



Energy & Water  
Ombudsman NSW

# Our holistic approach

Annual Report 2016/2017

# About this report

This Annual Report is published in accordance with the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) Charter and the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution. The Benchmarks are Accessibility, Independence, Fairness, Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

## About our data

The data in this report is drawn from cases received by EWON during the 2016/2017 financial year, unless otherwise specified. EWON's open case data varies in accordance with case progression and figures in this report reflect case status as at 11 July 2017.

## About our case studies

Personal information about our customers has been changed to protect their privacy.

## Overview

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) is an industry-based Ombudsman scheme, providing independent, free, and informal dispute resolution services to all NSW energy and some water customers. We focus on achieving fair and reasonable outcomes for all complaints – we are not a consumer advocate, nor do we represent industry.

### We receive, refer and resolve complaints about:

- disputed accounts
- high bills
- disconnection or restriction of supply
- payment difficulties
- reliability and quality of supply
- connection or transfer issues
- contract terms
- marketing practices
- poor customer service and more.

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## Our principal responsibilities, as set out in the EWON Charter, are:

- to handle energy and water complaints independently, fairly, informally, expeditiously and free of charge to the consumer
- to promote EWON to consumers and small business
- to encourage and provide advice to members on good complaint handling practices to assist in reducing and avoiding complaints.

As well as resolving complaints, we work with energy and water providers to continually improve their processes and deliver consistent, high quality customer service. We also contribute to the development of energy and water policy through our insightful reports and analysis. Our policy work is also aimed at influencing industry standards to reduce complaints.



**Professor Julian Disney AO**  
Chair

## Chair's message

EWON is pleased to have welcomed six new members over the last 12 months. Our total membership is now 51, by comparison with the six members with which we started in 1998.

Those members who are authorised retailers under the National Energy Consumer Framework (NECF), are required to provide their customers with high quality internal dispute resolution, in addition to the customer's rights of access to EWON's independent resolution processes. In the rapidly changing energy landscape, however, many other new providers are statutorily classified as exempt retailers. This means that they are not required to meet the NECF benchmarks and their customers may be at greater risk of inadequate access to appropriate dispute resolution.

In last year's Annual Report, I expressed the Board's great concern about the impact of this situation on customers and on EWON itself. Our active efforts to achieve improvements in relevant regulatory systems did not seem to have generated much response. I am pleased to report now, however, that after much hard work by the Ombudsman and her staff greater momentum for change has developed during the past year and we are optimistic that significant regulatory improvements will start to take effect during the coming year.

The Board has long recognised that the requisite regulatory changes will need to be accompanied by changes in EWON's own membership and governance structures. It has agreed that those changes should be given high priority once the key elements of the regulatory changes have become clear. They will require considerable discussion with stakeholders as well as with our counterparts in other states.

The Board has placed special emphasis on the need to strengthen and monitor the effectiveness of efforts to inform customers about the nature of EWON's services and the ways in which they can be accessed. It is well aware that the impacts of any failings in this respect by our members or EWON itself are likely to be felt most harshly amongst those customers whose need for help is greatest.

During the past year, major improvements have been made in EWON's website and other forms of public communication, as well as further expansion of our outreach program with a focus on the most vulnerable customers. At the same time, much effort has been devoted to helping members fulfil their obligations to inform customers about rights of access to dispute resolution, especially to EWON. An advisory template for communicating this information has been circulated and significant improvements have been achieved by some members. Continued monitoring and encouragement is expected to make further progress.

The Ombudsman and her staff have worked very hard to achieve these and other improvements. By the end of the year, the rigour and clarity of financial management had been greatly strengthened, as had the specification and observance of good governance processes. A strong and cohesive senior management team is in place and readying itself for the substantial opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, including a likely increase in the workload of the complaints staff after several years of decline.

The expiry of the three-year terms of office for community members of the Board led to considerable change during the year. Grant Arbuthnot, Carolyn Hodge and Elizabeth Priestley did not stand for re-election after having made outstanding contributions during the inevitably testing transitions to a new governance structure and a new Ombudsman and management team. They were replaced by Max Bosotti from ParaQuad, Robyn Evans from the Salvation Army and Iain Maitland from the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW. The six-monthly Consultative Council meetings continued to be very well attended and made a valuable contribution to exchanges of information and views between community organisations, energy and water companies and EWON itself.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of my fellow Board members for the diligence and integrity with which they have played their role. I would also like to express the Board's thanks to the Ombudsman, Janine Young, and her staff for their dedication to building further on the achievements and reputation that have been a hallmark of EWON since its inception.

**Professor Julian Disney AO**

Chair  
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW Ltd

# Ombudsman's message



**Janine Young, Energy &  
Water Ombudsman NSW**

Our strategic priorities in 2016/2017 were led by a simple but powerful statement – EWON achieves the best possible outcomes for its customers and members. This is only made possible by having valued and well supported people. To achieve this, we focused on four strategic priorities aligned with the EWON Charter:

- delivering customer service excellence
- enhancing our awareness and influence
- engaging our people
- developing intuitive, sustainable systems and processes.

Many people think that Ombudsman offices only handle complaints. Offering a free energy and water dispute resolution service for NSW consumers is of course, one of our key responsibilities and it is linked to each of our strategic priorities. But the Charter also requires us to promote EWON to consumers and small businesses, and to assist energy and water providers to develop complaint handling practices which also reduce and avoid future complaints.

In addition, the Charter requires us to identify systemic issues. This includes making members aware of these issues and reporting them, where necessary, to the relevant Minister and regulators. Further, it is essential that we liaise with, and educate, the community and members. All of these activities are aimed at reducing complaints.

We take each of these responsibilities very seriously.

## Delivering customer service excellence

Just as we were getting used to complaints decreasing, the trend reversed! By the end of September 2016, it appeared that we were heading towards receiving 22,000 complaints in 2016/2017. From October 2016 however, each month's case receipt was higher than the same month in the preceding year. In the April to June 2017 quarter, complaints received were 21% above that quarter in 2016.

The overall total received for the year was 23,613. While this was 147 fewer complaints than 2015/2016, by year end the call on EWON was to respond to an ongoing increase in complaints.

Most complaints received, 74%, were about electricity, 23% were about gas, and the remaining 3% related to water.

Closure of the Solar Bonus Scheme on 31 December 2016 contributed to the increase in complaints. Ongoing delays with the installation of net meters left many customers without feed-in tariffs for the electricity generated by their home solar system. Customers also complained about not receiving accurate and timely information or advice from retailers about net metering contract terms and conditions. It is critical that this experience informs the industry's preparation for the 1 December 2017 Power of Choice digital meter rollout.

Estimated billing emerged as the second highest billing issue for our customers, after high bills. Meter access is a particular challenge in apartments and houses with internal meters. While energy retailers and customers share responsibility for ensuring quarterly meter reads take place, in reality it is often difficult for both parties to coordinate access with the energy distributor, the entity responsible for reading the meter and providing usage data to the retailer for billing customers.

Energy affordability concerns have become the norm for the many NSW consumers who experience financial vulnerability. This is evidenced by our continued receipt of complaints about payment difficulties, high bills, increasing debt and disconnection of supply.

Some of these customers told us they are also confused by the array of energy offers which make it difficult for them to find the best deal. Customers on low or fixed incomes in particular, said they are not able to take advantage of pay-on-time or direct debit discounts, as delayed payment would result in additional fees. Others are unaware of their option to switch plans. These issues are now being considered more broadly by energy retailers and policy makers.

To deliver customer service excellence in this environment it must be more responsive and linked directly to customer feedback. In 2016/2017 we began conducting quarterly online surveys about the experience of customers whose EWON complaint had been referred to their provider's specialist complaint team for resolution. Previously, unless these customers returned to EWON dissatisfied with the referral outcome, we were unaware of their satisfaction with the provider's response. This feedback and the results of our broader customer satisfaction surveys, improves our customer service and enables us to provide improvement advice to members – a great result for all.

## Developing intuitive, sustainable systems and processes

2016/2017 was a year of innovation through revitalisation of our look and our systems, processes and procedures. Launched in last year's Annual Report, our new branding raised the profile of our expanded array of consumer resources, including complaint issue-related factsheets and brochures for non-English-speaking and Aboriginal consumers.

Our new brand was recently recognised with a Graphic Design Corporate Identity and Branding Sydney Design Award.

The Silver Award recognised that the rebrand had re-energised EWON, by creating a fresh and dynamic visual identity which appeals to our broad range of stakeholders.

We made significant improvements to our case management processes, and developed a Case Handling Manual. And to further ensure the effectiveness of our complaints handling, we developed a new approach to quality assurance, shifting the focus to drive fair and reasonable outcomes and timeliness. The new approach also highlights case management strengths and identifies targeted areas for continuous improvement.

Our new website's user-friendly complaint form, led to an increase in the number of customers lodging web-based complaints and a decrease in emailed complaints. And a new telephone system helped streamline processes, while also paving the way for an upgrade of our Customer Relations Management system in 2017/2018.

Our members also benefitted from our year of innovation. They now have access to EWONlink, a new portal that provides secure access to weekly, monthly and quarterly reports, induction material and updates on EWON's activities. We also offered member induction sessions via video conference; a well-received time, travel and cost-saving alternative to face to face participation.



## Enhancing awareness and influence

We continued to work with a range of community organisations and government agencies, including Legal Aid NSW, NSW Fair Trading, NSW Council of Social Service and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. And we established a new partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office, which endorsed EWON's inclusion in the development of the Bourke Affordable and Appropriate Housing Strategy, a project aimed at improving living standards in the Bourke region.

Our continued partnerships with SydWest Multicultural Services, St Vincent de Paul, the Good Service Mob and the Joint Outreach Initiatives Network (JOIN), allowed us to extend our Bring Your Bills days to more communities.

A personal highlight of 2016/2017 was returning to Wilcannia in NSW's far west at the invitation of the community, to hold a Bring Your Bills day. The visit was the beginning of a collaborative project with Mid Lachlan Aboriginal Housing Corporation and a range of other services, which took us to a further 12 Aboriginal communities between April and June 2017. For the first time, we invited Origin Energy, the main energy provider for the region, to participate in Bring Your Bills days in each community. This allowed its staff to meet directly with customers rather than via our complaint referral and investigation approach.

Member engagement expanded with a new initiative - a Member Forum focusing on customer service. Presenters from outside and inside the energy and water sectors shared their insights about improving customer service and the value of making an apology.

In last year's Annual Report, I talked about EWON's position in relation to exempt entities and embedded networks. We believe that the consumer protections available to customers of authorised retailers should be extended to those reliant on embedded networks for their electricity supply. I am pleased to report that we were able to progress this in 2016/2017, by working collaboratively with the Australian and New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network and the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).

The AER recognises the significant role of Ombudsman offices in building consumer confidence and trust in the energy industry by providing independent dispute resolution. One option now being considered is whether exempt entities in NSW, South Australia and Queensland should be required to become members of an energy Ombudsman scheme in their state.

## Engaging our people

We continued investing in our staff by implementing a new learning and development framework that offers a range of professional development opportunities.

This included expanding our Stepping Up leadership development program to include emerging leaders and establishing an online learning platform for compliance and other training. We also further developed our technical skills through a series of master classes focusing on dispute resolution, as well as specific energy and water knowledge areas.

Achieving our strategic objectives in 2016/2017 reflects not only our investment in the EWON team, but also the values that we all bring to EWON every day.

## What's ahead in 2017/2018

2018 is a very special year for EWON - we will celebrate 20 years of EWON's contribution to the changing face of energy and water in NSW.

It promises to be another eventful year, with the upgrade of our complaints management system, expanding our outreach program to more regional communities, further enhancing member resources, and preparing for a potential expansion of EWON's jurisdiction.

We also know it will be another challenging year for consumers. Rising energy costs from 1 July 2017 and the digital meter rollout are increasing uncertainty, across what is already a very complex landscape. In response, we are strengthening our community outreach program and the direct involvement of energy retailers. It is critical that together, we take a collaborative approach to closing the increasing energy affordability gap. Already the commitment of EWON members to this new approach and their focus on making a bigger difference is very encouraging.

In closing, I thank the EWON Board for its strategic guidance and support. We farewelled some long standing Directors and welcomed new Directors, all of whom have contributed to our success through strengthened governance across the year.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to the EWON team for their great work; together we have an ongoing commitment to ensuring we achieve the best possible outcomes for our customers and members.



**Janine Young**

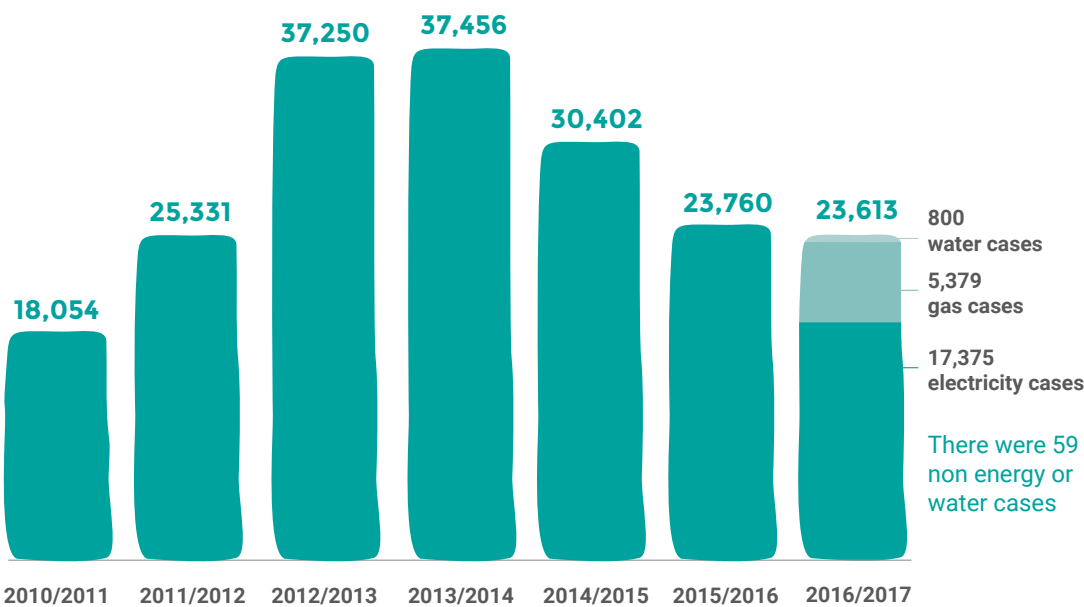
Ombudsman  
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

# Our year at a glance

23,613

cases received  
in 2016/2017

## Cases received by EWON from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017

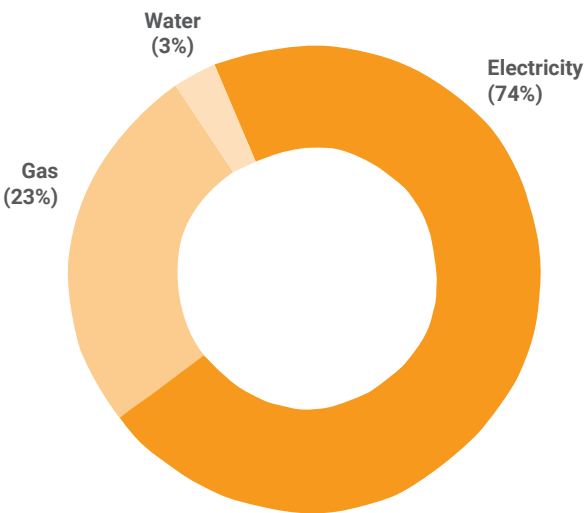
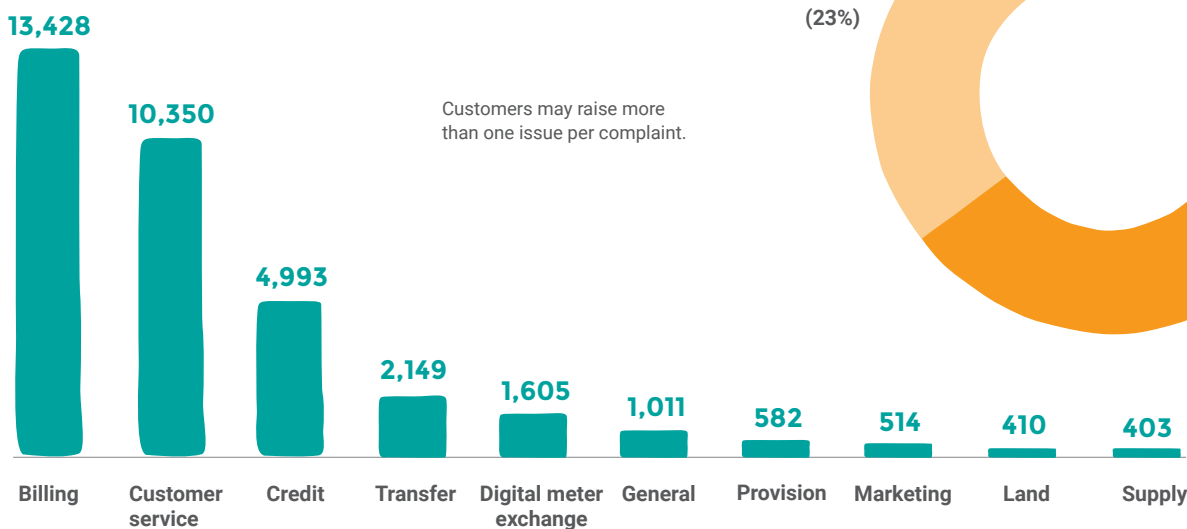


1%

decrease  
in cases  
received  
from  
2015/2016

## Cases received by industry

## Cases received by primary issue



57%

of all cases involved  
billing issues

44%

of all cases involved  
customer service issues

21%

of all cases involved  
credit issues



# About us



**Professor Julian Disney AO**  
Chair



**Angela Tsoukatos**  
Sydney Water



**Danielle Manley**  
Endeavour Energy



**Iain Maitland**  
Community Director



**Ian Israelsohn**  
Jemena



**Jan Prichard**  
Origin Energy



**Maria Good**  
Community Director



**Max Bosotti**  
Community Director



**Nicole Wallis**  
AGL



**Robyn Evans**  
Community Director



**Wayne Warburton**  
Community Director

## EWON Board

The Board of Directors is responsible for EWON's corporate governance, funding and strategic direction. The Board is made up of an independent Chair, five Community Directors representing consumer interests such as disability, financial counselling, energy advocacy and social justice, and five Industry Directors representing our electricity, gas and water provider members.

In November 2016 there were a number of changes to the Board, as the terms of the Chair and all Community Directors came to an end. Professor Julian Disney was reappointed as the independent Chair of EWON. Elizabeth Priestly, Grant Arbuthnot and Carolyn Hodge chose not to renominate for ongoing Board positions. Maria Good and Wayne Warburton renominated and were reappointed to the Board. They were joined by Max Bosotti, Robyn Evans and Iain Maitland as new Community Directors. EWON's Constitution requires the longest serving Industry Director to stand down and renominate should they wish to continue on the Board. Jan Prichard renominated and was re-elected as an Industry Director at the AGM.

## EWON Consultative Council

Consultative Council meetings are part of EWON's constitutional framework. They offer an open forum for consumer and small business representatives and our members to meet, raise issues, and put forward their views. They also allow us to update and consult with our key stakeholders, and they contribute to our planning. In accordance with EWON's Constitution, we convene a Consultative Council meeting twice annually. In 2016/2017, our Consultative Council meetings were on 17 November 2016 and 27 April 2017. **See page 38** for more information about our Consultative Council meetings.

# About us

## Our team

In 2016/2017, EWON's structure was streamlined into four core teams working under the leadership of the Ombudsman:

People

Finance & Corporate Services


Investigations

Governance, Awareness & Policy

**Two new General Managers joined EWON, Bernadette Or, General Manager Finance & Corporate Services and Adrian Borchok, General Manager Investigations.**

**This structure enables EWON to meet each of our Charter responsibilities as well as prepare for a potential significant expansion of our jurisdiction. The structural changes include:**

- The 12 month appointment of Manager Governance to explore the different structures of external dispute resolution schemes in Australia and determine an appropriate model for future membership if our jurisdiction is expanded. The Manager Governance is also responsible for managing the Stakeholder Relations Officers and providing support to the Company Secretary. Read more about EWON's potential expanded jurisdiction on **page 26**.
- Senior Investigations Officers (SIOs) were appointed in each Investigation Team at the end of 2016/2017 and commenced their new role on 1 July 2017. As well as handling casework, SIOs report to, and support, their teams' Investigation Manager and offer guidance and advice to Investigations Officers to ensure effective complaint management and customer service excellence. They provide back up support for coaching, quality assurance, and act as delegate for the Investigation Managers when required.
- The Manager IT was appointed to project manage and deliver system upgrades.
- The Manager Communications and Outreach leads the Community Engagement, Aboriginal Community Engagement and Communications Team, enabling them to bring their combined specialist expertise together, under the Governance, Awareness & Policy umbrella. This integrated team builds awareness of provider processes, educates consumers and their advocates about energy and water issues and EWON's dispute resolution service and, through strategic communications activities, delivers an extensive community outreach program.



Back row from left Helen Ford, General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy; Adrian Borchok, General Manager Investigations; Judy Vergison, General Manager People. Front row Bernadette Or, General Manager Finance & Corporate Services; Janine Young, Ombudsman.

**Ombudsman**  
Janine Young

The Ombudsman is responsible to the Board for the strategic direction and management of the organisation, including EWON's day to day operations, business planning, financial management, stakeholder liaison and staff and resource management. The Ombudsman's consideration and resolution of individual disputes is conducted independently of the Board. The Ombudsman also ensures EWON provides high quality, independent dispute resolution, and raises awareness and customer service standards across the energy and water industries.

**Executive Assistant**

**General Manager Investigations**  
Adrian Borchok

The Investigations Team handles customer complaints against providers. This includes receiving, assessing, investigating and reviewing complaints to ensure that EWON achieves its key objective of fair, reasonable and independent complaint handling.

**General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy**  
Helen Ford

The Governance, Awareness & Policy Team oversees our governance, quality, member relations, communication, community outreach and policy functions by:

- Coordinating our governance processes, including supporting the EWON Board and maintaining member relations through regular contact and reporting, and by holding forums to discuss issues underpinning complaints
- Building awareness of our services and educating consumers and their advocates about energy and water issues through strategic communication activities and an extensive community outreach program
- Driving continuous improvement of case management process by reviewing cases and implementing quality assurance processes
- Identifying complaint trends and systemic issues arising from case work, providing advice and analytical support, conducting research, and preparing public submissions and comments on regulatory changes and industry developments.

**General Manager People**  
Judy Vergison

The People Team is responsible for making EWON a 'great place to work' by maximising staff engagement and contribution. It develops the organisation's HR strategy, which provides a framework of policies and procedures that attract, retain and develop our highly professional staff.

**General Manager Finance & Corporate Services**  
Bernadette Or

The Finance & Corporate Services Team manages EWON's financial reporting, ICT infrastructure and service delivery, and general administration and facility management.

**Manager Initial Response**

Investigations Officers  
Early Resolution Officers  
Assessment Officers

**Manager Team 1**

Investigations Officers

**Manager Team 2**

Investigations Officers

**Manager Team 3**

Investigations Officers  
Case Review Officer

**Manager Team 4**

Investigations Officers  
Case Review Officer

**Manager Projects**

Investigations Officers

**Manager Policy & Research**

Senior Policy & Research Officer  
Policy & Research Officers

**Manager Quality Assurance (QA)**

QA Officers

**Manager Governance**

Stakeholder Relations Officers

**Manager Communications & Outreach**

Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer  
Community Engagement Officer  
Outreach Support Officer  
Online Communications Officer  
Communications Officer  
Team Assistant

**HR Services Team Leader**

Learning & Development Specialist  
HR Administration Officer

**Manager IT**

Senior Data Analyst  
IT Officers  
IT Assistant  
Financial Accountant  
Administration Services Coordinator

# About us

## Our holistic approach

EWON performs an important role in balancing the needs of individual consumers with those of energy and water companies. Factors such as limited English, poor literacy, health issues, disability and financial hardship make it more difficult for some consumers to independently resolve issues with their energy or water provider.

**The frustration caused by a communication breakdown which contributes to an unsatisfactory response to an enquiry or complaint, can exacerbate the problem. In these situations, we provide an accessible avenue for breaking down the barriers for both parties.**

Handling customer complaints is often seen as the central focus of EWON and other Ombudsman offices. But we take on much more. EWON's Charter outlines our key responsibilities, all of which come together to provide a whole of organisation approach to consumer issues and complaint reduction. These are outlined below, including identifying which parts of the organisation play a key role in delivering each responsibility.

### Charter responsibilities

To handle complaints about the conduct of providers of energy or water services fairly, informally, and expeditiously, without charge to the person making the enquiry or complaint.

 **Complaints Management**

To promote EWON to consumers and small businesses.

 **Promotion & Awareness**  
 **Stakeholder Engagement**

To encourage and provide advice to members on the development and maintenance of good complaint handling practices to assist in the reduction and avoidance of complaints.

 **Policy & Influence**  
 **Stakeholder Engagement**

 **Complaints Management**

 **Policy & Influence**

 **Systemic Issues**

 **Stakeholder Engagement**

 **Promotion & Awareness**

Identify possible systemic issues, whether systemic to a particular member or systemic to a group or type of members, and where appropriate investigate these.

 **Complaints Management**  **Systemic Issues**  
 **Policy & Influence**

To inform the community of its activities, EWON must publish an annual report and may publish other material from time to time.

 **Promotion & Awareness**  
 **Complaints Management**

Undertake community and member liaison and educational initiatives with the aim of avoiding or reducing the incidence of complaints.

 **Promotion & Awareness**  **Policy & Influence**  
 **Stakeholder Engagement**  **Complaints Management**

## EWON's holistic approach in practice

This example of our work shows how real change can be achieved by taking a holistic approach to complaints reduction.

In the first instance, EWON's complaints management highlighted the broad concerns; our systemic issues process then identified the specific issues and the relevant instrument for supporting change within the business; our policy work directed the spotlight on required policy changes; and finally our stakeholder engagement contributed to the implementation of the revised policy and process.



## Case study

### Water

#### Water complaints spark policy change

Last year EWON received a number of complaints from tenants who had their water supply restricted because their landlord had a debt with their water provider. The water provider would not negotiate a payment plan with the tenants, and required full payment of the arrears before it would lift the restriction – in some cases the tenant had already paid their landlord for water usage, in accordance with their lease agreement.

EWON published case studies about these complaints in a quarterly report to members, and raised the issue with the water provider. We also made a submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) review of the water provider's licence and included case studies about these tenants' experience and the systemic nature of this issue. We pointed out that if tenants were required to pay the arrears in full they needed to be given extra time to pay and a payment plan option.

This would allow them to negotiate with their landlord or raise a tenancy complaint with the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and in turn be reimbursed for their out of pocket expenses.

Following on from the submission, EWON presented at an IPART public hearing reviewing the provider's licence, again covering the points made in our submission. The water provider's Managing Director, who was at the forum, took note of our concerns and invited EWON to work with the provider as he committed to review its approach to collecting arrears in tenanted properties and revise its policy and Customer Contract.

As a result, the provider no longer restricts water to known tenanted properties, and if it finds out a property is tenanted after a restriction is applied, it is lifted immediately – a just outcome for many NSW water customers!

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**Category:** Systemic issues  
**Outcome:** Policy change  
**Issue:** Tenant disconnection



# About us

## Our benchmarks

EWON plans its activities and measures its performance against the Australian Government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution (CDR Benchmarks). The CDR Benchmarks provide standards and encourage best practice in industry-based dispute resolution services throughout the country.

## The six benchmarks are:

1. Accessibility
2. Independence
3. Fairness
4. Accountability
5. Efficiency
6. Effectiveness

## Focusing on accessibility

We continue to improve our accessibility so that all community members can benefit from EWON's services and resources. To achieve this, we engage with a diverse range of demographic, cultural, language and geographic communities.

In 2016/2017, we used 10 channels to increase access to our services for NSW consumers.

### Website redevelopment

Ensure compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

### Glossary of terms

An online glossary of terms to help customers cut through energy and water industry jargon

### Plain English factsheets

Easy to understand information about complex topics

### AUSLAN video

Overview of EWON for people with a hearing impairment

### External services

Continued use of the Translating and Interpreting Service and National Relay Service

### Multilingual resources

New brochure and factsheets in 38 languages

### Video conferencing

Offering alternative ways of engaging with us

### Increased community outreach

More visits to diverse groups and locations (See more on [page 48](#))

### Social media

Expanding our reach to new demographic groups

### Updated resources

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

## Accessibility

## Reflecting the benchmarks in our case handling

### Timely case handling

We closely monitor how we respond to complaints, the time taken to close cases, and the outcome of investigations.

Against a benchmark of 90%, this year we finalised 90% of cases within 30 days. Only 4% of cases were open longer than 90 days, against a benchmark of 5%.

### Internal review

We apply the principles of procedural fairness in our decision making. We provide opportunities for all parties to participate in the process, and we explain the reasons for our decisions in writing. Customers can request a review of our decision if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and they:

- identify bias in our investigation
- provide relevant new information which may change the outcome
- identify an error or omission by EWON.

This year we received 17 formal requests for internal review from 5,635 finalised investigations. Our reviews identified four needed further investigation and 13 where no further investigation was required.

## Our values

EWON's values articulate not only what we consider to be the right behaviours to demonstrate but drive how we actually carry out our work on a day to day basis, in all we do. Our values provide a framework for consistency and accountability in our actions and decisions, underpinning the everyday interactions of all EWON staff with customers, providers and stakeholders.



#### Independence

We are impartial; we approach our work transparently and openly.



#### Respect

We are courteous; we build trust by listening and following through on our commitments.



#### Integrity

We are open and honest; we stand by our actions.



#### Service Excellence

We are proactive; we are committed to delivering high quality services to our customers and stakeholders.



#### One Team

We work together; we are flexible, helpful and take personal responsibility.



#### Social Justice

We are accessible and fair; we take a holistic approach to addressing customer circumstances.



## EWON awareness surveys

Building awareness of energy and water issues affecting consumers and promoting the service we provide are key responsibilities in our Charter.

Our community engagement program, stakeholder engagement and communications activities aim to reduce complaints to EWON by educating consumers, small businesses and community workers about energy and water issues, as well as member complaint processes and financial affordability and hardship processes and programs. They also raise awareness of our services so customers know about us when something goes wrong. However, customers only contact us if they have a problem, so we don't know how many NSW consumers know about EWON.

In 2016/2017 we approached Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), which carries out six-monthly consumer sentiment surveys about a range of energy retailer matters, to ask if it would expand its survey to gauge awareness of Energy Ombudsman offices.

The ECA agreed and its August 2016 and April 2017 surveys included two questions designed to measure the levels of Ombudsman awareness amongst Australian consumers.

The first question was aimed at measuring unprompted awareness; "If you had a complaint about your electricity or gas services which you could not resolve by talking to your retailer or network company, which people or organisation[s] would you contact?" Thirty percent of people responded with an Ombudsman-related answer, some stating Energy Ombudsman specifically (6%). Interestingly, the word 'Ombudsman' was spelt in many ways, as shown in the light bulb image.

obdusman  
omburdsmon  
onmadsman ombutsman  
Ombudesman onbudsman  
Ombudsman omboardsman  
Omnibudman ombusman  
**OMBUDSMAN**  
Ombodsmen Omnibus  
Omdibusman Ombudma  
omnibudsman Obnasman  
ombust man omnisbun  
ombudman omnibusman  
ombudusman obusman  
**Onwardman**  
on busman Obudsman  
ombudsom ombusiman  
omsbudsman  
Ombardsman  
Omsbudman  
  
ombudman  
abudsman  
Onbussman  
obudsmen  
ombodsmen

A second question gauged prompted awareness of consumers by asking 'How familiar are you with an organisation called the Energy Ombudsman, which assists consumers with complaints about energy?'. Over the two surveys between 28 and 30% of consumers responded that they were familiar or very familiar with the term 'Energy Ombudsman'.

These survey results indicate that current awareness is at a level where if someone needed us, they may know to call us or a family member or friend may be able to refer them to us. We are often asked what level of awareness is our objective. Our aim is that consumers know to contact us when they need us! So it is critical that we continue our work to raise awareness levels across NSW for the benefit of all stakeholders.

## Refer to higher level (RHL) surveys

If a customer calls us and has only had brief contact with the provider's contact centre, we offer customers a referral to their provider's specialist complaints team before we conduct an investigation. This approach gives the provider another opportunity to resolve the customer's problem directly. Importantly, it also gives the customer a chance to have their complaint reviewed by more senior staff which also empowers them in their future dealings with the provider.

The complaint is most often resolved by this engagement between the customer and their provider, and the customer does not need to recontact EWON. One limitation is that we don't find out the outcomes of such complaints – so we ensure the customer knows to contact us if not satisfied.

In 2016/2017 we introduced a further line of sight to RHL outcomes by conducting quarterly surveys to collect customer feedback and gauge their level of satisfaction with the RHL process. We conducted the first RHL survey using complaint data from October to December 2016. The results of this survey set a benchmark to compare future results.

Each of the two subsequent surveys saw positive increases on the initial benchmark survey results. We were especially pleased with the number of customers who said they would recommend our service, achieving a high Net Promoter Score (NPS) of + 55 in the April to June 2017 survey. The NPS indicator measures customer's rating of their service experience, and reflects that most are advocates and promoters of EWON.

"How reassuring it is to know that there are policies in place to protect customers from companies that dismiss your rights as consumers. Thank you to the representative who answered the phone personally, no automated voice system, no reams of paperwork to fill in with stat declaration forms. The process was painless and an outcome was reached without tears (on my behalf). Many thanks."

**EWON RHL customer**

**78%** of customers were satisfied with our service

**83%** rated the manner of EWON staff as excellent or good

**81%** rated the knowledge of EWON staff as excellent or good

**79%** of customers were satisfied with the referral process

**59%** of complaints were resolved by the provider

### Of these:

**73%** were fully satisfied with the outcome

**22%** felt obliged to accept the provider's outcome

**41%** of complaints were not resolved by the provider

### Of these:

**57%** were still in progress

**22%** where the retailer didn't agree with the outcome the customer was seeking

**18%** were not contacted by the retailer

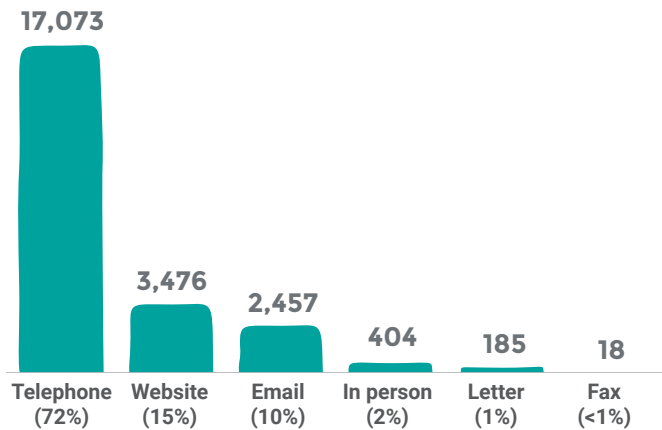
**11%** returned to EWON

The percentages do not equal 100% as customers can choose multiple responses to this question

# The big picture

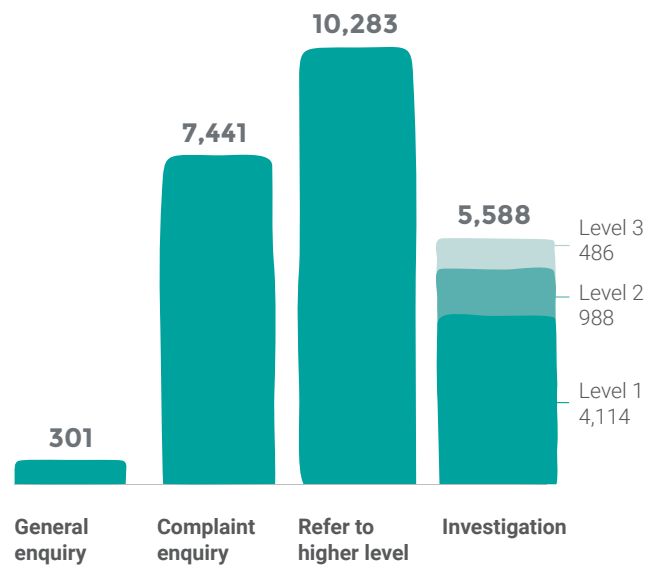
23,613  
cases received

## How we received complaints



Following the rollout of our new online form, complaints submitted via the website have increased by 34% and now make up 15% of our total complaints received

## Cases received



5,635  
investigations finalised

23,665  
cases closed\*

\*More complaints were resolved than received due to complaints being carried forward from the previous financial year and resolved in the current year

## Investigation outcomes



## Case study

### Gas

#### Connection error means loss of rental income for Mrs Joyce

Mrs Joyce owned two properties and was living in one while the other was being renovated. She contacted her energy retailer to have gas connected to the property she was renovating before she moved in. Her retailer told her that the gas was already connected, but when Mrs Joyce's plumber went to install appliances, he found there was no gas connection.

Mrs Joyce contacted her retailer again. They said they had incorrectly recorded the property's street number and had connected the wrong home. They told Mrs Joyce that they would need to submit a new connection request with the distributor which would take three months and cost around \$820.

Mrs Joyce wanted to move in as soon as possible, but with a small child and no hot water or gas it wasn't practical. Facing the loss of rental income from the second property, and with two mortgage payments to meet, she contacted EWON for assistance. We asked the distributor if the connection process could be accelerated and they agreed to schedule the connection sooner. Mrs Joyce visited the distributor's contractors on site and was told that the connection couldn't go ahead because of wet weather. She found them rude and raised poor customer service as another issue with us.

EWON discussed the connection error, delay and Mrs Joyce's financial loss with the retailer and they agreed to apply a credit of around \$4,890 to her account for loss of rental income. They also agreed to waive the non-standard meter connection fee of \$820 and acknowledged that their failure to record the correct address contributed to the delayed gas connection.

Mrs Joyce thanked our Investigations Officer for her reliability and support during the complaint process. "It is my hope that I don't ever need your services again, but it's reassuring to know that EWON do actually help and that I'm not alone with big companies."

---

**Category:** Level 2 investigation  
**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution  
**Issues:** Failure to respond, incorrect advice/information, poor service

## Case study

### Electricity

#### Customer contacts EWON after meter installation confusion

In late 2016, Mr Hudson installed a new solar hot water system in his home. He wanted to use the new system with a digital meter so he could monitor his usage to save energy, water and money. He asked his retailer to install a second meter programmed to off-peak and was advised the installation would take place in 2017. Mr Hudson continued to follow up with the retailer about installation and a few months later his retailer told him he would need to pay to install a relay before the new meter could go in. Mr Hudson agreed to pay for the relay to be installed.

The technician who installed the meter noted an issue with the relay turning off, but said it would correct itself overnight. Later Mr Hudson realised the timer had not been programmed and contacted his distributor who told him that the retailer is responsible for programming the timer. He then contacted his retailer and they advised that the programming needs to be set by the distributor.

After several phone calls and emails to the retailer and distributor, Mr Hudson was frustrated with the poor customer service he was receiving. He felt he was being given the run around and was also concerned that he was losing out financially because he couldn't monitor his usage, so he contacted EWON for advice.

We contacted the distributor who acknowledged that there was confusion over who was responsible for programming the meter and agreed to visit the site to program the meter. The following day Mr Hudson confirmed the timer appeared to be working correctly and that he considered the matter resolved.

---

**Category:** Level 2 investigation  
**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution  
**Issues:** Billing, customer service, digital meter exchange

# Enquiries and complaints

## 301

general enquiries

### General enquiry

**A request for information about energy or water, or an issue outside EWON's jurisdiction**

Sometimes customers contact us about an issue relating to energy or water but they don't have an actual complaint. For example, they may be trying to call their provider but have called EWON in error, or in a small number of cases they may be calling about something else, such as an issue with their phone provider. In these cases, we note their call and refer them to their provider or the appropriate organisation and close the file as a general enquiry.

### Complaint enquiry

**A request for information or assistance about energy or water that we can settle quickly**

When customers raise a complaint about their energy or water provider, we ask if they have already spoken to their provider about the issue. If they haven't, we provide them with advice and generally advise them to speak to their provider to resolve the problem. We let them know they can contact us again if they are not satisfied with the provider's response. Sometimes the customer has a question that we can immediately address, such as a request for referral to an agency distributing Energy Account Payment Assistance vouchers or a query about an approved fee or charge on their account. In both cases we offer general advice and information to the customer about their rights and responsibilities. These cases are classified as complaint enquiries and closed.

## 7,441

complaint enquiries

## 10,283

referrals to providers under the RHL arrangement in 2016/2017

### Refer to higher level

**A customer complaint that has been referred to the nominated provider contact for resolution at a higher level in the organisation**

If customers tell us about a complaint they have already made an attempt to resolve with the provider, we offer to refer them back to the provider at a higher level. We categorise these complaints as refer to higher level (RHL).

This approach gives the provider another opportunity to resolve the customer's problem directly. Importantly, it also gives the customer an opportunity to have their complaint reviewed by senior staff working in the provider's specialist complaints area. EWON has protocols in place requiring that the provider contact the customer within three business days to discuss resolution. If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome, the customer can return to EWON for assistance.

EWON closely monitors the performance of each company to ensure that this process continues to be an efficient and effective way to resolve these types of complaints. In 2016/2017, we have also started conducting quarterly RHL customer satisfaction surveys. See **page 17** for information about the survey results.



# 5,588

investigations opened

## Investigations

### Investigated cases are categorised as Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3

We investigate complaints where customers have already tried multiple times to resolve their complaint with their provider, including when they are returning to us after an RHL because they are not satisfied with the response they received from the provider.

An investigation usually involves speaking to both parties to get the facts and circumstances of the case from their points of view. Where appropriate, we also offer to refer the customer to other services, for example welfare agencies, financial counselling and tenant advisory services. We analyse information from the provider, including metering data or voice recordings of energy contracts. We also review legislative provisions, conduct comprehensive research and, where required, make site visits and consult with independent experts. In reaching an outcome, we consider laws, codes and regulations, and industry best practice in order to come to a fair and reasonable outcome based on the individual circumstances of each complaint.

Investigated matters are initially categorised as Level 1, where they are generally resolved in 240 minutes or less. They often involve collecting and clarifying information related to the investigation and require contacting the customer and the provider several times.

When a complaint has not been resolved at Level 1 and further investigation is necessary, we upgrade the complaint to Level 2. These cases typically require detailed research, investigation and analysis and may include a detailed written report for the customer. If a complaint is still not resolved after 480 minutes but merits further investigation, if we make unsuccessful requests for information from the provider, or if we are unable to negotiate a settlement without expert advice, the complaint investigation is upgraded to Level 3.

**In 2016/2017, we closed 5,635 investigations: Level 1, 3,775; Level 2, 1,141; Level 3, 719.**

## Outcomes

### Facilitated resolution, negotiated resolution, no further investigation and binding decisions

Facilitated resolutions are those where the provider works with us taking positive, proactive steps to seek resolution of a customer's complaint in an efficient and timely manner. In a negotiated resolution, we conduct a full investigation and are actively involved in negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome for the parties.

When EWON's investigation concludes that the provider's position is fair and reasonable, when the customer withdraws a complaint, or where the customer does not keep in contact with us, a case is closed on the grounds of 'no further investigation'. In each of these cases, we write to the customer advising of the outcome.

Occasionally the Ombudsman may be required to make a binding decision. A binding decision is an enforceable order to a provider to take a prescribed course of action. In 2016/2017 all complaints were able to be resolved without the Ombudsman being called upon to make a binding decision.

Fairness and accountability require that customers can request a review of those decisions within 28 days of receiving our written report. In circumstances where the customer can provide new information not available at the time of the investigation, can identify an error in the information on which the decision was made, or if the customer is of the view that the case manager has exhibited bias, one of our Quality Assurance Officers will undertake an internal review.

**In 2016/2017 we facilitated 989 resolutions, negotiated 4,027 resolutions and closed 619 complaints with a no further investigation outcome.**





# Complaints this year

**For the third consecutive year, our complaint numbers fell. However the 1% decrease is much less pronounced than the 22% decrease we reported in 2015/2016 and the 19% reduction in 2014/2015.**

EWON received 23,613 complaints in 2016/2017 as compared to the 23,760 complaints received in 2015/2016.

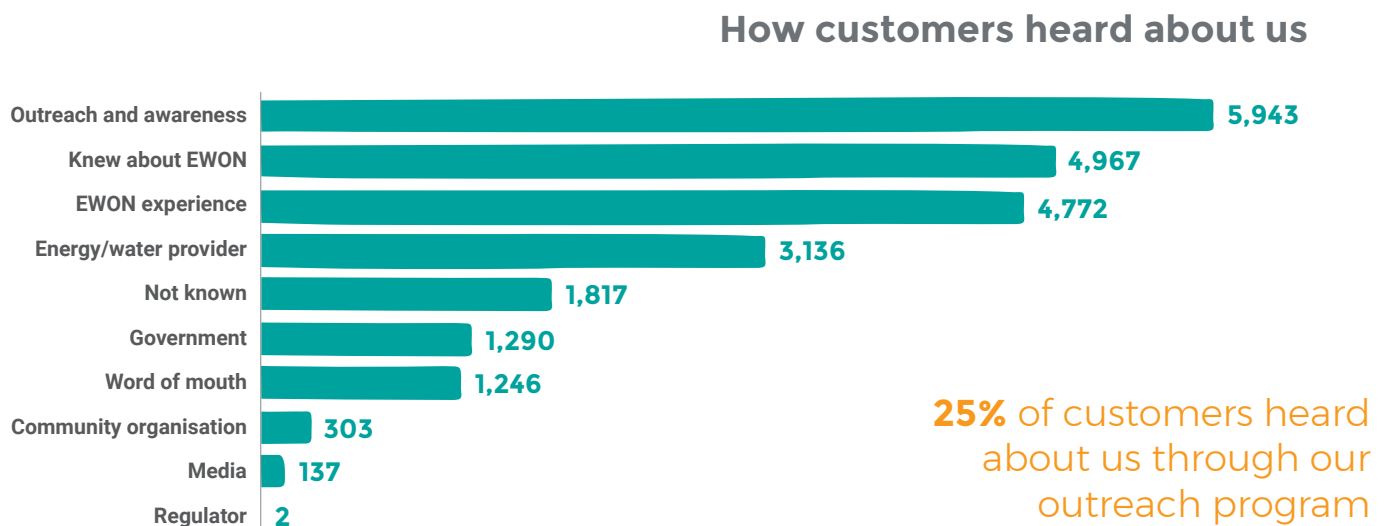
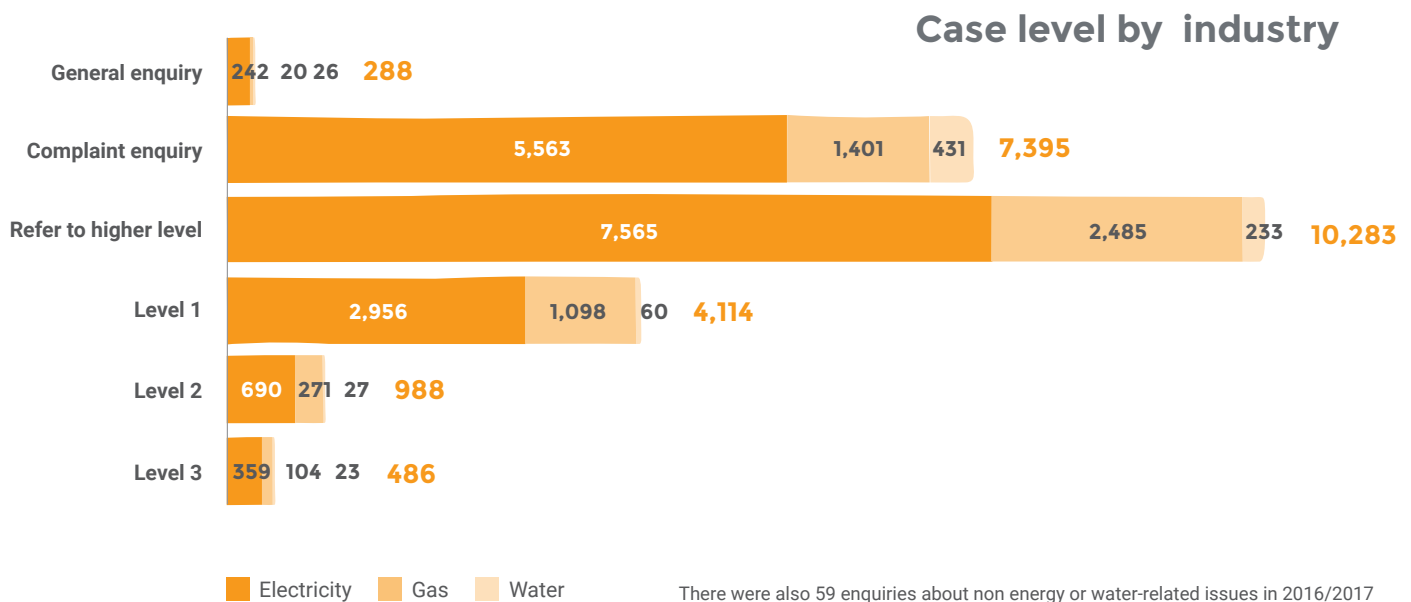
The downward trend reversed and complaints steadily increased throughout the third and fourth quarters of the financial year. Between April and June 2017 complaints received by EWON were up 21% compared to the same period in 2016, and an upward trend was established. Breakdown of complaints:

- 301 general enquiries
- 7,441 complaint enquiries
- 10,283 cases referred back to the provider at a higher level
- 5,588 were investigated
- 23,665 complaints were resolved, 52 more than we received.

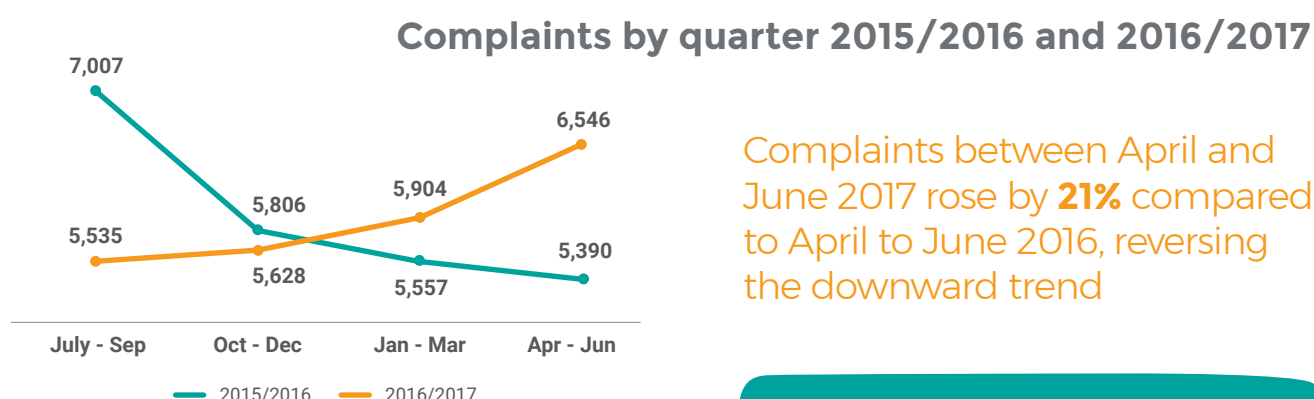
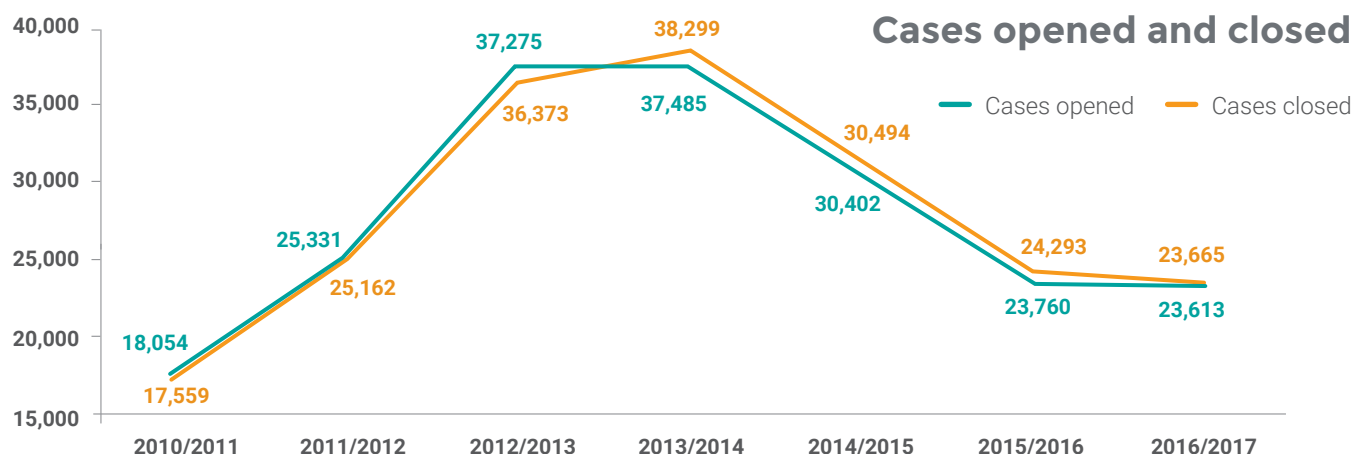
The proportion of electricity, gas and water complaints remained relatively consistent with 2015/2016. Electricity accounted for 74% (17,375) of all complaints, gas accounted for 23% (5,379) and water complaints remained stable at 3% (800) of our complaints.

Billing continued to be the biggest issue for our customers, with 57% (13,428) of all cases involving a billing issue, a decrease from 59% (14,109) in 2015/2016. Other significant issues were customer service, which factored in 44% of cases (up from 42% in 2015/2016), credit at 21% (down from 28%) and transfer issues at 9% (down from 12%).

We introduced digital meter exchange as a new issue in 2016/2017. This was in response to the rollout of digital meters, prior to and following the end of the Solar Bonus Scheme on 31 December 2016. Digital meter exchange issues factored in 7% (1,605) of all complaints in 2016/2017.







Complaints between April and June 2017 rose by **21%** compared to April to June 2016, reversing the downward trend

### Complaints by gender

**46%** female  
**54%** male

### Advocates and authority to act

Sometimes the person contacting us is an advocate authorised to access the account. They may be a friend or a family member of the complainant or a community worker. When an advocate contacts us we seek an authority to act from the customer before investigating the complaint. Complainants can provide us with the authority to act by filling out a form or, in some cases, advising us over the phone.

### Retail/distribution comparison

|                              |                 | 2016/2017 | % change from 2015/2016 |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| <b>Electricity</b>           | Retailer        | 15,778    | 1%                      |
|                              | Distributor     | 959       | -11%                    |
|                              | Exempt retailer | 125       | 34%                     |
|                              | Other           | 513       | 9%                      |
| <b>Gas</b>                   | Retailer        | 4,952     | -8%                     |
|                              | Distributor     | 384       | 79%                     |
|                              | Exempt retailer | 9         | 29%                     |
|                              | Other           | 34        | 6%                      |
| <b>Water</b>                 | Retailer        | 523       | -1%                     |
|                              | Distributor     | 225       | 1%                      |
|                              | Other           | 52        | 37%                     |
| <b>Non energy/ non water</b> | General enquiry | 59        | 55%                     |
| <b>TOTAL:</b>                |                 | 23,613    | -1%                     |

The increase in complaints about electricity and gas exempt retailers reflects the increasing number of embedded networks and exempt retailers in NSW

The main gas distribution complaint issues were problems with new connections, poor customer service and failure to respond

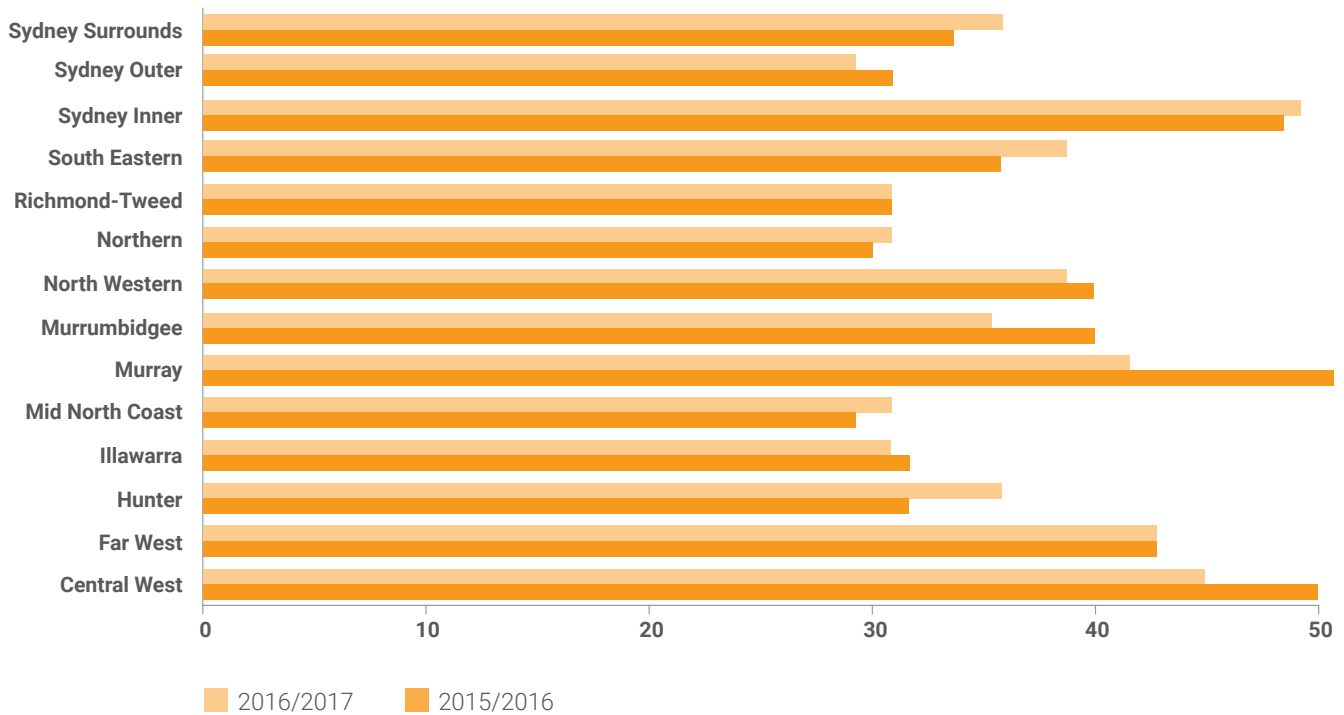
# Complaints by Local Government Area (per 1,000 people)



|              |    |              |   |                      |   |                  |   |
|--------------|----|--------------|---|----------------------|---|------------------|---|
| Sydney       | 12 | Campbelltown | 3 | Ryde                 | 3 | Northern Beaches | 2 |
| Woollahra    | 5  | Canada Bay   | 3 | Willoughby           | 3 | Sutherland       | 2 |
| North Sydney | 4  | Inner West   | 3 | Canterbury-Bankstown | 2 | Waverley         | 2 |
| Parramatta   | 4  | Lane Cove    | 3 | Cumberland           | 2 | Camden           | 1 |
| Strathfield  | 4  | Liverpool    | 3 | Fairfield            | 2 | Hornsby          | 1 |
| Bayside      | 3  | Mosman       | 3 | Georges River        | 2 | Hunter's Hill    | 1 |
| Blacktown    | 3  | Penrith      | 3 | Ku-ring-gai          | 2 | The Hills        | 1 |
| Burwood      | 3  | Randwick     | 3 |                      |   |                  |   |

\*Some complaints by LGA may be under or over-represented due to the 2016 Council amalgamations

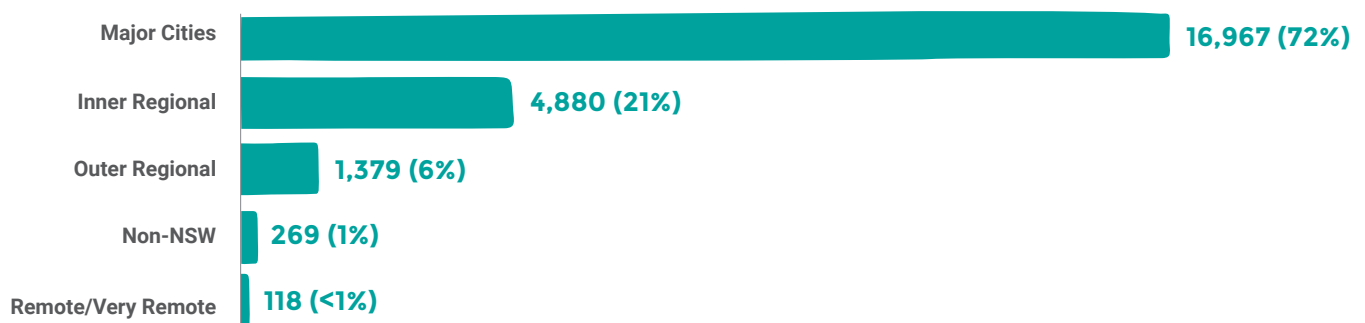
## Complaints per 10,000 people by NSW region



## Complaints by NSW region

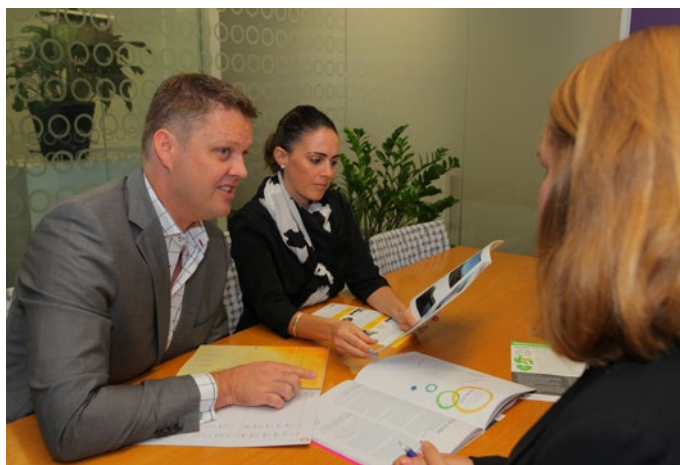
| Region           | 2016/2017 | % change from 2015/2016 |
|------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Sydney Outer     | 6,917     | -6%                     |
| Sydney Inner     | 6,292     | 2%                      |
| Hunter           | 2,053     | 10%                     |
| Sydney Surrounds | 1,702     | 6%                      |
| Illawarra        | 1,237     | -3%                     |
| Mid North Coast  | 894       | 8%                      |
| Central West     | 855       | -9%                     |
| South Eastern    | 783       | 8%                      |
| Richmond-Tweed   | 685       | 1%                      |
| Northern         | 534       | 5%                      |
| Murrumbidgee     | 479       | -12%                    |
| Murray           | 466       | -17%                    |
| North Western    | 353       | -6%                     |
| Non-NSW          | 269       | 6%                      |
| Far West         | 94        | 0%                      |

## Location of customers lodging a complaint



# Consumer issues

As part of our holistic approach, EWON is committed to addressing issues that negatively affect consumers and prevent or reduce complaints coming to us. We identify complaint issues through our casework and outreach activities, and work with providers, regulators, government and community agencies to influence policy development and encourage the adoption of best industry practice.



## Access to external dispute resolution

Access to free, fair and independent dispute resolution for consumers in NSW remained a key issue for EWON in 2016/2017. Most energy customers in NSW enjoy consumer protections over and above those provided by general consumer law, including access to external dispute resolution schemes like EWON. The essential nature of electricity and gas make these additional consumer protections necessary; however, the changing face of the energy market has left a growing number of customers without some of these protections.

Embedded networks are private networks that serve multiple premises, and are owned by a body corporate, strata manager, or the building owner. Exempt entities operate and sell energy through an embedded network. Each exempt entity has a supply arrangement with an energy

network provider which gives them one metered connection point to the building's internal private network. The exempt entity then on-sells energy to individual customers. Customers of these entities are billed for their energy usage by the owner of the private network. Customers are very restricted with respect to choosing another retailer as the wiring and metering infrastructure does not support choice.

Currently in accordance with NSW legislation, customers of exempt entities can raise complaints with EWON and we will investigate these complaints. However, as the exempt entities are not members of EWON, the Ombudsman's decisions are not binding on the exempt entity and cannot be enforced. Further, those entities cannot be charged for complaints and so the cost is borne by EWON's members.

Issues raised by customers of exempt entities are similar to complaints raised by customers of authorised providers.

However, the relationship between the customer and exempt entities can be multi-faceted. Often, customers are hesitant to complain as they are concerned it may impact their relationship with the entity, who may also be their landlord and who they may rely on for many other services such as maintenance or repairs.

Customers living in retirement villages, residential parks or unit blocks can also lose consumer protections if the complex is renovated or retro-fitted to incorporate an embedded network. They also no longer have access to the competitive market to find the energy deal best for them.

The Australian Energy Regulator is canvassing options to address the gap in consumer access to external dispute resolution. EWON welcomes regulatory change that ensures all energy customers in NSW have equal access to consumer protections, including to our services.



## Energy affordability

Media and policy makers' focus on energy affordability grew significantly throughout 2016/2017. This is largely due to ongoing debate about Australia's energy future, the impact of changes to the electricity and gas markets and the cost of energy for residential and business consumers.

Payment difficulties, debt collection and disconnection, continue to be key reasons why customers seek EWON's assistance. Raising awareness of assistance available to people experiencing issues with affordability, including energy rebates, payment plans and hardship programs, is a key part of our work. We also contribute to the wider policy debate about energy affordability and how it affects customers.

In July 2016, the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) introduced the Sustainable Payment Plans Framework. This voluntary framework encourages energy retailers to offer extra assistance to customers and improve communication about financial issues, particularly regarding payment of bills. The AER publishes a list of retailers that have committed to adopting and implementing the framework.

### Debt

The AER retail statistics\* reported that 85,801 NSW residential electricity customers were in debt as at March 2017, up 7.8% from March 2016. The average electricity debt for residential electricity customers in NSW was \$663 in March 2017, up \$39 (6.8%) from March 2016. The average debt owed by residential gas customers increased by \$28 (5.5%) to \$537 in the same period.

In March 2017, the AER completed its review of the minimum debt amount which can trigger a customer's energy being disconnected. The AER review found that the current \$300 minimum disconnection amount remained effective.

### Disconnections

2016/2017 could see a decrease in electricity disconnections for NSW residential customers, the first in a number of years. Disconnected residential gas customers are likely to be at a similar level to 2015/2016. Disconnection complaints to EWON decreased overall in 2016/2017, although the number of disconnection complaints received per month increased in the second half of the year.

We continue to promote the work we do to assist people facing disconnection, to close the significant gap between those who actually have their energy supply disconnected and those who know to approach us for help. EWON most often arranges same day reconnection and provides access to payment plans, affordability/hardship programs and energy efficiency advice.

### Hardship programs

According to AER figures, the number of electricity customers supported by financial hardship programs in March 2017 increased by 4.2% to 24,921 since 2016 (23,913). For gas customers, the increase was 9.3% (7,275 up from 6,657).

There were 86,327 residential electricity customers in NSW on payment plans in March 2017, a slight increase on the figure reported in March 2016 (85,636). There was also a small increase in the number of NSW gas customers on payment plans, to 21,195 in March 2017, up from 20,537 in March 2016.

\*NSW AER data from [aer.gov.au/retail-markets/retail-statistics](http://aer.gov.au/retail-markets/retail-statistics) as at 29 June 2017





# Consumer issues



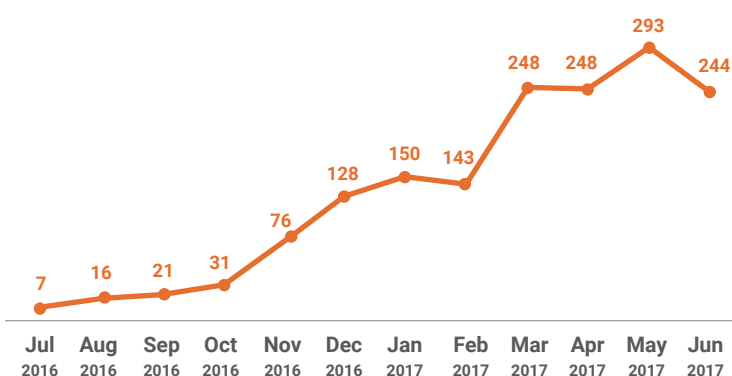
## End of Solar Bonus Scheme and digital meter rollout

The Solar Bonus Scheme closed on 31 December 2016, changing the way solar energy is measured and billed in NSW. The 147,000 households and businesses participating in the scheme received a feed-in tariff of 60 or 20 cents for the energy they exported into the electricity grid – these customers may have received low, or in some cases no, energy bills for many years.

Most customers on this scheme required the installation of a net digital meter to receive solar feed-in tariff benefits from 1 January 2017. The NSW Government identified this as an opportunity to begin a retailer-led digital meter (or smart meter) rollout, ahead of the wider digital meter rollout that will take place from 1 December 2017. All new and replacement meters installed in NSW will be digital with remote communication capacity.

EWON experienced a steady climb in complaints about digital meters throughout 2016/2017, receiving a total of 1,605 complaints, ranging from seven in July 2016 to an average of 262 in April, May and June 2017.

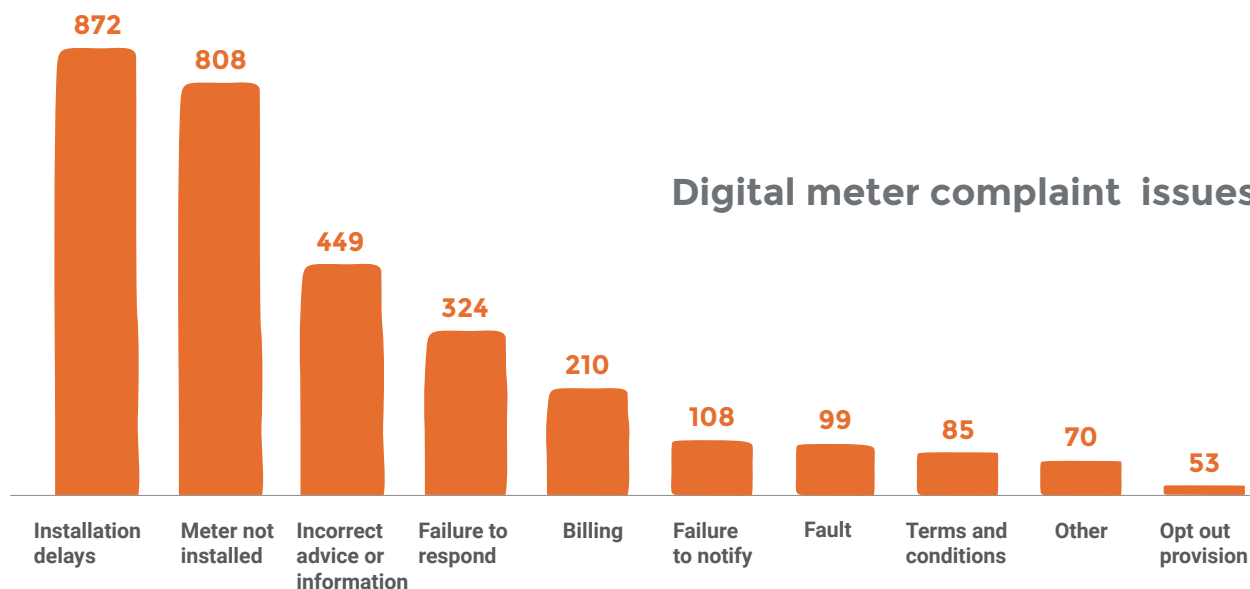
### Digital meter cases from July 2016 to June 2017



Complaints continue to come in, with some customers still waiting on a net meter to be installed.

Digital meter complaint issues that may have implications for the broader rollout include:

- **Installation delays**  
Customers experience a significant or ongoing delay receiving a digital meter after signing a contract with a retailer to provide one.
- **Meter not installed**  
Customers unable to get information about the installation process after being offered a contract that included the installation of a digital meter.
- **Opt-out provision**  
Customers not providing explicit informed consent to having a digital meter installed because their contract includes an opt-out rather than opt-in provision.
- **Insufficient mobile coverage**  
Customers being advised that they have insufficient mobile coverage to support a digital meter (digital meters use the mobile phone network to transmit information).
- **Incorrect meter**  
Installers arriving at the site with the wrong meter (for example, with a single phase meter where a three phase meter is required).



**Electricity retailers advised that delays were, and still are, due to installations taking more time than expected; a lack of qualified installers; aged/damaged house/meter wiring; the presence of asbestos or other meter board/box quality issues; and problems with access to meters.**

Digital meter complaints to EWON continue while installation delays continue. Many customers are out of pocket because they cannot receive any solar feed-in tariff for the electricity they export to the grid.

Further, these delays lead to customers experiencing higher than expected bills and in turn cause them financial stress and hardship. Customers should ask for backdated feed-in tariff credits once their meter is installed, if this is not offered by their retailer.

We continue to work with providers and engage with government and regulators regarding these issues.

## Solar Bonus Scheme closure campaign

In late 2016, EWON launched a campaign targeting Solar Bonus Scheme customers who may not have been aware that the scheme was coming to an end. The campaign included an online resource, online advertising, a flier, email campaign, and social media to communicate the five steps customers needed to follow to prepare for the scheme's closure. The online resource also provided information about metering arrangements, tariffs, and how to compare and find the best energy retail offer.





# Complaint issues

We open one case when a customer contacts us but they often experience more than one complaint issue, such as a high bill and poor customer service. Therefore the number of complaint issues is greater than the number of cases we receive.

## Complaints by primary issue

| Primary issue           | 2015/2016 | 2016/2017 | % changed |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Billing                 | 14,199    | 13,428    | -5%       |
| Customer service        | 9,972     | 10,350    | 4%        |
| Credit                  | 6,675     | 4,993     | -25%      |
| Transfer                | 2,895     | 2,149     | -26%      |
| Digital meter exchange* | -         | 1,605     | -         |
| General                 | 736       | 1,011     | 37%       |
| Provision               | 522       | 582       | 11%       |
| Marketing               | 401       | 514       | 28%       |
| Land                    | 378       | 410       | 8%        |
| Supply                  | 465       | 403       | -13%      |

\* Digital meter exchange became a complaint issue as a result of the Solar Bonus Scheme closure effective from 31 December 2016  
Issue count varies from year to year as cases are reviewed

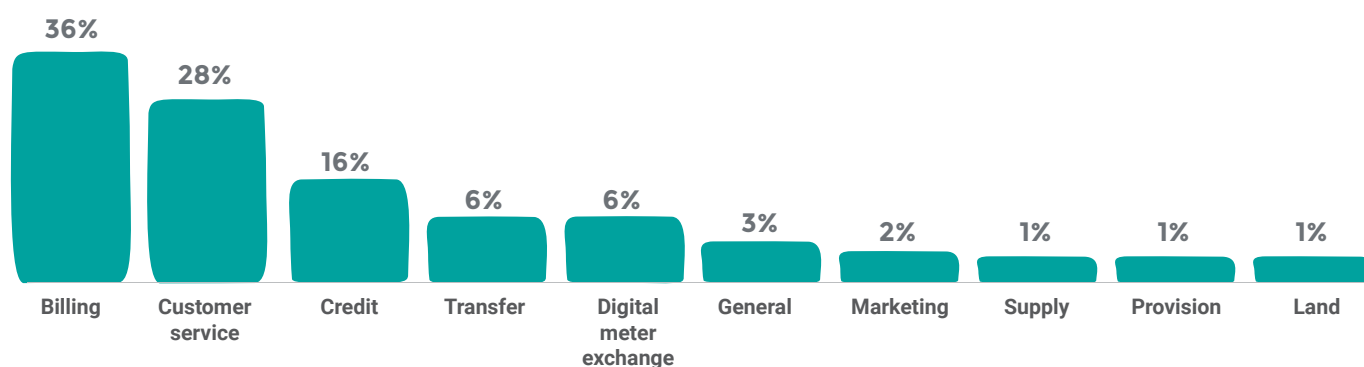
## How we categorise complaint issues

- **Billing:** high and disputed bills, fees and charges, responsibility for accounts
- **Credit:** disconnection, arrears, difficulty in payment, payment arrangement declined, debt collection
- **Customer service:** failure to respond, incorrect advice, poor attitude/service
- **Transfer:** error in billing or transfer of account due to switching retailers, contract terms, delay in transfer, site ownership
- **Digital meter exchange:** delay, meter not installed, incorrect advice, failure to respond/notify, billing, terms and conditions
- **General:** non energy/water related, contractors
- **Land:** impact of network assets, maintenance, environment
- **Marketing:** conduct by marketers, misleading information, pressure, non-account holder signed up
- **Provision:** problems with new or existing connections
- **Supply:** quality, damage/loss, outages.

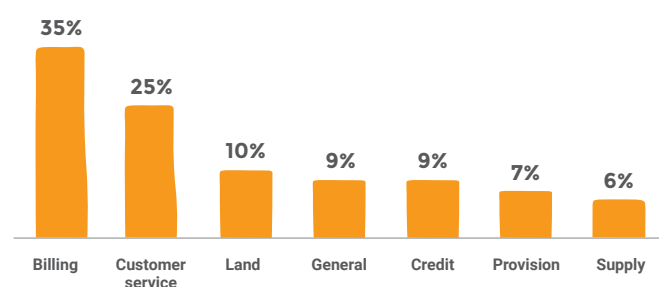
**26%** decrease in transfer related complaints

**28%** increase in marketing related complaints

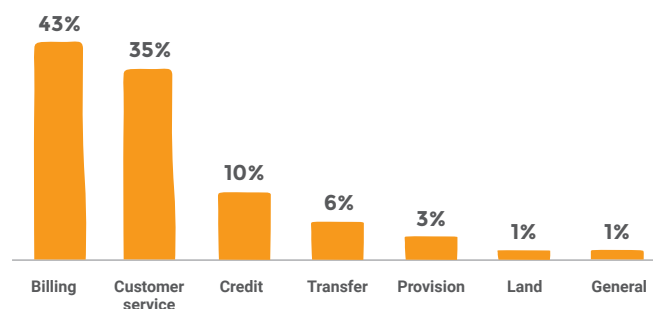
## Electricity issues



## Water issues



## Gas issues



## Billing

13,428 complaints involved billing issues

| Issue                             | No. complaints |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| High or disputed account          | 6,169          |
| Estimated account, meter not read | 2,761          |
| Opening or closing account        | 2,098          |
| Billing error                     | 1,995          |
| Fees and charges                  | 1,174          |
| Tariff (feed-in or TOU, prices)   | 1,081          |
| Backbilling                       | 1,009          |
| Other                             | 736            |
| Delayed bill or bill not received | 620            |
| Rebate/concession                 | 618            |
| Billing period                    | 616            |
| Refund or credit                  | 424            |
| Meter                             | 410            |
| Format                            | 148            |
| Debt transfer                     | 39             |

## Customer service

10,350 complaints involved customer service issues

| Issue                                    | No. complaints |
|--|----------------|
| Poor service                             | 5,233          |
| Failure to respond                       | 3,828          |
| Incorrect advice or information provided | 2,041          |
| Failure to consult or inform             | 1,216          |
| Business to business                     | 690            |
| Unprofessional attitude                  | 316            |
| Privacy                                  | 157            |
| Online                                   | 73             |

## Credit

4,993 complaints involved credit issues

| Issue                     | No. complaints |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Payment difficulties      | 2,239          |
| Collection                | 1,891          |
| Disconnection/restriction | 1,782          |

## Transfer

2,149 complaints involved transfer issues

| Issue                         | No. complaints |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Site ownership                | 597            |
| Transfer in error             | 442            |
| Contact terms                 | 418            |
| Transfer without consent      | 357            |
| Delay                         | 324            |
| Billing problems              | 144            |
| Request for transfer rejected | 88             |
| Cooling off rights            | 83             |

**1,011** complaints involved general issues

## Digital meter exchange

1,605 complaints involved digital meter exchange issues

| Issue                           | No. complaints |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Installation delays             | 872            |
| Meter not installed             | 808            |
| Incorrect advice or information | 449            |
| Failure to respond              | 324            |
| Billing                         | 210            |
| Failure to notify               | 108            |
| Fault                           | 99             |
| Terms and conditions            | 85             |
| Other                           | 70             |
| Opt out provision               | 53             |

## Provision

582 complaints involved provision issues

| Issue  | No. complaints |
|--|----------------|
| Existing connection (e.g. cost of alteration, maintenance) | 298            |
| New connection   | 230            |
| Disconnection/restriction                                  | 76             |

## Marketing

514 complaints involved marketing issues

| Issue                                     | No. complaints |
|---|----------------|
| Misled by marketers                       | 298            |
| Information                               | 103            |
| Other                                     | 71             |
| Pressure into signing contract            | 66             |
| Non account holder approached for consent | 21             |

## Land

410 complaints involved land issues

| Issue                                     | No. complaints |
|---|----------------|
| Network assets (maintenance or placement) | 230            |
| Property damage/restoration               | 134            |
| Vegetation management                     | 38             |
| Easement                                  | 25             |
| Other                                     | 25             |
| Street lighting                           | 12             |

## Supply

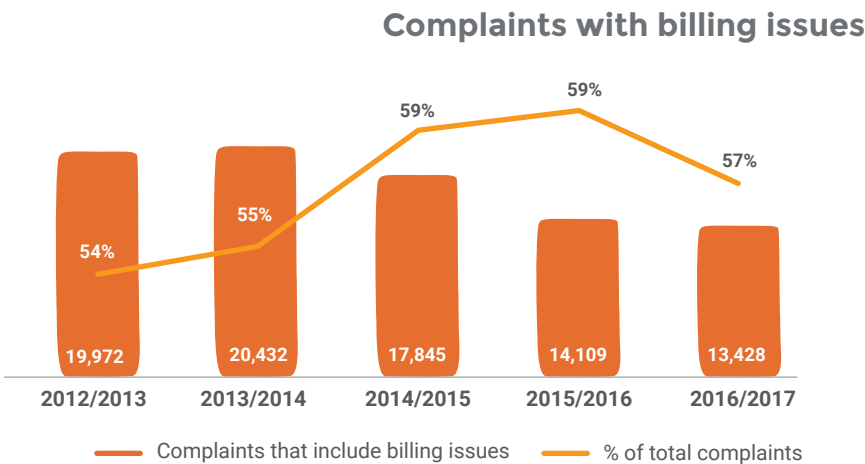
403 complaints involved supply issues

| Issue                   | No. complaints |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Supply off (unplanned)  | 188            |
| Supply off (planned)    | 136            |
| Quality                 | 36             |
| Supply variation        | 34             |
| Sewer overflow/blockage | 24             |
| Water restriction       | 1              |

# Focusing on our top three issues

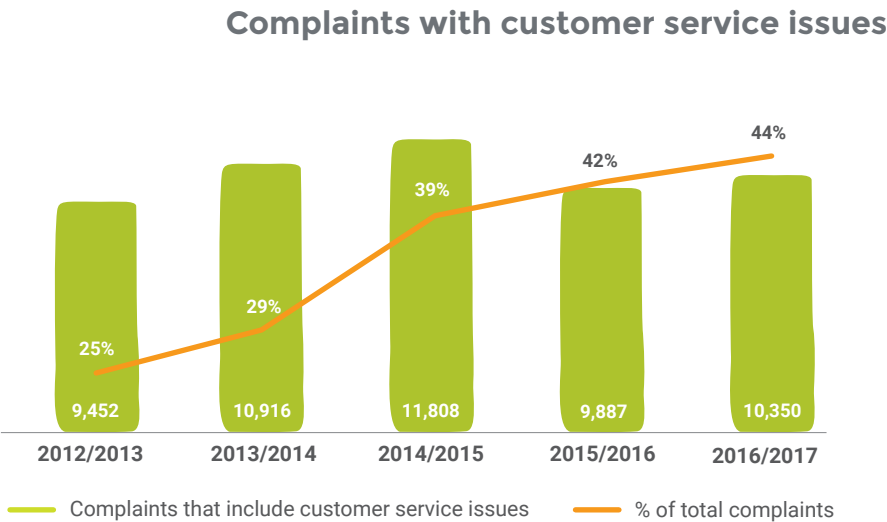
## Billing

Billing continued to be our biggest issue, present in 57% of all complaints.



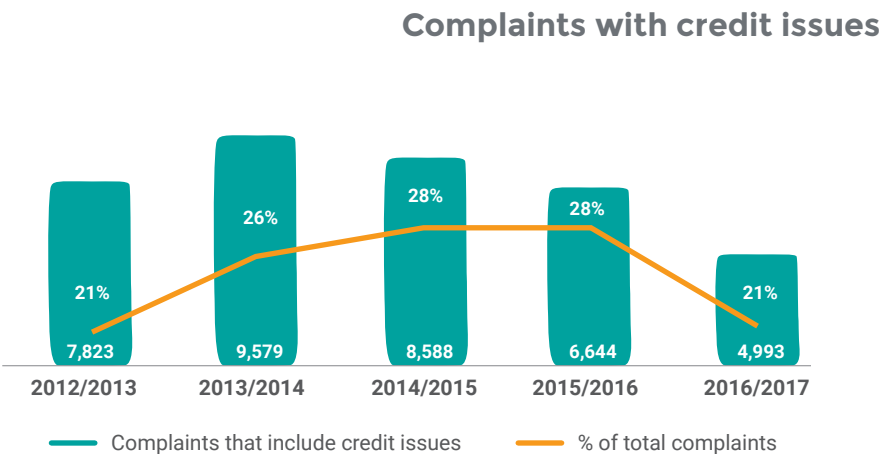
## Customer service

Customer service complaints grew in 2016/2017 in both number and percentage of our overall complaints. Customer service is often an underlying factor for customers contacting EWON, but for these complaints, customer service was the driving factor for EWON's involvement.



## Credit

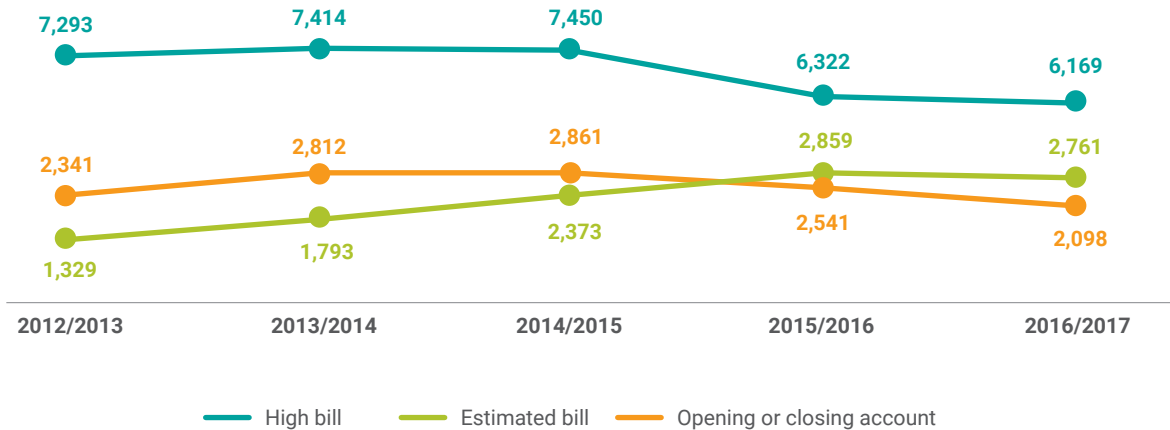
Credit-related complaints continue to be our third biggest issue. Credit issues underpin energy affordability and financial hardship, which are a key focus for EWON.



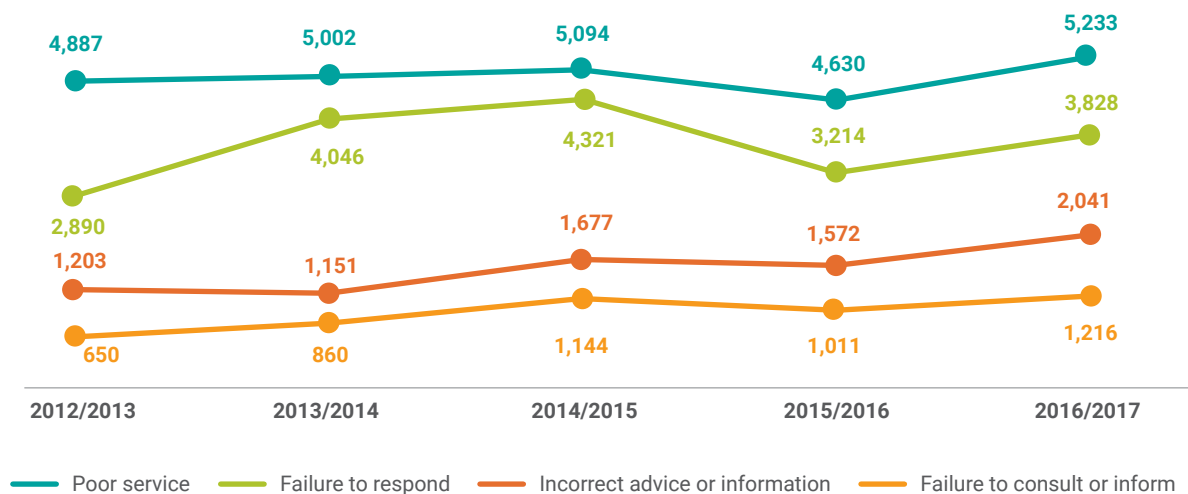
**670** impending disconnection complaints

**1,112** actual disconnection complaints

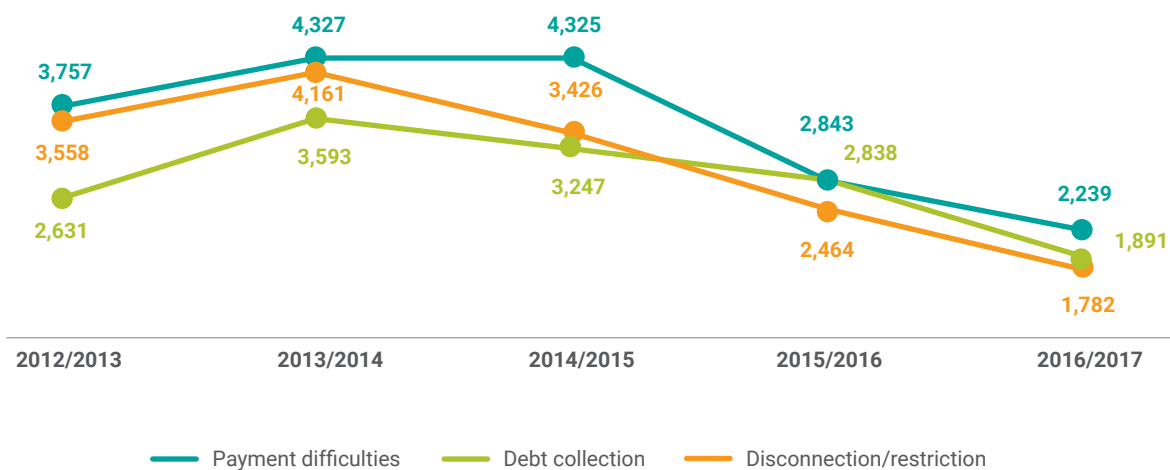
## Trends in billing complaints 2012/2013 to 2016/2017



## Trends in customer service complaints 2012/2013 to 2016/2017



## Trends in credit complaints 2012/2013 to 2016/2017



# Progressing energy and water policy

One of EWON's key responsibilities is to assist providers to reduce or avoid complaints, and raise customer service standards in the energy and water industries. To achieve this, our Policy and Research Team responds to actions and changes proposed by government, industry and regulators by drawing on our individual complaint and systemic issue data.

## Digital meters

The retailer-led digital meter rollout commenced in NSW in 2016/2017, following the closure of the NSW Government's Solar Bonus Scheme in December 2016. A steady climb in digital meter complaints about provider delays in installing new meters, incorrect information or advice, or failure to respond to customer queries has since become "business as usual" at EWON.

Without new net meters, customers are not able to receive feed-in tariff credits for the solar electricity they generate and export into the grid, which offsets the cost of their electricity consumption.

EWON participated in a NSW Ministerial Round Table about the progress of the digital meter rollout and more generally, about affordability. The reasons provided by retailers for the slow progress of the rollout included asbestos and faulty wiring in switchboards, a lack of suitably qualified installers, lack of metering/signal connectivity, and the time needed for each installation being greater than anticipated.

EWON also provided information to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal regarding issues already affecting customers, and possible future issues, from the wider retailer-led 1 December 2017 rollout. These issues include customers requiring easy access to adequate information to compare offers, the need for specialist call centre staff to provide customers with accurate information, and the 'opt-out' approach taken by some retailers in gaining consent from customers.

For more information on digital meter complaints, see **page 28**.

## New products and services

Throughout 2016/2017, an increasing number of consumers moved away from the traditional model of receiving energy to emerging technologies, products and services. These include receiving electricity via an embedded network, through Solar Panel Purchase Agreements, and stand-alone energy systems based on battery storage.

In this changing market it is important that all energy consumers continue to have equitable access to the consumer protections available for customers receiving energy via traditional network/retailer supply. Emerging technologies have the potential to provide consumers with more choice, better information about energy consumption, and potentially lower energy costs. However, these come at a cost, which may be a barrier for customers on low or fixed incomes. The most vulnerable energy consumers should also benefit from the positive changes in the energy market and not be left behind. The energy sector therefore needs to ensure adequate protections are in place for consumers who cannot access new technologies or where innovation creates inequality. If this is not market driven, regulation may need to be put in place.

Small scale battery storage installations also became more prevalent in 2016/2017. The benefits are significant but safety and network risks could also emerge. For example, specialist training is required for fire safety officers to enable them to enter a burning property with an onsite storage battery. We made a submission to the Council of Australian Governments Energy Council expressing our support for a national register of battery storage installations. This is aimed at ensuring adequate resource allocation, network security, and the protection of consumers and emergency workers.



## Hardship

Energy affordability and financial hardship continue to be one of the biggest challenges many consumers experience. Over 21% of all complaints we received in 2016/2017 involved customers with credit issues, including payment difficulties, debt collection or disconnection issues.

Many of the systemic issues we identified related to hardship, involving consumers experiencing vulnerability. These included eligibility for NSW Government rebates and access to provider affordability and financial hardship programs.

Our submissions to government and regulators during 2016/2017 consistently emphasised the importance of considering the needs of consumers experiencing vulnerability when reviewing energy laws and guidelines, to ensure they have access to the consumer protection framework.

EWON recently participated in the review of the NSW Government's Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme initiative. From July 2017, emergency payment vouchers for customers in financial hardship have been sent electronically to their provider, replacing the paper voucher regime.

The Australian Energy Regulator's Sustainable Payment Plan Framework and the Debt Collection Guideline for Collectors and Creditors, published by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission, provide important benchmarks for dealing with customers experiencing financial hardship. EWON worked with our members to highlight the importance of the framework and guidelines in our casework. Our investigations staff refer to these documents when assisting customers experiencing difficulty paying their bills, or complaining about debt and credit-related issues.

Assisting customers in hardship by identifying opportunities in NSW Government policy is an important part of our work. In response to a request from the NSW Minister of Planning and Environment, EWON asked the NSW Government to consider reviewing the current energy rebate scheme. We highlighted the fact that customers eligible for the NSW Gas Rebate do not have a statutory protection against late payment fees, unlike customers who receive the Low Income Household Rebate and other rebates, who are protected from such fees.

## Systemic issues

Identification, review and, where appropriate, investigation of systemic issues is a clear EWON Charter responsibility. A systemic issue is a complaint issue that does, or has the potential to, affect a large number of customers and may relate to one member or a group of members. EWON pursues systemic issues until a suitable resolution is achieved. Some systemic issues are identified through our casework, others via our outreach, and providers also proactively notify us of systemic issues from time to time.

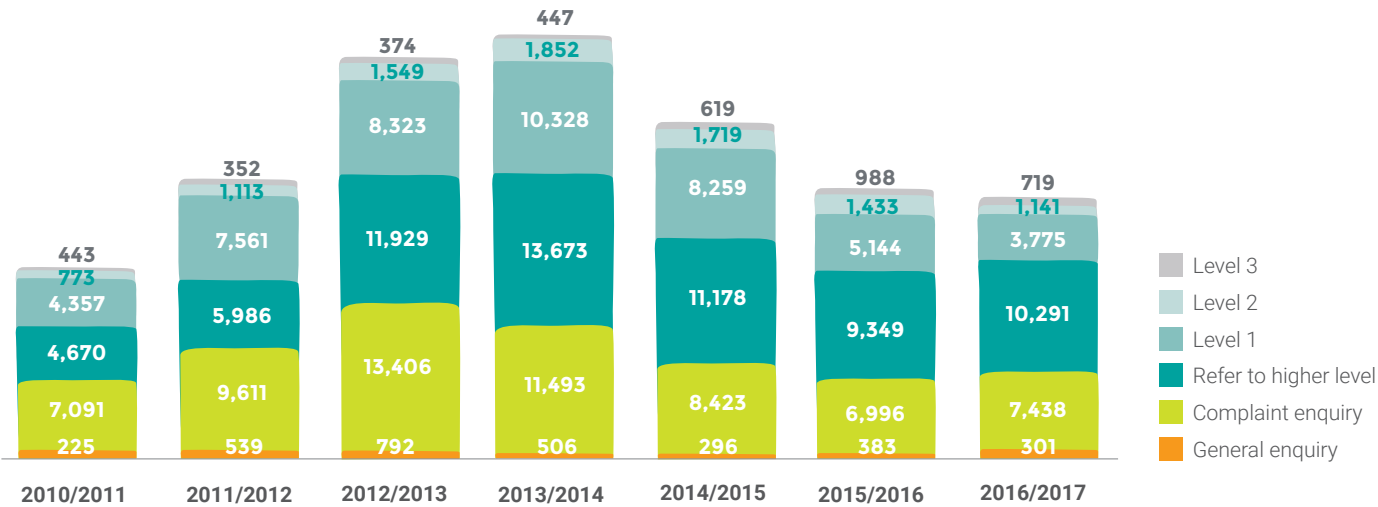
During 2016/2017, EWON reviewed and closed 26 systemic issues and as at 30 June 2017, eight issues were under investigation. Issues we reviewed during the period include:

- A provider was incorrectly charging late payment fees to customers receiving the Low Income Household Rebate, affecting 21,000 customers. We contacted the provider and ensured the error was corrected on customers' bills and those customers were credited for fees paid.
- A provider's update to its billing system caused a data mismatch that led to some customers having their energy supply disconnected in error. After the provider advised us that they had fixed the error in their system, EWON monitored complaints for any further issues.
- A provider refused to set up a direct debit arrangement for a customer because he did not have an email address and was unable to use the internet. We contacted the provider and advised them to provide direct debit access for customers who cannot, or do not use the internet to manage their finances. The provider established a direct debit arrangement for the customer and agreed to provide clearer information to their customer service staff to ensure customers without access to the internet or email were not similarly impacted.

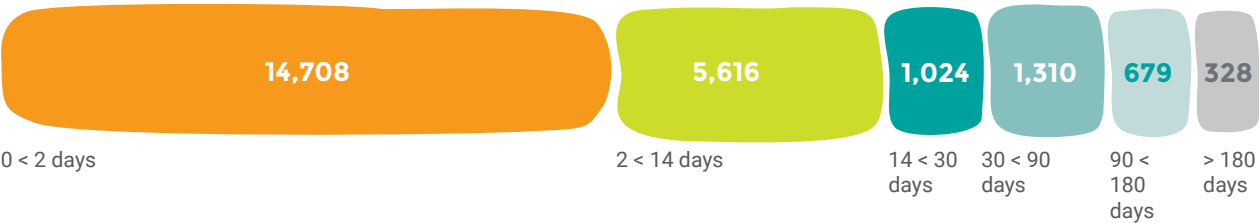


# Resolutions and outcomes

Complaint closure type from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017



Time taken to finalise complaints **90%** of cases were finalised within 30 days, up from 85% in 2015/2016



## No wrong door

Where a customer has not contacted their provider in the first instance, we provide advice about their rights and responsibilities and refer them to their energy or water provider. Where customers require broader assistance than what is within EWON's jurisdiction, we work closely with other organisations and refer customers as required.

**1,057**  
referrals to  
community agencies

| Referral  | Number |
|---|--------|
| Energy/water provider   | 4,621  |
| Community agency/Energy Accounts Payment Assistance/water Payment Assistance Scheme | 1,057  |
| Referred to retailer hardship team  | 595    |
| Financial counsellor  | 567    |
| NSW Fair Trading/NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal                                | 442    |
| AER/Energy Made Easy website  | 419    |
| Another Ombudsman   | 320    |
| Other government agency   | 282    |
| Legal/tenancy advisor   | 186    |
| Private contractor  | 182    |
| Department/Minister for Energy/Water  | 79     |
| Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal   | 23     |



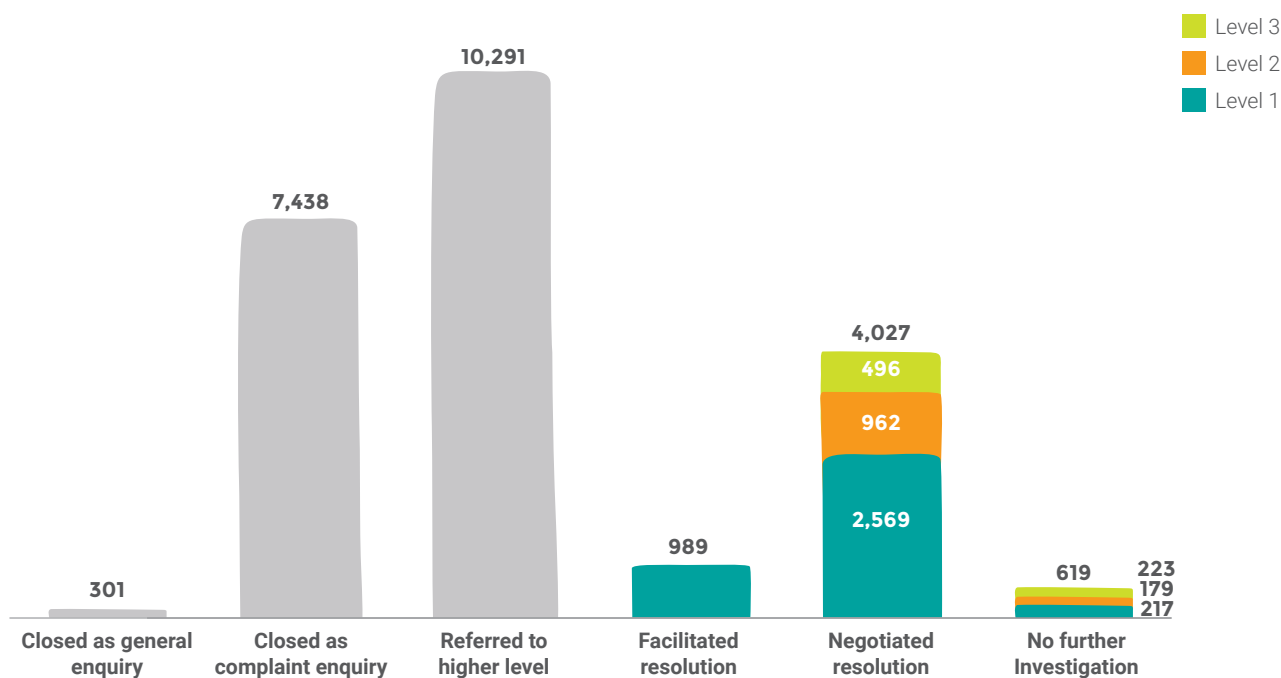
# 4,027

negotiated resolutions

## Complaint closure trends

| Level                       | 2015/<br>2016 | 2016/<br>2017 | %<br>variance |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| General enquiry             | 383           | 301           | -21%          |
| Complaint enquiry           | 6,996         | 7,438         | 6%            |
| Refer to higher level (RHL) | 9,349         | 10,291        | 10%           |
| Level 1 investigation       | 5,144         | 3,775         | -27%          |
| Level 2 investigation       | 1,433         | 1,141         | -20%          |
| Level 3 investigation       | 988           | 719           | -27%          |
| Total                       | 24,293        | 23,665        | -3%           |

## Complaint resolutions and outcomes



## Explanation of terms

### General enquiry

A customer contact that may be about an energy or water matter but is not a complaint and/or is out of jurisdiction.

### Complaint enquiry

A request for information or assistance that can be settled or referred quickly.

### Refer to higher level (RHL)

A complaint referred to the energy or water provider's specialist dispute resolution team.

### Investigation

EWON investigates and negotiates an outcome when a complaint cannot be resolved between the customer and the provider.

# EWON Consultative Council meetings

## Bringing the community and industry together

Consultative Council meetings are a key part of EWON's governance, providing lines of communication and facilitating collaboration between members, community workers, and small business. The meetings offer an opportunity for our key stakeholders to speak openly, consult with each other, and build awareness about consumer issues. They also inform our investigations and policy work and provide an excellent opportunity for our stakeholders to contribute to EWON's planning. We appreciate the contribution of everyone who participates in the meetings. Our Constitution specifies that two Consultative Council meetings be held each financial year.



Ombudsman, Janine Young, (centre) with Tim Evans and Jimmy O'Connell from EnergyAustralia

## 17 November 2016

EWON's first Consultative Council meeting for 2016/2017 focused on exempt entities and embedded networks. Sarah Proudfoot, General Manager Retail Markets at the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) presented on the rapid growth in embedded networks, and the increasing number of exempt entity customers. This discussion highlighted some of the challenges these customers face, such as lack of access to retail competition and independent dispute resolution. For more information about exempt entities, see **page 26**.

Briar Hall, Leader Customer Vulnerability and Recovery at EnergyAustralia, spoke about why retailer hardship programs need to change to serve customers better. Her presentation highlighted the importance of focussing on what customers want and need, to assist them to manage their bills. It also provided an overview of EnergyAustralia's new approach to meeting customer needs, particularly vulnerable customers.

Community workers were invited to submit questions ahead of the meeting and were encouraged to ask questions on the day. Attendees asked about the implications of the end of the Solar Bonus Scheme and the digital meter rollout. They also highlighted the difficulties of comparing energy contracts, accessing hardship programs and they sought information about the financial assistance available to water customers.

## 27 April 2017

EWON's April 2017 Consultative Council meeting was extremely well attended with over 100 participants, including industry representatives and community workers.

Tim Evans, Head of Business Processing Outsourcing Optimisation & Shared Services at EnergyAustralia presented on the retailer-led rollout of digital meters. This topic prompted further discussion about the costs and benefits of digital meters for customers.

Legal Aid NSW's Director Civil Law, Monique Hitter and Senior Solicitor for Aboriginal Communities, Jemima McCaughan, spoke about their Civil Law work with vulnerable people, including the Money Counts and Debt Waiver programs.

During the facilitated discussion, community workers requested information on the NSW Government's Energy Accounts Payment Assistance scheme, which moved to a digital platform on 1 July 2017. They also outlined the difficulties their clients experience with high energy bills, energy contracts and cooling-off periods, the end of the Solar Bonus Scheme, and fees associated with paper bills and paying energy accounts at post offices. Energy retailers provided information about exemptions for these fees for eligible customers, including those receiving concessions or on hardship programs.



EWON Consultative Council meeting, April 2017

## Case study

### Electricity

#### Electricity account transferred without consent

Mr Lawson and his wife had a contract with the same energy retailer for many years, so when a bill for over \$6,000 arrived from another retailer, it came as a shock. The account was under Mr Lawson's wife's name and the new retailer had charged the peak rate for electricity, a higher rate than they had been paying with their original retailer.

Mr Lawson said his wife had never dealt with the retailer before, however, when they contacted them, they were told that Mr Lawson's wife had signed up when a door to door marketer had visited their home. Later, the retailer said that the sign up was done over the phone; they then said the new account was created online.

Mr Lawson and his wife refused to make any payments unless the retailer could prove how they had signed up. The retailer did not provide any proof that a contract had ever been signed; soon after Mr Lawson received a debt collection notice for the outstanding amount. Mr Lawson thought this was unjust and believed he was unable to resolve the dispute with the retailer, so he called EWON for an investigation.

EWON contacted the retailer and established that there was no documentation to prove that Mr Lawson's wife opened an account. On this basis the retailer arranged for the account to be transferred back to the Lawsons' original retailer, closed the account, recalled the amount owed from the debt collector and confirmed that a default was not placed on the customer's credit file.

---

**Category:** Level 1 investigation  
**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution  
**Issues:** Billing, credit, customer service

## Case study

### Electricity

#### Exempt retailer customer received high bills and no rebates

Ms McDonald lives alone in an apartment complex where her energy is supplied via an embedded network. She is billed by the property owner who operates as an exempt retailer, rather than an authorised energy retailer.

Ms McDonald first contacted EWON because she received a series of bills that she thought were too high and she was also unable to access her meter to check her usage. She told us that the Low Income Household Rebate had not been applied to her bills, and was unhappy that the rates and daily service availability charge had increased without any prior warning.

We explained to Ms McDonald that because her provider was an exempt retailer, we did not have the same decision-making power with respect to the outcome as we would have if it was an authorised retailer, but that we could still investigate the complaint, seeking a fair and reasonable outcome.

EWON contacted the exempt retailer and it agreed to apply the Low Income Household Rebate retrospectively and into the future. Exempt retailer staff provided meter data and advised that customers could contact the building maintenance staff for access to the meter room.

We informed Ms McDonald that based on the primary meter data provided by the exempt retailer, it appeared that she had been billed appropriately. We explained that her increased usage may be due to higher use of the air conditioning over the summer months.

Ms McDonald got in touch to thank EWON for our time and effort.

---

**Category:** Complaint enquiry  
**Outcome:** Closed as complaint enquiry - exempt entity  
**Issues:** Billing

# Working with our members

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) requires all NSW electricity and gas providers to be members of EWON. Some water providers are required to join EWON, while others join voluntarily.

We work closely and independently with our energy and water members, reviewing their customer service and complaints handling, sharing information about customer concerns and industry issues, and addressing complaints as quickly as possible. This work is aimed at raising customer service standards, promoting best practice, and reducing complaints overall, and those that come to us.

## EWON members

- 1st Energy
- ActewAGL Gas Distribution
- ActewAGL Retail
- AGL
- Alinta Energy
- Allgas Energy
- AquaNet
- Ausgrid
- Australian Gas Networks (Albury)
- Australian Gas Networks (NSW)
- Blue NRG
- Central Coast Council
- Central Ranges Pipeline
- Click Energy
- Commander Power & Gas
- CovaU
- Diamond Energy
- Dodo Power & Gas
- Endeavour Energy
- EnergyAustralia
- Energy Locals
- Enova Energy
- Enwave Mascot
- ERM Power
- Essential Energy
- Flow Systems
- Hunter Water
- Jemena
- Living Utilities (Lendlease Recycled Water)
- Lumo Energy
- Mojo Power
- Momentum Energy
- Next Business Energy
- OC Energy
- Origin Energy
- People Energy
- Pooled Energy
- Powerdirect
- Powershop
- QEnergy
- Red Energy
- Sanctuary Energy
- Shoalhaven Water
- Simply Energy
- Sydney Desalination Plant
- Sydney Water
- TransGrid
- Urth Energy (in administration since 2 February 2017)
- Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies
- Water NSW
- WINconnect

## Member changes

- Members who joined EWON in 2016/2017 include People Energy (September 2016), Energy Locals (November 2016), Living Utilities, Lendlease Recycled Water (Barangaroo South) (November 2016), OC Energy (February 2017) and Enwave Mascot (June 2017).
- The NSW State Government sold 50.4% of Ausgrid in October 2016. Ausgrid is now operated by the Ausgrid Operator Partnership, which continues to trade, and be a member of EWON, under the Ausgrid name.
- The NSW State Government sold 50.4% of Endeavour Energy in May 2017. Endeavour Energy is now operated by the Endeavour Energy Network Operator Partnership, which continues to trade, and be a member of EWON, under the Endeavour Energy name.
- Urth Energy ceased trading in electricity, as its licence was withdrawn by the AER on 2 February 2017.
- Central Coast Council withdrew its voluntary membership effective 30 June 2017.

## Visits to members

The Ombudsman, Janine Young, and senior EWON staff visited Essential Energy in Port Macquarie. They were given an overview of the challenges the network faces, covering 95% of the State geographically, but with only 25% of NSW energy customers living in that area. The visit included a tour to meet operational staff, including the inspiring Quality Assurance team which focuses on continual improvement of Essential Energy's infrastructure.

The Ombudsman and General Manager Investigations visited Origin Energy in Adelaide. They met with staff and held a number of case conferences to work through complaint issues.

Senior EWON Investigations staff toured the EnergyAustralia head office in Melbourne and their call centre in Geelong. This was a great opportunity to learn about their operations and customer service processes.

EWON staff toured the Living Utilities recycled water site at Barangaroo in Sydney. Staff learned about their business model, customer service operations, organisational structure and how their efficient use of utilities helps them meet sustainability targets.

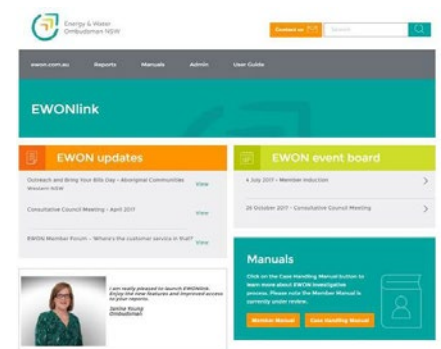
## Meetings and presentations

Member meetings and presentations keep us updated on the changes members are making that may affect customers, our work or our engagement with them. In 2016/2017, the following members met with the Ombudsman and EWON staff to give presentations or provide updates and overviews of their operations:

- Origin Energy - presented to EWON management about the digital meter rollout
- AGL - presented to EWON management about the digital meter rollout
- EnergyAustralia
- Mojo Power
- Ausgrid
- Endeavour Energy
- Energy Locals
- Red Energy/Lumo Energy
- Momentum Energy
- Simply Energy
- Jemena
- Hunter Water
- OC Energy.

## New member portal

We launched EWONlink, our new member portal. Members can access current and archived weekly, monthly and quarterly reports via the portal as well as see meeting notes, presentations, updates on events, induction training, forums and other relevant activities. The improved usability of the site has increased member access to our information and streamlined administration processes.



## Urth Energy

Urth Energy was suspended from the National Electricity Market on 2 February 2017. As per the market rules, customers were transferred to other providers under the AER's Retailer of Last Resort (ROLR) scheme. There were 780 Urth Energy electricity customers across three states. NSW customers were transferred to their ROLRs as follows:

- Origin Energy for customers in the Endeavour Energy or Essential Energy area.
- EnergyAustralia for customers in Ausgrid's area.

After the transfers, EWON received two complaints about Urth Energy, of which one related to the transfer.

## Inducting members

Induction sessions for member company staff are an effective way to facilitate efficient complaint resolution. They provide an opportunity to introduce new member staff and new or long term staff of existing members to our evolving case management processes and procedures.

These sessions also provide an overview of our structure and member reports, and allow us to review customer complaint case studies with members.

## Using technology to expand our reach

In March 2017, EWON's member induction session was available online via video conferencing for the first time. Members who were unable to attend in person could participate remotely. Our members appreciated having another way to engage with EWON and the majority of attendees who participated via video conference said they would do so again.

This is a further example of our focus on efficiency and effectiveness – reducing travel time and cost for member staff, while at the same time increasing member engagement with EWON.



# Member forum

## Where's the customer service in that?

EWON's Charter requires us to identify systemic issues and help members reduce complaints. Complaints about poor customer service increased throughout the first half of 2016/2017, after reaching a low point at the end of 2015/2016, and this was identified as a systemic issue across EWON's membership. Poor customer service means customers come to EWON about matters which should be resolved when the customer first contacts their provider.

To address this EWON hosted a forum for members in April 2017 focusing on customer service issues. The forum examined key elements of good customer service, as well as drivers for improvements in customer service. The Ombudsman spoke about the types of customer services complaints EWON receives, and about how taking a few simple steps can go a long way in resolving disputes. Presenters from outside of the industry shared their insights into improving customer service.



Chris Wheeler, Deputy Ombudsman at the NSW Ombudsman, talked about the importance of making apologies to customers, covering what an apology should include, the impact of apologies, and the benefits that can flow to all parties from an appropriate 'full' apology.

Dr Brendan French, Executive General Manager Advocacy and Remediation at the Commonwealth Bank Australia (CBA), and former EWON Deputy Ombudsman, spoke about customer service from the perspective of the banking industry. While exploring this theme, Dr French also referred to a current financial sector joint project - "Making banking better for Australia."

The day concluded with a panel and small group discussions facilitated by EWON's General Manager Investigations, Adrian Borchok. Representatives from Sydney Water and Mojo Energy joined Mr Wheeler and Dr French on the panel, to discuss customer service scenarios and outcomes.

In feedback to EWON, many attendees noted that having speakers from other industries was a highlight. Attendees also appreciated the opportunity to work together collaboratively to explore ways to improve customer service, and the chance to network with dispute resolution experts.





## Case study

### Electricity

#### Ms Yu discovers her father was double billed for 17 years

Miss Yu was surprised to discover that her father had been paying an electricity account for 17 years for a property that wasn't his. English was not her father's first language and he did not realise that in addition to paying his own bill each quarter, he was also paying for another account. Miss Yu contacted the retailer on numerous occasions to clarify what had happened and have the issue resolved. She explained that the property had a similar address but was in fact a nearby business.

The account for the incorrect address was closed by the retailer. However, they told Miss Yu they could not refund payments on the incorrect account because they hadn't been notified sooner. Miss Yu persisted and the retailer asked her to provide proof of payment. Ms Yu could only provide receipts dating back to 2001 and the retailer advised they would only refund the payments that the customer could prove they'd made.

Acting as an advocate for her father, Miss Yu contacted EWON for assistance with recovering the full amount. The retailer was able to find and share the full payment history for the incorrect account with EWON. The retailer also visited the site and established that Miss Yu's father was not associated with the premises or account.

The retailer advised EWON that they would refund the full amount, around \$8,750, to Miss Yu's father for payments made since 2000. Miss Yu was relieved when the retailer contacted her to arrange payment of funds to her father's bank account.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation  
**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution  
**Issues:** Billing error, customer service

## Case study

### Gas

#### Neighbours go without gas during dispute about gas mains ownership

When the main pipe supplying gas to 15 homes in an inner Sydney suburb started to leak, some residents were left without gas for heating and cooking for several days. The distributor disconnected supply due to safety concerns and advised that because the leak was along the private main in a laneway it was the customers' responsibility to organise and pay for repairs.

Residents looked into repair options and received a quote from a gas plumber for \$80,000. The residents believed the leak should be repaired by the distributor because it was part of their gas network, so they contacted EWON.

EWON started an investigation into whether the distributor or residents were responsible for the damaged gas main.

The distributor advised that the main was installed in 1927 and was excluded from a network upgrade in 1990. Easement arrangements for the main's location were unclear due to multiple occupancies and other services using the laneway area. The distributor said that for this reason the main was the residents' responsibility, that they would need to arrange for its replacement and that each household would be responsible for their own reconnection costs to the new line.

As a result of our investigation the distributor initially changed its position and offered to install a new main in the street, rather than the rear lane. The distributor advised this would be completed at its expense and would form part of the distributor gas network. However, the residents would be responsible for changing their internal gas pipes from the rear of their properties to connect to the new main at the front of their properties.

The residents remained without gas for a month, and after further extensive communication and negotiation, the plan to install a new main in the street was found to be not viable and the distributor agreed to replace the damaged main in the lane as a customer service gesture. This work included reconnecting each premise to the newly installed main at no cost to the customers and establishing an easement over the gas main location. The distributor also confirmed the new gas main would be regarded as part of its network.

After the work was completed, the residents contacted EWON to advise that the new main was not underground, but was pipework that ran above ground in the lane. We re-opened the investigation and confirmed the new connection was compliant with gas installation standards and regulations. The residents were satisfied with our explanation and thanked us for our work.

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**Category:** Level 3 investigation  
**Outcome:** Negotiated resolution  
**Issues:** Customer service, land, provision

# Working with government and regulators

In 2016/2017, EWON continued to work with government agencies and regulators to update them on industry trends and issues that we identify through our complaint handling and community engagement activities. We also developed reports and submissions to inform energy and water policy decisions.

## Australian Energy Regulator (AER)

We provided quarterly reports to the AER and met with them regularly, both individually and with other state Ombudsman schemes. We continued our engagement on the network regulatory process and reform of the retail and network exemption frameworks. We also contributed to AER consultations relating to the minimum amount owing for disconnection, the NSW distributors' tariff structure statements, and the network service provider registration exemption guidelines.

## Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

We engaged with the AEMC by participating in workshops, and the Ombudsman also presented at its Consumer Priorities Forum, which informs the AEMC's consumer issues working agenda. In addition, we made submissions to the AEMC on regulatory arrangements for embedded networks and on minimising the effect on customers of erroneous transfers.

## Government

EWON provides quarterly reports to the Resources and Energy Division of the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. This year we also participated in discussions with the Department about the digital meter rollout for Solar Bonus Scheme customers. We attended a round table discussion about affordability chaired by the NSW Minister for Energy, which explored problems with the digital meter rollout, as well as fees and charges for paper bills, deregulation of the retail gas market and feed-in tariffs for solar customers.

We participated in the NSW Government's review into access to civil justice. The Ombudsman and senior EWON staff were part of the working group and a sub-committee, and we made a submission to the review. We also made a submission to a communications plan consultation for deregulation of the retail gas markets and provided feedback on the Office of Environment and Heritage's Climate Change Fund strategic plan.

At a federal level, we made three submissions to the Council of Australian Governments' reviews. The first was on regulatory arrangements for stand-alone energy systems, the second on consumer protections for behind the meter electricity products, and the third on a proposed register of battery storage installations.

We made a second submission to the Consumer Affairs Australia and New Zealand Australian Consumer Law (ACL) Review covering energy-related issues and, in particular, the ACL's relevance to the development of new products and services in the energy industry.

## Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

In 2016/2017, we contributed to IPART's review of a water provider's operating licence. We also made a submission to IPART's review of retailer offers to Solar Bonus Scheme customers.

## Office of Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)

As an approved External Dispute Resolution Scheme under the Privacy Act, EWON reports on privacy-related complaints to the OAIC. For the 2016/2017 financial year, 1,015 complaints related to customers concerns about credit reporting and 158 to potential privacy breaches.

# Working with our peers

The Ombudsman, Janine Young, is a member of the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) and in 2016/2017 continued to sit on its Executive Committee. The Ombudsman is also a member of the Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON).

## ANZOA

ANZOA members head up industry-based, parliamentary and statutory external dispute resolution offices most often as Ombudsman, but also as organisational leaders who perform the same independent role as Ombudsman in positions such as complaints commissioners. ANZOA provides a valuable peer forum for its members, all of whom meet accepted high standards of independence, impartiality and effectiveness and observe the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution.

In May 2017, the Ombudsman and General Manager Governance, Awareness & Policy attended an ANZOA seminar and heard from a range of speakers about issues relevant to Ombudsman schemes. The NSW Ombudsman, John McMillan, spoke about the importance of building a public profile as an Ombudsman. Jeannie Paterson from Melbourne Law School and Yvette Maker from Melbourne Social Equity Institute were invited by ANZOA to share their research about taking a human rights approach by supporting people with a disability to engage in consumer transactions, including external dispute resolution. Finally, Diane Carmody, Deputy Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and Karen Stevens, Insurance & Financial Services Ombudsman NZ, presented on the challenges of dealing with variable workflow, a timely topic for EWON and other schemes as we experienced a drop in complaint numbers in 2015/2016, and are now seeing complaints increase again.

EWON employees also have the opportunity to engage with staff in similar roles by taking part in ANZOA's interest groups. These cover public relations and communications, policy and research, systemic issues, Indigenous complaint handling, human resources, and learning and development.



## ANZEWON

This valuable network provides energy and water Ombudsman and utilities complaints commissioners from across Australia and New Zealand the opportunity to work together to address industry and policy developments that affect consumers.

A key focus for 2016/2017 was working collaboratively with relevant ANZEWON members to consider how to expand the jurisdiction of our schemes to include exempt entities. Changing its exemption guidelines to make membership of energy Ombudsman offices a requirement is currently being considered by the Australian Energy Regulator. ANZEWON held a number of workshops focused on developing underpinning principles for expanded jurisdiction including scoping:

- funding and membership models
- member application processes
- Charter and Constitutional changes
- engagement with current and new members
- implementation strategies
- shared resource development.

For more information about exempt entities, see the consumer issues section on **page 26**.



# Ombudsman engagement highlights

The Ombudsman's direct engagement with stakeholders and NSW communities helps develop strong networks, increases awareness of our services and builds community trust in what we do. It is an integral part of the holistic nature of our work. Below are some highlights of the Ombudsman, Janine Young's engagement activities in 2016/2017.



## Conferences, speeches and events

- EDR Forum and Financial Counsellors Association of NSW Conference
- Anti-Poverty Week forums in Campbelltown and Lismore (see **page 49** for more details)
- National Investigations Symposium
- Social Workers in Disability Conference
- Local Community Services Association Conference 2016, presented
- Tenant's Union 40th Anniversary – House and Home: Looking back, looking forward
- Utility Week 2016, participated in two panels/focus groups and presented
- Energy Consumers Australia Foresighting Forum 2017.

## Peak body engagement

- 26th Annual Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia International Symposium 2016
- Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) engagement to gauge awareness of EWON's services as a part of the ECA Customer Awareness Survey. Also took part in their Foresighting Forum and met with the CEO, Rosemary Sinclair, to discuss consumer issues.



## Aboriginal projects and engagement

- Wilcannia, Menindee and Dareton road trip, meeting with community and Aboriginal organisations, holding Bring Your Bills days, and participating in Tenant Support and Education Project Power and Water Usage Workshops
- Yarning Circle participation at the Financial Counsellors Association Conference
- Bourke Affordable and Appropriate Housing Strategy participant.







Ombudsman, Janine Young, with then NSW Fair Trading Commissioner, Rod Stowe

## Collaboration and partnerships

- **NSW Ombudsman:** In November 2016, the Ombudsman met with the Acting NSW Ombudsman to renew our Memorandum of Understanding regarding customer complaint referrals. The Ombudsman also met with Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs), regarding EWON's participation in the Bourke Affordable and Appropriate Housing Strategy. We also continued to collaborate with the NSW Ombudsman on outreach.
- **NSW Fair Trading:** In July 2016, the Ombudsman and the Fair Trading Commissioner renewed our Memorandum of Understanding regarding customer complaint referrals. The Ombudsman and the Commissioner also continued to hold regular meetings to discuss common issues and referral processes and also cooperate in media opportunities. We also undertook joint outreach activities to deliver information and services to consumers, community workers and small business owners across the state.
- **Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC):** In April 2017 the Ombudsman met with the new CEO of PIAC, Jonathon Hunyor. We continued to collaborate with PIAC on outreach activities and to deliver training for community workers in the disability and aged care sectors.
- **Legal Aid:** We continued to work with Legal Aid on joint outreach initiatives and to provide their Aboriginal clients with tailored support. In 2016/2017, the Ombudsman also worked with senior Legal Aid staff and EnergyAustralia on a debt waiver pilot program for energy customers experiencing financial hardship.

- **NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS):** EWON and NCOSS meet regularly to discuss energy affordability issues. In 2016/2017, the Ombudsman also participated in a pre-forum workshop and attended NCOSS's 'A New Year for Women' forum.

## High level committees

- Civil Justice Collaboration Working Group – member, contributing to the development of a new NSW Civil Justice Strategy
- Energy Roundtable organised by the NSW Minister for Energy and Utilities participant
- COAG Energy Council stakeholder consultation meeting attendee
- Ausgrid's Customer Consultative Committee observer
- Jemena's Gas Network Customer Council observer.



Acting NSW Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan with Ombudsman, Janine Young



# Engaging across NSW

- Complaints Management
- Policy & Influence
- Systemic Issues
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Promotion & Awareness





# Community engagement overview

**EWON's community engagement program is an important element of our holistic approach and a key responsibility set out in our Charter. One of the program's aims is to reduce complaints coming to EWON by educating consumers, small businesses and community workers about energy and water issues. It also helps raise awareness of our services and provides an opportunity for us to learn about issues affecting consumers first hand – in fact, we can become aware of recurring issues in the community before they are identified through our investigations and systemic issues work.**

We take part in and organise events, including our very popular Bring Your Bills days (see **page 52** for more details), often in collaboration with other organisations. We also present to groups on topics including payment assistance, government rebates and how to save energy and water.

In 2016/2017, we continued to engage with community workers and consumers, with a particular focus on reaching vulnerable groups and those experiencing hardship.

## Community workers

Community workers are an important link between EWON and vulnerable consumers, and they often take on the role of advocating for consumers who are in debt or facing disconnection. In 2016/2017 we took part in a range of community events, meetings, expos and forums, and presented to the staff of community organisations.

## Public Interest Advocacy Centre partnership

In 2016/2017 we continued to partner with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) to deliver training about energy and water issues to community workers in the aged care and disability sectors. We also presented to a range of groups including:

- No Interest Loans Scheme conference attendees
- Anglicare Mt Druitt
- Tomaree Neighbourhood Centre
- Social Workers in Disability conference attendees.

## Anti-Poverty Week forums

EWON has held Anti-Poverty Week forums for community workers for 12 consecutive years. In 2016 we went one step further and held two forums – a metropolitan forum in Campbelltown and a regional forum in Lismore. These forums raised awareness of energy affordability issues affecting consumers, gave EWON an opportunity to speak directly with community workers and learn about issues affecting their clients. Our ongoing theme is that 'Poverty will not be alleviated until energy is affordable for all Australians'.

Eighty people attended the Campbelltown forum and mini expo. The forum featured speakers from the Financial Rights Legal Centre, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Legal Aid, as well energy and water providers. Exhibitors included other Ombudsman services, government agencies and community organisations.

The Lismore forum attracted 30 community workers from across the Northern Rivers region and provided an important opportunity to expand our network in a regional area that experiences high levels of homelessness and other disadvantage. This forum was opened by the Deputy Mayor Gianpiero Battista and speakers included representatives from the State Debt Recovery Office, local community groups and energy and water providers.



# Community engagement overview

## Culturally and linguistically diverse groups

Raising awareness of our service includes our engagement across a diverse range of communities. We work with community workers, interpreters and bilingual staff, and use translated factsheets and plain English presentations to break down the barriers associated with language and low literacy.

An example of our work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups in 2016/2017 was at Navitas English College in Parramatta, where we presented to 180 adult students. We reviewed students' energy and water bills, helped them apply for rebates and provided information about other sources of assistance.

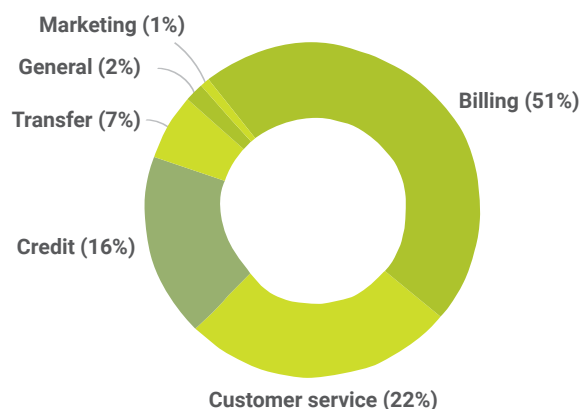
## Complaints from culturally and linguistically diverse customers

This year 595 customers identified as CALD when they made a complaint to us. The top four issues raised by CALD customers were billing (51%), customer service (22%), credit (16%) and transfer (7%). Most of the complaints came from outer Sydney at 48%, with 40% coming from inner Sydney. Complaints were received from customers whose preferred language is:

Mandarin (115)  
Arabic (95)  
Cantonese (49)  
Vietnamese (45)  
Korean (45)  
Spanish (21)  
Farsi (20)  
Assyrian (17)  
Thai (17)  
Russian (15)  
Greek (14)  
Hindi (12)  
Italian (11)  
Punjab (9) and numerous other languages.

## Top issues raised by culturally and linguistically diverse customers

We do not routinely collect information about customers' cultural background, but record it when it is offered. These figures could therefore under-represent the number of CALD customers who use our services. On the other hand, these figures indicate that we need to continually focus on engagement with CALD communities, to ensure they are aware of EWON and the service we provide.



## Seniors

Working with seniors is an important part of our community engagement work. Older people often tell us they have difficulty understanding the complex nature of the energy and water industries. Also, many seniors we speak to are concerned about energy affordability, with some sharing their approach to avoiding using heating and cooking appliances because they are worried about future bills.

In our information sessions we make seniors aware of rebates they may be entitled to, how to find the best deal and how to access discounts. We also provide information about managing bills and dealing with providers.

In 2016/2017, we attended the Royal Easter Show for the eighth consecutive year. EWON organises a large marquee for the dedicated Seniors Day. This year, as in previous years, we invited other complaint handling agencies to join us, so seniors could access a range of services in one place. We reached over 700 people, many of whom said they were grateful to be able to access so much information in one place and speak with staff from a range of organisations face to face. The NSW Ombudsman was there, along with the Financial Ombudsman Service, the Credit Investment Ombudsman, the Seniors Rights Service, Legal Aid, NSW Trustee and Guardian, the Public Guardian and Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

In late 2016, we also expanded our reach to over 6,000 housebound people by working with Meals on Wheels who delivered EWON brochures to its clients with their meals.



## Small business

Small business customers are often unaware they can come to EWON and only a small number access our services. To increase awareness of EWON amongst small businesses, we attend targeted events and work with organisations with strong links to the sector.

EWON continues to focus its small business customer engagement through business forums, expos and trader walks, where we visit individual retail shops to offer information about energy and water issues and discuss how we can assist. In 2016/2017 we reached over 2,100 small business customers during visits to Condell Park, Dee Why, Gosford, Hornsby, Kempsey, Parramatta, Port Macquarie, Revesby, Windsor and Wollongong.

## Housing tenants

Tenants in public and private housing have limited control over the energy and water efficiency of their homes, and this can lead to high bills. Housing may have poor insulation, and tenants may have problems with common hot water systems and inefficient lighting and appliances. In 2016/2017, EWON attended events organised by the Illawarra Forum for tenants in Wollongong where we provided information, reviewed tenants' energy bills, checked their rebate eligibility, and discussed the concerns they raised.



## Other activities

This year we reached over 5,500 consumers through our community engagement program. In accordance with our Charter, we are always aiming to increase awareness of our services and other energy and water assistance amongst low income and other vulnerable consumers. To broaden our reach, we attended the following diverse range of events:

- Mardi Gras Fair Day, Sydney
- Homeless Connect days in Sydney, Macarthur/ Campbelltown, Hunter region
- Blacktown Community Expo
- Salvation Army One Stop Shop, Blacktown
- NSW Fair Trading Building Forum, Dee Why
- Intercultural Expo, Eastwood
- Multicultural Expo, Erina
- Fairfield High School Refugee Expo
- You're Kidding Me Expo, Glendale
- Kogarah Storehouse - Community Expo
- Liverpool Law Expo
- Salvation Army Macquarie Fields Expo
- One Stop Shop, Eastgardens
- Law Week Expo Wollongong TAFE with Diversity Services.



## The Joint Outreach Initiatives Network

The Joint Outreach Initiatives Network (JOIN) brings together outreach staff from complaint handling agencies across NSW, to share information and resources and explore opportunities for joint initiatives. There are 50 members representing 23 organisations. This year, meetings were hosted by EWON, NSW Fair Trading, The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and the NSW Ombudsman.



# Bring Your Bills days

We expanded the reach of our very popular Bring Your Bills days during 2016/2017. These days form an important part of the holistic approach we take to align all aspects of our Charter responsibilities. They also give us the opportunity to learn about issues affecting consumers first hand, and to help people understand how to read their bills, learn about the assistance available and how to save energy and water. This early involvement aims to prevent bigger problems, like debt and energy disconnection or water restriction, in the future.

Often consumers have trouble understanding the complex energy and water industries and are unaware of the consumer protections available to them. This coupled with financial or health issues, low literacy levels or limited English language, often means that customers experience vulnerability and may not contact their energy or water provider or access EWON's assistance. People place great value on receiving face to face assistance, especially when it is offered close to home.

At our Bring Your Bills days, EWON's Investigations Officers, often aided by interpreters, listen to customers' concerns, review their energy and water bills, and liaise with providers to resolve issues. The customer's involvement in the process often empowers them to contact their provider directly,

which allows complaints to be resolved collaboratively and quickly. Both providers and customers benefit from the constructive engagement and the quick resolution of issues that these events offer. We schedule Bring Your Bills days at the request of community agencies or as we identify areas through our complaint handling work. In addition to EWON's monthly visits to SydWest Multicultural Services in Blacktown and Anglicare and St Vincent de Paul in Mt Druitt, we also held Bring Your Bills days with:

- Anglicare, Albury
- Arncliffe Community Centre, Arncliffe
- Metro Assist, Bankstown
- Metro Assist, Campsie
- St Vincent de Paul, Campbelltown
- Macarthur Homeless Event, Campbelltown
- St Vincent de Paul and Willoughby Council, Chatswood
- St Vincent de Paul and Hornsby Council, Hornsby
- Community First Steps, Fairfield
- Addison Road Community Centre, Marrickville
- Community agencies' conglomerate, Warrawong
- Illawarra Forum for housing tenants, Wollongong
- St Vincent de Paul, Woy Woy

More and more agencies are welcoming our direct involvement.



EWON staff with the Member for Berowra and Member for Hornsby at the Hornsby Bring Your Bills day

## EWON perspectives

EWON's Community Engagement Team organises Bring Your Bills days and Investigation Officers attend on the day to assist clients. EWON staff consider these events an important part of their work and often comment on the positive outcomes after returning from a day out of the office, as their quotes below show.

"I enjoy seeing the consumers engage with all of the exhibitors. I see them walk out happy and thankful for the assistance, like a great weight has been lifted from their shoulders!"

"Thank you for letting me be part of the Bring your Bills day in Hornsby. It was such a rewarding experience. All of the customers I spoke to were so grateful for our assistance and I really felt that I was able to make a difference. Thanks!"

"Participating in Bring Your Bills days is very rewarding, especially providing immediate help to people face to face. I also find that sometimes people are reluctant to come forward and need some encouragement to seek our assistance when obviously in need – this can be done at outreach events."

**EWON managed 348 complaints from the 40 Bring Your Bills days we organised in 2016/2017. Many more consumers were assisted with general information about energy and water issues.**

## Collaboration is key

Many of our Bring Your Bills days include a mini expo, where community organisations, government agencies and other complaint handling bodies attend. These 'one stop shops' allow consumers to get help with their energy and water accounts, as well as tenancy, financial, housing, legal, health and welfare issues.

In 2016/2017, we collaborated with a range of agencies to deliver Bring Your Bills days, including the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Australian Taxation Office, Anglicare, the Department of Human Services, Family and Community Services, Community Migrant Resource Centres, the Financial Rights Legal Centre, Legal Aid, NSW Fair Trading, the Seniors Rights Service, the State Debt Recovery Office, St Vincent de Paul, the No Interest Loans Scheme, Ability Links, Lifeline, the Salvation Army, and other Ombudsman services. It truly is a powerful holistic way of assisting customers experiencing vulnerability.

## Case study

### Electricity

Mr Coe has an acquired brain injury and was struggling with his energy bills. He visited a Bring Your Bills day and mini expo on the Central Coast. Mr Coe spoke to EWON staff about switching energy providers and asked what he could do to save energy and money around the home. EWON staff then referred him to staff at the Centrelink stall who helped him set up Centrepay to pay his energy bills. He then visited the State Debt Recovery Office and Legal Aid stalls and spoke to their staff about an outstanding fine he had. He is now paying off his fine with a Work and Development Order, while working at a community organisation. Legal Aid also linked him with a disability organisation, Ability Links.

Mr Coe came to the Bring Your Bills day specifically to visit EWON, however he got help with a number of other issues and is now significantly better off. He commented that he felt valued and safe during the process and he appreciated all the different organisations coming together in one place.

**Category:** Complaint enquiry  
**Outcome:** Close as a complaint enquiry  
**Issue:** Affordability



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement

**EWON's Aboriginal community engagement enables us to establish and strengthen links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their leaders and the agencies and services that work with them.**

We make our services accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. During the year we participated in a range of events across NSW.

## Good Service Mob visits

EWON is part of the Good Service Mob, a collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff from complaint handling agencies that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers in NSW. Established in 2005, the Good Service Mob aims to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are aware of their rights as consumers, and the free services available to help them. In 2016/2017, we took part in the Good Service Mob community information days in Moruya, Wallaga Lake, Inverell, Tenterfield, Glen Innes and Doonside.

## Working with the disability sector

Our Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer presented at a number of information sessions organised by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal disability organisations working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The presentations aimed to increase awareness of EWON's services amongst community workers who will be supporting people with disabilities moving into the community with support packages under the NDIS.

We also delivered joint training with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre to community workers in the disability and aged care sectors about energy and water issues.

## Inter-agency meetings

EWON's Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer attends Indigenous Inter-agency meetings throughout the year. Working with organisations which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities allows us to learn about and cross-promote each other's services.



## Yubun Festival

Over 30,000 people attended the Yabun Festival in January 2017 to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. EWON staff spoke to over 350 customers about problems they faced with their energy and water bills. The day also provided a great opportunity to build our networks with over 100 other stallholders in attendance.

## Festival of Energy

EWON attended the Aboriginal Housing Office's (AHO) Festival of Energy celebrations in Dubbo in September 2016. The festival provided consumers with opportunities to access services to help them reduce their energy costs, information on how to shop around to get the best deal, and how to access payment assistance schemes. It also celebrated the AHO's pilot program to install roof-top solar panels on the homes of social housing tenants in Dubbo.

At the festival, EWON's Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer presented to consumers on ways to save energy and encouraged them to check that they are on the right energy contract. We also provided a Bring Your Bills session to help consumers with their energy bills.

## Law Week

In May 2017 we took part in Law Week activities in Bourke and Brewarrina. Law Week gives community members the opportunity to speak with our staff about their concerns and lodge complaints. They can also access resources to help manage energy and water accounts, including information about rebates and other assistance, and tips for reducing energy and water consumption. EWON received a \$1,000 grant from the NSW Law Society to support our participation.



## Complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers

Billing and affordability issues continue to be the main reasons Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers come to EWON, with 38% of issues received in 2016/2017 relating to billing, and 30% to credit. Of the 327 complainants who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander:

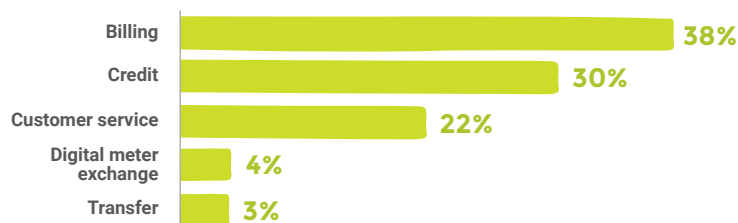
- 104 reported payment difficulties
- 80 reported high bills
- 44 had been disconnected or were facing disconnection
- 33 had faced issues with debt collection or credit default listing.

Some customers experienced a combination of these issues. Around 22% of these complaints came from outer Sydney,

14% from inner Sydney, 10% from Sydney surrounds, 10% from the North Western region, 9% from the Murray region and 6% from the Hunter region of the state.

While we do not routinely collect information about our customers' cultural backgrounds, we record it when it is offered. For this reason, these figures may under-represent the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers who use our services.

### Top issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers



## Energy and water workshops and Bring Your Bills days

EWON teamed up with the Tenant Support and Education Project to deliver a series of Power and Water Usage Workshops and Bring Your Bills days tailored to Aboriginal communities in regional and remote areas. The workshops focused on saving energy and water around the home, as well as options for tenants experiencing difficulties with their energy bills.

We invited Origin Energy to participate given the majority of residents in these areas are Origin Energy customers, as a result of its purchase of Country Energy some years back. They accepted our invitation and sent two representatives who participated directly in the Bring Your Bills sessions. This ensured residents received one on one support from either EWON or Origin Energy to help them access hardship programs, payment plans, rebates, payment assistance vouchers, referrals and more.

These events were also designed to raise awareness of, and create links to, support programs to empower community members to seek help from their energy providers and other services in the future.

**During these trips, EWON received 65 complaints. The majority of these complaints were about affordability issues.**

### Community feedback

**"Mob saving money. Awesome. Good communicators in this program."**

**"It was enjoyable, helpful, easy to understand and would be good to come back again".**

**"Great project, motivated staff and great delivery."**

**From April to June 2017 EWON visited the following communities:**

- Wilcannia
- Menindee
- Dareton
- Goodooga
- Murrin Bridge/ Lake Cargelligo/ Euabalong
- Brewarrina
- Bourke/Enngonia
- Coonamble
- Walgett
- Gulargambone.

**Other services that participated by ensuring residents received one on one advice and assistance included:**

- State Debt Recovery Office
- Legal Aid
- Far West Legal
- Anti-Discrimination Board
- First Nations Disability Network Australia
- Salvation Army
- Compass Housing
- Life Line
- NSW Fair Trading
- Energy Accounts Payment Assistance providers.



**"It was an honour to share stories and laughs with a great bunch of Aboriginal people who are all committed to making a big difference for their mob."**

**Janine Young, Ombudsman**

# Customer perspectives

"Thanks a lot for resolving my dispute. Two years of my emails to [my provider] did not make any impact but one email to the Ombudsman did!"

**Mrs Patel**

"Hello there, this is to thank you for investigating my complaint with [my provider]. Your intervention has resulted in my bill being reduced by \$283. I have been trying to resolve this for 4 months and without your help I doubt that I would have succeeded. Your service is invaluable for individuals trying to achieve an honest outcome."

**Ms George**

"To all who assisted in this matter, I wish to thank you for your help in this matter. I would also like to say that your assistance was carried out in an exemplary manner. Staff were helpful, polite and efficient. Thank you very much, it means a great deal to me."

**Ms Ng**

"This is an excellent result and I would like to thank you personally for your professionalism, your updates and the way the matter finally concluded. Your management should be proud of the way you handle your numerous matters. Many thanks again for your assistance".

**Mr Corman**

"I wanted to write to let you know how impressed I was with the service and support given to me today by one of your Customer Service Representatives. She was courteous, understanding and helpful throughout the entire process! Her active listening skills are off the charts! Please pass on my thanks to both her and her manager – it really did make a frustrating experience much easier to deal with! Thank you once again for assisting in resolving my issue – well helping to anyway!"

**Mr Garret**

"Just a note to say many thanks to you and your team for bringing such a satisfactory finish to my problem with my provider. Without your help the situation could have gone on forever. I shall be ever grateful".

**Mrs Marsh**

"I would like to thank you for all of your help with this matter, today I received an apology email and phone call saying that everything I had done and said was the truth".

**Mr Jaeger**

"I am extremely grateful for your assistance with my case without which [my provider] would have simply ignored me. I am happy that my case is resolved and I appreciate EWON's support. I wish that more dissatisfied customers like myself are aware of EWON and can find help."

**Mr Liu**

"I am writing to thank you for your help with our dispute with [our provider] over the insanely large gas bill we received last week and to give you an update. I have no doubt that we would not have received such a significantly improved offer had you not agreed to investigate the matter on our behalf. Thanks again for everything. You rock!! "

**Miss Sail**

"Thank you for your help with this. I am sure your intervention has had a positive impact. Today I received a call from [my water provider], and for the first time in almost 2 years of wrangling, I am encouraged by their actions to resolve the problem to our mutual satisfaction. Fingers crossed for that to continue! Thanks again for your help so far."

**Ms Parker**

# Complaints by industry

## Top three issues by provider

| Provider                              | First issue      | %    | Second issue     | %   | Third issue            | %   |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------|------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| 1st Energy                            | Transfer         | 29%  | Billing          | 28% | Customer service       | 19% |
| ActewAGL                              | Billing          | 42%  | Customer service | 31% | Credit                 | 13% |
| AGL                                   | Billing          | 44%  | Customer service | 29% | Credit                 | 14% |
| Alinta Energy                         | Billing          | 32%  | Customer service | 28% | Transfer               | 20% |
| AquaNet                               | Billing          | 50%  | Customer service | 50% | -                      |     |
| Ausgrid                               | Customer service | 32%  | Supply           | 26% | Provision              | 22% |
| Australian Gas Networks (Albury)      | Land             | 67%  | Customer service | 33% | -                      |     |
| Australian Gas Networks (NSW)         | Customer service | 46%  | Supply           | 31% | Provision              | 23% |
| Blue NRG                              | Billing          | 63%  | Customer service | 23% | Transfer               | 12% |
| Central Coast Council                 | Billing          | 46%  | Customer service | 23% | Credit                 | 18% |
| Click Energy                          | Billing          | 49%  | Customer service | 24% | Transfer               | 14% |
| Commander Power & Gas                 | Billing          | 41%  | Customer service | 31% | Transfer               | 23% |
| CovaU                                 | Billing          | 43%  | Customer service | 24% | Credit                 | 15% |
| Diamond Energy                        | Billing          | 59%  | Customer service | 31% | Transfer               | 8%  |
| Dodo Power & Gas                      | Billing          | 48%  | Customer service | 26% | Transfer               | 12% |
| Endeavour Energy                      | Supply           | 33%  | Customer service | 27% | Land                   | 20% |
| EnergyAustralia                       | Billing          | 50%  | Customer service | 31% | Credit                 | 11% |
| ERM Power Retail                      | Billing          | 70%  | Credit           | 20% | Customer service       | 5%  |
| Essential Energy                      | Customer service | 34%  | Supply           | 23% | Provision              | 20% |
| Flow Systems                          | Customer service | 30%  | Billing          | 30% | Land                   | 20% |
| GoEnergy                              | Billing          | 100% | -                |     | -                      |     |
| Hunter Water                          | Billing          | 33%  | Customer service | 26% | Credit                 | 16% |
| Jackgreen                             | Credit           | 71%  | Billing          | 14% | Customer service       | 14% |
| Jemena                                | Customer service | 53%  | Provision        | 37% | Land                   | 7%  |
| Lumo Energy                           | Billing          | 44%  | Credit           | 26% | Customer service       | 24% |
| Mojo Power                            | Billing          | 30%  | Customer service | 28% | Digital meter exchange | 18% |
| Momentum Energy                       | Billing          | 51%  | Credit           | 22% | Customer service       | 17% |
| Next Business Energy                  | Billing          | 47%  | Customer service | 21% | Transfer               | 13% |
| Origin Energy                         | Billing          | 40%  | Customer service | 25% | Credit                 | 18% |
| People Energy                         | Billing          | 54%  | Customer service | 19% | Credit                 | 12% |
| Powerdirect                           | Billing          | 48%  | Customer service | 28% | Credit                 | 13% |
| Powershop                             | Billing          | 44%  | Customer service | 27% | Digital meter exchange | 15% |
| QEnergy                               | Billing          | 57%  | Customer service | 28% | Credit                 | 8%  |
| Red Energy                            | Billing          | 38%  | Customer service | 21% | Credit                 | 16% |
| Sanctuary Energy                      | Billing          | 45%  | Customer service | 33% | Digital meter exchange | 8%  |
| Shoalhaven Water                      | Billing          | 65%  | Customer service | 20% | Credit                 | 10% |
| Simply Energy                         | Billing          | 32%  | Credit           | 23% | Customer service       | 23% |
| Sydney Water                          | Billing          | 33%  | Customer service | 28% | Land                   | 13% |
| TransGrid                             | Customer service | 60%  | Land             | 40% | -                      |     |
| Urth Energy                           | Billing          | 78%  | Transfer         | 11% | Customer service       | 11% |
| Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies | Customer service | 73%  | Supply           | 18% | Land                   | 9%  |
| Water NSW                             | Billing          | 39%  | Customer service | 30% | Land                   | 12% |

# Electricity

Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table

Energy Locals, Enova Energy, Enwave Mascot, Pooled Energy, OC Energy and WINconnect received no electricity complaints in 2016/2017

There were 125 exempt retailer complaints including residential park operators

There were 796 out of jurisdiction/provider unknown complaints

Electricity providers that received fewer than 50 complaints were Blue NRG, Commander Power & Gas, Diamond Energy, ERM Power Retail, GoEnergy, Jackgreen, Next Business Energy, People Energy, Transgrid and Urth Energy

## Customer numbers key

- Under 1,000
- 1,001 to 10,000
- 10,001 to 100,000
- 100,001 to 500,000
- 500,001 to 1,000,000
- Over 1,000,000

| Provider         | Customer numbers*      | Cases received 2016/ 2017 | Cases received 2015/ 2016 | Variance | General enquiry | Complaint enquiry | RHL   | Level |     |     |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                  |                        |                           |                           |          |                 |                   |       | 1     | 2   | 3   |
| Retailer         |                        |                           |                           |          |                 |                   |       |       |     |     |
| 1st Energy       | <div><div></div></div> | 171                       | 25                        | 146      | 4               | 57                | 71    | 34    | 4   | 1   |
| ActewAGL         | <div><div></div></div> | 163                       | 165                       | -2       | 1               | 55                | 57    | 38    | 8   | 4   |
| AGL              | <div><div></div></div> | 3,607                     | 3,916                     | -309     | 23              | 965               | 1,558 | 847   | 151 | 63  |
| Alinta Energy    | <div><div></div></div> | 294                       | 23                        | 271      | 1               | 78                | 148   | 51    | 13  | 3   |
| Click Energy     | <div><div></div></div> | 249                       | 195                       | 54       | 1               | 73                | 132   | 28    | 7   | 8   |
| CovaU            | <div><div></div></div> | 92                        | 129                       | -37      | 0               | 21                | 45    | 16    | 8   | 2   |
| Dodo Power & Gas | <div><div></div></div> | 104                       | 119                       | -15      | 1               | 43                | 50    | 8     | 1   | 1   |
| EnergyAustralia  | <div><div></div></div> | 3,818                     | 3,495                     | 323      | 23              | 1,080             | 1,753 | 732   | 151 | 79  |
| Lumo Energy      | <div><div></div></div> | 168                       | 520                       | -352     | 2               | 44                | 78    | 30    | 7   | 7   |
| Mojo Power       | <div><div></div></div> | 62                        | 0                         | 62       | 0               | 22                | 29    | 9     | 1   | 1   |
| Momentum Energy  | <div><div></div></div> | 81                        | 144                       | -63      | 1               | 27                | 31    | 18    | 2   | 2   |
| Origin Energy    | <div><div></div></div> | 4,867                     | 5,331                     | -464     | 48              | 1,298             | 2,481 | 731   | 202 | 107 |
| Powerdirect      | <div><div></div></div> | 371                       | 380                       | -9       | 0               | 86                | 159   | 100   | 17  | 9   |
| Powershop        | <div><div></div></div> | 121                       | 38                        | 83       | 0               | 47                | 59    | 11    | 3   | 1   |
| QEnergy          | <div><div></div></div> | 64                        | 97                        | -33      | 0               | 20                | 26    | 13    | 3   | 2   |
| Red Energy       | <div><div></div></div> | 746                       | 357                       | 389      | 4               | 209               | 373   | 107   | 31  | 22  |
| Sanctuary Energy | <div><div></div></div> | 75                        | 104                       | -29      | 0               | 24                | 45    | 5     | 1   | 0   |
| Simply Energy    | <div><div></div></div> | 344                       | 422                       | -78      | 1               | 117               | 134   | 68    | 20  | 4   |
| Distributor      |                        |                           |                           |          |                 |                   |       |       |     |     |
| Ausgrid          | <div><div></div></div> | 354                       | 380                       | -26      | 3               | 185               | 89    | 28    | 28  | 21  |
| Endeavour Energy | <div><div></div></div> | 285                       | 345                       | -60      | 3               | 141               | 92    | 25    | 18  | 6   |
| Essential Energy | <div><div></div></div> | 292                       | 343                       | -51      | 1               | 128               | 99    | 41    | 10  | 13  |

\*Customer number data prepared by the AER as at 30 June 2016

## Total electricity cases

| Level                 | 2015/<br>2016 | 2016/<br>2017 | %<br>change |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| General enquiry       | 319           | 242           | -24%        |
| Complaint enquiry     | 5,205         | 5,563         | 7%          |
| Refer to higher level | 6,516         | 7,565         | 16%         |
| Level 1               | 3,816         | 2,956         | -23%        |
| Level 2               | 954           | 690           | -28%        |
| Level 3               | 489           | 359           | -27%        |
| Total                 | 17,299        | 17,375        | <1%         |

# 17,375

electricity cases received  
in 2016/2017

# 16,065

residential

# 1,238

small business

# 72

other (including  
educational institution,  
government, not for profit,  
primary producer and  
strata schemes)

# <1%

increase in electricity  
complaints from 2015/2016

# 26,201

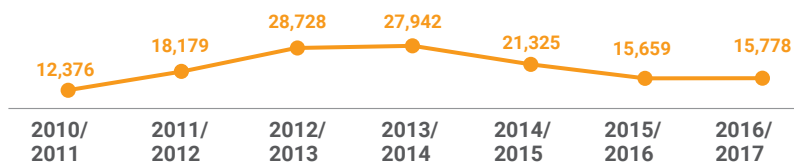
issues raised about  
electricity companies

# 513

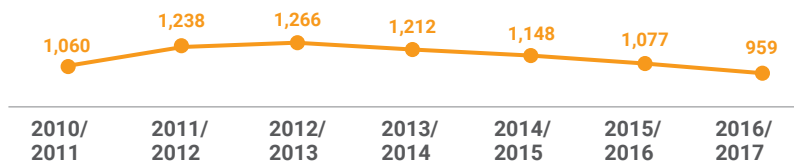
non-provider specific or  
out of jurisdiction electricity  
cases

## Electricity trends from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017

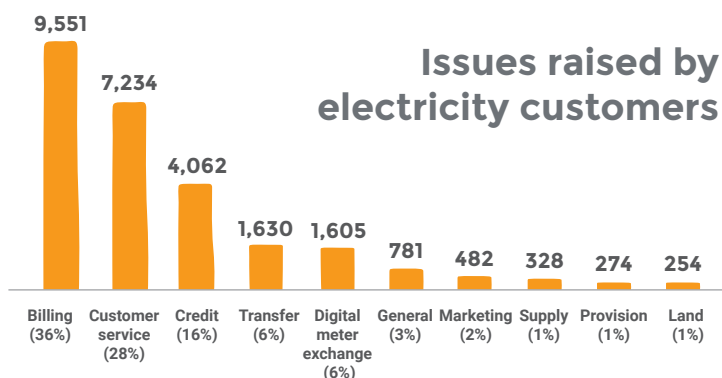
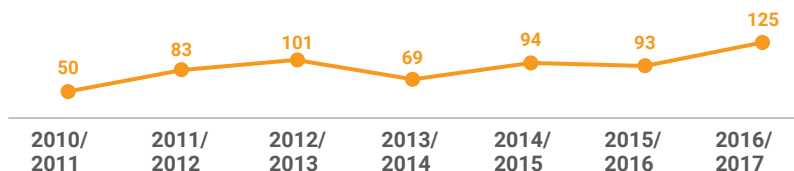
### Retailer



### Distributor



### Exempt retailer



# Gas

Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table

There were 9 complaints about exempt retailers

ActewAGL Gas Distribution, Allgas Energy, Central Ranges Pipeline, OC Energy and WINconnect received no gas complaints in 2016/2017

There were 94 out of jurisdiction/ provider unknown complaints

## Customer numbers key

- Under 1,000
- 1,001 to 10,000
- 10,001 to 100,000
- 100,001 to 500,000
- 500,001 to 1,000,000
- Over 1,000,000

Gas providers that received fewer than 50 complaints were ActewAGL, Alinta Energy, Australian Gas Networks (Albury), Australian Gas Networks (NSW), Click Energy, CovaU, Dodo Power & Gas, Powerdirect and Simply Energy

| Provider        | Customer numbers*      | Cases received 2016/2017 | Cases received 2015/2016 | Variance | General enquiry | Complaint enquiry | RHL   | Level |     |    |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-----|----|
|                 |                        |                          |                          |          |                 |                   |       | 1     | 2   | 3  |
| Retailer        |                        |                          |                          |          |                 |                   |       |       |     |    |
| ActewAGL Gas    | <div><div></div></div> | 56                       | 79                       | -23      | 0               | 20                | 24    | 10    | 2   | 0  |
| AGL             | <div><div></div></div> | 2,393                    | 2,782                    | -389     | 11              | 564               | 1,104 | 553   | 118 | 43 |
| EnergyAustralia | <div><div></div></div> | 1,345                    | 1,217                    | 128      | 2               | 304               | 648   | 261   | 94  | 36 |
| Lumo Energy     | <div><div></div></div> | 51                       | 147                      | -96      | 0               | 10                | 24    | 12    | 3   | 2  |
| Origin Energy   | <div><div></div></div> | 859                      | 1,055                    | -196     | 1               | 230               | 439   | 140   | 34  | 15 |
| Red Energy      | <div><div></div></div> | 90                       | 10                       | 80       | 0               | 21                | 46    | 20    | 2   | 1  |
| Distributor     |                        |                          |                          |          |                 |                   |       |       |     |    |
| Jemena          | <div><div></div></div> | 366                      | 206                      | 160      | 0               | 123               | 155   | 77    | 7   | 4  |

\*Customer number data prepared by the AER as at 30 June 2016



## Total gas cases

| Level                 | 2015/<br>2016 | 2016/<br>2017 | %<br>change |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| General enquiry       | 34            | 20            | -41%        |
| Complaint enquiry     | 1,313         | 1,401         | 7%          |
| Refer to higher level | 2,503         | 2,485         | -1%         |
| Level 1               | 1,209         | 1,098         | -9%         |
| Level 2               | 385           | 271           | -30%        |
| Level 3               | 188           | 104           | -45%        |
| Total                 | 5,632         | 5,379         | -4%         |

5,379

gas cases received  
in 2016/2017

5,138

residential

220

small business

21

other (including  
government, not for  
profits and strata  
schemes)

4%

decrease in gas complaints  
from 2015/2016

8,134

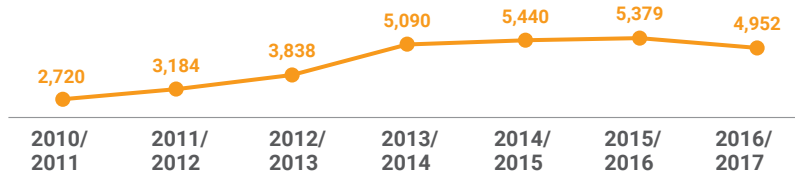
issues raised about gas  
companies

34

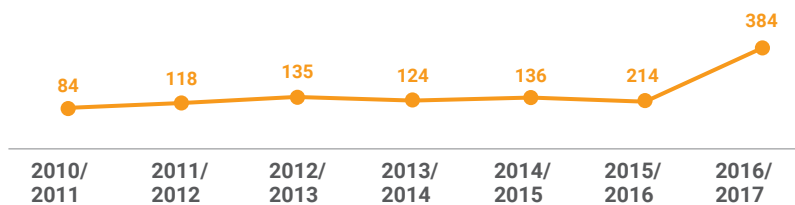
non-provider specific or out  
of jurisdiction gas cases

## Gas trends from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017

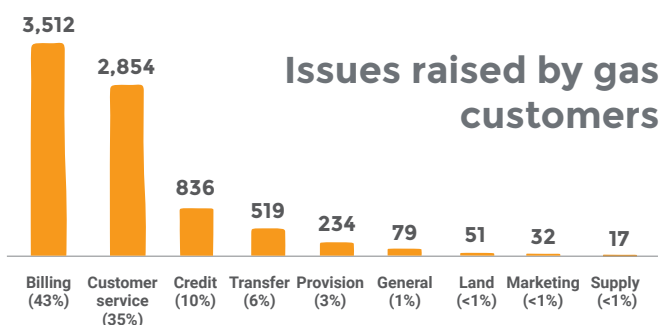
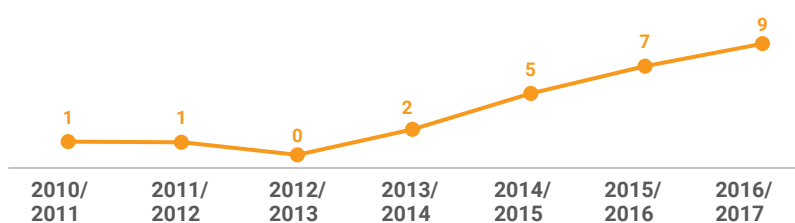
### Retailer



### Distributor



### Exempt retailer



# Water

Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table



Sydney Desalination Plant, Living Utilities and Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies received no water complaints in 2016/2017

There were 141 out of jurisdiction/ provider unknown complaints

Water providers that received fewer than 50 complaints were AquaNet, Central Coast Council, Essential Energy, Flow Systems, Shoalhaven Water and Water NSW

## Customer numbers key

- Under 1,000
- 1,001 to 10,000
- 10,001 to 100,000
- 100,001 to 500,000
- 500,001 to 1,000,000
- Over 1,000,000

| Provider             | Customer numbers*   | Cases received 2016/ 2017 | Cases received 2015/ 2016 | Variance | General enquiry | Complaint enquiry | RHL | Level |    |    |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|-------|----|----|
|                      |   |                           |                           |          |                 |                   |     | 1     | 2  | 3  |
| Retailer/Distributor |   |                           |                           |          |                 |                   |     |       |    |    |
| Hunter Water         |  | 100                       | 119                       | -19      | 1               | 44                | 36  | 9     | 8  | 2  |
| Sydney Water         |  | 460                       | 499                       | -39      | 11              | 217               | 163 | 37    | 14 | 18 |

\*Customer number data prepared by IPART as at 30 June 2016

## Total water cases

| Level                 | 2015/<br>2016 | 2016/<br>2017 | %<br>change |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| General enquiry       | 19            | 26            | 37%         |
| Complaint enquiry     | 405           | 431           | 6%          |
| Refer to higher level | 234           | 233           | 0%          |
| Level 1               | 80            | 60            | -25%        |
| Level 2               | 36            | 27            | -25%        |
| Level 3               | 17            | 23            | 35%         |
| Total                 | 791           | 800           | 1%          |

# 800

water cases received  
in 2016/2017

# 750

residential

# 27

small business

# 23

other (including not for  
profit, primary producer  
and strata schemes)

# 1%

increase in water  
complaints from 2015/2016

# 1,051

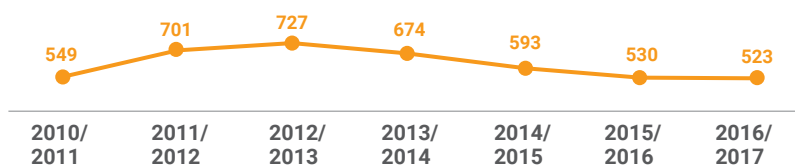
issues raised about water  
companies

# 52

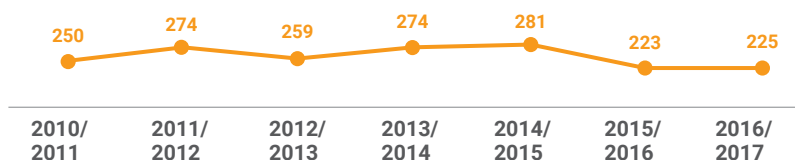
non-provider specific or out  
of jurisdiction water cases

## Water trends from 2010/2011 to 2016/2017

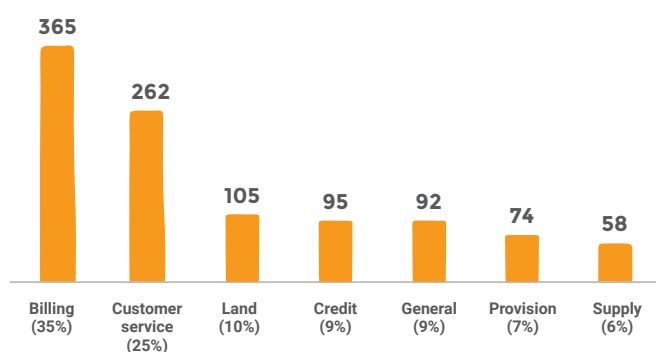
### Retailer



### Distributor



## Issues raised by water customers



# Engaging our people

We continually focus on building a workplace where our people are proud to work for EWON, are highly engaged, and are able to perform at their best, knowing they undertake valuable work.

Working in an Ombudsman office provides a valuable career experience for people with a combined strong social justice and customer service ethic, who want to be part of a values-based organisation where our rewarding work makes a difference.

During 2016/2017, EWON focused on staff development by establishing frameworks, processes, new initiatives and a range of learning modes to revitalise professional development. Below are some of the highlights from the year.

## Stepping Up leadership program

In 2015/2016, we delivered our first “Stepping Up” team leadership program, involving 12 current leaders. In 2016/2017, we followed this up with a program for 13 emerging leaders, all of whom successfully completed the six month program in March 2017.

Staff who participated in the program found it extremely useful, particularly for developing meaningful communications within their teams. They also valued the professional and personal development they gained from the training. The program received very positive feedback from participants.

**“I have really enjoyed the program. It’s allowed me to take a step back and look at the way I do things, my intent and communication. It’s helped me identify areas in which I can develop and improve”**

**“It’s been a wonderful opportunity to take the time to recognise my strengths and weaknesses, the value I bring to the organisation, and how I can improve.”**



## EWON Speaker Series

In November 2016, we held our first Speaker Series. The aim of the series is to engage staff through access to stimulating conversations about topical issues, and to enhance understanding of consumer issues, industry developments and emerging issues. The following speakers presented on a range of topics in 2016/2017:

- ‘Work of NSW Ombudsman’– Prof John McMillan, AO, Acting NSW Ombudsman
- ‘How we do what we do’– Lynelle Collins, Director Energy & Utilities, NSW Fair Trading
- ‘Understanding refugee resettlement better’– Sky de Jersey, Program Officer-Policy & Strategy and Dor Achiek, Youth Projects Coordinator, Settlement Services International
- ‘Behind the energy issue headlines’– Dr Rory Campbell, Manager Policy & Research, EWON.

## EWON MasterClass program

The EWON MasterClass program was launched in March 2017 to offer interactive learning and development opportunities in specialist areas. The series is comprised of four streams:

- Dispute Resolution
- Technical Knowledge
- Personal Effectiveness
- Leadership.

### Technical Knowledge MasterClass: Water and sewerage infrastructure

In February 2017, two groups from our Investigations Team took part in an interactive workshop about water and sewerage infrastructure at the Sydney Water Training Centre in Liverpool. Staff found it extremely valuable to have a technical trainer educate them in a purpose-built training facility where they were able to see how the interacting parts of the system work.

### Personal Effectiveness MasterClass: Priority management

Staff explored prioritising tasks, time management and how to implement actions which turn their day to day task mindset into a 'working smarter not harder' outlook.



## Integrated people systems

In 2016/2017, EWON implemented a new payroll and time recording system, with a move to outsourced payroll services.

## EWONlearning

In January 2017, we launched 'EWONlearning', a new learning management system which enables all staff to take part in online compliance training on privacy, work health and safety, bullying and harassment prevention, social media and equal employment opportunity.

In addition to compliance courses, EWONlearning offers a variety of personal effectiveness, communication, and leadership training courses. These courses will be expanded in 2017/2018.



Ombudsman, EWON staff and designers receiving design award



# Financials

| <b>Balance sheet</b>                             | <b>2017 \$</b>   | <b>2016 \$</b>   |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| <b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>                            |                  |                  |
| Cash and cash equivalent                         | 1,479,679        | 2,065,003        |
| Trade and other receivables                      | 4,165,954        | 2,333,639        |
| Other Deposits                                   | 2,749,551        | 2,861,418        |
| Total Current Assets                             | 8,395,184        | 7,260,060        |
| <b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>                        |                  |                  |
| Property, plant and equipment                    | 846,158          | 906,692          |
| Total Assets                                     | 9,241,342        | 8,166,752        |
| <b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>                       |                  |                  |
| Trade and other payables                         | 5,405,478        | 4,751,392        |
| Provisions – annual leave and long service leave | 570,545          | 635,390          |
| Total Current Liabilities                        | 5,976,023        | 5,386,782        |
| <b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>                   |                  |                  |
| Provisions                                       | 408,813          | 348,331          |
| Total Liabilities                                | 6,384,836        | 5,735,613        |
| <b>NET ASSETS</b>                                | <b>2,856,506</b> | <b>2,431,139</b> |
| <b>FUNDS</b>                                     |                  |                  |
| Unrestricted funds                               | 2,856,506        | 2,431,139        |
| Total Funds                                      | 2,856,506        | 2,431,139        |

| <b>Cash flow statement</b>                       | <b>2017 \$</b>   | <b>2016 \$</b>   |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| <b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>      |                  |                  |
| Receipts   |                  |                  |
| Funding received (Members)                       | 10,109,407       | 10,348,403       |
| Payments to suppliers, employees and other       | -10,592,446      | -8,615,211       |
| Net cash inflow from Operating Activities        | -483,039         | 1,733,192        |
| <b>CASH (OUTFLOW) FROM INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES</b> |                  |                  |
| Interest Received                                | 103,106          | 93,866           |
| Payment for plant, equipment and intangibles     | -317,258         | -152,370         |
| Interests paid                                   | -60              | -60              |
| Net cash inflow from Operating Activities        | -214,152         | -58,564          |
| Net increase in cash held                        | -697,191         | 1,674,628        |
| Cash at the beginning of year                    | 4,926,421        | 3,251,793        |
| <b>CASH AT THE END OF THE YEAR</b>               | <b>4,229,230</b> | <b>4,926,421</b> |

| <b>Detailed income &amp; expenditure statement</b> | <b>2017 \$</b> | <b>2016 \$</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| <b>INCOME</b>                                      |                |                |
| Funding Received:                                  |                |                |
| Annual case fees                                   | 9,436,697      | 10,202,285     |
| Annual fixed fees                                  | 1,377,729      | 1,287,058      |
| Joining fees                                       | 38,150         | 26,322         |
| Interest received and sundry income                | 106,641        | 93,866         |
| Gross Income                                       | 10,959,217     | 11,609,531     |
| <b>Less EXPENDITURE</b>                            |                |                |
| Communications                                     | 177,231        | 136,262        |
| Depreciation & Amortisation                        | 380,579        | 426,451        |
| Employee-related expenses                          | 228,539        | 180,934        |
| Occupancy costs                                    | 949,071        | 1,069,126      |
| Operating expenditure                              | 749,011        | 731,730        |
| Salaries and on-costs                              | 8,049,419      | 8,798,893      |
| Total Expenditure                                  | 10,533,850     | 11,343,396     |
| <b>NET SURPLUS</b>                                 | <b>425,367</b> | <b>266,135</b> |



## Contact

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Email [omb@ewon.com.au](mailto:omb@ewon.com.au)  
ABN 21079718915

## Keep in touch

