



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase by 13% in the Mid North Coast region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased in the Mid North Coast region* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising 13% from 2016/2017 to 1,011 – above the overall NSW increase of 12%.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints rose 30% in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 55% of all complaints from the Mid North Coast region. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

The report also shows a 34% 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 49% of complaints from the Mid North Coast.

"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 six percent, and were present in 21% of all complaints from the Mid North Coast 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 96% of EWON's complaints from the Mid North Coast in 2017/2018, and increased by 13% from 2016/2017. Gas increased by 25% and make up one percent of complaints, while water complaints made up two 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 Mid North Coast reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Bellingen, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Mid-Coast, Nambucca, Port Macquarie-Hastings.*