



Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW  
Free, fair and independent

# Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

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## Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase by five percent in the Illawarra region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the Illawarra region\* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising five percent from 2016/2017 to 1,302.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints from the Illawarra rose 17% in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 56% 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 in the Illawarra 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, decreased by seven percent, however were the third highest issue for people in the Illawarra, 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 77% of EWON's complaints in the Illawarra region in 2017/2018, and have increased by 12% from 2016/2017. Gas complaints fell by 13% and are present in 19% of cases from the Illawarra 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](mailto:jacquelineh@ewon.com.au).**

*\*EWON's Illawarra reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Kiama, Shellharbour, Shoalhaven, Wingecarribee and Wollongong.*