



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Quarterly Activity Report: Complaints, Case Studies and Community.

Quarterly Report

1/7/2016 TO 30/9/2016

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Introduction

Historically, EWON has produced these reports for the benefit of energy and water providers, our members, to share with them our insights on the complaints we receive from customers in NSW. Lately, through our stakeholder engagement activities we have identified that community workers and customers may also benefit from better knowledge of the sorts of complaints that EWON receives daily. In publishing this report we hope to promote general awareness of the consumer protection available to customers in NSW, and the role that EWON can play in assisting customers as they engage with their energy and water providers.

This quarter the report has focused on two areas where EWON is seeing complaints: smart meter offerings, primarily as part of the ending of the existing solar bonus scheme; and fees for paper bills and over the counter payments. Both these sources of complaints represent new initiatives by energy members. The customer experience that EWON has distilled from customer feedback is provided to members to assist in refining the customer engagement process when members are planning on introducing either new products or fees.

It is also critical that today's environment of scams and misinformation is taken into account and proactively addressed. An offer of a free digital meter is perceived as "a scam" by some customers, and therefore credibility and confidence is required to support the offer.

In this report, unless otherwise stated, all statistics presented are based on cases received, rather than cases closed. This is consistent with our Annual Report and will be our practice going forward. We welcome any feedback about this report. For further information, or to discuss any aspect of it, please contact our office. Contact details are on the cover of this report.

Complaint Activity July – September 2016

Overview

The number of customers approaching EWON with complaints continued to decrease in comparison to the corresponding quarter in 2015. Overall, complaints received this quarter (July 2016 to September 2016) reduced by 27.7% in comparison to the same period last year (5,059 compared to 6,996). Further, we have seen a continued plateauing of complaint numbers over the past three months.

Electricity: Electricity retail complaints declined by 30.8%, from 4,679 opened in the same quarter of 2015 to 3,238. There was also a 34.3% reduction in electricity distribution complaints, from 297 to 195.

Gas: The number of gas retail complaints received this quarter declined by 28.8% (1,132) in comparison to the corresponding period in 2015 (1,589). The number of gas distribution complaints (63) rose by 12.5% in comparison to the equivalent period last year (56).

Water: The number of water complaints received this quarter (213) increased by 13.3% compared to the corresponding period (188) in 2015.

The figure below illustrates the complaints opened in the quarter compared to last year across a number of categories. The figures for this quarter are shown alongside the figures for the corresponding quarter last year.

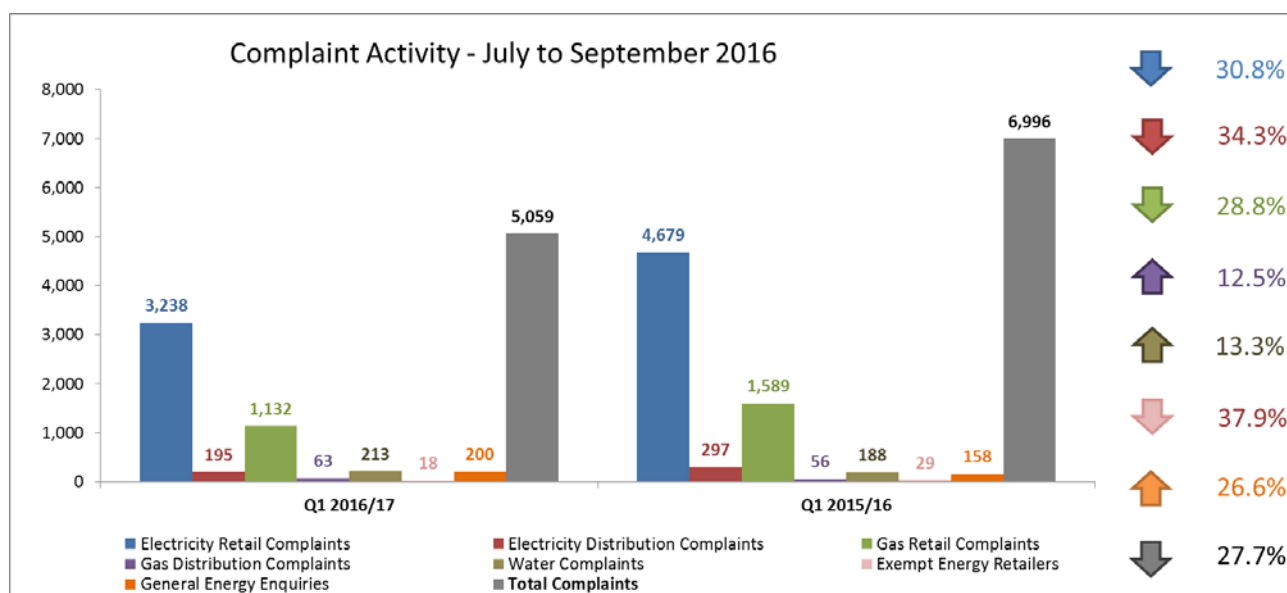


Table 1 below provides more detailed information about the number of complaints received between July and September 2016, in comparison to the corresponding period in 2015, along with the change, presented in actual and percentage terms.

Table 1 – Files opened Jul – Sep 2016

Case Subject	Provider Type	Jul 16 – Sep 16	Jul 15 – Sep 15	Increase or decrease	% change
Electricity	Distributor	195	297	-102	-34.3%
Electricity	Exempt retailer	16	25	-9	-36.0%
Electricity	General enquiry	180	131	49	37.4%
Electricity	Retailer	3,238	4,679	-1,441	-30.8%
Electricity Total		3,629	5,132	-1503	-29.3%
Gas	Distributor	63	56	7	12.5%
Gas	Exempt retailer	2	4	-2	-50.0%
Gas	General enquiry	13	17	-4	-23.5%
Gas	Retailer	1,132	1,589	-457	-28.8%
Gas Total		1,210	1,666	-456	-27.4%
Non energy/ Non water	General enquiry	7	10	-3	-30.0%
Non energy/ Non-water Total		7	10	-3	-30.0%
Water	Distributor	56	52	4	7.7%
Water	Exempt retailer	2	1	1	100.0%
Water	General enquiry	13	12	1	8.3%
Water	Retailer	142	123	19	15.4%
Water Total		213	188	25	13.3%
Grand Total		5,059	6,996	-1937	-27.7%

Customer Complaint Issues

Despite decreasing complaint numbers, complaints about estimated billing increased again this quarter to 591 from 543 for the same period last year. Of those complaints, 67% were for electricity bills with the remainder for gas. More significantly, this issue rose to 5.3% of all issues from 3.8% of all issues last year.

Customers' complaints about incorrect advice or information also increased this quarter in comparison to the same quarter last year, with 17 more complaints in this quarter and an increase as a percentage of total issues to 4.2% from 3.1%.

Reflecting the overall decrease in EWON complaints, there has been a significant reduction in complaints about the following issues:

- Payment difficulties – down 38.8% (443 from 724)
- Debt Collection – down 34.3% (276 from 420)
- Customer service, poor – down 23.1% (1,035 from 1,354)
- Disputed high bills – down 20.4% (1,413 from 1,776)

Table 2 – Top 10 issues Jul – Sep 2016 compared with previous quarter

Primary Issue	Secondary Issue	Tertiary Issue	Jul 16 – Sep 16	% share of total issues	Jul 15 – Sep 15	% share of total issues
Billing	High	Disputed	1,413	12.7%	1,776	12.3%
Customer service	Poor service		1,035	9.3%	1,345	9.3%
Customer service	Failure to respond		823	7.4%	960	6.7%
Billing	Opening/closing account		597	5.4%	775	5.4%
Billing	Estimation	Meter access/not read	591	5.3%	543	3.8%
Customer Service	Incorrect advice/information		467	4.2%	450	3.1%
Credit	Payment difficulties	Current/arrears	443	4.0%	724	5.0%
Credit	Collection	Credit rating	325	2.9%	437	3.0%
Customer service	Failure to consult/inform		292	2.6%	298	2.1%
Credit	Collection	debt collector	276	2.4%	420	2.9%
Total number of issues per quarter			11,114		14,412	

New products or fees

When retailers introduce new products or fees, customers often contact EWON seeking information or to express their concern. If a retailer informs EWON in advance of such a change, and shares the information that is provided to customers, then EWON can independently explain to customers their rights and responsibilities in relation to the change. Equally, EWON is positioned to provide feedback to retailers about their customers' concerns. We can also provide advice to members about their draft communications and potential impacts on customers before the change occurs.

The beginning of the retailer led roll-out of digital meters and the introduction of new fees associated with billing provided two current examples of this two-way process.

Retailer led digital meter roll-out

In preparation for the end of the solar bonus scheme, some retailers have begun a rollout of digital meters to their solar customers. As with any new product or process, there are always teething problems. EWON is always in a better position to assist customers if fully briefed by our members about new products and services.

The provision of new meters to solar customers is the first part of a retailer-led rollout of new digital meters. This is a significant change from the previous arrangements where distributors had a monopoly on metering services and consumers lacked choice. Customers are now being asked to make a decision to change their metering arrangements in a fundamental way. It is crucial for the success of the retailer-led meter rollout, that customers are able to make an informed decision about whether or not they choose to replace their meter.

There are some key learnings that can be gained from the current limited rollout to solar customers - that will be extremely relevant to the wider rollout in 2017 and beyond.

It is difficult for customers to make an informed decision if they do not have access to crucial information. Questions about tariff rates, ability to change retailers and costs of meter installation if a customer wanted to defer the decision, are key questions that customers ask. Customers expect that if they are being offered a product by a retailer, they should be able to contact that retailer and be given answers to all of their questions before making a decision.

Some retailers have chosen an opt-out process for the installation of digital meters. If this model is chosen by retailers in the future, the mechanisms for choosing to opt-out need to be efficient, and retailers responsive to customers' questions and decisions. Inevitably, in an opt-out process some customers who do not want a new meter will receive one. Information and mechanisms for resolving this need improvement. EWON's understanding is that re-installing the customer's original meter or installing another Type 6 meter may not be possible. However a Type 5 meter may have the capacity to be configured as an accumulation meter and be installed to the customer's satisfaction.

Any process that involves the installation of equipment is likely to have at least a small level of error and, where such errors occur, retailers need to be effective and efficient at providing adequate redress to customers adversely affected.

EWON will continue to monitor customer experience with the digital meter roll out and provide feedback to our members. This process should enable improvements to be made to the meter replacement program and ensure a greater level of customer satisfaction.

Case Studies: Communication breakdown

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Lack of information</p>	<p><i>Initial correspondence, so that the customer can make an informed decision, should include all relevant information.</i></p> <p>The customer received a letter from his retailer offering him a new digital meter. He rang EWON to ask if he would be able to change retailers in the future if he accepted this offer. EWON advised that this would depend on the contract that he signed. EWON further advised the customer to talk to his retailer about the specific details of the offer and told the customer he could come back to EWON if dissatisfied with the retailer's response.</p>
<p>Lack of information</p>	<p><i>Contact centre staff training should include all relevant information.</i></p> <p>The customer had received the offer of a new net digital meter and was happy to proceed. She then rang her retailer to seek information about the feed-in tariff she would receive. The call centre could not provide her with this information, so she rang EWON.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Lack of information</p>	<p><i>Information about the tariffs associated with the offer of a digital should be provided to customers proactively, to assist them make an informed decision.</i></p> <p>The customer rang EWON with questions about the offer of a digital meter from his retailer. He was concerned that he would be forced on to a time of use tariff, and also sought information about how he could change his meter later (if he declined the current offer). EWON advised him to engage with his retailer in relation to these questions and told the customer he could come back to EWON if dissatisfied with the retailer's response.</p>
<p>Lack of information</p>	<p><i>Independent advice is required by some customers to assure themselves that offers are genuine.</i></p> <p>The customer rang EWON to confirm that the no-cost installation offer of a digital meter was genuine and to complain that she had to accept the offer before tariff pricing was confirmed. EWON indicated that the offer of a free installation was genuine and advised the customer to contact her retailer about any other questions that she had. The customer was also advised she could come back to EWON if dissatisfied with the retailer's response.</p>
<p>Lack of information</p>	<p><i>Once the roll out process has begun, customers should be able to contact their retailer and expect that their questions can be answered.</i></p> <p>The customer had contacted his retailer seeking information regarding the end of the solar bonus scheme, and what options the retailer was</p>

Case	Customer information / outcome
	<p>offering. He said that he made six calls and received conflicting information and that the retailer could not answer all his questions.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>

Case Studies: The opt-out process

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Difficulty in opting out</p>	<p><i>Where a retailer chooses to engage in an opt-out process it is essential that the process is simple and that customers are able to engage easily with highly trained specialist staff.</i></p> <p>The customer received a first letter from his retailer offering a free digital meter. This seemed attractive but when he rang the retailer they had very little information to assist him in making his decision. He was especially concerned that they could not tell him specific information regarding tariffs that would apply if he took up the offer. He then received a second letter advising the installation of the digital meter would proceed unless he opted out. He tried to ring his retailer but experienced long delays and could not get through. He rang EWON seeking assistance in contacting his retailer.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Difficulty in opting out</p>	<p><i>Where a retailer chooses to engage in an opt-out process it is also essential that a customer's decision to reject the offer is acknowledged.</i></p> <p>The customer had received a letter indicating that a digital meter would be installed at her premises. She tried ringing her retailer but could not get through so she wrote, advising that she did not want the installation and requested confirmation. She also requested information about how such metering would impact on her bills if it was installed. She approached EWON because she had not received a reply.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Difficulty in opting out</p>	<p><i>The failure of the call centre to deal with the customer and to wrongly refer her to a distributor is a serious error.</i></p> <p>The customer had rung her retailer to decline the offer of a digital meter. She was transferred to several different sections and finally referred to her distributor. The distributor informed her it was a retailer issue, so the customer contacted EWON.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Difficulty in opting out</p>	<p><i>The process established for a customer to opt out should, at its conclusion, leave a customer confident that their decision has been confirmed.</i></p> <p>The customer had contacted her retailer to decline the offer of changing her meter. In her view the retailer did not clearly confirm her decision. They also failed to answer her other questions. The customer said that the retailer had told her failure to change meters would incur additional meter reading costs. The customer called EWON to seek assistance in having the retailer confirm that they had received her opt-out request. She also sought information about whether her decision to retain the current metering would incur additional meter reading costs.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>

Case Studies: Meter exchange without customer knowledge

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Lack of notification / identification</p>	<p><i>This meter replacement may have gone ahead if the technicians had retailer identification and an information pack for customers.</i></p> <p>Technicians arrived at the customer's property to change his meter. He said they were in an unmarked van and had no retailer identification. They could not explain why he had not been notified about the meter replacement, and could not provide any information about the consequences of the change in meter. He refused permission for the meter change and contacted EWON.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Digital meter not replaced with analogue meter</p>	<p><i>Where a customer has requested a reversal of a digital meter installation, relevant information about this process should be provided. This is particularly important if the retailer is unable to install an analogue meter. Customers should not be told that their old meter can be restored if this is not possible.</i></p> <p>The customer received a letter advising that a digital meter was to be installed. The customer's husband rang the retailer seeking information on how to cancel the installation but was unable to cancel as he was not the authorised account holder. The meter was then replaced five days later. The customer rang the retailer, asking them to reverse the installation. The retailer agreed to this request but, when this was done, the customer found the replacement meter was a different digital meter, not her old analogue meter. The customer contacted EWON to seek assistance in getting an analogue meter.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the</p>

	customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.
Lack of retailer response	<p><i>It is important to the integrity of an opt-out process that where a meter exchange has occurred without the customer's knowledge that the retailer responds quickly to the customer's concerns.</i></p> <p>The customer was away on holiday and when she arrived home she found a letter about a proposed meter change which said she had to contact the retailer before a date that had passed in order to opt out. She then found that the meter had already been changed. She had since been in contact with her retailer about having the new meter removed but had not received any answer to her request.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>

Case Studies: Installation problems

Case	Customer information / outcome
Solar system turned off	<p><i>Where a customer identifies an issue with a digital meter installation, a retailer should follow up quickly and rectify any problems.</i></p> <p>The customer had a new digital meter installed. She said that she had not requested this and did not know that it had happened. She then noticed that her solar system had not been operating since the installation of the new meter. She contacted her retailer a number of times asking them to take responsibility for this situation. She said that the retailer finally agreed to send someone out to check the installation; however a week had passed and nobody had contacted her.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
Damage claim	<p><i>Retailers should have an appropriate claims process in place for potential damage caused during the meter installation process. Customers' claims should not be rejected automatically.</i></p> <p>The customer's meter was changed. When the power was restored, after the installation, the customer's alarm system was damaged. He had contacted his retailer but they had denied responsibility.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
Solar system turned off	<p><i>Where a customer identifies an issue with a digital meter installation, a retailer should follow up quickly and rectify any problems. It should not take an EWON case to get a fair outcome.</i></p> <p>The customer had a new meter installed, however during the installation the solar system was turned off and not turned back on. She contacted the retailer seeking compensation for the lost solar generation. The</p>

	<p>retailer initially sent the customer to the distributor about this issue and had then not responded to the customer's requests. The customer was dissatisfied with the retailer's response and came to EWON.</p> <p>This matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level (#269448). The customer then returned to EWON unhappy with the \$100 compensation offer the retailer had made and requested that EWON investigate the matter. The customer rang the next day to tell EWON that the retailer had re-contacted her and increased their offer to \$400, that she had accepted this and that the matter was resolved.</p>
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Case Studies: Where customers request a new meter

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Customer misunderstanding</p>	<p><i>The customer had not been informed there would be a delay between his account being transferred to a new retailer and the installation of a new meter.</i></p> <p>The customer had transferred to his preferred retailer because part of the offer was a new digital meter. He rang EWON because he thought the transfer had not occurred. EWON checked and confirmed that the transfer had occurred. The customer thought it had not been actioned because his meter was not changed. EWON then transferred the customer's call through to his retailer so he could find out when his meter would be changed. The customer understood he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Customer misled</p>	<p><i>The customer felt he had been misled into signing a contract with a new retailer on the basis he would get a new digital meter that did not eventuate.</i></p> <p>The customer entered into a contract with a new retailer on the basis that he would be supplied with a new digital meter free of charge. He was advised that, once the transfer was complete, the meter would be changed within 20 days. After 20 days, he contacted the retailer who confirmed the installation and said that he would be contacted with an installation date. He was not contacted and then rang his retailer again; this time the retailer said that digital meters were not being installed in NSW. This was confirmed when his call was escalated. The customer approached EWON as he felt he had been misled and that he would not have transferred to the retailer without the offer of a free meter installation.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
<p>Lack of retailer response</p>	<p><i>Good customer service requires a retailer to keep the customer informed if there are delays in installation.</i></p> <p>The customer accepted the offer of a new digital meter from her retailer. She then contacted her retailer a number of times over four months</p>

	<p>attempting to set a date for the installation. She also attempted to take up a special solar offer by the same retailer and was advised that she would be contacted. She attempted contact once more, and was informed that someone would contact her. She called EWON seeking assistance in arranging for her meter installation and to establish the solar offer.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing she could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>
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Case Study: Wrong information about reconnection involving a smart meter

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Wrong information</p>	<p><i>The provision of incorrect information could have resulted in the customer being left without power overnight. The action of the distributor in organising a special reconnection ensured this did not occur. As more digital meters with remote connection functionality are installed, retailers will require a more diligent approach to ensure similar errors do not occur.</i></p> <p>The customer was disconnected for non-payment and contacted EWON seeking reconnection and a new payment plan which EWON was able to facilitate. The retailer advised EWON and the customer that the customer's electricity supply would be reconnected remotely because she had a smart meter and that reconnection would occur that day.</p> <p>However, when the customer followed up hours later (toward 5pm), because she was still disconnected, the retailer then advised that a field officer needed to attend and replace the fuse. EWON rang the distributor and it confirmed they were unable to attend and reconnect that day.</p> <p>The retailer acknowledged they had provided incorrect information about the reconnection process to both EWON and the customer.</p> <p>The retailer offered to pay for overnight accommodation. The distributor then rang EWON and said that they had organised an after-hours reconnection, which was performed. The retailer waived the \$193.60 reconnection fee and offered to upgrade the customer's contract so she would receive a greater discount. EWON also advised the customer of her payment obligations, the consequences of missing payments and provided advice about accessing EAPA vouchers.</p>

Fees for paper bills and over the counter payments

The introduction of fees for paper bills and over the counter payments by the three major retailers has caused concern for some vulnerable customers. Some retailers provided EWON with information in advance of these changes, while others did not. In one instance the only information EWON had about exemptions from the fees came from the retailer's letter that a customer forwarded to EWON. Until we received that letter, EWON was unable to inform customers about the exemptions attached to the introduction of the fees for that retailer.

All three major retailers are providing an exemption from the fees to holders of a concession card and to customers participating in a hardship program. One retailer has also included life support customers in the exemption. One retailer has also provided an exemption for all customers on a standing offer, while another has done this only for customers on a gas standing offer. Only one retailer has indicated that customers without access to a computer can contact them to make special arrangements.

EWON is of the view that the exemptions should be standardised between retailers so that customers can be offered clear and simple advice about whether or not they are exempt from these fees. Customers eligible for exemption are vulnerable customers and will often be in contact with community agencies for support. Consistent exemptions would assist those agencies provide clear and succinct information to all eligible customers to help ensure they are aware these fees do not apply to them.

EWON also suggests that special consideration be given to customers without access to e-mail, even where they do not hold a concession card. There are many areas of NSW which are internet and mobile phone black spots. It is clearly unreasonable to penalise customers living in those spots, and it is incumbent on retailers to identify such customers and ensure they continue to receive a free paper bill.

Information about the exemptions should be readily available but, when checked by EWON, details of the exemptions were only readily available on the website of one of the three major retailers. When EWON receives complaints about the introduction of fees for paper bills and over the counter payments, we advise customers the decision to introduce fees is a commercial decision and, therefore, outside our jurisdiction. None of the case studies below were investigated and all but one were treated as complaint enquiries. Where we had information about exemptions, we provided that information to the customer. All customers were encouraged to talk directly with their retailer. The case studies are provided in this report to reflect the concerns customers are raising with EWON with the expectation that retailers will positively address these issues in accordance with EWON's suggestions.

Case studies: Customers who were on pensions and concerned about the impact of the new fees

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>The retailer providing incorrect information</p>	<p><i>This customer should have been informed by his retailer that he was exempt from the fees. The failure to do so caused unnecessary concern.</i></p> <p>A customer rang EWON concerned about the fee that would apply for a paper bill as he was a pensioner without access to a computer. He had rung his retailer and was told that the fee would apply. EWON encouraged him to recontact his retailer and ask about exemptions. EWON also told the customer that we had noted his concerns and these would be included in our reporting to retailers and regulators. The customer thanked EWON for listening to, and noting, his concerns.</p>

Case studies: Where customers do not have access to the internet

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>No access to internet</p>	<p><i>Customers without email or access to the internet should not be charged for a paper bill, regardless of whether they fall into an exemption class.</i></p> <p>A customer sent a letter to EWON about a problem with an estimated account. She also complained about the fee for a paper bill and asked how this was fair for people like herself that did not have internet. The matter related to the estimated bill was referred to a higher level with her retailer. EWON identified that she was on a standard contract and, therefore, the paper bill fee would not apply.</p>
<p>No access to internet</p>	<p>The customer contacted EWON concerned about the fee for a paper bill. She said that she did not have access to a computer and that she felt that the fee was extremely unfair and was poor customer service. EWON suggested that the customer contact her retailer to establish if they had a process in place for customers without a computer. If she was dissatisfied with the result, she could come back to EWON and we could facilitate her contact with the retailer at a more senior level to discuss her concerns.</p>
<p>No access to internet</p>	<p>The customer rang EWON to express her concern about the introduction of fees for paper bills and over the counter payments. She said she considered this to be discrimination against those who do not have a computer. EWON encouraged her to raise her concerns directly with her retailer.</p>

Case studies: Where customers thought fees were unfair and unreasonable

Case	Customer information / outcome
<p>Objections on principle</p>	<p><i>The introduction of fees for paper bills comes with the risk of a negative reaction from customers if it is not done in a transparent, fair way.</i></p> <p>EWON received a letter from a local MP passing on a customer’s concern about the introduction of fees for paper bills and over the counter payments for a range of services. The customer was primarily concerned about the impact on the poor and elderly. She was also concerned about essential services “winding up the charges”. EWON contacted the customer and provided information about existing exemptions. Similar information was provided to the MP’s office.</p>
<p>Objections on principle</p>	<p>A customer rang EWON concerned about the introduction of fees for paper bills and over the counter payments. She saw this as “a form of bullying” customers to move to direct debit. She said that while she had a direct debt arrangement, she was concerned about customers who could not afford to do this and “who live from dollar to dollar”. EWON suggested that she should raise her concerns with her retailer. EWON also provided information on alternative payment arrangements and possible exemptions.</p>

Case studies: Where customers have concerns about cyber safety

Case	Customer information / outcome
Concern over spam	<p><i>Some customers have concerns about security, scamming or unwanted marketing. These concerns should be addressed by retailers.</i></p> <p>A customer emailed EWON to raise her concerns about the fee for a paper bill. She was concerned that registering for an email bill would expose her email account to spam marketing material. She was also concerned about the impact on older customers. EWON rang the customer and explained about the exemptions available for vulnerable customers. The customer expressed her appreciation to EWON for calling and discussing the issue with her.</p>
Concern over scams	<p>A customer made an online complaint to EWON. He had moved to email billing to avoid the paper bill fee but said he was receiving scam invoices from companies he had no accounts with. This concerned him so much that he had returned to receiving paper bills. EWON rang the customer and provided him with information regarding exemptions; where to find information on retailers who currently did not charge for paper bills. The customer indicated that he already had this information. He wished to ensure EWON was aware of the paper invoice fee issue.</p>
Concern over security	<p>A customer rang EWON as he was extremely unhappy with the new fees. He did not think that online payment was safe or secure. He said that he had rung his retailer but that he did not get a satisfactory response to his concerns. He felt that these fees were discriminatory.</p> <p>The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing he could re-contact EWON if necessary.</p>

Case study: customer concern about direct debit and estimated bills

Case	Customer information / outcome
Concern over estimations	<p><i>Customers can have legitimate concerns about direct debiting arrangements and should have those concerns addressed, regardless of whether they fall into an exemption class.</i></p> <p>A customer rang EWON to complain about the introduction of the new fees. He felt that the only way to avoid them was to establish a direct debit arrangement. He did not want to do this as he often received estimated bills. This concerned him about the retailer taking too much money out of his account. He had not raised his concerns with his retailer. EWON established that he held a concession card and was eligible for exemption from the fees. EWON suggested that the customer call his retailer to discuss the situation.</p>

Water Complaints

Water complaints received this quarter (213) increased 13.3% compared to the corresponding period (188) in 2015.

Complaints about disputed billing, poor customer service and payment difficulties associated with current bills and/or arrears are the most common water complaint issues.

Water complaints about customer service increased this quarter, while complaints about billing and payment difficulties remained stable. This increase in general water complaints reflects a slight increase in complaints from customers about local government water authorities that are not members of EWON and, therefore, outside our jurisdiction. These customers are referred to the NSW Ombudsman for assistance.

Table 3 – Water Top 5 issues Jul – Sep 2016 compared with previous quarter 2015

Primary Issues	Secondary Issue	Tertiary Issue	Jul 16 – Sep 16	Jul 15 – Sep 15	% Change
Billing	High	Disputed	55	57	-3.5%
Customer service	Poor service		36	20	80.0%
General	General energy/water		21	14	50%
Customer service	Failure to respond		20	9	122.2%
Credit	Payment difficulties	Current/ arrears	17	17	0.0%

The majority of water complaints opened during this quarter were either complaint enquiries or referred back to the provider at a higher level. The proportion of investigated complaints was 9.8% of total water complaints.

Table 4 – Investigation of water complaints

Complaint type	Number of complaints	% Total water complaints
General Enquiry	8	3.8%
Complaint enquiry	114	53.6%
Refer to Higher Level	70	32.8%
Level 1	19	8.9%
Level 2	2	0.9%
Level 3	0	0%
Determination	0	0%
Total	213	100%

The issues that arose concerning water this quarter are similar to the issues covered in the case studies from previous quarterly reports. Therefore, no case studies are provided for water in this report.

Stakeholder Engagement

This section gives a summary of significant Stakeholder activities by EWON during this quarter.

Members	
<i>Meetings</i>	
AGL	<i>General Manager Investigation, Investigations</i>
EnergyAustralia	<i>Investigations</i>
Origin Energy	<i>General Manager Investigations, Investigations Manager</i>
Jemena	<i>Investigations, Stakeholder Relations</i>
Ausgrid Customer Council	<i>Ombudsman and General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
Community	
<i>Forums</i>	
Real Estate Agents and Strata, Motor Dealers, Residential Tenancy, Building forums with NSW Fair Trading	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Illawarra Housing Forum with NSW Fair Trading	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Wollongong Builders Forum with NSW Fair Trading	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
<i>Presentations</i>	
Local Community Services Association	<i>Ombudsman</i>
Goulburn RSL Sub-branch	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Probus – Matraville, Guildford, Springwood, Castle Hill	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Liverpool Migrant Centre	<i>Investigations Officer</i>
Holroyd Family Support Group	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Seniors Stall – Toongabbie	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>

Hume Community Housing	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Mens and Ladies Shed	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
NEAMI National – Community Mental Health Service	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Community First Steps – Fairfield	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Non Interest Loans Scheme Conference with Public Interest Advocacy Group – Peakhurst	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
ISTSOWEL Italian Group – Dapto	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Turning Point Camden	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Warilla Baptist Care	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Berkley Community Centre	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Tomaree Neighbourhood Centre	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Aboriginal Housing office and Fourth&Centre	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
<i>EWON stalls</i>	
Bring Your Bills Day – Sydney West Multicultural Centre	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Mt Druitt	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Peninsula Community Centre	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Campbelltown	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Willoughby	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Illawarra	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Blacktown	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>

Bring Your Bills Day – Yerin Aboriginal Health	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Bring Your Bills Day – Koolyangarra Outreach Service	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Sydney Homeless Connect Day – Expo	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Coast Connect – Peninsula Links Day	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Central Coast Connect Day	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Hunter Homeless Connect Day	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Westmead HUB – Westmead Primary School	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Australian Community Workers Association Conference	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Motor Dealers and Incorporated Associations, Self-Managing Landlords with NSW Fair Trading – Kempsey	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Trader Walk – Kempsey	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Trader Walk – Port Macquarie	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
NAIDOC – Campbelltown City Council, Central Coast Darkinjung, Prince of Wales Hospital, Walla Mulla, Family and Sports Day Redfern	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Aboriginal Women’s DV Action Group	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Yass and Goulburn Information and Services Expo	<i>Investigations Officer</i>
Ngulla Walla Family Services Expo	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Wingecaribee Community Services Expo	<i>Investigations Officers</i>
Marrickville Community A Fair Day	<i>Investigations Officers</i>

Seniors Expo Stall – Swansea, Lake Munmorah	<i>Community Engagement Officer, Investigations Officers</i>
Non Interest Loan Scheme Conference – Peakhurst	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Meetings	
Public Interest Advocacy Group	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, Community Engagement Officer</i>
St Vincent De Paul	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Joint Outreach Initiatives Network – Alternative Dispute Resolution Group	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
Good Service Mob	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Broken Hill Chamber of Commerce	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Broken Hill Aboriginal Land Council	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Lifeline	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Central Darling Shire Council	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Wilcannia River Radio	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Menindee Local Aboriginal Land Council	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Aboriginal Disability Network	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, Community Engagement Officer</i>
ANZOA Indigenous Interest Group	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Inner Sydney and Koori Riverstone Aboriginal Interagency Network	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Redfern Community Centre Luncheon Group	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
Lifestart – NDIS – Hornsby	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>

Government and Other Stakeholders

Meetings

AEMC	<i>Ombudsman, General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
Living Utilities	<i>Ombudsman, General Manager Investigations, Manager Policy</i>
NSW Energy Round Table	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
ANZEWON	<i>Ombudsman</i>
Department of Aboriginal Affairs	<i>Ombudsman, Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
NSW Anti-Discrimination Board ATSI Advisory	<i>Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer</i>
NSW Fair Trading	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality, Community Engagement Officer</i>
Australian Energy Regulator	<i>Community Engagement Officer</i>
SOCAP	<i>General Manager Investigations, Investigations Managers</i>
NCOSS	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
EWOV	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
Tenant's Union 40 th Anniversary	<i>Ombudsman, General Manager Investigations, General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
Department of Industry – Resources & Energy	<i>General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>
NSW Meals on Wheels	<i>Ombudsman and General Manager Policy, Engagement and Quality</i>