



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase by 24% in the North Western region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the North Western region* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising 24% from 2016/2017 to 436. The increase is double the overall NSW figure of 12%.

Population data shows that there were 47 complaints per 10,000 people – the equal third highest number of complaints from any region in NSW.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, complaints related to energy affordability, including payment difficulties, debt collection, credit default listings and disconnections, increased by 78% in the North Western region, and were present in 43% 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," explained Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young.

The report also shows a six percent 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 34% of complaints from the North Western 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," Ms Young said.

Billing complaints fell one percent in 2017/2018 however, continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON in the North Western region, present in 48% of all complaints. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

Electricity complaints rose 28% and accounted for 94% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018. Gas complaints increased by seven percent and accounted for four percent of complaints in 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 North Western reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Bogan, Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar, Coonamble, Dubbo, Gilgandra, Narromine, Walgett, Warren and Warrumbungle Shire.*