

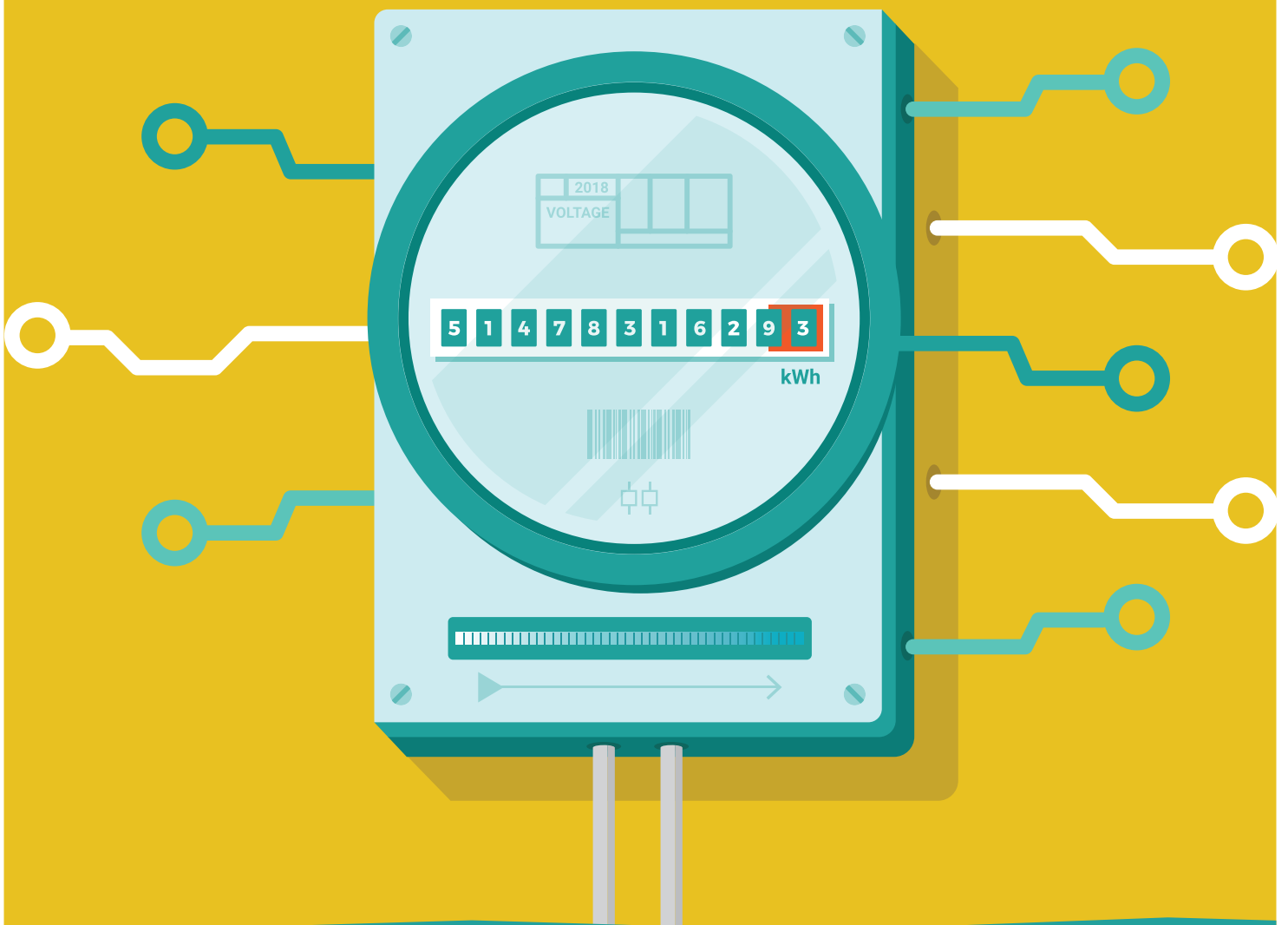


Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW

# EWON Insights

## Complaints Analysis

1 October 2018 - 31 December 2018



Energy & Water  
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# Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of EWON's new look Quarterly Activity Report, EWON Insights. Our new name reflects that our Quarterly Reports not only provide information about complaint issues, they also give members insights into why these issues occur. This provides them with the opportunity to reduce or eliminate them altogether.



**6,861**  
COMPLAINTS RECEIVED  
down from 7,225 last quarter

↓ **5%**

decrease in complaints compared with last quarter

↓ **<1%**

decrease in complaints compared with the same period in 2017/2018

## Complaint environment

Overall complaints to EWON fell by less than 1% during the quarter when compared to the same period in 2017/2018. They also decreased by just under 5% from the July to September 2018/2019 quarter, which is not unusual given the holiday period in December.

Despite these overall decreases, electricity complaints rose by almost 6% when compared to the same quarter the previous financial year and water complaints were also up on the second quarter of 2017/2018 (4.6%). Gas complaints decreased by a significant 25% when comparing the same periods – a seasonal occurrence.

The top three reasons customers came to EWON remained the same over the corresponding periods in 2017 and 2018 – high bills, poor customer service and failure of providers to respond to customers.

Complaints about exempt entities increased between the second quarters in 2017 and 2018, up from 28 to 37. As these entities become EWON members across 2018/2019 and their customers gain greater awareness of EWON, complaints may further increase.

## Themes of this report

Transfers made in error or without the consent of the customer are our main focus. We also look at digital meter complaints about issues other than delays, which were covered in our January to March 2018 report.

Case studies in this report highlight that all too often when a customer contacts their retailer with a transfer related complaint, they are not given the attention they deserve at the outset. Customers can face unreasonable barriers to having the issue addressed, as well as delays which may lead to them being left without electricity or gas for an extended period. This is unacceptable, particularly as the customer is not at fault. Many of these complaints should have been dealt with quickly and effectively at the front line.

'Power of Choice' digital meter reforms were introduced just over a year ago, on 1 December 2017. Customers are still receiving incorrect or misleading information, being put on the wrong tariffs, and experiencing poor installation practices. Most concerning is that some retailers continue to 'pass the buck' to meter data providers and other contractors, rather than handling their complaints.

It is also difficult to locate information on some retailer's websites about fees and charges associated with digital meters. This information must be easy to access and needs to be fully explained and disclosed to customers. Many customers do not understand that metering costs are currently built into bills and see costs related to new metering installations as an additional charge.

A smaller number of complaints about other issues related to meter installations were also received. These include issues affecting transfers, tariffs and other matters. For these complaints, clearer communication and transparent information from retailers would have resolved customers issues without requiring them to approach EWON.

EWON has asked energy and water companies to work on addressing these issues in the coming months.

**Janine Young | Ombudsman**  
Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW





# Complaint activity

October - December 2018



⬇️ 4%

decrease in electricity complaints compared with last quarter



⬇️ 11%

decrease in gas complaints compared with last quarter



⬇️ 8.9%

decrease in water complaints compared with last quarter

## ELECTRICITY

The 5,230 electricity retail complaints represent an increase of 5.3% when compared with Q2 2017/2018, when there were 4,965 complaints. This is a 4.0% decrease from last quarter's count of 5,449 complaints. The 248 network cases opened represents a slight increase when compared with 232 in the same quarter last year and 232 in the previous quarter. Overall electricity complaints increased by 5.9%, 5,594 this quarter compared to 5,283 in the corresponding 2017 quarter. There was a 3.9% decrease compared to the previous quarter.

## GAS

The number of gas retail complaints received this quarter (986) decreased by 24.0% in comparison to the corresponding period in 2017 (1,299). They also decreased when compared with July - September 2018 (1,075). The numbers of gas network complaints (44) fell by 45.7% in comparison to the equivalent period last year (81) and decreased (44.3%) compared to last quarter (79). Overall, gas complaints (1,040) decreased by 25.0%, compared to 1,386 in July - September 2017 and increased by 11.0% when compared to 1,168 complaints last quarter.

## WATER

The number of water complaints received this quarter (204) increased by 4.6% compared to the corresponding period in 2017 (195) and decreased by 8.9% compared to last quarter (224). High bills remained the largest driver of water complaints.

## EXEMPT ENTITIES

EWON received 37 complaints from customers of exempt entities this quarter compared to 28 in the same quarter in 2017 and 52 last quarter. Most of these were electricity related (34).



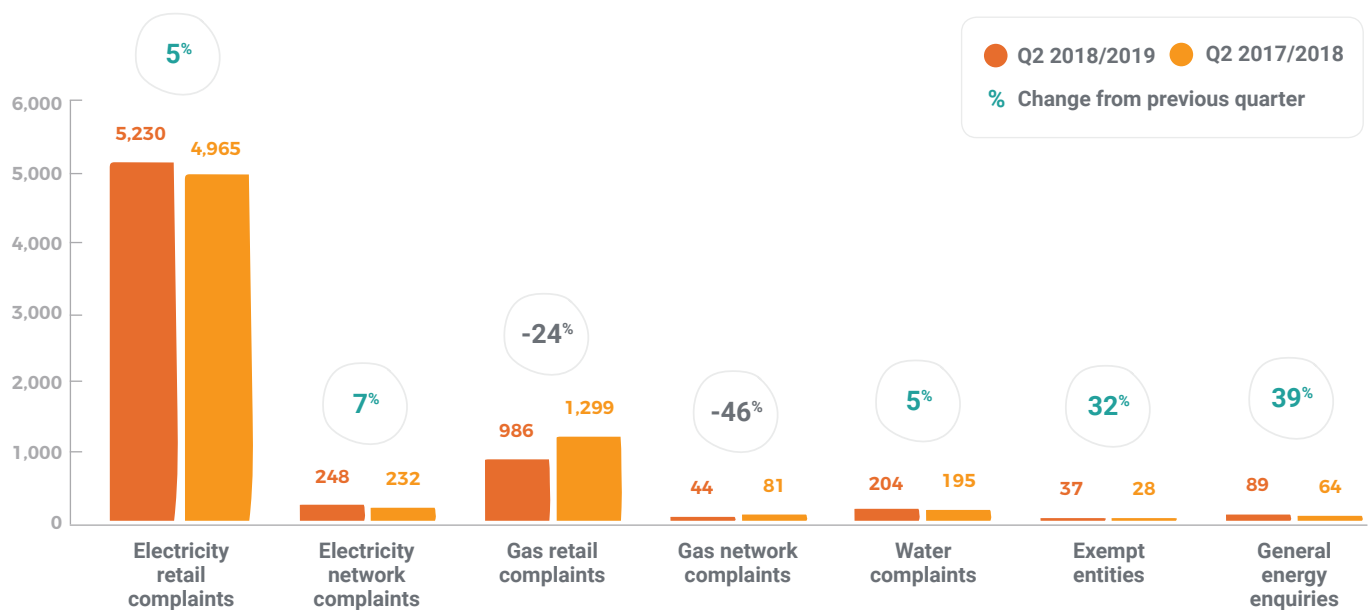
# Complaint activity

## Complaints received

### Complaint activity overview

Complaints received by EWON this quarter decreased slightly in comparison to the same period in 2017 (6,861 compared to 6,888). When compared with last quarter, there was a decrease in complaints of 4.9% (6,861 compared to 7,225), driven by 226 fewer complaints about electricity and 128 fewer complaints about gas. There were 20 fewer complaints about water compared to the previous quarter.

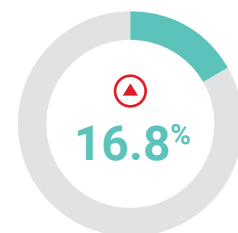
FIGURE #1: Complaint activity



### Customer complaint issues

Overall the number of issues customers complained to EWON about decreased, reflecting the decline in the number of complaints opened. High bill complaints numbered 2,343, up from 2,274 last quarter, and continue to be the largest issue, representing 16.8% of all issues raised this quarter. Complaints about customer service continued to remain high with four different aspects of customer service recorded in the top ten issues customers complained about. Complaints about poor customer service represented 12.7% of all issues complained about. This proportion has increased every quarter for the last five quarters.

Delays in the installation of digital meters was again in the top ten issues raised by customers coming to EWON. The number of complaints about this issue increased by 70 to 399 complaints up from 329 in the previous quarter. Payment difficulties (404) dropped this quarter by 22% compared with the previous quarter and by 34% on the same quarter the previous year. Complaints about credit rating remained in the top ten issues this quarter despite numbers dropping to 266, a decline of 62 complaints but still 35 more than EWON received in the same quarter the previous year.



#### HIGH BILLS

This issue accounted for 2,343 complaints







# Complaint activity

## Complaints received

**FIGURE #2: Complaints received October - December 2018, including previous quarters**

Figure 2 provides more detailed information about the number of complaints received from October to December 2018, in comparison to the previous three quarters and the corresponding period in 2017.

Provider type	Oct-Dec 2018	Jul-Sep 2018	Apr-Jun 2018	Jan-Mar 2018	Oct-Dec 2017
 Retailer	5,230	5,449	5,050	4,247	4,965
Network	248	232	253	203	232
Exempt retailer	34	47	21	20	25
Unknown	82	92	107	74	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,594</b>	<b>5,820</b>	<b>5,431</b>	<b>4,544</b>	<b>5,283</b>
 Retailer	986	1,075	1,047	890	1,299
Network	44	79	68	43	81
Exempt retailer	3	5	1	2	3
Unknown	7	9	11	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,040</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>1,127</b>	<b>937</b>	<b>1,386</b>
 Retailer	131	146	165	98	137
Network	54	6	53	61	47
Exempt retailer	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	19	14	18	7	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>195</b>
 Non-energy/Non-water	23	13	22	6	24
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>6,861</b>	<b>7,225</b>	<b>6,816</b>	<b>5,653</b>	<b>6,888</b>

● Electricity
 ● Gas
 ● Water
 ● Non energy / water



# Top 10 issues

October - December 2018

FIGURE #3: Top 10 issues for this quarter and previous quarters

Primary & secondary issue	Oct-Dec 2018	Jul-Sep 2018	Apr-Jun 2018	Jan-Mar 2018	Oct-Dec 2017
<b>1</b> High, disputed	2,343	2,274	1,958	1,782	2,464
<b>2</b> Poor service	1,770	1,857	1,595	1,367	1,577
<b>3</b> Failure to respond	975	1,018	1,122	1,097	1,194
<b>4</b> Opening/closing account	589	680	662	560	558
<b>5</b> Estimation, meter access/not read	558	561	554	564	609
<b>6</b> Incorrect advice/information	480	518	480	624	569
<b>7</b> Payment difficulties, current/arrears	404	599	580	449	609
<b>8</b> Delay	399	329	364	190	97
<b>9</b> Failure to consult/inform	392	520	431	479	398
<b>10</b> Collection, credit rating	266	328	300	276	221
<b>Total number of issues per quarter</b>	<b>13,932</b>	<b>15,551</b>	<b>14,630</b>	<b>12,847</b>	<b>14,768</b>

● Billing    
 ● Customer service    
 ● Credit    
 ● Digital meter exchange



# Energy issues

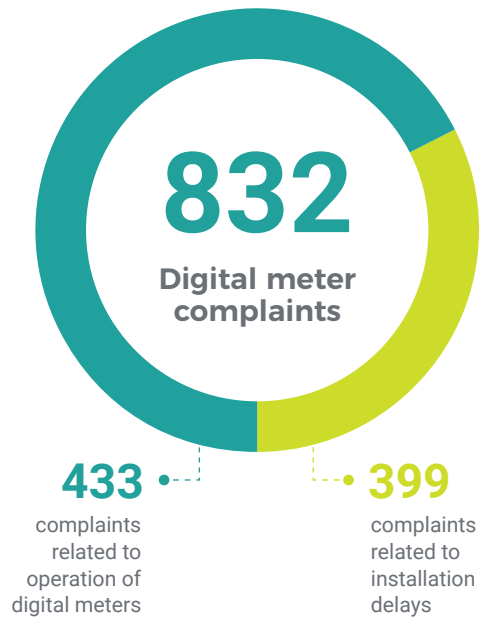
## Digital meter issues

This quarter customers raised 832 issues related to the installation and operation of digital meters. Of those, 399 matters were about installation delays. However, with new metering installation timeframes in effect since 1 February 2019, complaints about delays are expected to decrease significantly.

Customers also approached EWON with a range of other issues related to digital meters, including to clarify or confirm information provided by retailers about digital meters.

### Solar installations being connected to old meter

In an environment where meter installation delays are common, EWON has been contacted by customers who have had solar systems installed and turned on, prior to the digital meter being installed. This non-compliant installation has adverse impacts on the customer.



### EQ CASE STUDY

#### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Small business new to embedded network and unable to negotiate better rates or payment arrangement

A customer had solar installed in early August 2018 and the installer indicated that the work was completed and turned the system on. The installer also told the customer an application for a new digital meter had been made. A fortnight later the customer was notified by the retailer that the installation of a new meter had been scheduled. Sixteen days before the new meter was installed, the old meter was read and the customer was informed that the solar should not be on as it made the meter run backwards, so he turned the solar off. The customer then received an estimated bill for

\$550 for the period, which included one month where the solar had been turned on. The customer thought this was high, as his previous bill was for \$343. The customer recognised that the need for an estimate was his responsibility, but came to EWON seeking assistance to have the estimated bill adjusted to reflect his historic usage. The meter was installed 43 days after application date.

The customer agreed to have the complaint referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)





# Energy issues

## Digital meter issues

### Replacement meter program

Many complaints about digital meters come from customers who need a new meter because of a supply upgrade or because of a faulty meter. Recently EWON starting receiving complaints from customers whose meter upgrades resulted from retailers implementing a meter replacement program based on that established by distributors for 2018. In these

cases, customers concerns include the lack of information, their right to opt out, and the costs associated with the replacement. EWON has also received complaints from customers who have requested a new meter only to have their request refused.



### CASE STUDY

#### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Extra requirements placed on a customer who requested a type 4A meter when his meter was included in a replacement program

A customer received a notice from his retailer informing him that his meter was due to be upgraded. He checked the retailer's website and established that he was able to opt out of the remote reading functionality. He called the retailer and it agreed to install a type 4A meter without communication capabilities. He was then advised that for the new meter to be installed without the communication feature, he would need to obtain a certificate of safety. He was also advised if he chose to

have a meter with remote reading capabilities, he would not need to provide this certificate. He did not consider this to be reasonable so he came to EWON.

The customer agreed to have his complaint referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated. The retailer later advised EWON that the customer had the meter he had requested without the requirement of a certificate of safety.



### CASE STUDY

#### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Request for a digital meter to address access issues refused

A customer requested his retailer install a digital meter as he had a dog in the yard and the meter reader could not access the meter. The retailer did not respond so he called again. The retailer advised him that if the meter was not faulty and he did not have a solar system installed, it would not replace the meter. The customer

came to EWON seeking assistance to get a new meter.

With the customer's agreement, the complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Energy issues

## Digital meter issues

### Concerns raised about fees associated with digital meters

During the initial rollout of digital meters, customers did not incur any cost for the meter or the installation and, in many instances, there were no fees associated with meter reading. Now some retailers have introduced fees especially for type 4A meters, and sometimes ask customers to pay for the

meter itself. EWON has found it can be difficult to locate information about fees and charges associated with digital meters and, to add to the confusion, some customers are not aware that metering costs are built into bills and see new metering installation fees as additional charges.



#### CASE STUDY

##### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Confusion about off peak charges and fees associated with a 4A meter

A customer had requested an off peak meter in early July 2018, and this had not been installed by late September. Her retailer could not provide a timeframe for the meter upgrade, so the customer approached EWON. The matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level for resolution. The customer returned to EWON as she was unhappy with her retailer's response. She did not understand why her current meter could not be configured for off peak. She also wanted to know why when she asked about having the communication facility on the meter disabled, she was told there would be a \$292 annual fee. She said that she did not pay to

have her meter read now and objected to the fee.

An EWON investigation established that because the customer had requested an upgrade, a meter reconfiguration could not be done because her current meter was a type 5 meter owned by the distributor, and all upgrades were required to be either a retailer-provided type 4 or 4A meter. EWON explained to the customer that her retailer has a right to charge its fee of 83c a day for reading a type 4A meter manually. We also provided the customer with detailed information regarding various health studies relating to digital meters.



#### CASE STUDY

##### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Request for a digital meter to address access issues refused

A customer advised EWON that she had been informed by her retailer that a new digital meter needed to be installed at her property, as her current meter was obsolete. The customer confirmed this with the distributor. Her retailer also advised she would be required to pay a \$90 charge per year for the meter, which she felt was a very high charge for something

she could not opt out of. She was also concerned that she may have to pay a meter reading fee as her property was in an area with low connectivity, which could prevent the meter being read remotely.

She wanted her concerns noted by EWON and did not request any further investigation.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Energy issues

## Digital meter issues

### Billing complaints

The second highest digital meter complaint issue is related to estimated bills. Many of these were caused by solar being incorrectly connected to an analogue meter. Other complaints

are due to simple billing errors, while some have been caused by billing systems having difficulty with new plans or accepting data from meter data providers.

### CASE STUDY

#### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### System block on new plan

A customer contacted EWON to complain that his retailer had been unable to activate a new plan it offered in May 2018 when he'd had solar panels and a new meter installed. He contacted his retailer on several occasions and had been advised there was a service order on the account and the customer service team was unable to clear or cancel the order. The customer told EWON that after a heated discussion he had received a credit for solar buyback, which was part of the agreed plan, but the retailer could not provide

the additional discount under the new plan because it could not activate it. The customer service team said that it had forwarded several emails to the department responsible for the service order but there had been no response. The customer sought EWON's help in getting the correct plan activated and discounts backdated to the beginning of May 2018, as originally promised.

The customer agreed to have the complaint referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Energy issues

## Digital meter issues

### Faulty or incomplete new meter installations

EWON has received complaints from customers about faulty meters, as well as cases where the meter installation had not been completed properly.

### Other issues

EWON received a smaller number of complaints about other issues related to meter installations. These include issues affecting transfers, tariffs and other matters.



#### CASE STUDY

##### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Replacement meter fee

A customer advised that since his new meter had been installed, his bill no longer showed a solar feed-in tariff and was based on estimated reads. He contacted the retailer on many occasions to resolve the matter without success. The retailer's complaints team insisted he needed a new meter, but the new connections team did not consider the meter to be at fault and advised the customer to contact his solar

installer. At that point he approached EWON.

The customer agreed to have the complaint referred to his retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated. The retailer informed EWON that it had arranged for a meter replacement at no cost and provided \$320 compensation for lost solar production.



#### CASE STUDY

##### DIGITAL METER ISSUES

### Customer could not transfer until meter replaced but the retailer would not replace the meter with a transfer request in place

A customer said that he had been advised that his meter was faulty and needed to be replaced. His retailer made three different appointments for the replacement, none of which were kept. This complaint was referred to the retailer for resolution at a higher level. The customer returned to EWON dissatisfied with the retailer's response. He said he was advised that for the meter replacement to occur he had to cancel a transfer request that was in place and, on the same day he received another letter advising of yet another date

for the replacement meter to be installed - leaving him confused by the conflicting advice.

An EWON investigation established that because of a pending transfer, the metering coordinator was cancelling the replacement requests. EWON also established that the transfer could not occur until there was a final meter read, but that this could not occur until the meter was replaced. The customer agreed to cancel the request and the meter was replaced.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Energy issues

## Transfer

EWON supported the proposed rule change by the AEMC relating to the rectification of transfers made in error. Our two main concerns were about disconnections resulting from erroneous transfers and the mechanisms for rectifying such transfers.

The rule change should have resulted in a reduced number of customers needing to approach EWON seeking assistance to resolve problems caused by a transfer in error.

However, our review of data suggests that, in some instances, rather than returning the incorrectly transferred site, it is being retained by the retailer which initiated the erroneous transfer, as a new occupant supply account. This means customers are still coming to EWON for assistance.



### CASE STUDY

#### TRANSFER

#### Transfer in error leads to disconnection

A customer contacted her retailer after her gas supply was disconnected. The retailer advised it no longer held her account and that she should contact the distributor to find out which retailer did. The distributor referred her to the retailer that now held the account. The new retailer declined to reconnect her so she came to EWON.

An EWON investigation established that the customer's neighbour had opened a gas account with the new retailer and it had taken the customer's gas meter in error. The retailer agreed to have the gas reconnected,

however, this took approximately 24 hours and during this time the customer was without gas for cooking and heating. The retailer also agreed to retrospectively transfer the customer's gas account back to her preferred retailer.

During EWON's investigation the retailer that took the account in error could not explain why a reconnection order was not raised or why it did not arrange for the account to be transferred back to the customer's preferred retailer when it initially became aware of the error.



### CASE STUDY

#### TRANSFER

#### Transfer without consent - cooling off period

A customer was having difficulty cancelling a transfer request for his electricity account, so he came to EWON. The customer considered he had agreed to the transfer based on misleading information from the retailer and wanted to cancel it during the cooling off period. He had tried to cancel the transfer several times and had been advised by the retailer that it had been

cancelled. Despite this, he continued to receive emails telling him that the transfer was progressing.

The customer agreed to have the complaint referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)

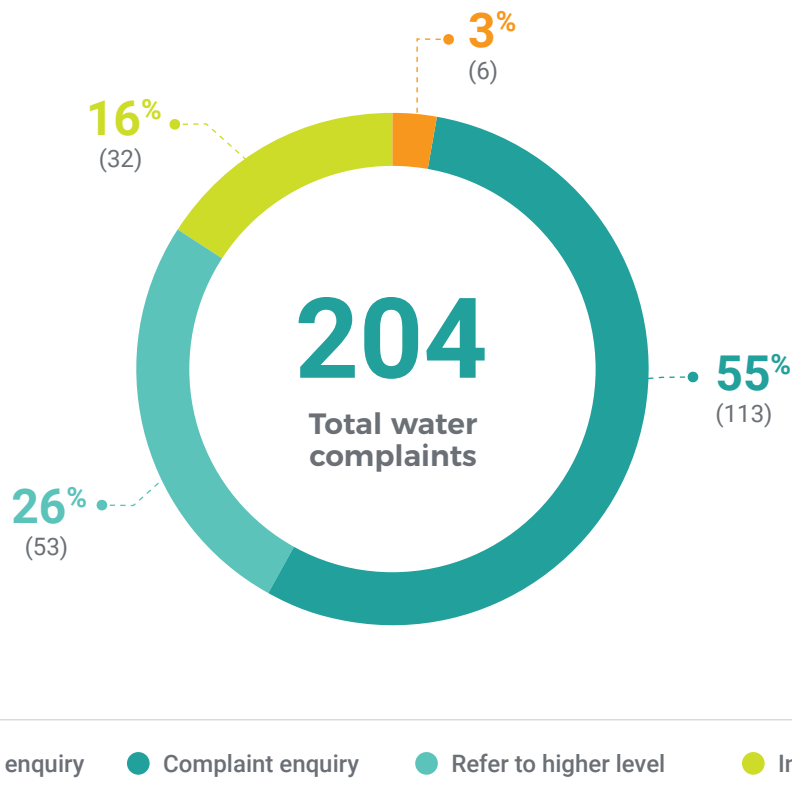


# Water

The number of water complaints received this quarter (204) increased by 4.6% compared to the corresponding period in 2017 (195) and decreased by 8.9% compared to last quarter (224).

High bills continue to be the most complained about issue for water customers contacting EWON. Otherwise, complaints to EWON about water providers relate to customer service issues and customers with property damage or requiring damage to be addressed, as seen in Figure 5 below.

**FIGURE #4: Water complaints**



**FIGURE #5: Top 5 water issues**

Primary & secondary issue	Oct-Dec 2018	Jul-Sep 2018	Apr-Jun 2018	Jan-Mar 2018	Oct-Dec 2017
<b>1</b> High, disputed	41	45	57	51	52
<b>2</b> Poor service	31	43	49	38	27
<b>3</b> Failure to respond	29	29	28	25	21
<b>4</b> General energy/water	29	26	38	14	28
<b>5</b> Property damage/restoration	18	16	15	19	14
<b>Total number of issues per quarter</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>142</b>

● Billing  
 ● Customer service  
 ● General  
 ● Land



# Water issues



## CASE STUDY

### BILLING

#### Accumulation of debt on a deceased estate

An advocate who was the executor of his late mother's estate, contacted the water provider about a bill he had received for her property for over \$17,000. The advocate was concerned that such a large debt had been allowed to accumulate on the account. He asked the provider to allow the debt to be paid by the estate on settlement, but this was declined. The advocate considered this unreasonable and came to EWON.

EWON contacted the provider and found that the account holder had made minimum payments when

she took over the property in the 1990s. EWON also learned that the account holder had accessed the provider's hardship policy when it was introduced in 2013 and, as she was an aged pensioner, the provider's policy did not allow for her water supply to be restricted for non-payment. The debt would not have been allowed to increase beyond the value of the property.

The provider agreed to allow the debt to be paid via the settlement process.



## CASE STUDY

### NETWORK ISSUES

#### Drinking water does not meet Australian Standards

A customer received a letter from his water provider advising that his drinking water source was not compliant with Australian Drinking Water Standards. The letter also advised that he was required to enter into a new non-standard Water Agreement and, if he didn't, his water supply may be disconnected.

An EWON investigation confirmed that the customer's water provider was not able to provide him with drinking water that met Australian Standards and under the terms of the water provider's operating licence, a new non-standard Water Agreement was required. EWON

advised the customer that EWON could not direct the water provider to upgrade his water supply to meet Australian Standards or supply non-potable water without a non-standard Water Agreement.

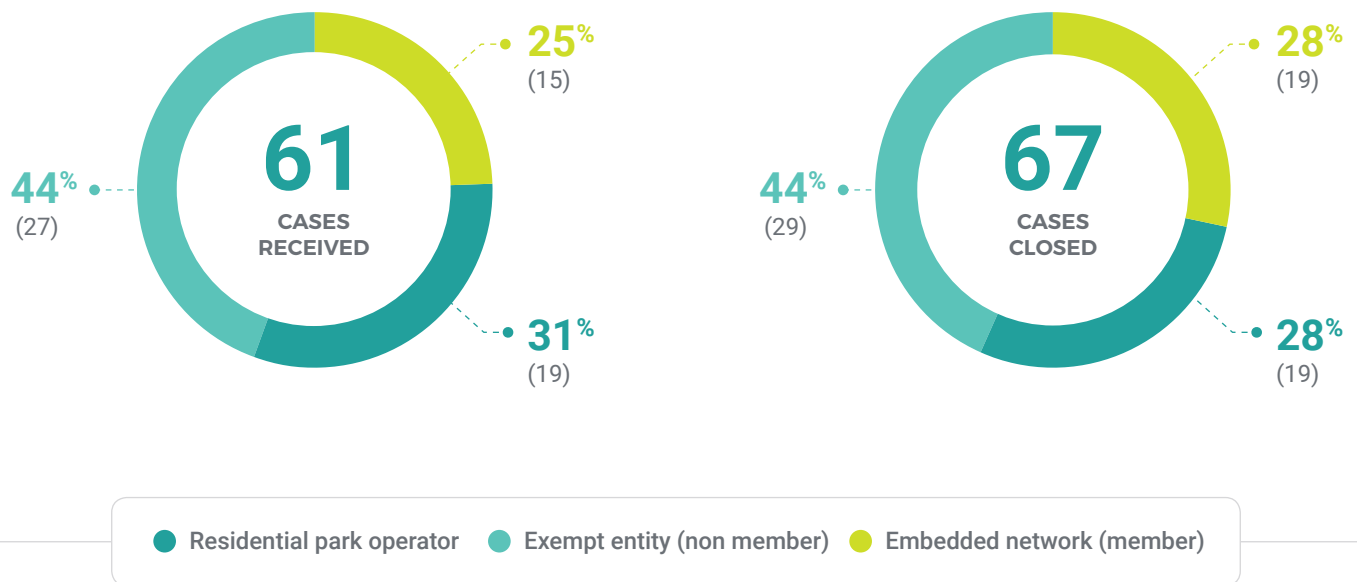
While this case was under review, the Managing Director of the water provider announced that it was funding, project managing and delivering a solution for the customer's community's needs which was beyond its Operating Licence requirements. Potential solutions being examined included rainwater tanks and onsite treatment.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Embedded networks

FIGURE #6: Cases opened and closed



## Top 5 issues for residential parks

1. Calculation of Service Availability Charges (SAC)
2. Access to solar PV systems
3. Retail pricing
4. Network standards
5. Other fees and charges.



## Top 5 issues for other embedded networks

1. High bill disputes
2. Complaints about accounts for common hot water systems
3. Disconnection for non-payment and disconnection of move-in customers
4. Delayed billing
5. Unplanned outages.





# Embedded networks

## Customer service - delayed/failure to respond

Some customers only approach EWON after multiple attempts to resolve a simple issue have been poorly handled. Poor customer service can be compounded when EWON gives the

provider the opportunity to resolve the issue through the 'refer to higher level' process, and either an agreed resolution is then not implemented, or the retailer doesn't contact the customer.



### CASE STUDY

#### DELAY, FAILURE TO RESPOND

### Failure to respond and maintain contact following referral

Following an unplanned electricity outage that lasted more than 15 hours, a customer lodged a claim for \$60 for spoiled food with their retailer. The customer came to EWON when she did not receive a response despite sending several emails. The complaint was initially

referred back to the retailer at a higher level, but, the customer returned to EWON when she was not able to resolve the issue with the retailer.

Following an EWON investigation the retailer agreed to pay the customer \$60 in compensation.

## Small business - customer service/ negotiating manageable payment arrangement

High bills are a key issue for many small business customers that complain to EWON. The AER strongly encourages retailers to reflect the principles of the Sustainable Payment Plans Framework in their engagement with small business customers experiencing payment difficulties. It is critical that

customers are given access to all the relevant information about their account billing, including their options to seek another retailer if desired or information on what other plans are available.



### CASE STUDY

#### DELAY, FAILURE TO RESPOND

### Small business new to embedded network and unable to negotiate better rates or payment arrangement

A small business customer received her first bill as part of an embedded network and thought it was very high. She considered the rates being applied to her account were higher than she paid at other premises. She approached the embedded network operator to discuss a better plan or investigate her options with regards to a traditional retailer, and to establish an affordable payment arrangement. She was told someone would

call her back and when this did not happen, she came to EWON.

With the customer's agreement, this complaint was referred to the provider at a higher level, knowing she could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

[VIEW MORE CASE STUDIES](#)



# Stakeholder engagement

## Members

Meetings	Staff involved
Operational Advisory Group – (Exempt Entities and WICA providers)	Ombudsman, General Manager Investigations, General Manager Finance and Corporate Services, General Manager Governance, Awareness and Policy, Manager Governance, and Member Liaison Officer
Member webinar	General Manager Investigations, Manager Governance and Investigations Manager
Consultative Council Meeting	Ombudsman, General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, General Manager Finance and Corporate Services, General Manager Investigations, Investigations Managers, Manager Policy & Research, Manager Governance, Senior Policy Officers, and Member Liaison Officers
Powershop	Investigations Managers and Investigations Officers
Jemena	General Manager Investigations / Manager Policy & Research
AGL	Ombudsman / Investigations Managers and Investigations officers
Origin	Ombudsman / General Manager Investigations
EnergyAustralia	Ombudsman
Ausgrid	Ombudsman
Real Utilities	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness and Policy
amaysim	Ombudsman
Qenergy	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
Locality Planning Energy (LPE)	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
Apex Energy	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
ERM Power	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
Reamped Energy	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
Enova Energy	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy
Essential Energy	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy



# Stakeholder engagement

## Government and other stakeholders

Meetings	Staff involved
Australian Energy Market Commission	Ombudsman / General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, Manager Policy & Research, and Manager Governance
Australian Energy Regulator	Ombudsman / General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, Manager Policy & Research, and Manager Governance
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal	General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, Manager Policy & Research, and Manager Governance
Office of Environment & Heritage (NSW)	Ombudsman / General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, Manager Policy & Research, Manager Governance, and Policy Officer
NSW Department of Premier & Cabinet	General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy and Manager Policy & Research
NSW Fair Trading	General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy and Manager Policy & Research
Stockland	General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy, Manager Governance, and Member Liaison Officer
Affiliated Residential Park Residents Association AGM	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness and Policy
Caravan and Camping Industry Association	Ombudsman
Energy Consumers Australia	Ombudsman
NSW Council of Social Service	Ombudsman
Public Interest Advocacy Centre –Stakeholder Forum	Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness and Policy
Service NSW	Manager Policy & Research, Manager Communications, and Community Engagement Officer
Anti-Poverty Week Forum	Manager Policy & Research, Manager Communications, and Community Engagement Officer
Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria	Ombudsman
Australian Financial Complaints Authority	Ombudsman



# Outreach events

October 2018

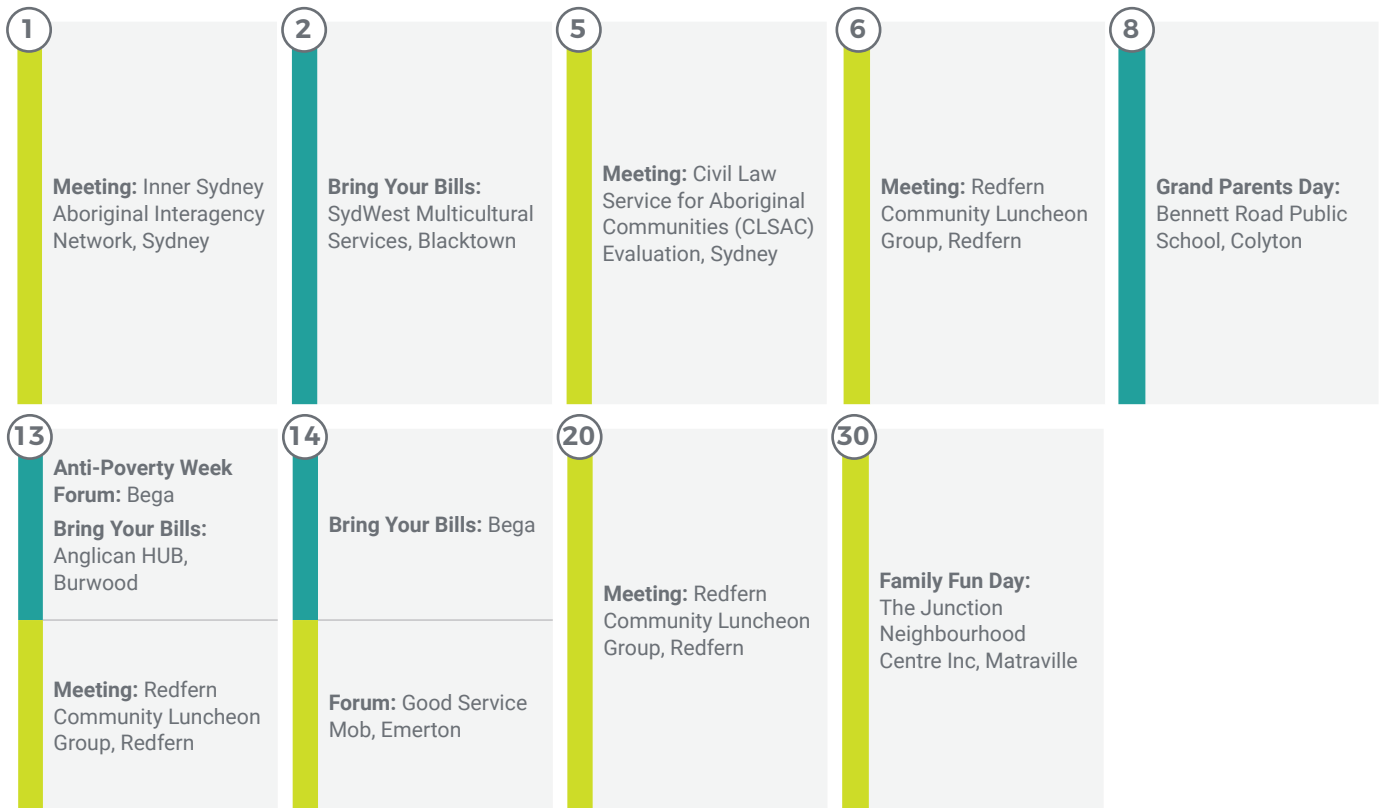


- General outreach events
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander events



# Outreach events

November 2018

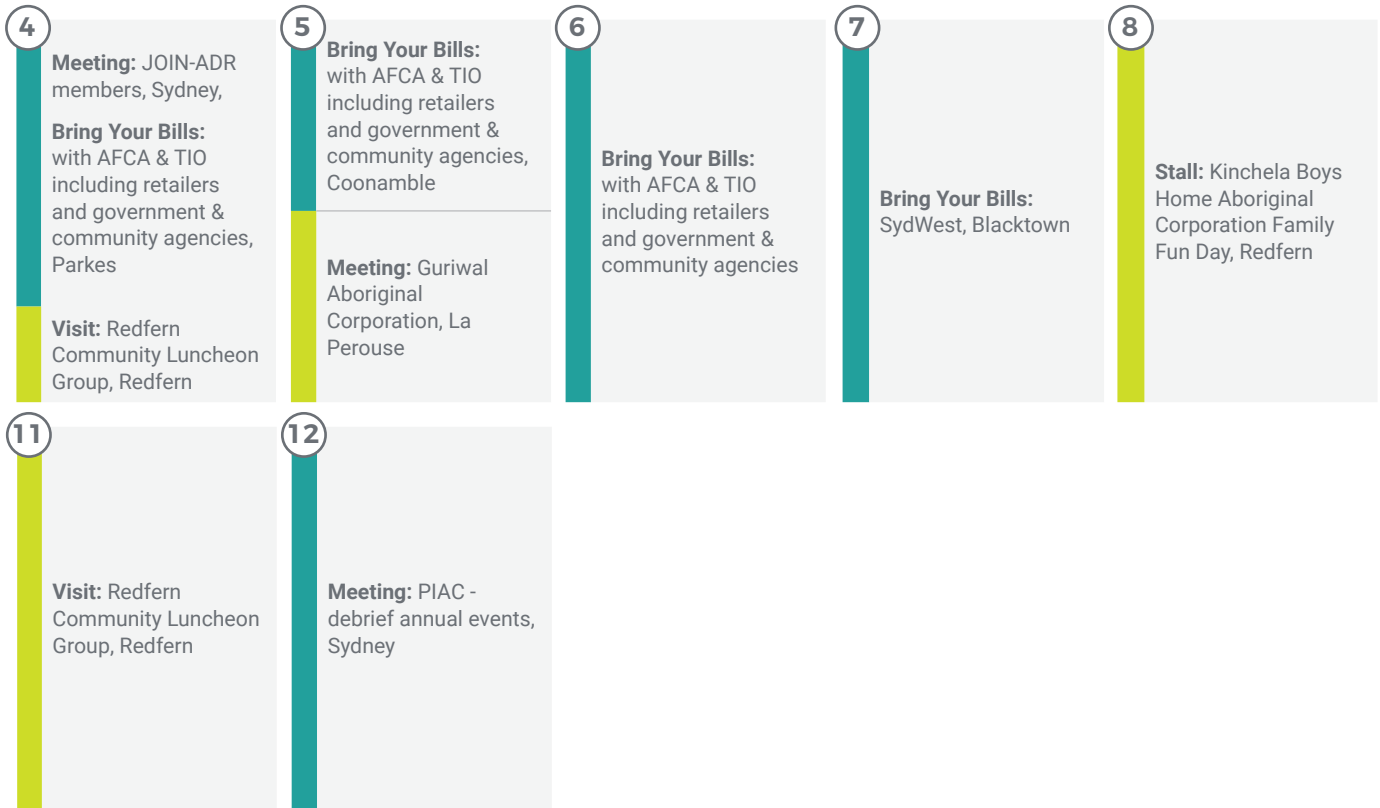


- General outreach events
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander events



# Outreach events

December 2018



- General outreach events
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander events

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# Digital meter issues

## Solar installations being connected to old meter

### Wrong advice from retailer concerning solar switch on

A customer called his retailer after he had been waiting for a new meter for his solar installation for over a month. He was advised by the retailer to turn his solar on without the new meter. He was going to do this, but was told by an acquaintance that this would result in his meter running backwards. He called the retailer again and this time was told that he should not turn the solar on as it could result in a high bill. He came to EWON seeking information about the meter installation delay and to complain about the conflicting information provided by his retailer.

With the customer's agreement, the complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

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### Meter delay and estimated bill

A customer had solar installed in May 2018 and requested a new meter on 22 May. It was finally installed on 21 August 2018, but in the interim he received an estimated bill. He came to EWON seeking advice concerning the estimated bill. EWON explained that if the solar was turned on prior to the new meter being installed, the bill needed to be estimated, as turning solar on without an appropriate meter could cause the existing analogue meter to run backwards.

The customer was referred to NSW Fair Trading to follow up on the solar installer who had connected the solar to the old meter. The customer was satisfied with the information provided and the complaint did not require any further investigation.





# Digital meter issues

## Replacement meter program

### Customer seeking information about replacement before speaking to retailer

A customer received an email from her retailer advising that it had been notified by the distributor that her meter was due for replacement, with a date for the meter installation. The customer sought an electrician's advice and was told that her meter was still functional. She called EWON saying that she didn't want a digital meter and had not been offered any alternatives by her retailer.

As the customer had not discussed the matter with her retailer, she was provided information about the digital meter replacement program and referred to the retailer to discuss her concerns, knowing she could return to EWON if she was not satisfied with the retailer's response.

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### No information provided about meter replacement

A customer said she received a letter from her retailer advising that she needed to replace her meter box as there was no room in it for a digital meter. She was unsure that she needed a new meter, so contacted an electrician. She was informed there was nothing wrong with her existing meter and it would cost up to \$4,000 to replace the meter box. She could not afford this as she is on a pension, so she approached EWON.

As the customer had not discussed the matter with her retailer, she was provided information about the digital meter replacement program and referred back to the retailer to discuss her concerns, knowing she could return to EWON if she was not satisfied with the retailer's response.

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### No information on why meter had to be replaced at significant cost to customer

The customer's retailer informed him in writing that his meter needed to be replaced. He called the retailer but it was unable to clarify why. Two months later, a technician came to his home and left a note advising that the meter board was too small for the new meter and he had to make alterations within one month to ensure that the meter could be installed. He called EWON and said he could not afford to replace the meter board and he thought that the retailer was pressuring him to have the meter replaced when there was no need to do so. The customer had not sought a quote for the work.

The customer was provided information about the digital meter replacement program, including his right to a type 4A meter and his responsibility for the meter box. As he had not discussed the matter with his retailer, he was referred back to it at a higher level to discuss his concerns, knowing he could return to EWON if he was not satisfied with the response.



# Digital meter issues

## Concerns raised about fees associated with digital meters

### Concern over fee for a 4A meter requiring a manual read

A customer had a digital meter installed and said it was regularly making a buzzing sound that disturbed her sleep and caused interference with her mobile phone and TV. She requested that her retailer fix the problem, but the technician did not come on the agreed date. The customer came to EWON and the matter was referred to her retailer at a higher level for resolution.

The customer returned to EWON dissatisfied with the outcome. A technician had visited her property and disabled the meter's remote communication capability to rectify the issue. He explained that there would now be a special meter reading fee, but that it would be waived for two years. The customer considered the fee should be waived permanently. EWON explained that the retailer had the right to charge for manual reading of the meter. We told the customer we could review the complaint but might not be able to change the outcome, and that the retailer could rescind the offer at any time.

The customer agreed to consider the retailer's offer and this matter was treated as a complaint enquiry.

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### Replacement meter fee

A customer received a letter from her retailer advising that it would be replacing her current meter with a digital meter, and that she would be charged for the installation. The letter stated that the installation would be charged to her next bill if it was under \$150, but if it was higher, the retailer would call to discuss the matter. The customer contacted the retailer and was advised that the replacement was compulsory. The customer called EWON to find out if she could be charged for a compulsory meter upgrade.

EWON informed her that retailers have different policies and that the charges were at each retailer's discretion. EWON provided the customer with details about the Energy Made Easy program so that she could compare her current retailer offer with other offers. This case was treated as a complaint enquiry as the customer was seeking information to assist her to talk to her retailer.



# Digital meter issues

## Billing

### High bill after new meter installed

After the customer had solar and a new meter installed, she received a bill for \$1,218.45 for the period commencing on the installation date. Her previous bills had been between \$500 and \$700. She contacted the retailer and was told that the bill was correct so she must be using more energy. The customer contacted EWON for assistance in getting her retailer to check the bill and her new meter.

With the customer's agreement, the complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing she could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

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### Delayed billing after new meter installation

A customer had not received a bill and was concerned about receiving a large backbill. He contacted his retailer and was told that the delay was due to the installation of a new meter. This matter was referred to the retailer at a higher level for resolution. The customer returned to EWON because the retailer had not responded to the referral.

The retailer advised EWON that there had been a delay in issuing the bill due to a recent meter exchange. The bill the customer had been expecting was then issued two months late. The retailer said that it would endeavour to issue the next bill in a timely manner and offered the customer a \$50 customer service gesture. The customer accepted this outcome in the knowledge that if his next bill was delayed, he could return to EWON.



# Digital meter issues

## Faulty or incomplete new meter installations

### Incomplete installation

An advocate told EWON that the customer's oven and hot water system stopped working when their meter was replaced by their retailer. The customer contacted the retailer on the day of the installation and was advised that the issue would be escalated to the meter installer. After four days, the customer organised an electrician, who resolved the issue. The customer was dissatisfied that the meter installer had not completed the job properly.

The complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level with the customer's agreement, knowing they could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated. The retailer informed EWON that it had apologised for the meter installer's error and provided the customer with a \$50 goodwill gesture.

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### Wrong type of meter installed

A customer said that his retailer had connected a meter that was not compatible with the inverter he had. It had installed a two-phase meter and he had a three-phase inverter, so his energy and solar generation was not being recorded accurately. The customer advised he made at least 12 calls and sent a minimum of 30 emails to the retailer, but it continued to say there was no problem with the meter and would conduct a site inspection. The customer had contracted an electrician who confirmed that the wrong meter was connected.

The complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, with the customer's consent. The retailer informed EWON that the wrong meter had been installed in 2017. It said that it had attempted a number of times to get the meter provider to rectify this and was finally successful on 1 November 2018. The retailer apologised to the customer and paid him \$1,314 for lost solar production.

## Other issues

### New tariff after meter installation

A customer had a new meter provided after having solar installed. He was surprised to see that his rate for supply had increased to 39.5c per kWh, up from 31.8c, as he had not been advised of an increase. EWON explained to him that it appeared he had been moved to a time of use tariff and that, depending on his consumption pattern, this could be beneficial despite the higher rate for peak energy. EWON also pointed out that the time of use tariff was set by the network and the retailer had passed this on. He said that he now understood, but that he considered the retailer should have informed him of the tariff change and what it meant. He did not require any further action and the complaint was treated as a complaint enquiry.

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### Customer advised to use Google to fix a problem with new digital meter

A customer's meter was replaced by his retailer as part of a replacement program. He then noticed that the meter was showing the incorrect time and was concerned as he was on a time of use tariff. When he rang the retailer, he was told to 'Google' the issue and fix it himself. He felt it was unreasonable that he should have to modify the retailer's meter.

With the customer's agreement, the complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated. The retailer confirmed with EWON that it had resolved the issue. It said that while the meter showed the time as AEST, it was corrected for daylight savings before the billing was finalised. The customer accepted this explanation. The retailer also said it intended to address the inappropriate advice provided to the customer through staff training.



# Transfer

## Transfer in error resulting in a disconnection order raised

An advocate contacted EWON when the electricity distributor's field officer knocked on her elderly family member's door to disconnect her electricity supply. The field officer did not proceed with the disconnection, and instead allowed the customer and advocate time to contact the customer's retailer.

The customer's preferred retailer advised that the account had been transferred to another retailer. She called her distributor and was advised the account had been transferred to another retailer she had never heard of.

An EWON investigation established that the customer's account had been transferred to the other retailer in error in October 2017. That retailer agreed to cancel all disconnection activity and transferred her account retrospectively back to her preferred provider.

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## Retailer declined to transfer account back to preferred retailer after transfer in error

A customer's electricity account was transferred to another retailer without her consent. The customer asked her preferred retailer to take back the billing rights to her account on several occasions, but was told that each request had been declined by the retailer that took her account in error. She then received a disconnection warning notice from that retailer and approached EWON for assistance.

An EWON investigation confirmed a transfer in error had occurred. The retailer that had taken the account in error advised it was not able to confirm with its customer if the wrong address or NMI had been transferred and on that basis, had declined the transfer request from the customer's preferred retailer.

The retailer that took the account in error agreed to cancel all disconnection activity and facilitate the retrospective transfer of the customer's account back to her preferred retailer.

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## Customer at risk of disconnection after account fails to transfer/ delay - possible breach of Rule 59 of the NERR - Part 2

A customer made attempts to establish a gas account with her preferred retailer over a 12-month period. The customer said she contacted her preferred retailer a number of times to ask when a gas bill would be issued and on each occasion she had been advised the billing rights would be requested.

The customer then received a letter from the retailer which owned the billing rights advising she was at risk of disconnection if she did not establish an account with it. The customer considered this to be unreasonable given she had tried to establish an account with her preferred retailer several times.

The customer came to EWON and an investigation found that her preferred retailer had attempted to establish an account but the transfer request failed. Her preferred retailer did not advise her of the failed transfer request in line with the associated rules. The retailer that held the billing rights agreed to stop all disconnection activity and arranged for the account to be retrospectively transferred to the customer's preferred retailer.

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## Account retrospectively transferred back to correct retailer under a different contract, after a transfer in error - possible breach of rule 57(A) 5 and 6 under the NERL

A customer's account with her preferred provider was transferred to another retailer in error. She arranged for the account to be transferred back to her preferred retailer, but it would not offer her the same contract she had been on prior to the transfer. This meant she would be financially worse off as a result of the transfer in error.

With the customer's agreement, this complaint was referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing she could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.



# Transfer

## Transfer without consent leads to customer at risk of disconnection

A customer received an email from her electricity retailer advising it was sorry to see her leave, even though she had not decided to transfer her account to any other retailer. She contacted her retailer and was advised that she needed to enter into another contract, and it would then request the transfer back of her account.

The customer subsequently received a letter from another retailer advising she was at risk of disconnection. She called that retailer and was advised that it had 'probably' received her details from a third party marketing company. At no time had she agreed to transfer her account.

An EWON investigation discovered that the account had been taken by a third party marketing company acting for the new retailer. That retailer agreed to cease all disconnection activity and arranged for the account to be retrospectively transferred back to the customer's preferred retailer.

The customer was not charged by the retailer that had taken the account without consent.

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## Small business customer disconnected after transfer in error – breach of rule 57A NERR

A customer called his retailer after he had been disconnected. The retailer advised that his electricity account had been transferred to another retailer nine months before.

The customer contacted the retailer that had disconnected him and was told that to have his power reconnected, he needed to establish an account with it and accept responsibility for the consumption. He did this to ensure reconnection but considered it unreasonable as he had never agreed to a transfer.

In an EWON investigation the retailer acknowledged it had taken the site in error and when it identified this, it had not attempted to rectify the transfer. As no explicit informed consent had been obtained, the retailer agreed to waive all charges for the period it had wrongly held the account.

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## Customer at risk of disconnection after retailer failed to activate account transfer

A distributor's field officer attended a home to disconnect a customer's electricity supply. The customer called her preferred retailer and was advised that her account was up to date.

The customer came to EWON as she was unsure why there had been a disconnection attempt. She had previously attempted to transfer her account to another retailer, but the transfer did not occur as she agreed to stay with her current retailer.

An EWON investigation established that, while her preferred retailer had created a new account for her, it had not 'activated' the account correctly. This meant the retailer was treating the supply address as an 'unknown consumer'. The retailer agreed to cease all disconnection activity and re-instate the account correctly.

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## Transfer in error – first retailer contacted by customer did not take corrective action to cancel transfer in line with rules

A customer's account was transferred to another retailer despite him asking his preferred retailer to stop the transfer, so he came to EWON for help.

An EWON investigation established that a retrospective transfer of the customer's account back to his preferred retailer had been arranged. The customer's preferred retailer also agreed to apply a customer service gesture as it had incorrectly advised the customer that he had to contact the retailer that took the supply address to prevent the transfer.



# Transfer

## Transfer failed/delayed – supply address disconnected

A customer established an account with her preferred retailer, but the transfer failed to progress. The retailer that held the billing rights to the site disconnected her as an 'unknown consumer'. It had sent 'unknown consumer' letters to the supply address, but the customer had discarded them as she believed she had already established an account with her preferred retailer.

The customer then established an account with the retailer that held the billing rights after being advised that it would have the gas reconnected. This did not occur.

An EWON investigation found that the incumbent retailer had raised the wrong service order for reconnection. It then raised the correct service order and the customer was reconnected seven days after disconnection.

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## Transfer in error – supply address disconnected

A customer's electricity account was taken by another retailer in error, resulting in his supply being disconnected. The customer had received letters addressed to 'unknown consumer' from the retailer that took the site, but discarded them as he believed he already had an account with his preferred retailer.

Following an EWON investigation, the retailer that took the site in error agreed to arrange reconnection of the customer's electricity supply. This occurred four days after disconnection. The retailer also agreed to retrospectively transfer the customer's account back to his preferred retailer. The customer was provided with a referral back to this retailer to submit a claim for loss.

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## Account established for incorrect DPI with customer's preferred retailer – retailer which holds billing rights disconnected supply and delayed reconnection for over 10 days

A customer contacted EWON after all attempts to get her gas reconnected had failed.

The customer had established a gas account with her preferred retailer and received and paid bills, but her supply was disconnected. When she discovered her account was for the wrong supply address, she called the retailer that held the billing rights to her address to set up an account, but the gas was not reconnected immediately.

An EWON investigation found that the customer's preferred retailer had established an account for the wrong meter. Her preferred retailer agreed to close the account for the wrong DPI and refund any payments made. It was also established that the retailer which owned the billing rights had raised a reconnection service order which was not completed by the distributor. A second service order was raised and the customer's gas supply was reconnected ten days after disconnection.

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## Supply address disconnected due to the wrong DPI after a transfer in error

A customer's gas supply was disconnected after she established a gas account with her preferred retailer and received and paid bills.

An EWON investigation established that her preferred retailer had been billing her for the wrong gas meter and the retailer that owned the billing rights to her meter disconnected her supply under an 'unknown consumer' account.

The retailer that owned the billing rights agreed to reconnect the customer after she set up an account and she was backbilled for her usage in line with applicable regulations.



# Water

## Payment methods of water bill

A customer received a water bill with a note on it saying it would be paid via direct debit. The customer did not recall providing authority for her bill to be paid in this way, so she called her provider. It advised that it only accepted payment of bills via this method.

EWON explained to the customer that under the Water Industry Competition Legislation, the provider was allowed to determine which payment methods it would accept. The customer advised that she understood other residents of the supply address paid their bill by other methods.

With the customer's agreement, this complaint was referred to the provider at a higher level, knowing she could return to EWON if an agreed outcome could not be negotiated.

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## Classification of property as commercial results in high bill

A customer contacted her water provider regarding a bill she considered to be very high. The provider advised her that the bill was correct and due for payment. The customer did not accept this and approached EWON.

An EWON investigation found that the property had previously been used for commercial purposes and was charged accordingly. However, after the customer purchased the property, it was only used for residential purposes and the provider had not re-classified the property to reflect this. The provider agreed to adjust the billing from the date of purchase to reflect residential use.





# Embedded networks

## Embedded network unable to explain bill to new customer

When the customer received his first bill after moving into a building with an embedded network, he called his retailer with some questions. He was not satisfied with the information he received, considering the retailer was not able to confirm if his hot water was heated by gas or provide a clear explanation of components of the bill. He came to EWON saying it was unreasonable that a retailer could not explain its own bill.

The customer agreed to have his complaint referred to the retailer at a higher level, knowing he could return to EWON if he needed to.

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## Delayed contact following referral of complaint

A customer sought compensation for spoiled food following an unplanned outage that lasted around 12 hours. The customer's claim was denied despite other occupants of the building receiving payments.

The complaint was initially sent back to the retailer at a higher level, however, the customer returned to EWON when she didn't hear from the retailer.

Before EWON investigated, the customer advised that the retailer had subsequently contacted her and she had accepted its offer to resolve her complaint.