



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Embargoed until 12am Tuesday 9 October 2018

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase from the Central West

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the Central West region* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising four percent from 2016/2017 to 887.

Population data shows that there were 47 complaints per 10,000 people – the equal third highest number of complaints from any region in NSW.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints in the Central West rose three percent in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 63% of all complaints. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

The report also shows a 10% increase in complaints related to customer service, including poor service, failure to respond, incorrect advice or information, and failure to consult or inform customers. These issues are present in 48% of complaints from the Central West.

"Customer service is often an underlying factor for people contacting EWON, but one that can be largely avoided if providers work constructively with consumers in the first instance," explained Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young.

Complaints related to energy affordability, including payment difficulties, debt collection, credit default listing and disconnections, increased by nine percent in the Central West, and were present in 27% of all complaints during the period.

"More work is needed to address affordability, including early identification of customers needing support, and tailored approaches which prevent payment difficulties escalating into serious debt," Ms Young said.

Electricity accounted for 80% of EWON's complaints in the Central West in 2017/2018, and rose by 15% in 2017/2018. Gas complaints accounted for 18% of complaints, but fell by 25%, and water complaints fell by 17% and make up one percent of all complaints.

"The theme of our Annual Report this year is 'Strengthening consumer protections'. We focus on ensuring all NSW energy customers receive equitable access to free, fair and independent dispute resolution services and that issues that impact on customers are brought to the attention of energy and water providers, government and regulators," Ms Young stated.

For more information or to arrange an interview with the Ombudsman, contact: Jacqui Heywood, Communications Officer – 0426 822 341 / jacquelineh@ewon.com.au.

**EWON's Central West reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Bathurst, Orange, Bland, Blayney, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow and Mid-Western Regional.*