



## Media release

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

Thursday 20 OCTOBER 2016

### Energy affordability a key issue for many households

Energy affordability remains a key issue for consumers, according to figures published in the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW's (EWON) 2015/2016 Annual Report today.

The Ombudsman received 6,644 complaints about affordability issues including payment difficulties, debt collection and/or disconnection or restriction of supply.

"While the number of complaints we received decreased, affordability issues continued to factor in 28% our complaints," Janine Young, the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, said.

EWON received 23,760 complaints in 2015/2016 – down 22% from 30,402 in 2014/2015. This is the second consecutive year that complaint numbers have fallen, after eight years of increasing complaint numbers.

Electricity and water complaints decreased, but gas complaints increased in volume and share, accounting for 24% (5,632) of total complaints, up from 18% in 2014/2015.

"We welcome the ongoing improvements in utility providers' internal dispute resolution processes, which have led to fewer complaints reaching us," Ms Young said.

Providers have also expanded assistance programs, such as payment plans and hardship programs for customers who are having problems paying their bills. Australian Energy Regulator (AER) figures show that the number of electricity customers on hardship programs increased by 31% from June 2014 to March 2016. During the same period, the number of gas customers on hardship programs rose by 68%.

According to the AER disconnections in NSW in 2015/2016 are expected to reach 32,000, the same as in the previous period.

"Despite the increased availability and uptake of payment assistance from providers and other help such as government rebates, we have not seen a decrease in people being disconnected from supply," Ms Young explained.

More investment in quality, social housing to address high energy costs would be the solution for many customers who contact EWON.

"Those who can least afford it often have the highest energy costs. Poorly insulated homes and appliances that are cheap to buy but expensive to run are often the norm. We need more energy efficient, affordable housing which delivers the benefits of new, low cost energy products and services to vulnerable consumers," Ms Young said.

**For more information or to arrange an interview with the Ombudsman, contact: Mia Lauzé,  
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## EWON 2015/2016 Annual Report: Key figures

EWON received 23,760 complaints in 2015/2016 – down 22% from 30,402 in 2014/2015.

Affordability/credit issues were raised in 28% of all complaints, including disconnection, denied payment plans, large arrears and debt collection.

Billing issues were raised in 59% of all complaints, 42% of all cases involved customer service issues.

Electricity accounted for 73% of cases, gas 24% and water 3%.

Electricity and water complaints decreased. Gas complaints increased in volume and share, accounting for 24% (5,632) of total complaints. Notably, there was a 57% increase in complaints about gas distribution.

EWON closed 24,293 cases, 7,565 were investigations finalised.

There were 1,053 complaints about impending disconnection and 1,409 complaints about actual disconnection.

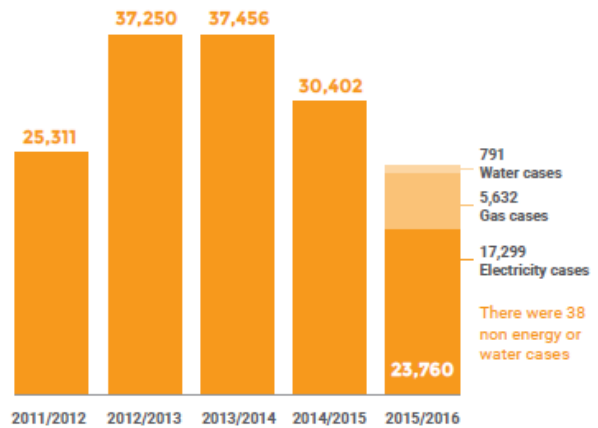
There was a 188% increase in referrals to a financial counsellor, reflecting increasing affordability issues.

Complaints were increasingly complex with a 60% increase of cases closed at level 3.

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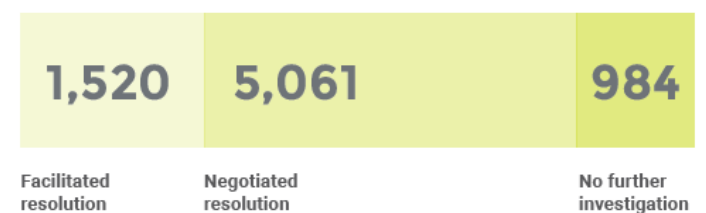
### Complaints received from 2011/2012 to 2015/2016



### Complaints by primary issue

Primary Issue	2014 / 2015	2015 / 2016	% Changed
Billing	17,845	14,109	-21%
Customer service	11,808	9,887	-16%
Credit	8,588	6,644	-23%
Transfer	4,262	2,888	-32%
General	732	734	0%
Provision	504	516	+2%
Supply	476	461	-3%
Marketing	604	397	-34%
Land	432	373	-14%

### Investigation outcomes



### Complaints per 10,000 people by region

