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## Ombudsman's report



### Release of EWON's Annual Report

Recently EWON released its Annual Report 2007-2008. This was a special edition in that it marked our 10th Anniversary.

In brief, we finalised 8913 complaints in the last financial year, which represents a 3% increase from the previous year (2006-2007).

In the previous year retail competition related complaints dominated, however decreased marketing activity this year resulted in less complaints of this nature. Consequently the issue of billing was once again the primary reason for complaints to EWON during 2007-2008.

Of greater concern to EWON however, was the increase in credit related complaints and in particular, the number of customers who came to us for help with a disconnection problem.

There were also complaints from customers who were disconnected in error when an account transfer between retailers did not go smoothly.

We will continue working with retailers and stakeholders to address these issues.

### Jemena joins EWON

Jemena (formerly Alinta) voluntarily joined EWON as a member from 1 July 2008. As Jemena manages the majority of the natural gas distribution network in NSW, we were very pleased to welcome them as a member of EWON.

### Change in Board members

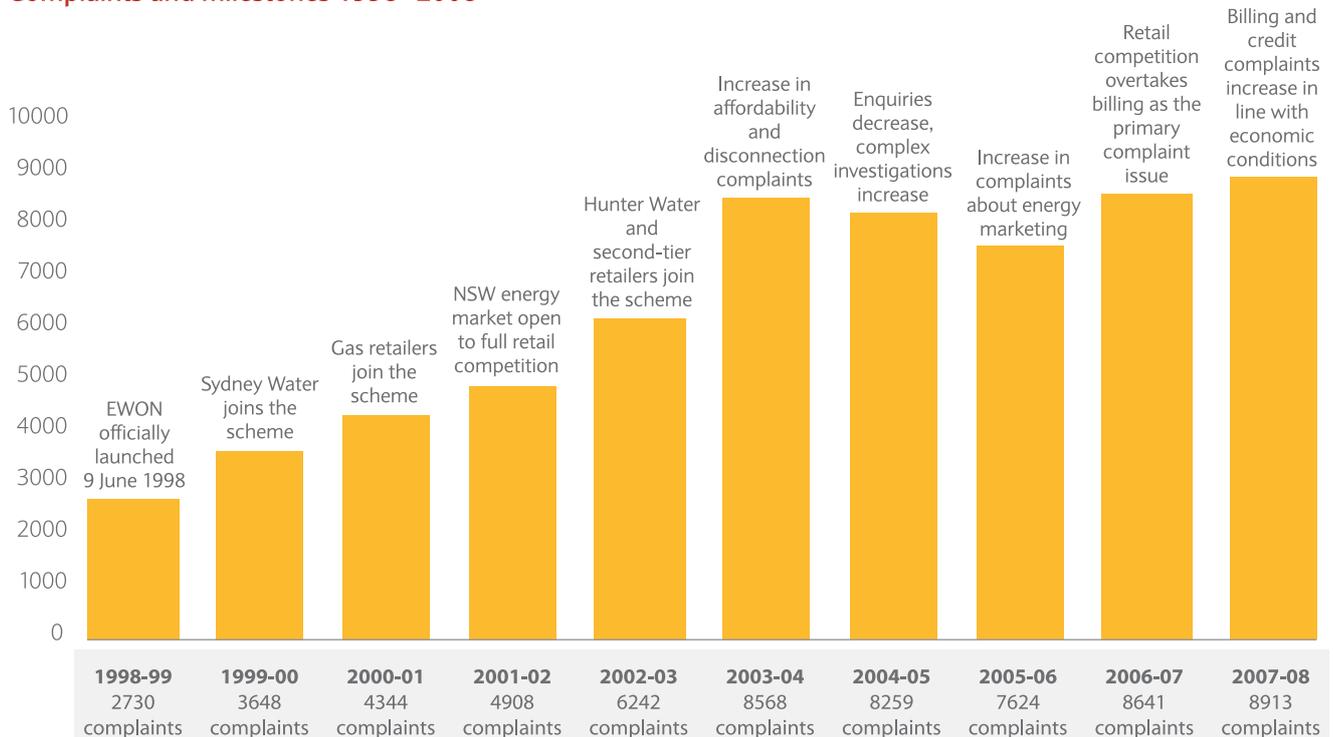
Kevin Murray (TransGrid), one of our long-standing Board members, has retired from his position.

Kevin was a member of the Electricity Association of New South Wales working group that proposed the establishment of an energy ombudsman scheme in 1996, and he was one of the scheme's original Board members.

Kevin has made a valuable contribution as a Board member and on behalf of EWON, I thank him for his support and commitment over the past ten years.

Clare Petre  
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

## Complaints and milestones 1998–2008



# Complaint statistics



## Overview of statistics

Complaint statistics from 1 April to 30 September 2008 are consistent with previous periods, in that the majority of complaints were from residential customers and about electricity issues.

While overall the primary reason for complaints to EWON remains billing (31% of all issues raised by customers), we are seeing an increase in credit related complaints. Significantly, we received 926 complaints from customers with arrears on their utility account.

### EXPLANATION OF TERMS

**Complaint enquiry:** a request for information or assistance that can be settled or referred quickly

**Refer to higher level (RHL):** complaint enquiry referred to a senior officer in the energy or water company

**Investigation:** complaint cannot be resolved between customer and company, EWON investigates and negotiates an outcome

**Determination (or binding decision):** outcome cannot be negotiated between the customer and company, Ombudsman resolves the matter through a determination which is binding on the company

### ABBREVIATIONS

**ATSI:** Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

**CALD:** culturally and linguistically diverse



Visit [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au)  
to download EWON's  
**Annual Report 2007-2008**  
or email [omb@ewon.com.au](mailto:omb@ewon.com.au)  
to request a hardcopy

### FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2008 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2008

#### SNAPSHOT OF COMPLAINTS

Overall	Total complaints closed	4752
Companies	Complaints about distributors	479 (10%)
	Complaints about retailers	4148 (87%)
Customers	Residential customers	4459 (93%)
	Small business customers	217 (5%)
	*Living in public housing Top issue for customers in public housing	219 (5%) Credit (38% of issues raised**)
	*Receiving pension/benefits Top issue for customers receiving pension/benefits	1143 (24%) Credit (33% of issues raised**)
	*ATSI customers Top issue for ATSI customers	65 (1%) Credit (55% of issues raised**)
	*CALD customers Top issue for CALD customers	271 (6%) Billing (30% of issues raised**)

\*EWON does not routinely collect demographic information unless it is volunteered by a customer.

\*\* Represents the percentage of all issues raised for this group of customers. Note: a customer can raise more than one issue in their complaint.

#### PRIMARY ISSUES PER REGION

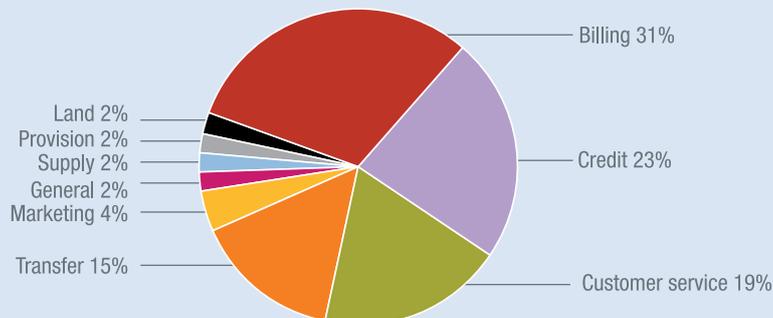
REGION	NO. COMPLAINTS	TOP THREE ISSUES		
Central West	106	Billing 37%	Credit 22%	Customer service 19%
Far West	13	Billing 23%	Credit 23%	Provision 23%
Hunter	531	Credit 28%	Billing 24%	Customer service 18%
Illawarra	266	Credit 29%	Billing 26%	Customer service 16%
Mid North Coast	77	Billing 37%	Customer service 20%	Credit 12%
Murray	85	Billing 29%	Credit 26%	Customer service 22%
Murrumbidgee	46	Billing 39%	Credit 20%	Customer service 15%
North West	40	Credit 33%	Billing 24%	Customer service 18%
Northern	82	Billing 26%	Credit 23%	Transfer 17%
Richmond-Tweed	94	Billing 38%	Customer service 16%	Credit 12%
South Eastern	105	Credit 34%	Billing 26%	Customer service 14%
Sydney Inner	1138	Billing 37%	Customer service 22%	Credit 15%
Sydney Outer	1658	Billing 29%	Credit 25%	Customer service 18%
Sydney Surrounds	370	Credit 30%	Billing 28%	Customer service 18%
Other	141	Billing 49%	Customer service 19%	Credit 13%

#### INVESTIGATION LEVELS

INDUSTRY	NO. COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINT ENQUIRY	RHL	INVESTIGATION	DETERMINATION
Electricity	3619	1310	770	1539	---
Gas	668	269	186	213	---
Water	351	213	55	83	---
Dual fuel	94	32	20	42	---
Non-energy/non-water	20	20	---	---	---

FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2008 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2008

## ALL ISSUES RAISED BY CUSTOMERS



## SNAPSHOT OF ISSUES RAISED BY CUSTOMERS

CUSTOMER ISSUE	NO. COMPLAINTS
<b>Billing issues</b>	
High bill or disputed account	823
Delay in billing or bill not received	221
Backbilling	187
Estimated account	152
Error with a rebate or concession	66
Common hot water system	24
<b>Disconnection and credit</b>	
Arrears or utility debt	926
Facing disconnection for non-payment	471
Disconnected due to non-payment	347
Denied an extension or instalment plan	268
Debt collection or credit listing	198
<b>Marketing</b>	
Misled by marketers	225
Pressured into signing or agreeing to a contract	66
Non-account holder approached for consent	42
<b>Transfer issue</b>	
Problems with the contract terms (variation in price, termination fees)	286
Delayed billing or problems with the new billing system	247
Did not consent to the transfer	231
Site ownership or disconnected in error due to transfer	184
Delay in the transfer	175
Transferred in error	154
Not informed about cooling-off rights	142
Transfer request rejected by retailer	23

## NOTES ON HOW WE CATEGORISE COMPLAINT ISSUES

**Billing:** high and disputed bills, fees and charges, responsibility for accounts  
**Credit:** disconnection, arrears, difficulty in payment, payment arrangement declined, debt collection  
**Customer service:** failure to respond, incorrect advice, poor attitude/service  
**Marketing:** conduct by marketers, misleading information, pressure, non-account holder signed up  
**Provision:** problems with new or existing connections  
**Supply:** quality, damage/loss, outages  
**Transfer:** error in billing or transfer of account due to switching retailers, contract terms, delay in transfer, site ownership  
**Land:** impact of network assets, maintenance, environment  
**General:** non-energy/water related, contractors



## Solar panels and feed-in tariffs

Customers who install photovoltaic solar panels can feed excess power generated (that is, the power they don't use) back into the electricity distribution grid. Some NSW customers also receive a reimbursement for the power they put back into the grid, in the form of a feed-in tariff, however this amount (at the time of printing) is not regulated.

In November 2008 the NSW government announced\* that it will be introducing a feed-in tariff scheme in the future (some other States and Territories already have legislation in place to regulate feed-in tariffs).

In 2007-2008 EWON received some complaints from customers who had opted for solar power, only to find their retailer did not offer feed-in tariffs. In some cases the customer had to cancel their existing energy contract to set up an account with a retailer that did offer feed-in tariffs, thereby incurring a fee.

We encourage customers to do some research before entering into any contract. In particular, if you plan to install solar panels, ask the retailer about how they deal with (or will deal with) feed-in tariffs.

## Can EWON investigate complaints about feed-in tariffs?

If your retailer has informed you that they will provide a feed-in tariff or credit through your billing and you dispute how the tariff is applied, EWON can investigate your complaint.

However, EWON is not able investigate complaints about:

- the eligibility criteria or level of government rebates for customers who install solar energy, or
- the level of feed-in tariffs of electricity retailers, or a retailer's decision not to offer a feed-in tariff.

## Solar rebates

The federal government through the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts offers a rebate for eligible residential customers who install solar power or a solar hot water system. Please note there are specific criteria which need to be met in order to be eligible. Visit [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au) or phone 1800 808 571 for more information.

\*Source: Department of Environment and Climate Change



## Dealing with arrears

EWON is currently receiving a number of complaints from customers with substantial arrears on their account.

Carrying a utility debt can place significant stress on a customer's finances. They will not only have to pay for the energy and water they are currently using, they will also have to allow extra money to pay for any arrears owing on the account. Customers who are not able to pay off the arrears may face disconnection or debt recovery action.

Some customers consider switching retailers when they are having trouble paying off their arrears. This can often lead to more problems however, as they can end up paying off arrears to two retailers.

### Finding out about arrears

Some customers are unaware that they have accumulated arrears on an energy or water account. For example, they may leave a property without closing their account or they switch to a new retailer and do not pay their final bill to their old retailer.

In some cases the customer only becomes aware of the debt when they open an account with a retailer and receive a large first bill, which they find is the result of accumulated arrears with the same retailer from previous addresses. Other customers only become aware when they are contacted by debt collectors.

Problems can also occur when joint account holders in a relationship separate and one person leaves the property. If the customer who leaves doesn't notify the retailer that they have left, they may be contacted about arrears at the property if their ex-partner doesn't keep up payments.

Customers who are unaware that they owe money to an energy or water retailer are often surprised to learn that

they can be asked to pay for arrears on an account up to six years later.

If a customer finds that they have substantial arrears on their account and they are having trouble making payments, we encourage them to seek help (see 'Options for dealing with arrears').

### Definition of arrears

When an electricity, gas, or water retailer sends a bill, there are usually 21 days to pay it – this is the 'due date' listed on the bill. Once the due date has passed, any amounts not paid become arrears.

### Transfer of arrears to new accounts

Energy and water retailers can transfer arrears from an old account to a new one, if they identify that the customer is someone who has a previous debt.

Retailers are able to transfer the debt, even if it relates to a different property. They are only allowed to do this if the previous account was in the same customer's name and a bill was issued.

According to the statute of limitations, retailers can only transfer arrears up to six years after the original bill was issued. This means that arrears can follow a customer from address to address, and the customer can be asked to pay them up to six years later.

### Confirmation the bill was issued

A bill is considered to have been issued where the retailer's records show that the bill was sent to the correct name and address on a particular date. For example, if the retailer's records show they issued a bill, but a customer did not receive it because their mail was lost or stolen, the customer is still responsible for the amount owing.

So, if a customer has not received a bill in over three months they should contact their retailer. Not seeing or receiving a bill doesn't mean the debt will go away or the customer can't be held responsible for it.

If there is a delay in the retailer issuing a bill, a customer may be able to negotiate a payment plan or more time to pay, but

they are still responsible for paying for the energy or water they have used.

### Disconnection for arrears

If a customer does not make an arrangement to pay arrears owing on their energy or water account, they risk disconnection. Also, if a customer is making regular payments towards the arrears but the amount is not sufficient to cover their current usage costs, they may risk being disconnected.

If the arrears relate to a different retailer, the current retailer will not disconnect the customer. However, the previous retailer can seek recovery for the arrears, often through a debt collection agency.

### Debt collection procedures

If arrears remain unpaid the retailer can begin debt recovery action. This can affect a person's credit standing and can mean their name is listed with a credit reference agency for up to five years. If this happens, the customer may have problems applying for a credit card, home or business loan, or even a mobile phone.

### Options for dealing with arrears

Customers should contact their energy or water retailer to ensure that the arrears are correct. If so, they can discuss a payment plan to cover both the arrears and current bills, or ask about the retailer's customer assistance program.

If a customer is unable to negotiate a payment plan or is not satisfied with the company's response they can contact EWON for help. We can also advise about other agencies and services that can assist with financial hardship.

If a customer is not able to make a payment, they should contact the retailer immediately to let them know.

### Other options for customers

\* Emergency financial assistance is available in the form of EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) and PAS (Payment Assistance Scheme for water) vouchers. These are available through community agencies such as neighbourhood centres, St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army or Anglicare. EWON can also provide information about agencies that distribute EAPA or PAS.

\* Contact the Credit and Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 for help dealing with creditors and financial difficulties or visit [www.cclcnsw.org.au](http://www.cclcnsw.org.au)

\* Talk to a financial counsellor. They can help to negotiate a payment plan with the energy or water retailer, and other creditors. Free financial counselling services are offered through community agencies. Contact EWON or visit [www.financialcounsellors.asn.au](http://www.financialcounsellors.asn.au) to locate services.

\* Customers can talk to their energy or water retailer about an audit to identify areas for reducing consumption or which appliances are expensive to run.

\* Customers on a low income may be able apply for NILS (No Interest Loan Scheme) to replace old or inefficient appliances with new energy or water efficient appliances. For more information visit [www.nilsnsw.org.au](http://www.nilsnsw.org.au) or contact EWON.

**Need help getting  
reconnected?  
Contact EWON on  
freecall ☎ 1800 246 545**

### Catherine discovers a substantial debt after disconnection

Catherine contacted EWON when she was having trouble getting her electricity reconnected. She explained that for some time she was paying \$60 per fortnight onto her electricity account by Centrepay. Despite regular payments, her supply was disconnected. Upset with what had happened, she asked a friend for help and they illegally reconnected her electricity supply. Catherine then cancelled her Centrepay arrangement.

About two weeks later, the retailer disconnected her supply at the pole top. Catherine then contacted a new retailer to have her electricity supply reconnected, but they referred her back to her standard retailer.

We contacted the retailer who said Catherine was disconnected for arrears of \$2200 at her current address. The retailer said Catherine's Centrepay arrangement related to her previous address and she owed \$1600 of arrears on that account. The retailer confirmed that they had followed the disconnection schedule. The retailer explained that after the first disconnection, they had visited the property for a scheduled meter read and discovered electricity was still being used. Following that, the retailer issued an order for disconnection at the pole top without further notice.

The retailer advised EWON that they would consider reconnection if Catherine joined their customer assistance program, reinstated her Centrepay arrangement and agreed to transfer her old debt to her existing account. We raised the issue that \$60 per fortnight would not be sufficient to cover Catherine's usage and reduce her arrears, and the retailer agreed to review Catherine's situation in the future.

We contacted Catherine to explain why the disconnection had occurred and that her Centrepay arrangement had not been transferred when she moved properties. We advised her of the retailer's offer and explained it was a temporary arrangement, and that the customer assistance program would review her situation in a month. We also provided Catherine with the details of agencies that distribute EAPA (Energy Accounts Payment Assistance) vouchers in her area.

Catherine accepted the retailer's offer and her electricity supply was reconnected.

### Water supply restricted due to \$7600 arrears

Roy could not reach agreement with his water retailer about paying off a debt of \$7600 which had accumulated on his late mother's account and had resulted in the water supply being restricted at her property. The water retailer referred Roy to EWON for help.

Roy explained to EWON that his mother had died five years earlier but her estate had not been settled as yet. For the past year he had allowed his daughter to live in his mother's property with her children as a security measure, after he found squatters there. Roy was concerned because his daughter had young children and they needed the water reconnected.

We contacted the retailer to discuss Roy's situation. The retailer's records showed they had been in discussion with Roy for some time about establishing an account holder at the property who would take responsibility for the bills. The retailer had also offered Roy a payment plan and three years to pay off the debt. While the retailer was aware that there was a young family at the property, they were concerned about letting the arrears accumulate further, considering five years had lapsed and the estate had not been settled.

We asked the retailer if they would consider reconnection if someone took responsibility for paying the account and they agreed.

Roy's daughter agreed to a Centrepay arrangement to cover her current usage and the water supply was reconnected. The retailer offered Roy a six month extension to settle his mother's estate and the arrears owing on her account.

## Common hot water services

Many unit blocks and townhouses have a common hot water service. The fluctuation and variation in bills that can occur with common hot water services has resulted in numerous customer complaints to EWON over the years.

With a common hot water service, there is a large tank for heating water (usually located in a common area) which supplies hot water to each unit. Most common hot water services use gas and customers are charged for the amount of gas it takes to heat the water they use.

The gas distributor calculates the amount of gas used to heat the water, and charges each customer in the complex based on how much hot water they have used. The water usage is then multiplied by a 'common factor', which varies from quarter to quarter, depending on how much gas has been used to heat the total volume of water for the building. The common factor applied to the billing quarter will be listed on the bill, usually below the meter readings.

It is important to note that the common factor is set by the gas distributor, who provides it to the retailer for billing. Consequently, if a customer queries a high bill with their retailer, they may be told that the retailer has no control over the common factor, and this is the case.



## Common causes of high bills

There are various factors that can contribute to a high bill in a property with a common hot water service.

For example, if some of the units in the block are unoccupied for a period of time in a billing quarter, the cost per unit will be higher than when the block is fully occupied. This is because there are fewer people sharing the cost of heating a set amount of water. Even if a customer feels they are using the same amount of hot water each quarter, the bills may vary due to a change in the common factor.

Things that can affect the common factor include the efficiency of the system, the temperature setting of the boiler, the condition of the pipe insulation and the distance from the boiler to the individual unit.

Note that the building manager or strata corporation manager is responsible for making sure that the hot water system is working efficiently, not the energy retailer or distributor.

## What EWON can investigate

Where a gas or electricity common hot water service is installed, EWON can investigate billing disputes about a customer's hot water consumption charges. For example, we can confirm with the gas distributor that the common factor is correct and check with the retailer that the common factor has been applied correctly. However, EWON cannot investigate a complaint about:

- the efficiency, age or condition of the hot water system
- the occupancy rate of the dwelling
- the action or inaction of a strata corporation, property manager or landlord (eg. if they refuse to engage a licenced plumber to inspect the hot water system).

If a complaint involves strata corporation or tenant/landlord issues, the NSW Office of Fair Trading can be contacted on 13 32 20 or [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)

## A tenant surprised when her bill doubled

Lucy moved into a newly built block of units which had a common hot water service. Her first two gas bills were \$165 and \$116, but her third bill was \$365. She couldn't understand why it was so high, as there was only one other person sharing with her, they were both out all day at work, and their usage had been similar for the whole time they had been in the unit.

Lucy contacted her gas retailer for an explanation and was told that the common factor was the cause of the increase in the bills. The retailer told Lucy there was nothing they could do, so she contacted EWON for help.

EWON's investigation found that the gas distributor had subsidised Lucy's first two bills, in recognition that new developments with common hot water services typically have a low occupancy rate to begin with. Consequently, Lucy's third bill was higher for this reason.

We explained to Lucy that the low occupancy rate was the reason for the high bill and referred her to the building manager if there was a problem with the installation in the future.

## Incorrect common factor leads to high bill

Marie is a pensioner living in public housing, in a building with a common hot water service. Her gas bills are usually around \$150 (for hot water only), so when she received a high bill of \$256, she contacted EWON for help.

Marie said the high bill had caused her a lot of stress and she was so worried about receiving another high bill she had begun to boil water in the kettle to do her washing.

We asked Marie if anything had changed at the property and she said the meter had been changed (after she received the high bill) and there had also been a leaking hot water pipe.

EWON's investigation found that the change of meter and leaking pipe were not the cause of the high bill. However, the common factor had been calculated incorrectly for three periods in a row. The gas distributor corrected the common factor for the period and the retailer reissued two of Marie's bills. As the reissued bills together added up to \$165, this left Marie's account in credit.

We provided Marie with more information on common hot water services and referred her to Housing NSW if she had concerns about the installation.



Speakers at EWON's Anti-Poverty Week forum in October 2008: (top row from left) Michaela Holloway (ASIC), Tricia Doherty (Integral Energy), Clare Petre (Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW); (bottom row from left) Elizabeth Millen (Sydney South West Area Health Service), Ramona Blacklock (Department of Water and Energy), Lyn Trindall (NILS)

## EWON in the community

As part of EWON's outreach strategy for this year our Community Development Officer, Narelle Brown, has visited Housing NSW offices at Dee Why, Wollongong, Burwood, Broadway, Ryde and Fairfield. Narelle has presented to managers and frontline staff to raise awareness about how they can assist public housing tenants who are having problems with their energy or water account, as well as provide information on EWON's services.

In November 2008 Narelle was invited to present at the St Vincent de Paul Regional Conference held in Woolloomooloo. The State Presidents who attended the conference were enthusiastic about discussing energy and water issues, and how their agency could help people who were having trouble managing their bills or facing disconnection.

If you would like to organise a presentation for your staff or community group please contact Narelle Brown on (02) 8218 5241 or email [narelleb@ewon.com.au](mailto:narelleb@ewon.com.au)

## People with a disability and water restrictions

Recently Narelle spoke to a carer's support group at Sutherland. There was discussion on the day about people who could not water their gardens in the times stated by Sydney Water due to their reliance on carers to assist them. Narelle followed up the issue with Sydney Water who confirmed that customers with a disability can apply for special arrangements. For more information phone Sydney Water on 13 20 92 or visit [www.sydneywater.com.au](http://www.sydneywater.com.au)

## Anti-Poverty week forum in Parramatta

This year our Essential Services forum for community workers during Anti-Poverty Week included new topics such as financial literacy and food insecurity. The forum was a good opportunity to consider the impact of financial and other hardship on consumers, and find out what assistance is available in the community.

We extend our thanks to the speakers: Michaela Holloway, Australian Securities and Investments Commission; Elizabeth Millen, Sydney South West Area Health Service; Lyn Trindall, NILS NSW Coordinator; Ramona Blacklock, Department of Water and Energy; and Tricia Doherty, Integral Energy.

Around 90 representatives from community and government agencies attended the forum and feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive.

## Update on EWON resources

### Translated factsheets

We continue to welcome suggestions for translations. Following requests from the community, we have had information about EWON translated into French, Urdu, Serbian, Assyrian and Simplified Chinese.

### New factsheet for community workers

We have developed a new factsheet specifically for community workers. Topics covered include disconnection and reconnection, and account holder responsibilities. To request printed copies email [omb@ewon.com.au](mailto:omb@ewon.com.au) or visit [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au)

## Current issues for Indigenous customers

Statistics for 2007-2008 indicate credit is still the primary issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers who contact EWON for help.

Rose Gordon, EWON's Indigenous Project Officer, notes that in recent community visits she's met a number of Aboriginal people who have had credit issues after they signed market contracts.

These customers indicated that after signing a contract, they had issues with the billing system of their new retailer or were caught out by delayed billing. The latter resulted in their accumulating debt which they couldn't afford to pay.

Rose says some elderly Aboriginal people fall into the category of 'vulnerable consumers' when it comes to negotiated contracts. "When a marketer knocks at their door," says Rose, "it may not be in their nature to say no, so they'll sign an energy contract just to be polite."

Rose encourages Indigenous consumers not to sign anything straight away, but to tell the marketer they'll need time to look over the information. "It's best to get someone you trust to look over the contract" says Rose, "it may seem like a good deal, but things like the billing frequency or payment method may not suit your finances."

Customers can contact EWON on freecall 1800 246 545 for information on choosing an energy contract.

### Information for community workers

#### Jackgreen and EAPA vouchers

EAPA vouchers for Jackgreen accounts can now be paid at a post office.

Customers can also continue to send their vouchers by mail to:

Jackgreen  
Level 5, 52 William Street  
East Sydney NSW 2011

#### 'Helping with the cost of energy' report by Anglicare

Anglicare's Policy Unit recently released a report following their research into the needs of low income customers who use their Emergency Relief services. The report is available for download from [www.anglicare.org.au](http://www.anglicare.org.au) or contact Anglicare on 13 26 22.



## Towards national energy reform

National energy reform has been underway for a number of years. The Ministerial Council on Energy (comprising federal and state ministers with responsibility for energy) is responsible for managing and delivering the reform.

The reform process began with the introduction of competition in the retailing of both gas and electricity, and the move to a national market for electricity trading. This was the first time that many consumers had to consider their energy supplier and supply arrangements.

In NSW retail competition in energy began in January 2002 and since then customers have had a choice of energy retailers and contract arrangements. However the legislation covering the operation of energy retailers in NSW remains state-based.

The NSW government has committed to electricity price control until 2013. In some other states the retail price of electricity is being deregulated.

Consumer protection measures for energy customers differ between states. The next major step in the reform process will be the introduction of national laws and regulations to cover the supply of energy to consumers.

The aim of introducing national laws is to provide consistent consumer protection in the changing market. The new legislation will cover aspects such as right of supply, billing, disconnection and hardship programs, and marketing. The national consumer protection framework is due to take effect in September 2009.

EWON has made a number of individual and joint submissions on the development of the national consumer protection framework for energy customers (these are available at [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au)).

The Ministerial Council on Energy has also been working on a range of issues concerning energy and the environment, including consideration of a national move to time-of-use or smart meters. The other major initiative that will impact on consumers is the introduction of carbon pricing. While final details are not yet available, both these initiatives will have cost implications for consumers.

From EWON's viewpoint, it is critical that appropriate measures are introduced to ensure that vulnerable consumers are protected.

For more information on the Ministerial Council on Energy visit [www.mce.gov.au](http://www.mce.gov.au)

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) provides an independent way of resolving customer complaints about all electricity and gas suppliers in NSW and some water suppliers.

Our service is free, fair and independent. Our aim is to keep essential services within reach of everyone.

### Contact EWON

FREECALL	<b>1800 246 545*</b> Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm
FREEFAX	1800 812 291
FREEPOST	Reply Paid K1343 Haymarket NSW 1239
EMAIL	<a href="mailto:omb@ewon.com.au">omb@ewon.com.au</a>
WEBSITE	<a href="http://www.ewon.com.au">www.ewon.com.au</a>
INTERPRETER	131 450
TTY/VOICE	133 677 (National Relay Service)

\*Calls from mobile phones may attract a fee, which will vary depending on your service provider. If you are calling from a mobile phone, let us know and EWON will call you back.

### About EWONews

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**Editorial enquiries:** [news@ewon.com.au](mailto:news@ewon.com.au)

Note: names have been changed in case studies for confidentiality reasons.

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Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW

[www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au)



Choice is a not-for-profit, independent organisation that represents consumer interests in Australia. Choice has launched a free service for customers who want to switch energy retailers.

For more information visit [www.choiceswitch.com.au](http://www.choiceswitch.com.au) or phone the Customer Help Line on 1300 668 887.

### EWON members up to 31 December 2008

ActewAGL  
AGL  
AGL Victoria  
Aurora Energy  
Australian Power and Gas  
Country Energy  
EnergyAustralia  
Energy One  
Hunter Water  
Independent Electricity Retail Solutions  
Integral Energy  
Jackgreen  
Jemena  
NSW Electricity  
Origin Energy  
Powerdirect  
Red Energy  
State Water  
Sydney Water  
TransGrid  
TRUenergy