



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Embargoed until 12am Tuesday 9 October 2018

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase by 14% in the Hunter region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the Hunter region* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising 14% from 2016/2017 to 2,344 – above the overall NSW increase of 12%.

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

The report also shows a 12% 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 in the Hunter region.

"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 30% in the Hunter, 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 84% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018, and increased by 20% from 2016/2017. Gas complaints fell by 24% and accounted for 10% of all complaints in the Hunter, while water complaints increased by 36% to make up six percent of all complaints from this region.

"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 Hunter reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Mid-Coast, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton, Upper Hunter Shire*