



Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Tuesday 4 April 2017

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW visits the Murray region to help tackle electricity affordability

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), Janine Young, will visit the State's Murray region next week to assist people who are having problems with their electricity bills.

"Affordability issues such as payment difficulties, disconnection and high bills factored in 31% of the complaints we received from the Murray region in the 2015/2016 financial year, compared to 28% of our complaints for NSW as a whole" the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, Janine Young, said.

Affordability issues are one of the three main reasons customers from the Murray region complained to EWON between July and December 2016/2017, along with billing related issues and customer service.

EWON will hold Bring Your Bills days in Dareton on 6 April, in collaboration with Origin Energy and a range of community organisations and government agencies. EWON is also partnering with Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing to deliver energy and water saving workshops in the same locations.

Community members are invited to bring their energy bills along and join EWON or Origin Energy for a one on one session.

"We can help people identify rebates they may be eligible for, show them how to read their bills, assist them to set up payment arrangements, refer them to other agencies, and more" Ms Young explained.

Other support services available on the day will include Aboriginal housing providers, the State Debt Recovery Office, Legal Aid, NSW Fair Trading, the Aboriginal Legal Service, Centacare - Wilcannia Forbes, the Anti-Discrimination Board, Energy Accounts Payment Assistance providers and financial counsellors.

The idea for the trip came when the Wilcannia community invited EWON to come back and hold a Bring Your Bills day following the Ombudsman's visit to the area in August 2016. The trip was extended to include Menindee and Dareton.

"People in regional, rural and remote communities face particular challenges trying to stay connected to electricity. These challenges include distance, high food and petrol costs, extreme weather conditions and aging housing stock often fitted with poor quality appliances, with the last two factors contributing to excessive energy bills," Ms Young explained.



Widening the affordability gap further is the cost to connect to the grid in different areas. In NSW, customers in Essential Energy's distribution area, which covers the most rural and remote parts of the state including the far west, pay \$1.50 per day. Whereas in the Ausgrid area in metropolitan Sydney customers pay 89c per day and in Endeavour Energy's area, covering Greater Western Sydney and the Illawarra, they pay 86c per day to connect to the grid. There are also significant differences in the cost per kilowatt hour customers pay in each area.

"I really hope people in Dareton and surrounding areas can come along for a chat and join us for a free BBQ lunch," Ms Young said.

Attendees will also receive a free power saving showbag.

The events details are:

Thursday 6 April 2017 from 10 am

Dareton Senior Citizens Room Silver City Highway (Behind Town Library near Tapio Park)

Transport from Nama into Dareton will be provided by Carewest (Wentworth Community Transport). People interested in using this service should contact Andrew Smith from Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing on 0428 117 373.

**For more information or to arrange an interview with the Ombudsman, contact: Mia Lauzé,
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