



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Media release

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Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW increase 15% in the South Eastern region of NSW

Complaints to the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) increased from the South Eastern region* of NSW in 2017/2018, rising 15% from 2016/2017 to 902. That is three percent higher than the overall NSW increase of 12%.

Population data shows that there were 43 complaints per 10,000 people – the fifth highest number of complaints from any region in NSW.

According to EWON's Annual Report released today, billing complaints rose 24% in 2017/2018 and continue to be the most significant complaint issue raised with EWON, present in 59% of all complaints from the South Eastern region. Billing issues include high and estimated bills, billing errors and problems with opening and closing accounts.

The report also shows a 21% 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 from the South Eastern 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 25% in the South Eastern region, and were present in 24% 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 89% of EWON's complaints in 2017/2018, an increase of 25% from 2016/2017 in the South Eastern region. Gas complaints fell 33% and were present in nine percent of complaints, while water complaints represented 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.

**EWON's South Eastern reporting region includes the following Local Government Areas: Bega Valley, Eurobodalla, Goulburn Mulwaree, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Snowy Monaro, Snowy Valleys, Upper Lachlan and Yass Valley.*