



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW from the Far West increase by 20%

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) from the Far West region* of NSW increased in 2017/2018, rising 20% from 2016/2017 to 113.

Average complaints per 10,000 people in the region were also high at 51 – the second highest number of complaints from any region in NSW.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, energy affordability was the main reason customers from the Far West came to EWON in 2017/2018. Energy affordability issues, including payment difficulties, debt collection, credit default listings and disconnections, were present in 38% of complaints from the region 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," Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young said.

Complaints related to customer service rose by 43%, including poor service, failure to respond, incorrect advice or information, and failure to consult or inform customers. These issues are present in 35% of complaints from the Far 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 Ms Young.

Billing complaints were the third most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, despite falling five percent as a percent of all complaints from the region. Billing issues, including high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts, were present in 35% of all complaints from the Far West.

Electricity accounted for 82% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018, and increased by 22%. Gas complaints remained stable at four percent of all complaints, while water complaints increased by 17% and were present in 12% of all complaints from the Far West.

"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 Far West reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Broken Hill, Central Darling and Unincorporated NSW Local Government Areas.*