



# Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

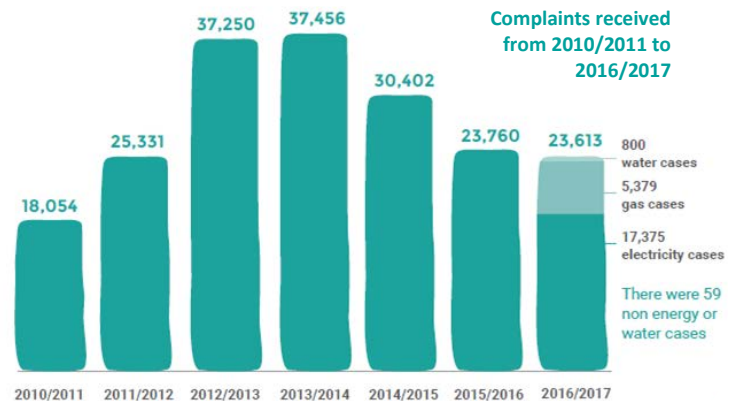
Monday 9 October 2017

**Embargoed until 12am Wednesday 11 October 2017**

## Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW trend upwards in a year of growing consumer uncertainty

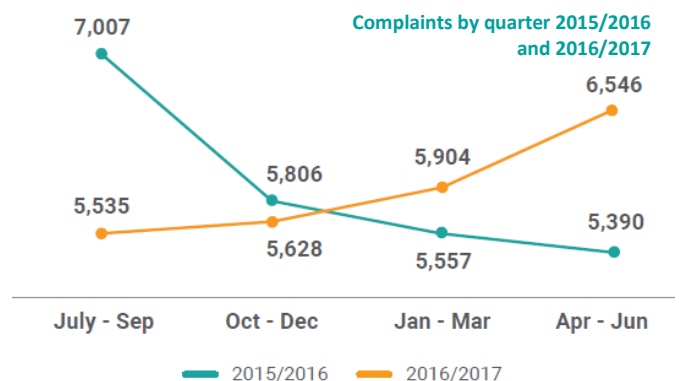
Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased each consecutive quarter in 2016/2017, despite a small overall decrease in complaint numbers compared to the previous year.

“While our complaints fell marginally overall, they steadily rose throughout 2016/2017 and continue to increase. We received 21% more complaints between April and June 2017 than we did in the same period in the previous financial year, establishing a strong upward trend” Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young explained.



According to EWON’s 2016/2017 Annual Report released today, it received 23,613 complaints in 2016/2017, down from 23,760 in 2015/2016, making this the third year in a row complaints to the Ombudsman’s office have fallen. However, the 1% decrease is much less pronounced than the 22% fall reported in 2015/2016 and the 19% decrease in 2014/2015.

“By July 2016, we reached the end of an era of complaints related to billing system improvements. Now we are dealing with emerging complaint issues such as digital meter exchange, as well as increasing complaints about customer service,” Ms Young stated.



Complaints rose 2% between the first and second quarters; a further 5% between the second and third quarter; and then climbed 11% between the third and final quarters.

“The top three complaint issues customers raised with EWON were about billing, customer service and credit, consistent with the previous financial year,” Ms Young said.

Most complaints received were about electricity at 74%, 23% were about gas, and the remaining 3% related to water.

Ms Young remains very concerned about energy affordability, particularly in light of 1 July 2017 price increases.

“Affordability issues, payment difficulties, high bills, increasing debt and disconnection of supply have become the norm for NSW consumers experiencing financial vulnerability.”

“The array of energy offers makes it difficult for customers to find the best deal. Customers on low or fixed incomes in particular, continue to tell us they were not able to take advantage of discounted offers because of compulsory pay-on-time or direct debit conditions. It is promising to see that retailers are now starting to address this,” said Ms Young.

The report shows a 4% increase in complaints related to customer service including poor service, failure to respond, incorrect advice or information, and failure to consult or inform customers.

Marketing complaints, including customers being misled by marketers and experiencing pressure to sign a contract, increased by 28%.

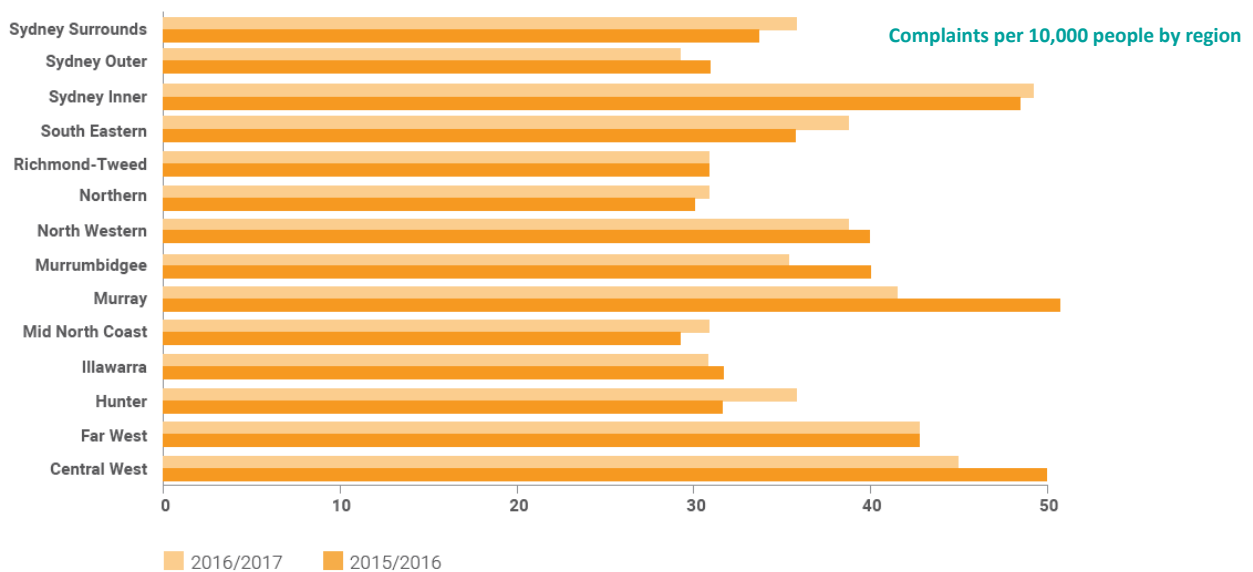
Digital meter complaints factored in EWON’s cases for the first time in 2016/2017, as result of electricity retailer-led rollout of new meters following the Closure of the Solar Bonus Scheme during the period. EWON received 1,605 related to digital meters, with installation delays, and meters not being installed the biggest complaint issues.

Complaints by primary issue

Primary issue	2015 / 2016	2016 / 2017	% changed
Billing	14,199	13,428	-5%
Customer service	9,972	10,350	4%
Credit	6,675	4,993	-25%
Transfer	2,895	2,149	-26%
Digital meter exchange*	0	1,605	-
General	736	1,011	37%
Provision	522	582	11%
Marketing	401	514	28%
Land	378	410	8%
Supply	465	403	-13%

\* Digital meter exchange became a complaint issue as a result of the Solar Bonus Scheme closure effective from 31 December 2016

“We hope the lessons learned during the initial rollout of digital meters will inform the wider Power of Choice rollout that will start on 1 December 2017,” Ms Young said.



For more information or to arrange an interview with the Ombudsman, contact: Mia Lauzé, Manager Communications & Outreach - 0408 602 503 / [mial@ewon.com.au](mailto:mial@ewon.com.au).