



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase for the first time in five years

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased in 2017/2018 for the first time in five years, rising 12% from 2016/2017 to 26,416.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints rose 18% in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 60% of all complaints. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

The report also shows a 19% 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 47% of complaints.

"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 listings and disconnections, increased by 12%, and were present in 21% 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 78% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018, up from 74% in 2016/2017. Gas complaints fell as percentage of total complaints from 23% in 2016/2017 to 19%, while water complaints remained stable at three 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.

Our focus on strengthening consumer protections in 2017/2018 will see EWON's membership increasing over the next two to three years. The growing number of customers who live in apartment blocks, residential parks and retirement villages whose energy supply is via its own internal / embedded network, can now access the same level of dispute resolution as customers of traditional providers. These customers' energy providers are now required to join EWON, participate in its process and abide by its decisions.

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