



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 12% in the Northern region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the Northern region\* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising 12% from 2016/2017 to 597.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints rose 10% in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 59% of all complaints from the Northern region. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

The report also shows a 28% 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 42% of complaints from the Northern 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 10% in the Northern region, and were present in 27% 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 97% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018, and have increased by 13% from 2016/2017 in the Northern region. Gas complaints fell by 18% and are present in two percent of cases from the Northern region and water complaints decreased by 17% and account for one 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](mailto:jacquelineh@ewon.com.au).**

*\*EWON's Northern reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Armidale, Clarence Valley, Glen Innes Severn, Gunnedah, Guyra, Gwydir, Inverell, Liverpool Plains, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Tamworth Regional, Tenterfield, Uralla and Walcha.*