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## Media Release

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Monday 26 November 2018

### Ombudsman services partner to assist drought-affected communities

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and the newly established Australian Financial Complaints Authority will hold 'Bring Your Bills Days' and Community Expos in Parkes, Coonamble and Dubbo on 4, 5 and 6 December 2018.

The Bring Your Bills Days will provide free advice and support for all residents, farmers and small business operators affected, directly or indirectly, by drought, low incomes or other factors.

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW has held Bring Your Bills Days across NSW for several years. Ombudsman, Janine Young, is really pleased to be working with other Ombudsman offices to bring key services to rural areas, meet with customers face-to-face and resolve problems on the spot.

"Energy affordability is often linked to other issues, so there is a real benefit in providing access to the tailored support offered by different Ombudsman offices and other services in one location," Ms Young said.

The Australian Financial Complaints Authority's (AFCA) Chief Ombudsman and Chief Executive Officer, David Locke, welcomes the opportunity to support regional communities.

"AFCA recognises the real challenges that drought-affected communities face. Many of these are financial. We will provide solutions for disputes about credit, loans and finance, insurance and a range of other financial products and services. AFCA also offers dedicated support for small businesses and can assist farmers with complaints that have cropped up because of drought or other issues," said Mr Locke.

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Judi Jones, is pleased to look at what her office can do to help relieve the pressure on communities that are doing it particularly tough.

"We understand phone and internet problems can create added stress during what is already a difficult time, and it can be essential to remain connected. As a free and independent service, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman may be able help find a way forward with these issues."

A range of other organisations including, NSW Fair Trading, Revenue NSW, the Seniors Rights Service, AGL, Origin Energy, local councils, financial counsellors and Energy Account Payment Assistance providers will also be on hand to provide advice and assistance.

"We find that meeting with customers face-to-face makes a big difference to everyone involved and often leads to problems being resolved much quicker than they would otherwise be," explained Ms Young.

## Why people should attend

Bring Your Bills Days offer a one-stop-shop opportunity for a range of services, including:

- resolving problems with energy, phone/internet or financial service providers
- negotiating affordable payment arrangements with energy providers
- having rebates applied to energy account (if eligible)
- accessing emergency energy payment assistance
- dealing with outstanding fines and legal issues
- complaints about credit, loans and finance, insurance, banking deposits and payments, investments and financial advice, superannuation.

Customers are also welcome to come along to speak to services directly about other issues.

Customers should bring along current and past energy, phone bills, credit card statements and any letters from their providers, financial products or service agreements or contracts, their Centrelink Health Card if they have one and any concession cards.

## Event details

### **Parkes**

Tuesday 4 December, 9am-3pm

Venue: Starlight Room, Parkes Services Club 9-17 Short Street, Parkes

### **Coonamble**

Wednesday 5 December, 9am-3pm

Venue: Coonamble Bowling Club, Aberford Street, Coonamble

### **Dubbo**

Thursday 6 December, 9am-3pm

Venue: Dubbo Regional Theatre and Convention Centre (DRTCC) 155 Darling Street, Dubbo

**For more information, visit [ewon.com.au/events](http://ewon.com.au/events)**

## Media contacts

To arrange an interview with any of the Ombudsmen involved or request high resolution images please contact:

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