



# Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Monday 9 October 2017

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## Energy affordability a significant issue for customers in the North Western region of NSW

According to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW's (EWON) 2016/2017 Annual Report released today, affordability issues factored in 30% of complaints received from the State's North Western region\*, compared to 21% for NSW as a whole.

"Affordability issues, payment difficulties, high bills, increasing debt and disconnection of supply have become the norm for NSW consumers experiencing financial vulnerability," Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young, said.

"My office has spent time in the region and seen first hand the impact energy affordability is having on people there. I have visited Bourke and Brewarrina and EWON's Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer recently visited Walgett, Coonamble and Goodooga."

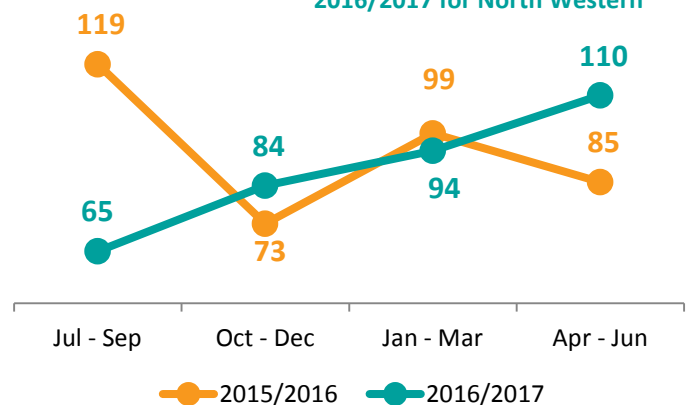
"The array of energy offers makes it difficult for customers to find the best deal. Customers on low or fixed incomes in particular, continue to tell us they were not able to take advantage of discounted offers because of compulsory pay-on-time or direct debit conditions. It is promising to see that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

Average complaints per 10,000 people in the region were high at 38, above the NSW average of 34.

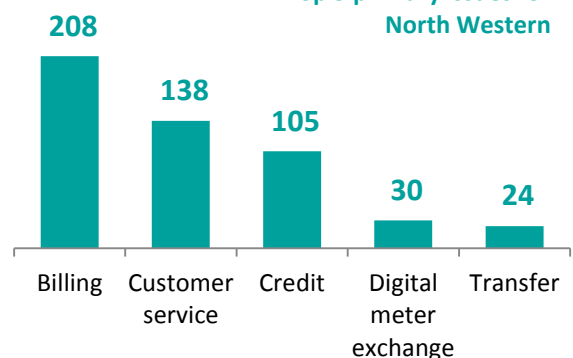
Despite this, complaints to EWON from the North Western region fell for the third year in a row, down 6% in 2016/17 to 353 from 376 in 2015/2016. Between 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 complaints from the region fell 33%, following a 12% decrease in 2014/2015, from the high of 638 complaints in 2013/2014.

This is consistent with the complaint trend for NSW overall, where the 1% decrease in complaints to EWON in 2016/2017 for NSW is much less pronounced than the 22% fall reported in 2015/2016 and the 19% decrease in 2014/2015.

Complaints by quarter from 2015/2016 to 2016/2017 for North Western



Top 5 primary issues for North Western



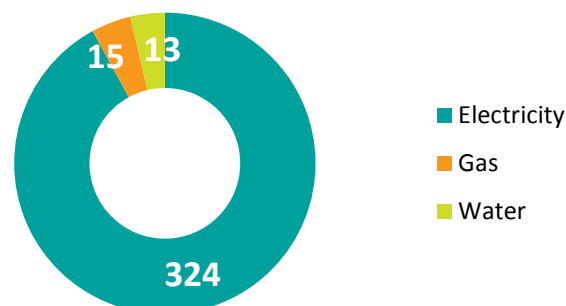
Complaints to EWON from the North Western region began to rise towards the end 2016/2017.

“EWON received 29% more complaints from the North Western region of NSW in the fourth quarter 2016/2017 than we did for that period in 2015/2016.” Ms Young explained.

This upward trend is consistent with the rest of NSW.

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

Complaints by Industry for North Western



The top three complaint issues customers raised with EWON in the North Western region were about billing, customer service and credit, consistent with NSW as a whole. Digital meter exchange was the fourth biggest complaint issues in the region, whereas it was the fifth biggest for NSW overall.

#### Cases received for each region in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 with percentage increase or decrease

EWON region	Complaints per 10,000 people	2016/2017	2015/2016	% change
Sydney Outer	29	6,917	7,340	-6%
Sydney Inner	49	6,292	6,173	2%
Hunter	35	2,053	1,864	10%
Sydney Surrounds	36	1,702	1,600	6%
Illawarra	31	1,237	1,273	-3%
Mid North Coast	31	894	824	8%
Central West	45	855	944	-9%
South Eastern	38	783	726	8%
Richmond-Tweed	31	685	677	1%
Northern	31	534	509	5%
Murrumbidgee	35	479	543	-12%
Murray	42	466	564	-17%
North Western	38	353	376	-6%
Far West	43	94	94	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	<b>23,613</b>	<b>23,760</b>	<b>-1%</b>

\*EWON’s North Western reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett Warren and Warrumbungle Shire.

To arrange an interview with the Ombudsman or request high resolution images, contact: Mia Lauzé, Manager Communications & Outreach - 0408 602 503 / [mial@ewon.com.au](mailto:mial@ewon.com.au).