



Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Wednesday 29 March 2017

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW visits the far west to help tackle electricity affordability

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), Janine Young, will visit the State's far west 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 32% of the complaints we received from the far west 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 were also the main reason customers from the far west complained to EWON between July and December 2016/2017, ahead of customer service and billing related issues.

EWON will hold Bring Your Bills days in Wilcannia on 4 April and Menindee on 5 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 Wilcannia community invited EWON to come back and hold a Bring Your Bills day after the Ombudsman visited Broken Hill and Wilcannia in August 2016 and saw first-hand how much of a problem energy affordability is in the area.

"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 the Wilcannia and Menindee communities 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:

Wilcannia - Wilcannia Community Hall, 76-78 Woore Street, Tuesday 4 April, from 10 am

Menindee - CWA Hall, Perry St (across from the Red Sands Takeaway Shop), Wednesday 5 April, from 10 am

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