	71	87	29	58	1	36	46	2	2	-	
	Nectr	55	56	32	24	-	19	28	4	3	2	
	3,001–10,000	Arc Energy	84	82	49	33	-	29	34	5	12	2
		WINconnect	61	55	55	-	-	23	30	-	2	-
	CovaU	202	152	92	60	-	33	85	10	18	6	
	1st Energy	99	74	95	-21	-	23	33	8	7	3	
	Tango Energy	137	98	35	63	2	32	55	7	2	-	
	<3,000	ReAmped Energy	530	77	136	-59	-	24	38	7	6	2
Discover Energy		2,174	167	17	150	2	54	78	20	10	3	
Elysian Energy (in administration)		-	86	-	-	-	72	12	2	-	-	
Distributor												
>1,000,000	Augrid	1	253	307	-54	3	120	95	8	12	15	
500,001–1,000,000	Endeavour Energy	2	226	162	64	8	111	82	9	10	6	
	Essential Energy	3	254	265	-11	1	109	105	11	16	12	

Electricity providers with no complaints

Brighte
CPE Mascot
iGENO
Localvolts
OC Energy
Powow
Radian Energy

Electricity providers with fewer than 50 complaints

Altogether
Amber Electric
Ampol Energy
BlueNRG
CleanPeak Energy
Diamond Energy
Electricity in a Box
Energym
Flow Power
Future X Power
GEE Energy
Glow Power
Humenergy
Locality Planning Energy
Lumo Energy
Microgrid Power
Mojo Power*
Next Business Energy
OVO Energy
People Energy (Mojo Power East) (RoLR)**
Power Club*
Powerdirect
QEnergy*
Real Utilities
Sanctuary Energy*
Savant Energy
seene
Shell Energy
Smart Energy
Social Energy*
Telstra Energy
Transgrid**

*Provider in administration **Network
***Retailer of Last Resort

[^]Only providers with more than 50 complaints have been included in this table. Energy retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 31 December 2022. Energy distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2022.

Gas providers

Gas customer numbers [^]	Gas provider	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2022/2023	Complaints received 2021/2022	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level		
									1	2	3
Retailer											
500,001–1,000,000	AGL	13	797	772	25	2	191	466	97	33	8
100,001–500,000	EnergyAustralia	19	732	618	114	2	136	457	79	55	3
	Origin Energy	18	582	598	-16	2	121	354	62	34	9
10,001–100,000	Red Energy	13	119	72	47	-	25	79	7	7	1
	Alinta Energy	38	178	96	82	-	34	111	16	15	2
	M2 Energy	20	81	55	26	-	14	45	7	11	4
	Simply Energy	50	148	141	7	-	29	96	10	10	3
3,001–10,000	CovaU	181	79	28	51	-	15	50	8	5	1
<3,000	Discover Energy	3,324	123	4	119	-	21	81	11	10	-
Distributor											
>1,000,000	Jemena	1	173	160	13	3	69	76	17	8	-

[^]Only providers with more than 50 complaints have been included in this table. Energy retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 31 December 2022. Energy distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2022.

Gas providers with no complaints

Humenergy
iGENO
Lumo Energy
Momentum Energy
Powerdirect
Real Utilities
ReAmped Energy
Savant Energy
Shell Energy
Tango Energy
Telstra Energy

Allgas Energy**
Central Ranges Pipeline**

Gas providers with fewer than 50 complaints

ActewAGL Retail
Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)
GloBird Energy
OVO Energy
Powershop (includes Kogan Energy)
Sumo
WINconnect

Australian Gas Networks (Albury)**
Australian Gas Networks (NSW)**
Evoenergy**

**Network

Water providers

Water customer numbers [^]	Water provider	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2022/2023	Complaints received 2021/2022	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level		
									1	2	3
Network/Retailer											
>1,000,000	Sydney Water	1	528	469	59	8	200	246	37	26	11
100,001–500,000	Hunter Water	2	64	53	11	-	30	28	3	1	2

[^]Only providers with more than 50 complaints have been included in this table. Water licensed and WICA provider customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2022.

Water providers with no complaints

Aquacell
 AquaNet
 Kyeema Wastewater
 Narara Ecovillage
 Podium Asset Services
 Rosehill Network
 Solo Water
 Sydney Desalination Plant
 Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies

Water providers with fewer than 50 complaints

Water NSW
 Altogether
 Essential Energy
 Shoalhaven Water

Expanded awareness



Engaging across NSW

EWON's community engagement program is designed to promote our services and educate consumers, small business and community workers about energy and water issues.

In addition to raising awareness about our complaint handling process, it reduces the volume of complaints by making customers aware of financial affordability programs and initiatives our members offer.

Community engagement also provides a vital opportunity for EWON to learn about matters affecting consumers. Engaging firsthand means we often become aware of issues as they emerge in the community and before they are identified through our complaint handling work. When this happens, our Community Engagement team notifies our Policy & Systemic Issues team or Dispute Resolution team to ensure these matters are considered in our complaints, policy work and stakeholder-engagement activities.

EWON is focused on raising awareness of our services among consumers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, including new arrivals and refugees
- seniors
- people with disabilities and their supporters
- LGBTQIA+
- youth
- small businesses.



50

local government areas reached



81

community engagement activities



10

community worker events



8

seniors events



3

small business events



12

activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

13

activities with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse customers



Click the photo above to see our explanatory video in Mandarin

3

youth events

9 events with people with disabilities or their supporters



Click the photo above to see our Life Support video



35

online presentations delivered

Engaging across NSW (continued)

Working with other organisations

In 2022/2023, there was a 79% increase in customers referred to EWON by a community organisation.

We partner with a range of community and industry organisations. Together, they help increase awareness of EWON events and offer complementary services and support. Partner organisations include:

- Benevolent Society
- Carers NSW
- Fair Trading NSW
- Financial Counselling Australia
- Full Stop Australia
- Good Service Mob
- Home in Place
- Hume Housing
- Legal Aid NSW
- Local councils
- Community and multicultural agencies
- Merana Aboriginal Community Association
- Murdi Paaki Services
- National Recovery and Resilience Agency
- NDIS quality and Safeguard Commission
- NSW Trustee & Guardian
- Peppercorn Services
- Rapid Relief team
- Red Cross

- Revenue NSW
- Salvation Army
- Services Australia
- Service NSW
- TAFE NSW
- The Women's Cottage
- Uniting NSW
- Wesley Mission

Community Assist Days

Our Community Assist Days provide services and support to customers with energy and water related issues, as well as legal, housing, financial or support related matters. We organise Community Assist Days in key locations based on complaints data and demographic information as well as significant local events, such as recent flooding, bushfires or drought.

We invite government and not-for-profit organisations as well as energy and water providers to offer support to residents. Each organisation has an information stall, can speak with customers face to face and network with other organisations.

We review customers' bills and try to resolve issues on the spot by liaising with providers and referring customers to other organisations at the event, such as Energy Accounts Payment Assistance providers. Providers and customers benefit from the constructive engagement and the quick resolution of issues.



79% increase in customers referred to EWON by a community organisation.

This year we held two Community Assist Days:

- **Northern Rivers (Widjabul land)** — in October 2022, 20 organisations joined us in Lismore to provide advice and support after the devastating floods.
- **Hawkesbury (Darug land)** — in May 2023 more than 15 organisations joined us to help a community that had been hit by multiple instances of flooding and bushfires. View a video from the event.



Engaging across NSW (continued)

Event highlights

Recharge and Energise Forum — Bundjalung land

In October 2022, more than 60 Northern Rivers community workers attended our Recharge and Energise forum in Ballina. The keynote speaker, Australian Energy Regulator (AER) chair, Claire Savage, presented on the AER's Vulnerability Strategy. This was followed by a panel discussion between regulators and ombudsman schemes. The event was well received, with 94% of attendees saying the information shared would help in their work with consumers. Networking opportunities, the variety of speakers and information sharing were also listed as highlights.



Yabun Festival — Gadigal land

In January 2023 we attended the 21st anniversary of the Yabun Festival, the largest one-day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural event in Australia. This is one of the largest events in EWON's outreach calendar that provides an opportunity to raise awareness of our service within the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.



Mardi Gras Fair Day — Gadigal land

Mardi Gras Fair Day is an important part of our inclusive engagement program and this year we shared an information stand with our Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman colleagues. More than 80,000 people attended and we answered energy and water related questions, provided energy and water saving tips, and information on concessions and rebates.



Click the video to see
our outreach team at
Mardi Gras Fair Day

Engaging across NSW (continued)

Event highlights

Nepean Disability Expo – Darug Land

We attended the Nepean Disability Expo, a free event with exhibitors from the Nepean, Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains regions. Exhibitors included government agencies, education and employment services, health and medical services, in-home care and support and disability services. This event enabled us to reach customers with disabilities, their supporters and families.



Sydney Royal Easter Show – Wann-gal land

We arranged for a number of complaint handling organisations to attend the annual Seniors Day at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. We were joined by the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, Legal Aid NSW, the NSW Ombudsman, Commonwealth Ombudsman, NSW Trustee & Guardian, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Seniors Rights Service and Sydney Water, so that seniors could access a range of services in one place.



 Click the video to see our outreach team at Seniors Day

Raising awareness across NSW

It is critical that energy and water consumers are aware of their right to use EWON's service. To ensure we are accessible to all consumers, EWON's communications team works to increase awareness of our services and educate consumers and their advocates about energy and water issues. We do this by:

- providing thought leadership, complaints data and analysis in response to media enquiries
- holding events across NSW
- developing consumer resources and awareness campaigns
- improving our website and social media channels.

Throughout 2022/2023, we rolled out several initiatives to promote our services and educate consumers.



23%

increase in LinkedIn followers



232,838

website visits with 116,917 website users

16 hours

of video viewed on EWON's Facebook



+376%

increase in Instagram reach



43

media articles

16

Ombudsman media interviews



187%

increase in Facebook reach

57%

increase in Facebook followers



246

complaints from customers who heard about us in the media



1.6m

consumers reached through our regional awareness campaign

Raising awareness across NSW (continued)

Embedded network campaign

One in 10 Australians live in an embedded network but many are unaware they can come to EWON if they need help with energy or water issues. In 2022/2023, we partnered with the AER to raise awareness among embedded networks customers of their right to contact EWON for free, fair and independent dispute resolution.

The online awareness campaign focused on residential complexes and retirement villages with communications materials available in Arabic, Chinese (simplified and traditional), Korean, Nepalese and Vietnamese. The campaign encouraged customers with an energy problem to contact their provider first and, if they still needed help, to contact EWON. We encouraged relevant organisations to promote our posters, fact sheets and social media within their networks.

We reached 1,120 people through social media and 60 organisations through our campaign email.



Click photo to see examples of the embedded network campaign

Promoting EWON across NSW

Promoting our office equitably is a key principle to achieve our accessibility benchmark. In 2022/2023, there was a 20% increase in customers hearing about us through EWON promotions.

In May and June 2023, we ran an awareness campaign in the Central Coast, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas. The choice of these locations was governed by a combination of our complaints data, socio-economic research and demographic information.

Our aim was to let customers know in a time of rising energy prices and cost of living pressures that EWON is here to help. We used digital billboards in shopping centres to reach customers in the areas they visit frequently, for example outside supermarkets, and combined this with digital and print advertisements in local newspapers enhanced by a social media campaign.

The four-week campaign resulted in:

- **1,384,700 consumers reached via digital billboards**
- **224,617 people reached via newspaper ads**
- **3,240 consumers reached via social media.**



Top: EWON awareness raising campaign at Lake Macquarie. Bottom: Our Community Engagement Team collaborating with Newcastle City Council.

Raising awareness across NSW (continued)

Thought leadership in the media

This year we provided expert commentary in response to enquiries from state and national media seeking information, data and insights into complaints trends. This has strengthened our position as a thought leader in the energy and water sectors. Media opportunities provide a valuable tool to raise general awareness of our service, to promote the internal dispute services provided by energy and water companies, and to ensure we are accessible to all NSW consumers. In 2022/2023, there were 246 complaints from customers who heard about EWON in the media, up from just 54 last year.

Ombudsman, Janine Young, featured on prime-time **ABC News** to speak about retailers using the fixed-rate daily charge with no price cap as a way of offsetting wholesale price increases.

Interviewed by **Northern Rivers ABC Radio**, the Ombudsman spoke on air to customers who received estimated bills for uninhabitable premises 12 months after the devastating Lismore floods.

As a result of this interview, the Ombudsman spoke to **ABC Sydney** and **Channel 9's Today Show**. In our engagement with three retailers directly mentioned in these interviews, we suggested that their frontline staff receive further training and that special consideration should be given to flood affected consumers – for 12-24 months following the actual crisis as this is when energy issues emerge.

After launching our October to December 2022 **EWON Insights report**, we provided information on high bill complaints to the **Daily Telegraph**. Taking up this issue, both **Channel 9** and **Channel 7 news** interviewed the Ombudsman on increases in high bills and affordability-related complaints.



Click the video to see the Ombudsman's Channel 9 interview on high bill complaints

Measuring awareness of EWON

Energy Consumers Australia's (ECA) consumer sentiment annual survey continues to track consumer awareness of ombudsman offices across the National Energy Market. It includes two questions that measure unprompted and prompted awareness of energy ombudsman services. In 2022/2023, the survey included responses from 549 NSW energy consumers.

The first question measures unprompted awareness by asking: 'If you had a complaint about your electricity or gas services, which you could not resolve by talking to your retailer or network company, who would you contact?' The percentage of respondents who gave an ombudsman-related answer had risen to 34.2% from 30.4% in 2021/2022. This increase could indicate that there has been an rise in customers needing our service.

The second question measures prompted awareness by asking: 'How familiar are you with an organisation called the energy ombudsman in NSW, which assists with complaints about energy?' This figure fell from 38.5% in 2021/2022 to 31.7% in 2022/2023. This decrease indicates ongoing awareness and outreach is required particularly in the current environment, so that customers who need us, can find us.

CONCILIATED OUTCOME

Case study

Gas details used to open electricity account



Mr Hooper bought a property in January 2022. The next month he received an electricity bill, addressed to 'The Occupier', from Retailer A for \$1,919 covering October 2021 to January 2022. He contacted Retailer A to open an account and had since received quarterly electricity bills which he paid by the due date.

However, in November 2022, he received three electricity bills in his name, totalling \$1,009, from Retailer B, covering February 2022 to September 2022. He advised Retailer B that he had not opened an account nor received a contract. He believed Retailer B had used details from his gas account with them to open the electricity account. In reviewing the bills, he also discovered that his meter number did not match the meter number on the

bills from retailer A and that he had been making payments on an account for another person's address.

Retailer B said it had the billing right to bill Mr Hooper and could use the personal information from his gas account to open an electricity account in his name. It did not offer to resolve the complaint.

Mr Hooper contacted EWON wanting Retailer B to close the electricity account and waive the bills. EWON found that Retailer B held the billing rights to the supply address for the period it billed Mr Hooper, and therefore could bill him under a deemed contract. Retailer B had issued several 'Dear Occupant' notices that Mr Hooper had dismissed because he didn't think it was his account.

We advised Retailer B that rather than using Mr Hooper's gas account details to open an electricity account, it should have contacted him by phone to advise what needed to occur. We also identified that Retailer B had ample opportunity to disconnect the electricity in accordance with the energy rules but instead opened an account in his name, without his consent.

We told Mr Hooper it was fair and reasonable to pay for his consumption as he had used the service, regardless of the provider. As he had received a refund from Retailer A, it would be unreasonable to expect Retailer B to waive the bill. However, EWON discovered that Retailer B had billed the customer \$701 and his bills from Retailer A were only \$450. Given

that Retailer B did not ask the customer's consent to the higher prices, it would be reasonable for Retailer B to match the billing of Retailer A. As a result of EWON's investigation, Retailer B applied a credit of \$250 to match the amount Mr Hooper had been billed by Retailer A.

Issues

Billing, account opening, error

Outcome

Conciliated outcome

Our people



Our staff and Board



72
EWON staff
81% full time
19% part time



7
internal promotions
or secondments
27 positions filled



32%
of staff have worked at EWON
for more than 10 years
5.81 years employee tenure



45%
female Board members
55% male Board members

69%
of women are
in leadership roles
76% female staff

EWON initiatives

 See next page for more about our staff initiatives



2,008
total hours of staff training

28 hours
of training per employee



Office-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training



Well-being program included skin cancer screening and flu shots



Birthday leave introduced



Change management training for established leaders



Leadership accelerator program for emerging leaders



Additional sick leave introduced



1,162
workshops, conferences, seminars, training and coaching sessions attended



600+
new e-learning courses available to staff

Staff training

To build a strong learning culture at EWON, we offered staff an extensive library of e-learning modules. These courses allow self-directed and autonomous learning. Courses include leadership skills, personal effectiveness, business skills, technology and digital transformation, and technical skills.

Change management

Established leaders received training to refresh their change management skills in sessions led by Development Dimensions International.

Staff leave

EWON's new Attraction and Retention Strategy includes birthday leave and gives permanent and fixed-term staff two extra sick and carer's leave days compared to Fair Work minimum entitlement.

Cultural awareness training

As part of our Reconciliation Action Plan, we partnered with Mirri Mirri to deliver EWON-wide cultural awareness training. Delivered as small, interactive workshops, the training aimed to increase our understanding and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The training gave staff the knowledge to identify bias, create meaningful connections to culture, and recognise the historical context of actions, behaviour and language.

Accelerated training

We launched a leadership accelerator program in partnership with the Epiphany Group. This program was introduced in line with EWON's capability framework, ensuring we develop our emerging leaders' potential. The eight month program covers personal effectiveness, communication, performance coaching, creating a high performance culture, achieving results, and building trust.

Our values



We are impartial; we approach our work transparently and openly.



We are open and honest; we stand by our actions.



We work together; we are flexible, helpful and take personal responsibility.



We are courteous; we build trust by listening, and following through on our commitments.



We are proactive; we are committed to delivering high quality services to our customers and stakeholders.



We are accessible and fair; we take a holistic approach to addressing customer circumstances.

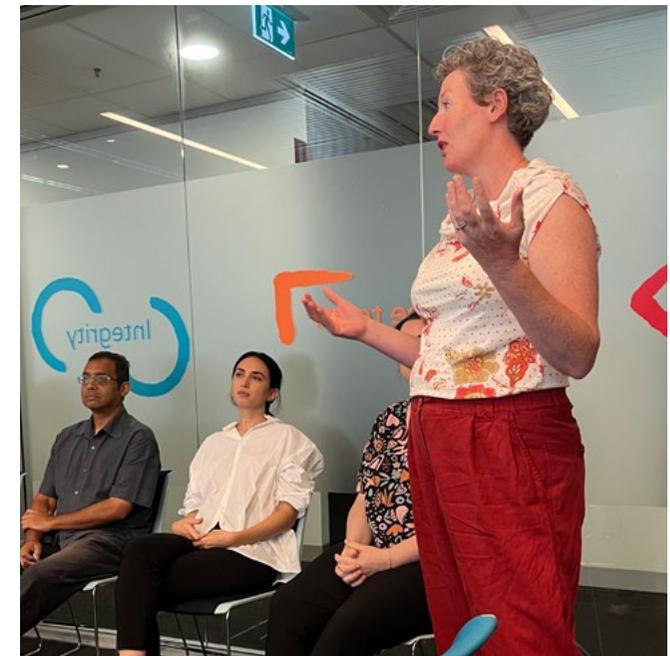
EWON culture audit

Giving staff a platform to voice their opinions is essential to supporting and understanding employee engagement. This year we conducted a culture audit survey as part of our employee engagement monitoring program. Our overall engagement score was 70%, which many organisations would consider to be positive in a post COVID-19 environment, but at EWON, we were aiming for 80% and are working towards this. Positively, our staff reported that:

- their work gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment
- they are proud to work at EWON
- they feel committed to EWON's goals
- they believe strongly in the purpose and objectives of EWON
- they believed health and safety was taken seriously at EWON.

Staff also reported they were looking for change with respect to:

- open and honest communication
- fairer remuneration
- opportunities for career progression
- support for staff experiencing stress or pressure
- feeling energised at work.



Financials

Statement of Income and Operating Expenditure for the year ended 30 June 2023	2023 \$	2022 \$
Income		
Revenue	13,810,299	12,897,154
Other income	122,955	72,915
Total income	13,933,254	12,970,069
Operating expenditure		
Employee benefits expenses and on-costs	(8,571,299)	(8,399,965)
Other employee-related costs	(316,496)	(321,976)
Occupancy and other related costs	(247,281)	(233,475)
Communications	(93,213)	(105,065)
Information technology	(1,429,469)	(1,136,970)
General and administration	(921,026)	(1,018,061)
Depreciation - plant and equipment	(68,472)	(98,185)
Depreciation - right of use asset	(804,904)	(796,560)
Depreciation - intangible assets	(352,947)	(332,419)
Interest expenses - lease liabilities	(84,011)	(108,149)
Total Operating Expenditure	(12,889,118)	(12,550,825)
Operating Surplus	1,044,136	419,244

Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 30 June 2023	2023 \$	2022 \$
Assets		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	7,337,908	6,674,641
Trade and other receivables	1,569,499	4,389,453
Other current deposits	50,000	50,000
Total current assets	8,957,407	11,114,094
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	127,772	196,244
Right of use assets	2,031,785	2,707,360
Intangible assets	394,021	592,617
Other non-current deposits	641,335	641,335
WIP - software development	76,274	154,350
Total non-current assets	3,271,187	4,291,906
Total assets	12,228,594	15,406,000
Liabilities		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	3,991,606	7,510,812
Lease liabilities	869,789	801,248
Provisions	926,564	936,869
Total current liabilities	5,787,959	9,248,929
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	634,872	525,775
Lease liabilities	1,324,230	2,193,899
Total non-current liabilities	1,959,102	2,719,674
Total liabilities	7,747,061	11,968,603
Net assets	4,481,533	3,437,397
Accumulated funds	4,481,533	3,437,397

Financials (continued)

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 30 June 2023	2023 \$	2022 \$
Fees from Members	15,534,267	14,157,796
Payments to suppliers, employees and other	(13,879,213)	(10,887,672)
Net cash flows from operating activities	1,655,054	3,270,124
Cash flows used in investing activities		
Interest received	98,955	7,540
Payments for property, plant and equipment	(76,275)	(194,074)
Net cash flows from/used in investing activities	22,680	(186,534)
Cash flows used in financing activities		
Interest paid on lease liabilities	(84,011)	(108,149)
Principal paid on lease liabilities	(930,456)	(736,464)
Net cash flows used in financing activities	(1,014,467)	(844,613)
Net increase in cash and cash equivalents	663,267	2,238,977
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	6,674,641	4,435,664
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year	7,337,908	6,674,641

Glossary

Affordability program

EWON's terminology for energy and water retailers 'hardship' programs which provide support for customers experiencing difficulty paying their energy and water bills.

Backbill

A bill issued either after a delay or when a customer has been undercharged.

Consumer Energy Resources (CER)

Energy producing technologies used in homes including rooftop solar systems, battery storage systems and electric vehicles.

Complaint

Any contact a customer has with EWON, including an enquiry, referred to a higher level or investigation.

Customer

NSW energy or water consumers who access EWON's service.

Digital meter (smart meter)

A type of meter fitted with a communication device that enables consumption data to be recorded at least every 30 minutes and transmitted remotely. It can also be used to disconnect and reconnect supply remotely.

Distributor

The entity that supplies the electricity, gas or water across the network, to the customer's property, reads their meter and provides metering data to the retailer. Electricity

distributors are often referred to as operating 'the poles and wires'.

Embedded network

When the energy or water infrastructure enables the owner of a site to sell energy or water to the occupants. Typically found in apartment blocks, retirement villages, caravan parks and shopping centres.

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA)

Vouchers to help people experiencing difficulty paying their electricity or gas bill. The vouchers are issued by participating community organisations.

Estimated meter read

A meter reading calculated when your meter has not been accessed or read, which may be based on your previous actual meter reads. The bill may give a reason for an estimated bill.

Exempt retailer

A seller of energy that is exempt from the requirement to hold a retailer authorisation with the Australian Energy Regulator. Under the National Energy Retail Law, any party that sells energy must either be authorised as a retailer or exempt from authorisation.

National Energy Customer Framework (NECF)

The structure for the national regulation of retailing electricity and gas. It includes the National Energy Retail Law, the National

Energy Retail Law Regulations and the National Energy Retail Rules.

National Energy Retail Rules (NERR)

Part of the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF). The rules include consumer protections for the sale of energy to small retail customers.

National Energy Retail Law (NERL)

Part of the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF). The act regulates the retail sale of energy to customers and makes provisions for the relationship between the distributors and consumers of energy.

National Meter Identifier (NMI)

The unique numerical identifier that is attached to each electricity supply address. The NMI is listed on your electricity bill.

Member

NSW electricity and gas networks and retailers, as well as exempt sellers and networks, that supply residential customers in embedded networks, must join EWON. Similarly, water providers such as Sydney Water, Hunter Water, Water NSW and licensees under the Water Industry Competition Act 2006 are required to be EWON members. Membership is optional for councils that provide water to their residents.

Ombudsman

The term originates from Sweden. The Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association describes an Ombudsman as 'A

free, informal and cost effective alternative to court action. Well known for independent and impartial review and investigation. Commonly describes both the person who holds the position of ombudsman and the office they head up. It is a gender neutral term.'

Payment plan

An arrangement between a customer and the retailer whereby regular, more frequent, smaller payments are made towards a bill.

Provider

General term to refer to an electricity, gas or water retailer or distributor that is a member of EWON.

Retailer

The provider that bills the customer for energy/water consumption.

Systemic issue

Regulatory issues or providers' policies or practices that can negatively affect numerous customers and lead to complaints to EWON.



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