



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Acting today Shaping tomorrow



Annual report
2021/2022



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Problems with your electricity, gas
or water provider? **Talk to us**

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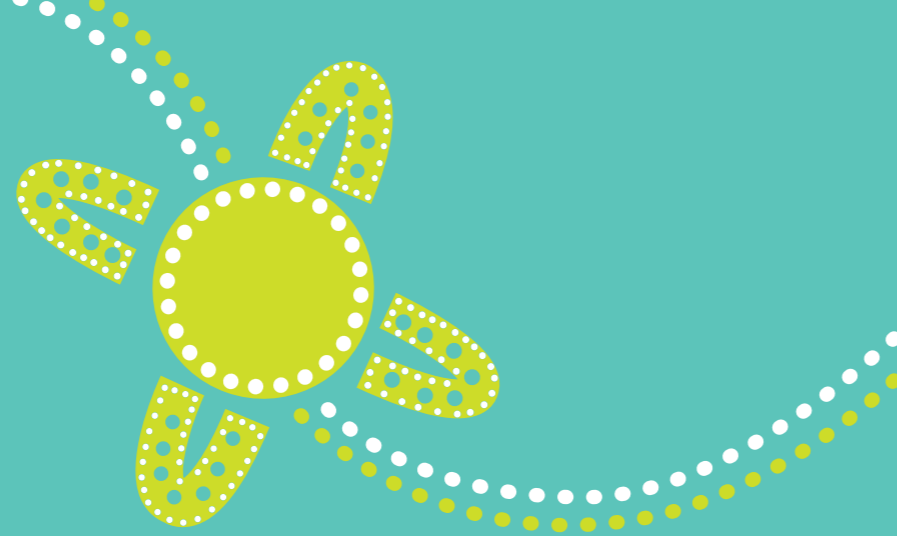
Annual report
2021/2022

Our mission

To provide high quality, independent
dispute resolution and to raise customer
service standards in the energy
and water industries.

EWON acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across New South Wales. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and we offer our thanks to Aboriginal communities who welcome us onto their land.

ngara ngwiya yudi — listen, give, guide



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 complaints received by EWON in the 2021/2022 financial year, unless otherwise specified. EWON's open complaint data varies in accordance with complaint progression, and figures in this Report reflect complaint status at 11 July, 2022.

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 that provides independent, free, informal, dispute resolution services to all NSW energy and some water customers. We seek to achieve a fair and reasonable outcome for all complaints and all parties. We are neither a consumer advocate nor an industry representative.

We investigate a broad spectrum of complaints including:

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

Our principal responsibilities set out in our Charter are to:

- > handle energy and water complaints independently, fairly, informally, efficiently and free of charge to the customer
- > promote EWON to consumers and small business
- > encourage and advise members on good complaint-handling practices to help reduce and avoid complaints.

We receive, investigate and resolve customer complaints and disputes and work with energy and water providers to improve their processes and deliver consistent, high quality customer service. We help raise industry standards, build customer confidence and reduce complaints by contributing to the development of energy and water policy through our submissions, reporting and analysis.



This report is printed using plant based toner on FSC® recycled paper.

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TONY CRAWFORD



Chair's report

To say that the energy sector was a lot simpler when EWON was established in 1998 would be an understatement. At that stage we had only seven members, comprising the six NSW electricity providers and the transmission operator. Today, we have 351 members who, due to a myriad of new technologies, products and business models, are becoming increasingly diverse.

But I'm proud to say that EWON is meeting head on the challenge of remaining fit for purpose in this complex environment. Our Strategic Plan or Tealprint brings to life how we deliver on our Charter and Constitution responsibilities. We're well on the way to completing several key projects that will ensure we not only keep up with, but remain ahead of, the rapid changes in today's energy sector.

Funding Model review

In the context of a more diverse member base, we reviewed our Member Funding Model this year, a recommendation of EWON's 2019 Independent Review. We engaged independent consultants to consult with current and future members, regulators, peak bodies and other ombudsmen on what a new funding model could look like. As we near the completion of this substantial project, we are confident we will establish a fit-for-purpose model that ensures EWON continues to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse membership.

Data, cybersecurity and risk management

Technology and data underpin EWON's operations, and we continue to evolve our complaints data to ensure it is more meaningful and accurate for all stakeholders. This year our Information Data Team (IDT) established a central database that will draw information from across the organisation. The resulting PowerBI dashboards will allow staff to analyse systemic and emerging complaints and compare historical outreach and engagement locations to ensure a strategic approach to reaching customers.

The insights our complaints data offers are of increasing interest to regulators. In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, EWON played a critical role in informing the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) of potential retailer breaches of the Statement of Expectations. The lockdowns in August 2021 saw the AER issue a subsequent set of Standby Statements and again, we were asked to report breaches. We know that this, in combination with our awareness campaigns and the work of our Outreach Team, helped keep complaints down during another year affected by COVID lockdowns.

Keeping our data secure and protecting the privacy of customers is fundamental to maintaining trust. In the current environment of increased cyber scams, the IDT has focused on addressing IT vulnerabilities and increasing staff awareness about cyber-attacks.

But cybersecurity is only one element of EWON's risk management. In 2022 we conducted a robust review of our Risk Management Framework to ensure alignment with changes in our operating environment. The framework will be regularly updated to align with current environment and risk management practices.

Reconciliation Action Plan progress

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) provides the framework for everyone at EWON to support the national reconciliation movement. We've made good progress on key deliverables including the introduction of Cultural Protocols training for new employee and prioritising purchasing EWON's collateral through Aboriginal-owned businesses. We have also engaged Mirri Mirri, an Aboriginal-owned cultural awareness training provider to educate all EWON staff and Board members. I look forward to seeing our RAP grow and evolve.

Consultative Council Meetings

Our biannual Consultative Council Meetings (CCM) are popular events, bringing together EWON members, government and industry stakeholders, and community groups. In November 2021 we invited the chief executive of Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), Lynne Gallagher, to discuss her organisation's work in the changing energy market. Our next CCM, in April 2022, focused on responses to the flooding in NSW. Ciara Sterling, the chief executive of Thriving Communities Partnership (TCP), explained how her organisation worked with others to provide efficient and timely assistance to flood-affected communities, while our members Endeavour Energy and Essential Energy highlighted their responses to flood-affected customers.

This year I was delighted to welcome four new Board directors: Joanna Quilty (NSW Council of Social Service), Anne Pearson (Energy Australia), April Blair (Intellectual Disability Rights Service) and our first director from an exempt entity, Theo Whitmont (Kincumber Nautical Village).

I warmly congratulate Janine Young on her reappointment as Ombudsman for another five years. Janine joined EWON in 2014 and we have all benefited from her strong leadership over the past eight years.

In closing, I thank my Board colleagues for their support and contribution to the strong and effective governance of EWON's affairs. I would also like to thank the Ombudsman, the Management Team and EWON's staff for their significant effort and commitment to deliver EWON's vision and purpose in another challenging year. Together they ensure that EWON continues to demonstrate the hallmarks of a strong and effective ombudsman scheme.

Tony Crawford
Chair
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

JANINE YOUNG



Ombudsman's report

The state of the energy sector at the end of this financial year was unprecedented. We observed the wholesale energy and gas markets being capped as price thresholds were exceeded and, in an extraordinary move, the Australian Energy Market Operator suspended the electricity market to manage supply shortages – an intervention that hasn't happened since the market started in 1998.

The structure and evolution of the water sector is also front of mind due to the complexity of NSW legislation in relation to water provision, licensing and dispute resolution scheme membership requirements across the State.

These changes, and the focus on renewables, are driving a shift in customer complaints. As customers invest in behind-the-meter products supplied by diverse businesses, we've experienced increased out-of-jurisdiction complaints. We're well aware that as the energy and water landscapes continue to evolve, like other external dispute resolution schemes, we need to ensure we remain fit for purpose.

Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow, the theme of this year's report, reflects EWON's commitment to acting now, to ensure we continue to shape the energy and water sectors for the benefit of our members and customers in the future. We'll do this by meeting our four strategic objectives.

Expanded awareness

Our media coverage this year was largely driven by our well-respected Spotlight On reports that explore the systemic issues we identify in our complaints data. We carefully consider all media requests so that we balance the benefits for members and consumers. Highlights this year included prime-time TV interviews about high water charges in embedded networks and Origin Energy's breach of customer hardship obligations, an issue we identified through our complaints.

The digital communications campaigns we launched during COVID helped increase our social media following. LinkedIn was particularly strong with a 45% increase in followers, while in a welcome development, our engagement with younger customers on Instagram increased by 40%. Connecting with this cohort is a challenge for all ombudsman offices.

We were delighted to host the Commissioner of Resilience NSW, Shane Fitzsimmons, as keynote speaker at our Re-engage and Renew Forums during Anti-Poverty Week in October 2021. The Australian Energy Regulator (AER), National Debt Helpline, Red Energy, Origin Energy and AGL gave presentations at our two online events for 150 Western Sydney and Orange community workers.

In May I was privileged to present at the External Dispute Resolution Forum of the 2022 Financial Counselling Australia Conference on beautiful Gimuy-walubarra yidi country (Cairns). I spoke of the way financial counsellors can help EWON identify systemic issues

which we then work to address. We look forward to working more closely with such counsellors to pursue our shared goal of improving outcomes for customers while identifying and addressing the reasons for complaints against energy and water companies.

Valued membership

As our membership continues to expand, we're constantly improving the information, data and services we offer to assist members and reduce complaints.

We enhanced our member portal EWONLink by introducing new reporting tools. This allows members to access complaints reports and for us to use complaints data to proactively address systemic issues.

Our Policy & Research Team contributed to the review of the NSW Ministerial Guidelines on Water Usage Charging for Community Housing Providers and Aboriginal Community Housing Providers. It aimed to give residents a direct link to their housing manager – who is also their water provider – to query their charges directly. We hope this reduces complaints to Hunter Water, Sydney Water, councils in NSW – and out-of-jurisdiction EWON complaints.

In collaboration with Energy & Water Ombudsman colleagues in other States, we developed a guide for members to promote ombudsman schemes in their verbal, written and digital customer communications. Sharing information about ombudsman services through complaints management builds consumer confidence and trust and, over the next year, we will engage with members to promote this initiative and assess member progress against regulatory requirements.

Best practice dispute resolution

I'm particularly proud of the goals our Dispute Resolution Team (DRT) has achieved in the past year. We undertook a major restructure of the team to increase the capacity of our Dispute Resolution Officers to undertake coaching while also delivering excellent service to members. We have also reviewed the way we assess out-of-jurisdiction complaints, introduced a second triage level to assess complex complaints, and continued our focus on reducing complaint resolution times.

We undertook a significant project with our ANZEWON peers to harmonise our complaint handling processes. National energy retailers hold membership with multiple state-based ombudsman offices and aligning and simplifying our processes is aimed at best-practice dispute resolution for the benefit of consumers and our members.

Customer feedback including complaints about EWON's service ensure we provide customers with the best outcome. Our Quality Team continually refines its approach and this year it critically analysed how we manage complaints, including those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and complaints that are out of our jurisdiction.

Influential policy contribution

EWON is increasingly quoted as a trusted source of information, which strengthens our position as an industry thought leader.

Our report, Spotlight on Hot Water in Embedded Networks, in March 2021 led EWON to host two workshops with key regulatory and government stakeholders to discuss solutions to regulatory shortfalls in this area in the 2022 financial year. We also focused on these issues in our submissions to the AER's exempt selling guideline, exempt network guideline and authorisation and exemption framework reviews.

We continued contributing high-quality policy submissions including to the AER's Better Bills guideline, AEMC's rule change for customers experiencing family violence, and the AER's draft consumer vulnerability strategy, in which our Spotlight On report on the National Energy Affordability Framework was referred to multiple times. Read more about our policy work on page 34.

Looking ahead

We're ready for an even busier 2023 aiming for our dispute resolution, outreach and policy work to take a further leap forward through automating data analytics via interactive Power BI dashboards. This will inform faster decision-making across the business as well as giving energy and water companies and regulators more insight into the issues underpinning customer complaints and consumer protection gaps.

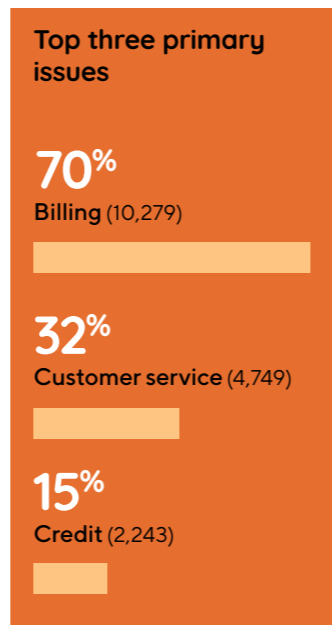
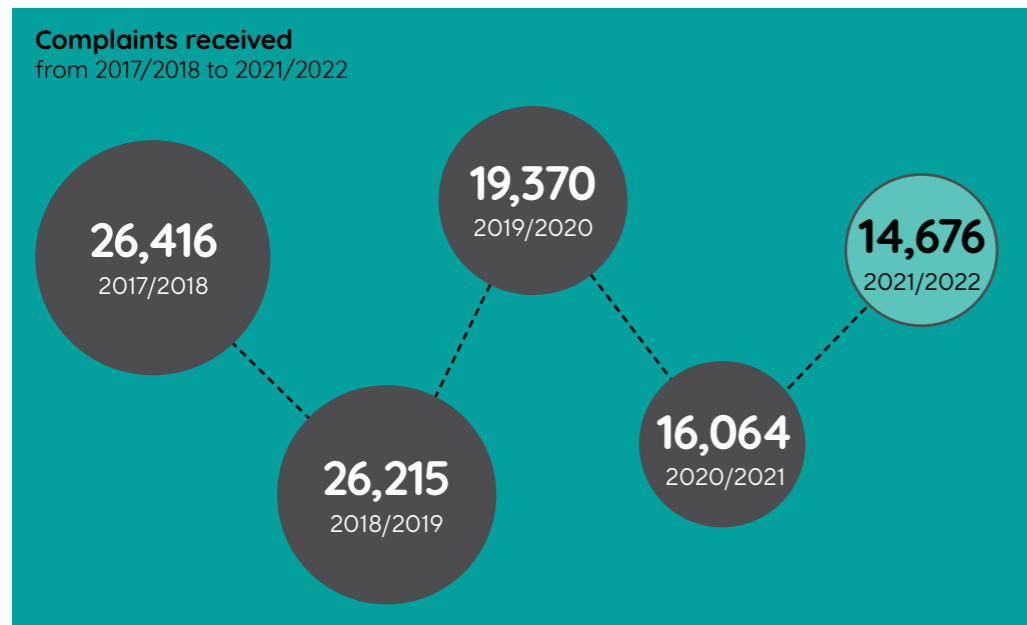
Remaining fit for the future continues to be a priority and we'll continue our conversations with the Energy Security Board, AER, AEMC, IPART, the Clean Energy Council, Energy Consumers Australia and, of course, members, so that we can help shape tomorrow's energy and water sectors.

I would like to thank the Management Team for their unwavering support, humour and resilience and, importantly, their commitment to challenging our thinking and the status quo. Special thanks also to the EWON Team. Renewing my contract for another five years was an easy decision – it is a privilege to work with a team so committed to EWON's purpose and the value of our work.

Finally, I would like to thank the Chair, Tony Crawford, and the Board for their excellent governance and strategic leadership. Their encouragement, support and guidance this year has been exceptional.

Janine Young
Ombudsman
Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

The big picture



EXPLANATION OF TERMS

General enquiry

Customer contact that is not a complaint but may be about an energy or water issue. In some cases, it may be out of our jurisdiction.

Complaint enquiry

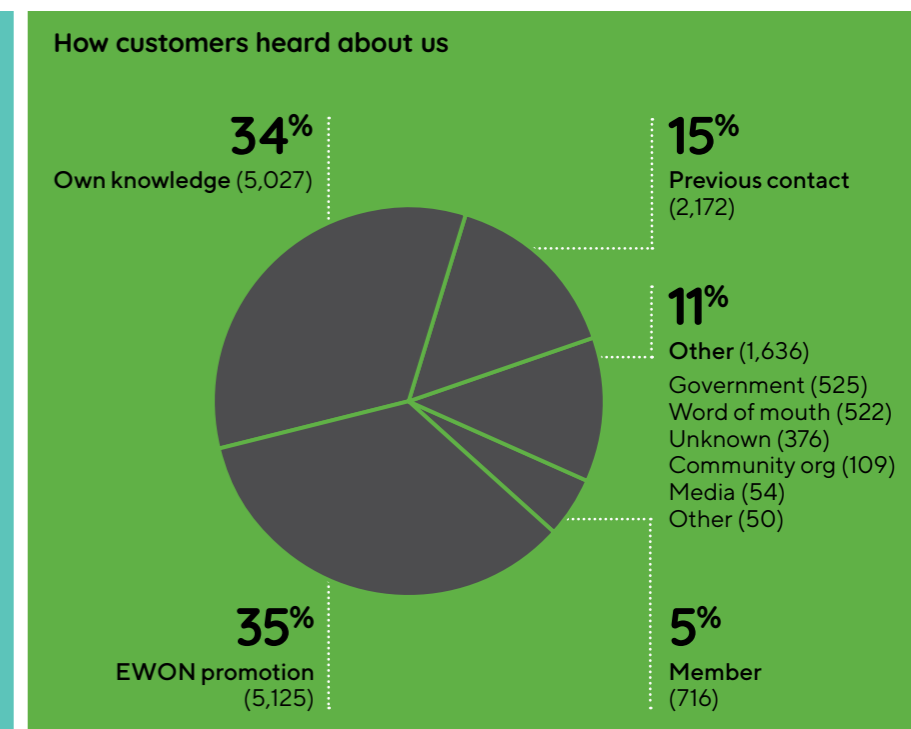
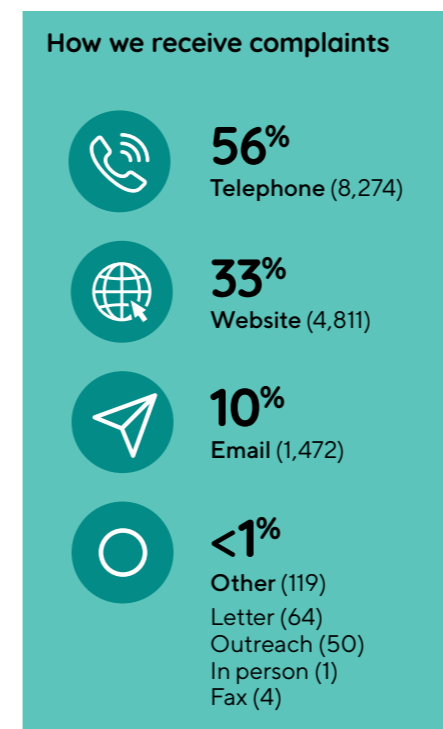
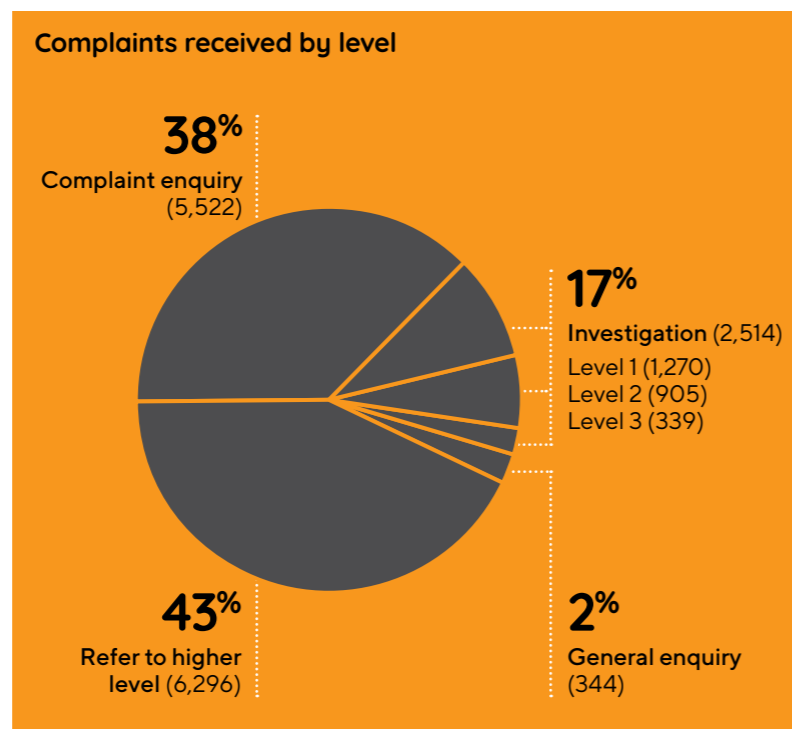
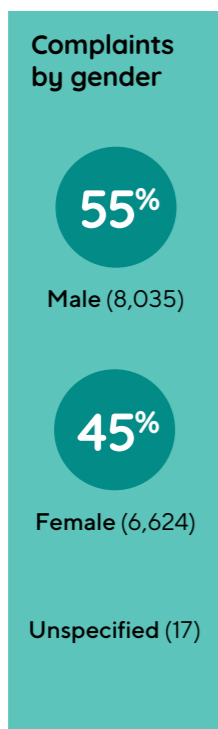
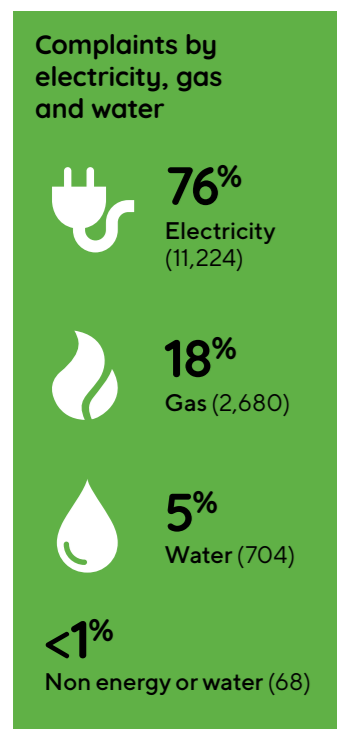
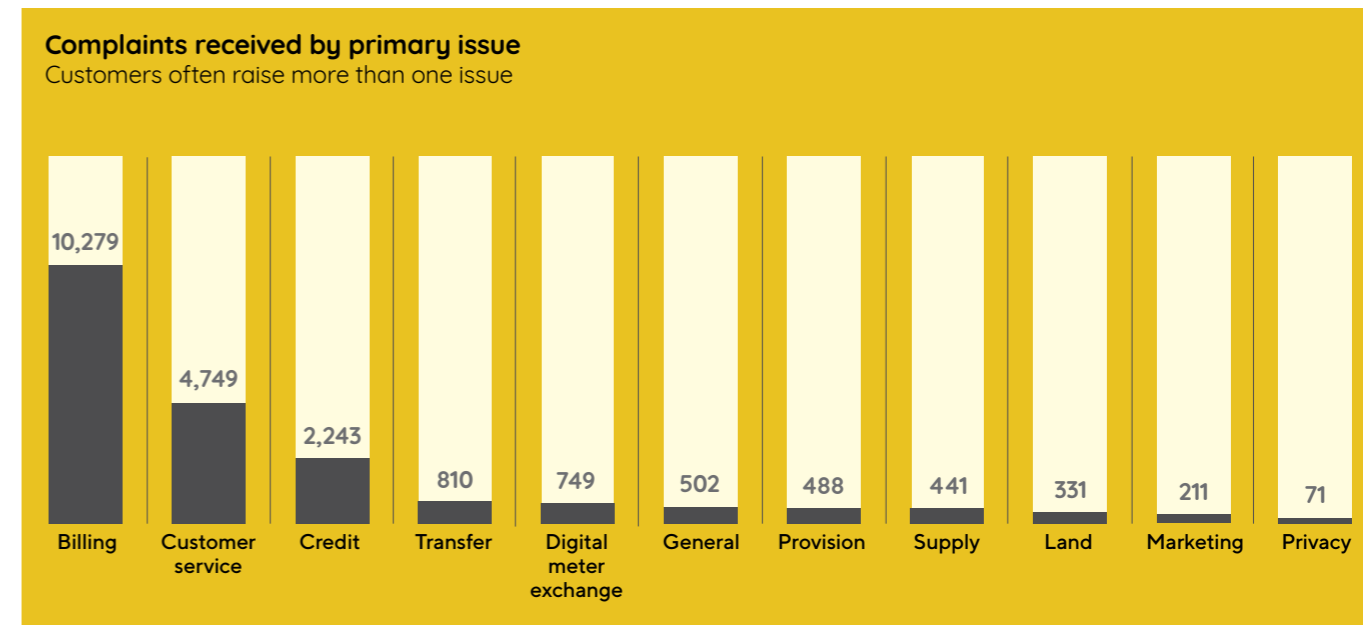
A request for information or assistance, including where the customer has not contacted their provider, that can be settled or referred quickly to a provider's contact centre or a referral agency.

Refer to higher level (RHL)

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

Investigation

A complaint EWON investigates aiming to negotiate an agreed outcome because, via direct customer contact or via our RHL process, it could not be resolved by the energy/water provider.



About us

EWON Board

The EWON Board is responsible for corporate governance, budget approval and strategic direction. The Board comprises an independent chair, five industry directors and five community directors.

In 2021/2022, we welcomed two new community directors: Joanna Quilty from the NSW Council of Social Service and April Blair from the Intellectual Disability Rights Service. We also welcomed two new industry directors: Anne Pearson from EnergyAustralia and Theo Whitmont from Kincumber Nautical Village, the first director from an exempt entity.

EWON Consultative Council

Consultative Council Meetings are part of EWON's constitutional framework. They offer an open forum for consumer and small business representatives, our members and other stakeholders to raise issues and put forward their views. Consultative Council Meetings also allow EWON to consult with key stakeholders and use the outcomes of these consultations to shape our planning.

We hold Consultative Council Meetings twice a year. In 2021/2022, they were on 11 November, 2021 and 28 April, 2022. See page 51 for more information about these meetings.

EWON Operational Advisory Group

The Exempt Entity and Water Industry Competition Act Operational Advisory Group gives embedded networks and small water providers a voice within EWON. It was established in accordance with EWON constitutional changes made in June 2018.

Tony Crawford
Chair



Joanna Quilty
Community Director
NSW Council of Social Service



Rod Stowe
Community Director
Super Consumers Australia Board and Consumer Advocacy Trust Fund Board



Kate Temby
Community Director
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW



Craig Memery
Community Director
Public Interest Advocacy Centre



April Blair
Community Director
Intellectual Disability Rights Service



David Stockler
Industry Director
Water NSW



Anne Pearson
Industry Director
Energy Australia



Rob Amphlett Lewis
Industry Director
Ausgrid



Jane Mills
Industry Director
Alinta Energy



Theo Whitmont
Industry Director
Kincumber Nautical Village



THE BENCHMARKS



Accessibility



Independence



Fairness



Accountability



Efficiency



Effectiveness

Our benchmarks

EWON measures its performance against the Australian Government's Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution (CDR Benchmarks). The CDR Benchmarks encourage best-practice, industry-based customer dispute resolution and set standards regarding:

- > accessibility
- > independence
- > fairness
- > accountability
- > effectiveness
- > efficiency.

Our strategic objectives

EWON strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for our members and their customers. Our strategic objectives set out our direction and enable us to provide high quality, independent advice, information and dispute resolution to NSW energy and some water consumers. They ensure we identify and address systemic issues, expand our reach across NSW, work with members and contribute high quality policy submissions. Our strategic objectives are:

- > expanded awareness
- > valued membership
- > best practice dispute resolution
- > influential policy contribution.

Our values

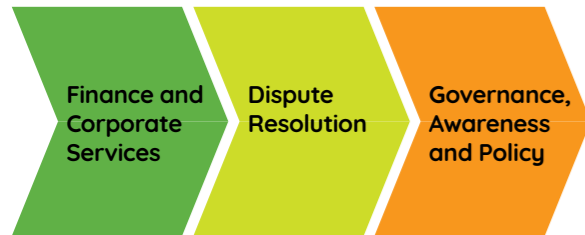
All EWON activities and initiatives are guided by our six organisational values:



Our team

EWON has three core teams under the leadership of the Ombudsman. They work closely to meet our Charter responsibilities while ensuring we remain effective and adaptable in the constantly evolving energy landscape.

EWON teams



Janine Young
Ombudsman



Helen Ford
Deputy Ombudsman

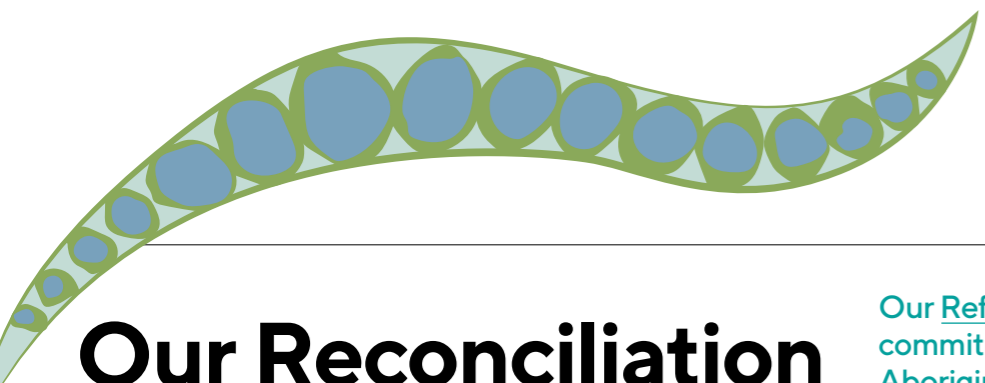


Bernadette Or
General Manager
Finance and Corporate
Services



Rosa Krilic
General Manager
Dispute Resolution





Our Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Reflect RAP demonstrates our commitment to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other Australians and provides a clear roadmap to guide our contribution to reconciliation.

EWON's journey towards reconciliation started more than a decade ago when we hired an Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer to establish an Aboriginal Community Outreach Program for communities across NSW. Since then, we've continually expanded our focus by introducing cultural awareness training for all staff, developing culturally appropriate resources and practices, and celebrating significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events through the year.

Our Reflect RAP records our progress to date and outlines how we plan to extend our support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in future. It is firmly embedded in all our day-to-day operations.

Our actions:

Joined Supply Nation, a network of Aboriginal-owned businesses, and committed to buying EWON collateral from it.

Recognised our RAP progress at the May 2022 staff meeting and distributed gift bags of collateral featuring designs by Barkindji artist Maddison Gibbs.

Engaged Mirri Mirri, an Aboriginal-owned cultural awareness training provider, to train EWON staff and Board members.

Ensured alternating staff and Board members present the Acknowledgment of Country at staff and Board meetings.

Established a dedicated section for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources on The Hub, our intranet

Introduced Cultural Protocols Training for new staff with our Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer as part of EWON's onboarding program.

Met regularly with Essential Energy and Endeavour Energy to explore Aboriginal outreach opportunities.

In the future, we will:

Introduce a separate phone queue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers voiced by our Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer.

Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention strategy to increase recruitment, retention and professional development opportunities.

Always Was Always Will Be
—Maddison Gibbs, Barkindji woman

Our systemic work in action

Origin Energy fined \$17 million for failing customers

Two years ago, our Dispute Resolution Team noticed that almost half of all complaints to EWON about affordability and disconnection were from Origin Energy customers. They alerted our Policy & Research Team, which identified several complaints in which Origin Energy actions were at odds with both the AER's Hardship Guideline and its own hardship policy.

EWON raised the issue with Origin Energy multiple times and highlighted disconnection and the lack of affordable payment plans in our compliance reporting to the AER. The Energy & Water Ombudsman SA (EWOSA) reported similar issues and a total of 37 complaints through EWON and 25 through EWOSA were raised with the AER.

In June 2022, the Federal Court ordered Origin Energy to pay a record \$17 million penalty for breaching laws and regulations designed to protect customers in financial difficulty. Without our complaint handling and systemic issues work, these breaches might not have been identified and brought to the attention of the AER.

The outcome

The Federal Court found that Origin Energy's automated processes led to more than 100,000 breaches of the National Energy Retail Law (NERL) and National Energy Retail Rules (NERR) between January 2018 and October 2021, affecting more than 90,000 customers. It found that the automated process meant customers' capacity to pay was overlooked in decisions about establishing and increasing payment plans and payment plans being cancelled.

The AER specifically recognised the work of EWON and EWOSA in helping bring about the outcome. Stemming from a relatively small number of complaints, the case highlights the importance of our thorough, cross-team approach to finding and dealing with systemic issues.

Alinta Energy waives \$1 million in customer debt

Our systemic issues work includes responding to AER requests for information. In 2021, the AER asked us for information about Alinta Energy's compliance with the AER's Hardship Guideline. Specifically, the AER wanted to learn more about the requirement for customers to attend financial counselling before being put on a payment plan or receiving hardship program support.

Our Policy & Research Team reviewed complaints identified by the Dispute Resolution Team and found that Alinta Energy customers had raised issues about difficulties negotiating payment plans. We found that customers seeking support were asked to make upfront payments or seek financial counselling before being offered payment plans or affordability program support. These requirements breached the AER's Hardship Guideline.

As a courtesy, we informed Alinta Energy that we would be responding to the AER's information request.

The outcome

Alinta Energy agreed to waive more than \$1 million in customer debt and conducted an internal review of its processes. Because of these actions, the AER decided not to impose further financial penalties. Alinta Energy waived an average of \$2,500 in energy debt for around 400 customers, well above the \$1,700 average energy debt held by customers on affordability programs.

Engaging across NSW

EWON's community engagement program is designed to promote our services and educate consumers, small business and community workers about energy and water issues. In addition to raising awareness about our complaint handling process, it reduces the volume of complaints by making customers aware of financial affordability programs and initiatives offered by our members.

Community engagement also provides a vital opportunity for EWON to learn about matters affecting consumers in NSW. Engaging firsthand means we often become aware of issues as they emerge within the community

and before they are identified through our complaint handling work. When this happens, our Community Engagement Team notifies our Policy & Research Team or Dispute Resolution Team to ensure these matters are considered in our complaints, policy work and stakeholder-engagement activities.

As COVID-19 restrictions eased throughout 2021/2022 and our face-to-face outreach program resumed, we reconnected with consumers, community workers and advocates across the State. To keep our staff and customers safe, we implemented our COVID-19 Safety Plan at all in-person outreach engagements.

EWON has a strategic focus on raising awareness of our services among consumers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability, including:

- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- > people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- > seniors
- > people with disabilities
- > youth
- > small businesses.

As in previous years, we held and participated in events targeting a variety of different community groups (see below).



203

outreach activities



32

events with community workers



27

activities with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse consumers



5

activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



39

Bring Your Bills Days and expos



58

activities with remote and regional communities



10

events with small business owners



10

events with social housing tenants



9

events with seniors



13

events with people with disabilities or their supporters



Far left: Resilience NSW Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons speaking at our online Re-engage and Renew Community Worker Forums.
Left: Customers at a post-flood recovery centre in Lismore.

Our community engagement program is strengthened by partnerships with a range of community and industry organisations. Together, they help increase awareness of EWON events and offer complementary services and support.

Partner organisations included:

- > Financial Counselling Australia
- > Murdi Paaki Services
- > Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention Legal Service
- > Good Service Mob
- > Energy Charter
- > Local councils
- > Legal Aid NSW
- > TAFE NSW
- > Carers NSW
- > National Debt Helpline
- > Uniting NSW
- > Mercy Connect
- > Rapid Relief Team
- > National Recovery and Resilience Agency
- > NSW Trustee & Guardian
- > Services Australia
- > Service NSW
- > Southern Cross Community Housing
- > Dementia Australia
- > Red Cross
- > Deaf Society
- > Australian Centre for Disability Law
- > Lebanese Muslim Association
- > Nowra Youth Centre
- > Revenue NSW
- > Salvation Army
- > Local community and multicultural agencies.

Event highlights

Re-engage and Renew Forums - Gandangara, Darug and Wiradjuri land

EWON's Re-engage and Renew Forums, our annual contribution to Anti-Poverty Week, were held online for community workers in Western Sydney and Orange. More than 150 community workers, government representatives and other stakeholders joined. The events included a keynote speech by the Commissioner of Resilience NSW, Shane Fitzsimmons, who talked about the importance of engaging with communities after natural disasters and during the pandemic. Attendees at the Orange forum also heard from Lynda Edwards, Financial Counselling Australia's Coordinator Financial Capability, about the experience of First Nations people during COVID-19.

Both forums included a panel discussion on energy affordability, disconnection and debt collection with presentations from the AER, the National Debt Helpline, EWON, Red Energy, Origin Energy and AGL.

Yabun Festival - Gadigal land

In late January, we kicked off our 2022 Outreach program at the 20th anniversary of the Yabun Festival, the largest one-day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural event in Australia. Held at Victoria Park in Sydney, the event brought together a range of First Nations-owned community and government organisations and NGOs. It was a fantastic opportunity to reconnect with communities we had been unable to visit during the pandemic.

Supporting farmers - Willyakali, Barkandji, and Gamilaroi land

Our Outreach Team and Deputy Ombudsman joined the National Response and Resilience Agency for the first time to increase our reach across the State and engage with communities in far-western NSW. As part of the Agency's Disaster Community Outreach Programs we visited Broken Hill, Menindee, Pooncarie, Mungo, Wentworth, Walgett, Coonamble, Pilliga, Rowena, and Narrabri. At each stop we joined community organisations, NGOs and government service providers to give information and assistance to farmers and community members.

Supporting flood affected customers - Widjabul land

Following the devastating floods in northern NSW in early 2022, EWON joined the Rapid Relief Team for a Farmers Community Connect Day in Lismore in June 2022. Attendees received hay and seed donations, food and access to support services. Our Community Engagement Officer also visited rescue centres and holiday parks housing flood survivors to ensure they were aware of EWON's services.



Left: Customers at the Yabun Festival and Yabun dancers (below).

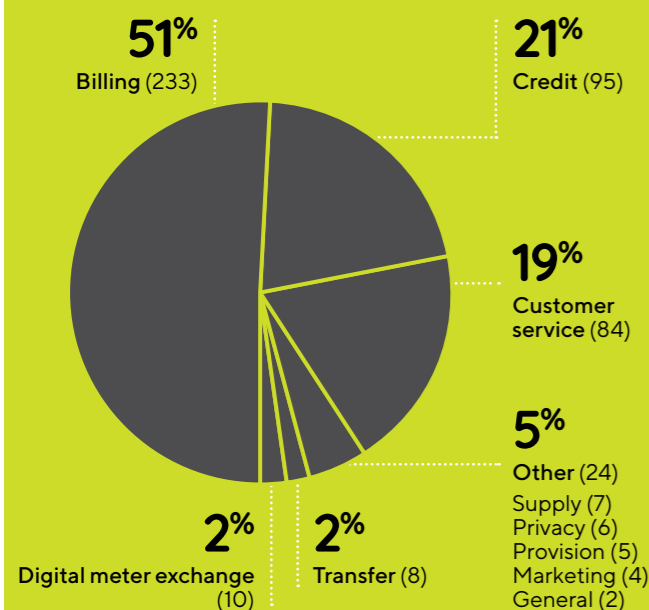
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

EWON's community engagement enables us to build and strengthen links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their leaders and the agencies and services that work with them. We make sure our services are accessible to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in NSW.

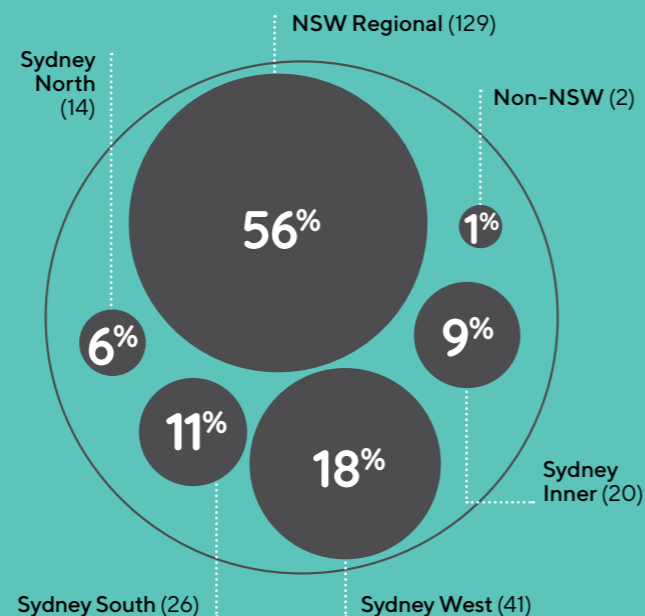
Reaching communities during lockdowns was particularly difficult. In April 2022 we launched We're Here for You, a multi-platform campaign aimed at reconnecting with Aboriginal communities we couldn't reach because of the pandemic. Focused on regional NSW areas including Bathurst, Bourke, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Moree, Nambucca, Orange, Wagga Wagga and Wilcannia, the campaign built on the success of our previous Mob Matters campaign. We're Here for You included social media, community radio and digital newspaper advertisements linking to a dedicated resource page on EWON's website.



Top issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers



Complaints by area from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse consumers

Raising awareness of our service among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities is a key focus for EWON. We work with community workers, interpreters and bilingual staff and use translated fact sheets and plain English presentations to reach diverse communities.

We have developed a multicultural strategy that documents our commitment to ensure that customers with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have equal access to our dispute resolution services.

Our objectives include:

- > promoting the telephone interpreting service
- > providing accessible resources to people with CALD backgrounds via promotional material and our website
- > targeting areas with a high CALD population through our outreach program.

EWON held 27 outreach activities with multicultural consumers and community workers this year. At multicultural interagency meetings we provide support and explore how we can better engage with community workers by providing resources and information, attending events and raising issues of concern.

We continued our Bill Support Days via phone bookings at SydWest Multicultural Service at Blacktown, and presented to the NSW Refugee Health Service, Jesuit Refugee Centre, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, and to the Adult Migrant English Program at various NSW TAFEs.

Member involvement in outreach

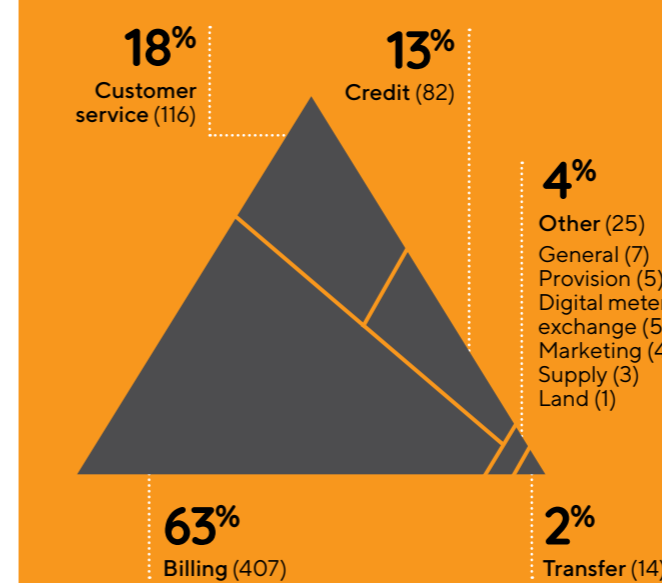
Member involvement at outreach events has grown in recent years because of the mutual benefits for providers and their customers. We find members who attend events learn more about the challenges customers face and the impacts of some of their processes.

Customers have the opportunity to resolve issues with their provider on the spot, knowing that EWON can help if they are not satisfied with the outcome. Some members give EWON a dedicated team member to call if they are unable to physically attend events so that customer complaints can still be addressed on the spot.

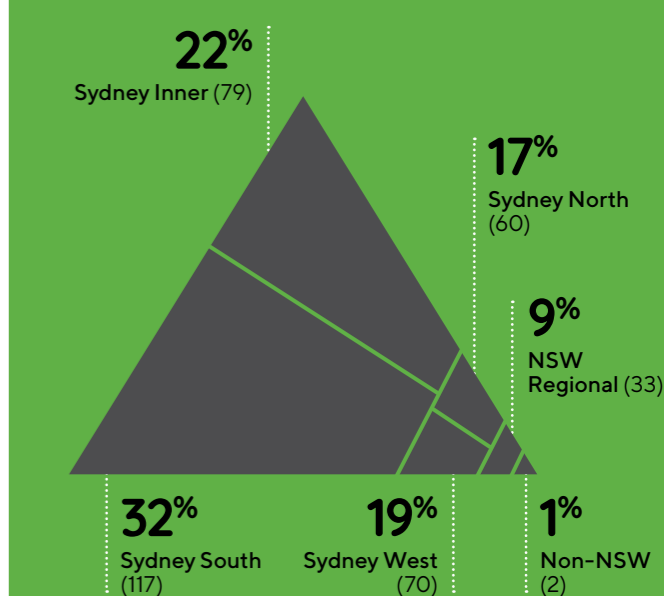
Essential Energy joined EWON and the Rapid Relief Team at a flood assistance day in Lismore and Origin Energy took part in a presentation to financial counselling students at Eva Burrows College.

We also partnered with Sydney Water and Hunter Water to host webinars about energy and water issues for consumers and community workers. Councils that hosted the sessions included the Inner West, Blacktown, Hawkesbury, Cumberland, Raymond Terrace, Port Stephens, Campbelltown Cessnock, Hornsby and Hills Shire.

Top issues raised by CALD customers



Complaints by area from CALD customers



Raising awareness across NSW

Our Communications & Outreach Team's role is to enhance awareness of our services and educate consumers and their advocates about energy and water issues, using print, digital and social media channels. The Communications Team:

- > provides thought leadership, complaints data and analysis in response to media enquiries
- > promotes outreach events across NSW
- > develops consumer resources and awareness campaigns
- > maintains EWON's website and social media channels.

Our thought leadership

This year we have strengthened our position as a thought leader in the energy and water sectors by providing expert commentary in response to enquiries from state and national media seeking information, data and insights into complaints trends.

Our Ombudsman Janine Young featured in several television segments on various topics including:

- > hot water embedded networks with 10 News in March 2022
- > Origin Energy's \$17 million fine with the ABC Evening Bulletin and ABC Breakfast News in June 2022
- > energy price spikes with the ABC Evening Bulletin and The Business program in July 2022

After our two Spotlight On reports, embedded networks became a key area where media sought EWON's expertise. We provided statistics, insights and expertise to News.com.au, The Guardian and CHOICE.

The Communications Team has also sharpened its focus on regional media. We provided insights about local trends and data relating to estimated bills to Wagga Wagga newspaper, The Daily Advertiser and discussed post-flood complaints in the Clarence Valley area with ABC North Coast Radio.



Our growing social media presence

Social media is a valuable tool to drive traffic to EWON's website and promote events, publications and industry news.

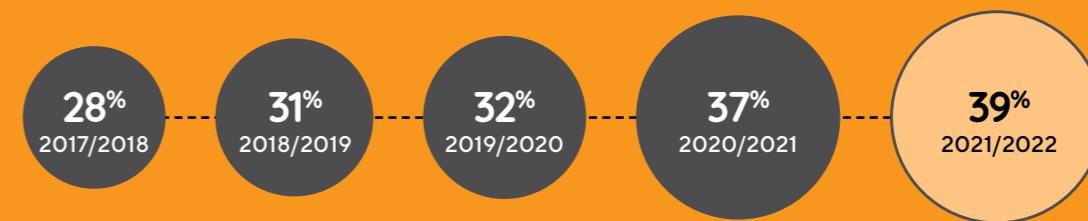
This year the Communications Team has focused on building EWON's social media presence, which has increased the number of followers across all platforms. Our performance on LinkedIn, the most widely used platform for business-related content, was particularly strong, with a 45% increase in our following and significant engagement from energy sector leaders with our posts. Similarly, we continue to engage a younger audience on Instagram, where our following rose by 40%.



Left: Ombudsman Janine Young was interviewed by Network 10 to discuss gaps in consumer protections for embedded network customers.

Measuring awareness

Percentage of people who responded that they were familiar or very familiar with the term Energy Ombudsman in NSW



Measuring awareness

While the Communications Team works to increase awareness of our service, measuring overall knowledge of EWON's services can be difficult because customers engage with us only when they can't resolve an issue with their provider. We use Energy Consumers Australia's (ECA) Consumer Sentiment Survey to track awareness of EWON.

ECA includes two questions in its yearly survey to measure the level of unprompted and prompted awareness of energy ombudsman services. In 2021/2022, 540 people responded to the survey.

The first question measures unprompted awareness by asking: "If you had a complaint about your electricity or gas services which you could not resolve by talking to your retailer or network company, who would you contact?" The percentage of respondents who gave an ombudsman-related answer increased slightly from 29% in 2020/2021 to 30.4% in 2021/2022.

Question two measures prompted awareness and asks: "How familiar are you with an organisation called the Energy Ombudsman in NSW, which assists with complaints about energy?"

In 2021/2022, 38.5% of respondents said they were familiar or very familiar with the term, a rise from the 37% who responded in 2020/2021. We continue to develop our outreach and communication strategies to build consumer awareness of our service.

Below: EWON's Deputy Ombudsman and Community Engagement & Dispute Resolution Officer travelled through Far West NSW with various community and government organisations.



Complaints and enquiries

“

Just to say a big thank you from me...Your effort fixed everything in less than a day!

Customer

343



General enquiry

A customer seeking information or help that may be about an energy or water matter that is out of our jurisdiction or is not a complaint.

Sometimes customers contact us with an energy or water enquiry but don't have a specific complaint. They may also call about something outside our jurisdiction such as a problem with a solar installer or their phone provider. When this occurs, we note their call and refer them to the appropriate organisation. We finalise these complaints as general enquiries.

5,514



Complaint enquiry

A request for information or help that can be quickly settled or referred to a provider's contact centre or other agency.

Customers may contact us with questions that we can address immediately such as a request for referral to an agency that distributes Energy Account payment assistance vouchers. Another example is a query about an approved fee or charge on their energy or water account.

A customer may also contact us with a complaint about their energy or water provider that they have not yet raised with their provider. We will then provide general advice and information about their rights and responsibilities. We refer customers to their provider. We let them know they can contact us again if they are not satisfied with their provider's response. These complaints are resolved as complaint enquiries.

6,273



Refer to higher level

A complaint referred to the energy or water provider's specialist Dispute Resolution Team.

Often customers contact us about complaints they have unsuccessfully tried to resolve with their providers, usually at a contact centre level. We offer to refer them to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team. If the customer agrees to this, we provide advice and information about their rights and responsibilities and categorise these complaints as refer to higher level (RHL).

The provider's specialist team is required to contact the customer directly within five days to resolve the complaint. We inform the customer that they can return to us if they are not satisfied with the outcome or haven't been contacted by the provider within five days.

This approach gives the provider a further opportunity to resolve the customer's problem directly. It also gives the customer a chance to have their complaint reviewed by senior staff in the provider's specialist complaints area.

1,212



Investigations

EWON investigates complaints that cannot be resolved between the customer and the provider. These are categorised as Level 1, 2 and 3 based on the time taken to resolve the complaint.

These include customers who return to us after their complaint has been referred to their provider's specialist dispute resolution team (RHL) because they are not satisfied with the response they received.

An investigation involves speaking to both parties to determine the facts and circumstances from each point of view. We analyse information from the provider such as metering data, telephone calls between the customer and the contact centre, and energy contracts. We also review relevant legislative provisions, conduct research and, in some cases, site visits, and consult independent experts. If appropriate, we offer to refer the customer to other services such as welfare agencies, financial counselling and tenant advisory services.

Investigated complaints are categorised by level. Level 1 complaints are most often resolved in four to six weeks because they are generally not complex. They involve collecting information from the provider and customer and talking through the issues and resolution options with both parties to reach an agreed outcome.

910



Level 2 complaints involve more in-depth research, investigation and analysis. Providers are often asked to supply detailed billing and metering information or reports from engineers or asset repairers. Such complaints may also require a detailed assessment to be prepared for the customer to review to provide further advice. Most are resolved with a negotiated outcome agreed to by both parties.

Complaint investigations are upgraded to Level 3 if they are not resolved via the Level 2 process and require further investigation. These complaints can involve detailed information requests to the provider or the customer and may require expert independent advice to reach an outcome. Most are resolved/finalised within six months but a small number of complex complaints can take up to, or more than, 12 months.

400



Outcomes

Facilitated resolutions

Facilitated resolutions are achieved when EWON receives non-complex complaints that meet investigation criteria, including dissatisfied customers returning from the Refer Higher Level process. After collecting relevant information from the customer and their energy/water provider, an EWON Conciliation Officer works with both parties to identify the issues that need to be resolved. The Conciliator assists both parties to develop options, consider resolution alternatives and ultimately reach an agreement.

Negotiated resolutions

Negotiated resolutions involve a full investigation into a complex complaint. An EWON Investigations Officer receives all relevant information from the customer and their provider including, when necessary, independent technical/expert advice. Customers are asked about their expectations and, where necessary, are required to substantiate financial loss or impacts. Equally, energy/water providers are asked to substantiate their position. The Investigations Officer involves both parties in negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome that has regard to all relevant rules, laws and guidelines and good industry practice.

No further investigation

When our investigation finds that there is no basis to further investigate the complaint or the energy/water provider's resolution offer is fair and reasonable i.e. it addresses all aspects of the complaint and how the customer was impacted, the complaint is finalised on a No Further Investigation basis. Likewise, if a customer withdraws their complaint or does not stay in contact with us during the investigation.

Prior to finalising a complaint on a 'no further investigation' basis, we send the customer a complaint assessment detailing all aspects of our investigation, the provider's resolution offer and any other actions it is taking to fully address the complaint and an outline of our preliminary views. The customer has the opportunity to provide further information to support their position, agreed with the proposed outcome or request our final decision. The timeframe for this advice is 28 days of receiving our assessment. When a 'no further investigation' decision has been made, the customer has the right to request an internal view on the grounds of bias, error or omission, or new information just to hand.

Binding decisions

Investigations are escalated to the Ombudsman for a binding decision when an investigation remains unresolved and the energy/water provider's final resolution offer does not fully meet the merits of the complaint. The Ombudsman then decides to resolve the complaint.

In 2021/2022 no binding decisions were made by the Ombudsman.

COMPLAINT ENQUIRY

Case study

EWON identifies high gas bill due to leak



Two months after moving into a rental property, Ms Howard received and paid a gas bill of \$39. Three months later she received a second gas bill for \$141, which her retailer told her was based on estimated usage. Ms Howard found a note from the meter reader informing her that the meter could not be accessed and requesting that she provide her own meter read through her retailer's app. After providing her own read, Ms Howard received a new gas bill for \$540 later that month. Confused by the high amount, she contacted EWON to ask whether her retailer was required to offer a bill reduction.

Ms Howard advised that she had followed advice from her retailer and hired a plumber to check her gas pipe for leaks, and that the plumber had confirmed there was a leak on her side of the meter. She asked her retailer to consider reducing the bill because of this, but it refused to do so as the leak was on her property and therefore not its responsibility. Although her landlord offered to reimburse her for 15% of the gas bill, Ms Howard was stressed by the amount she apparently owed.

EWON explained that property owners are responsible for maintaining and

repairing their gas installation and that the retailer billed all usage recorded by the meter. We told Ms Howard that her retailer did not have any obligation to adjust the bill based on the location of the leak and advised her to contact the Tenants' Union for further advice if she wasn't satisfied with her landlord's reimbursement offer.

Issues
Disputed high bill

Outcome
Resolved as complaint enquiry



REFER HIGHER LEVEL

Case study

High bills for vacant property resolved

Ms Cameron was away from her home for six weeks in 2021. When she returned there was no power and it appeared that the electricity meter had failed. A month later, she received an estimated bill for \$605 that partially covered the time she was away. She paid the bill and contacted her retailer to discuss the estimation and meter fault. She then received another estimated bill for \$644 that covered the remainder of the time she was away, and again disputed it. Disappointed by the poor customer service she received, Ms Cameron reached out to EWON for help.

2020, when she had been at home, were \$416 and \$697 respectively. She hoped that her retailer would compensate her for poor customer service and adjust the disputed bills to \$416, in line with her consumption on the previous bill.

We referred the complaint back to her retailer at a higher level. It advised us that the meter was replaced with a smart meter two months after Ms Cameron returned home and that it had asked the network distributor to review the last three bills issued on the faulty meter.

Ms Cameron was subsequently rebilled \$141 for the time she was away and the six weeks prior and \$31 for the period after

she returned. Her retailer also offered her a \$50 customer service credit for the inconvenience she experienced. Ms Cameron gladly accepted the outcome and told EWON that she didn't think her retailer would have responded if we hadn't intervened.

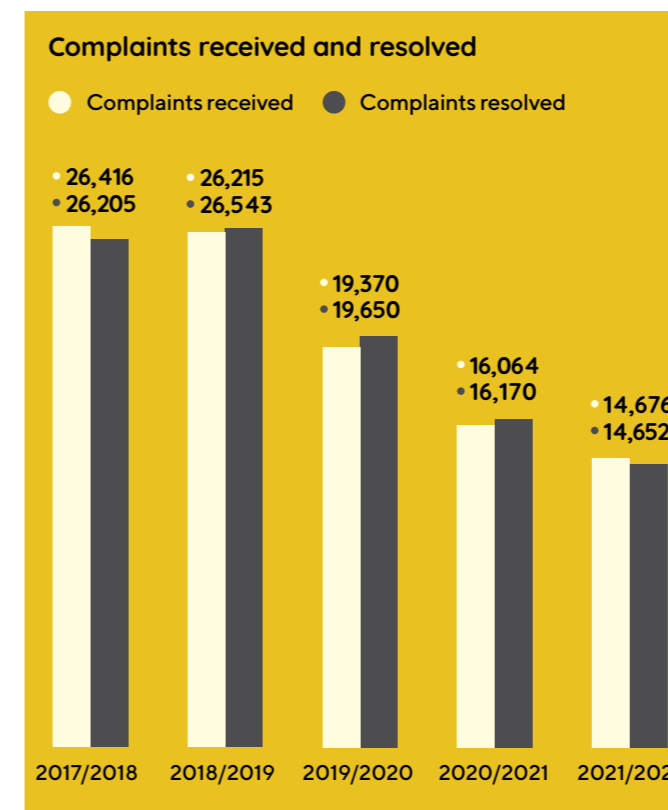
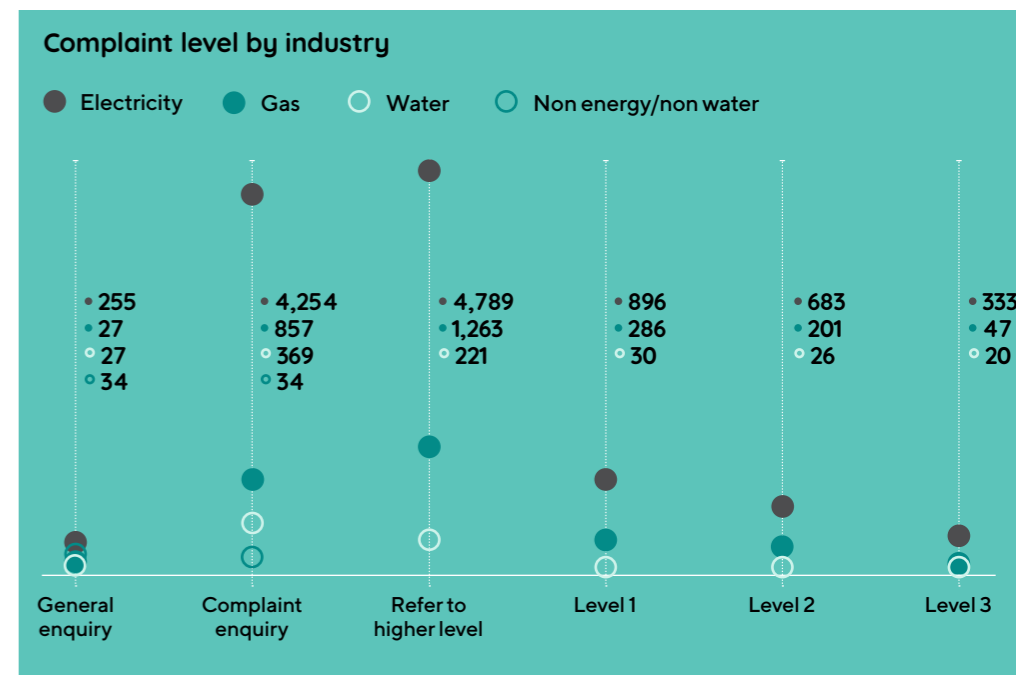
Issues
Meter fault, poor customer service, disputed high bill

Outcome
Resolved as RHL

Complaints this year

We received 14,676 complaints in 2021/2022, a 9% reduction on the 16,064 received in 2020/2021. The fall in complaints in the past two years can be strongly attributed to COVID-19 lockdowns across the state and the introduction of the AER Statement of Expectations in March 2020. This prevented disconnection, debt collection and credit default listing for customers who had been financially impacted by the pandemic.

We resolved 14,652 complaints in 2021/2022, down from 16,170 in 2020/2021.



Provider service	2021/2022	% change from 2020/2021
Retail	10,252	-8%
Network	748	-18%
Not allocated	152	-13%
Exempt entity	58	0%
Retail	2,470	-9%
Network	168	-8%
Not allocated	43	-32%
Exempt entity	-	-100%
Retail	370	-1%
Network	221	6%
Not allocated	102	0%
Non energy / Non water	68	-43%
Total	14,652	-9%

Complaints by area

COMPLAINTS IN SYDNEY

Bayside	2	Liverpool	2
Blacktown	1	Mosman	2
Burwood	2	North Sydney	3
Camden	2	Northern Beaches	1
Campbelltown	2	Parramatta	2
Canada Bay	2	Penrith	2
Canterbury-Bankstown	2	Randwick	2
Cumberland	2	Ryde	2
Fairfield	1	Strathfield	2
Georges River	2	Sutherland Shire	2
Hornsby	2	Sydney	6
Hunters Hill	1	The Hills Shire	2
Inner West	2	Waverley	2
Ku-ring-gai	1	Willoughby	2
Lane Cove	2	Woollahra	2

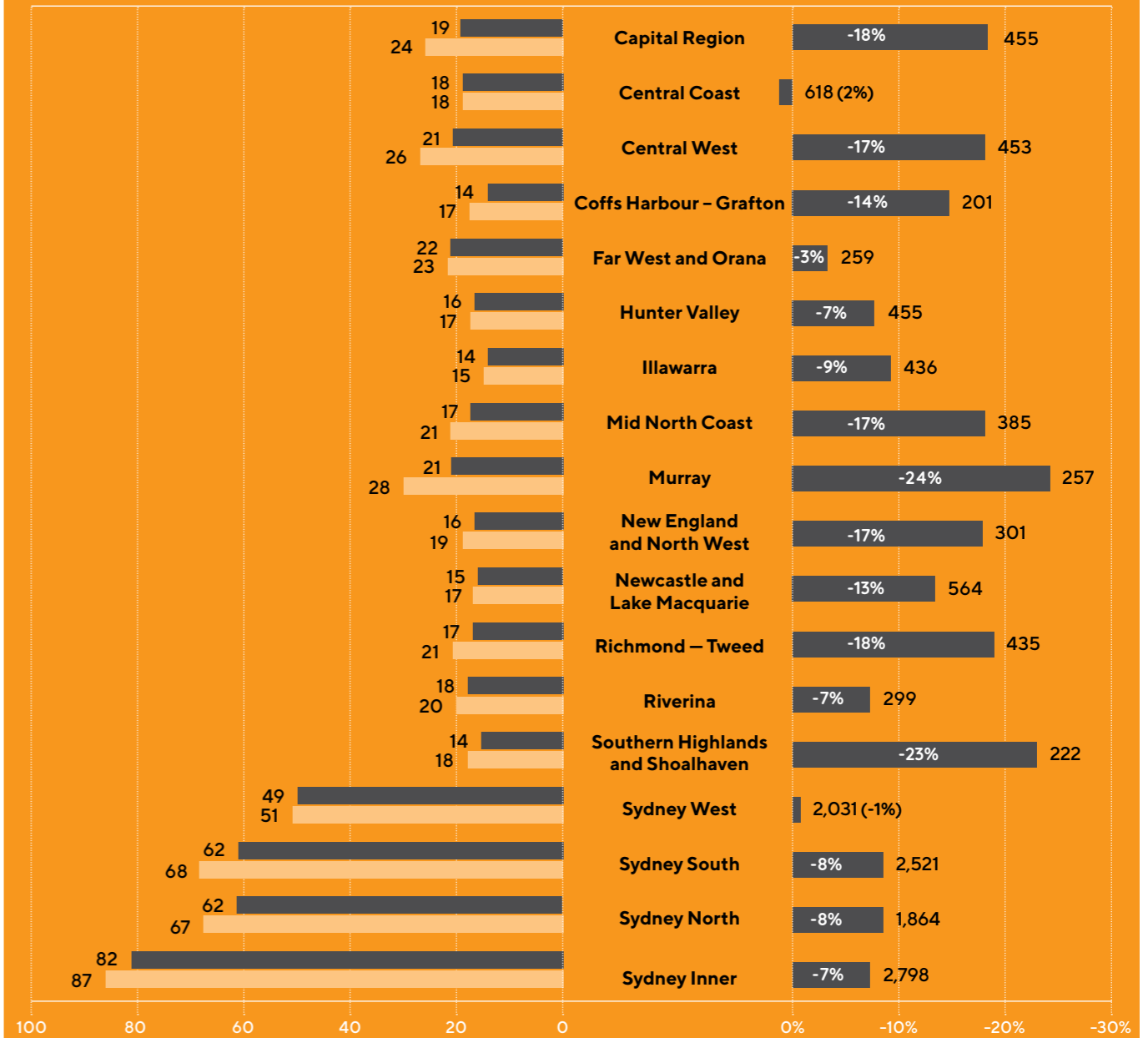
Complaints per 10,000 people by Local Government Area

● 1-3 ● 4-6 *map not to scale

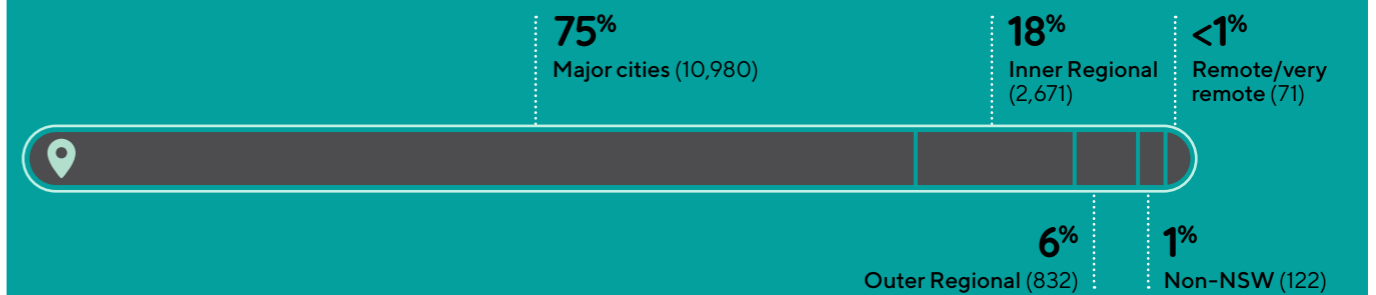


Complaints per 10,000 people by NSW region

● 2021/2022 ● 2020/2021



Location of customers lodging a complaint



Complaint issues

How we categorise complaints

We open one complaint when a customer contacts us. Complaints often involve more than one related complaint issue, which means we register more complaint issues than actual complaints. But we also categorise each complaint by a single "core issue", the key reason for the complaint.

Billing

High and disputed bills, fees and charges, opening/closing accounts.

Credit

Disconnection, arrears, payment difficulty, payment arrangement declined, debt collection.

Transfer

Error in billing or transfer of account due to switching energy providers, contract terms, delay in transfer, site ownership.

Customer service

Failure to respond, incorrect advice, poor attitude/service.

Digital meter exchange

Delay, meter not installed, incorrect advice, failure to respond/notify, billing, terms and conditions.

General

Non-energy/water related.

Supply

Quality, damage/loss, outages.

Land

Impact of network assets, maintenance, environment.

Provision

Problems with new or existing connections.

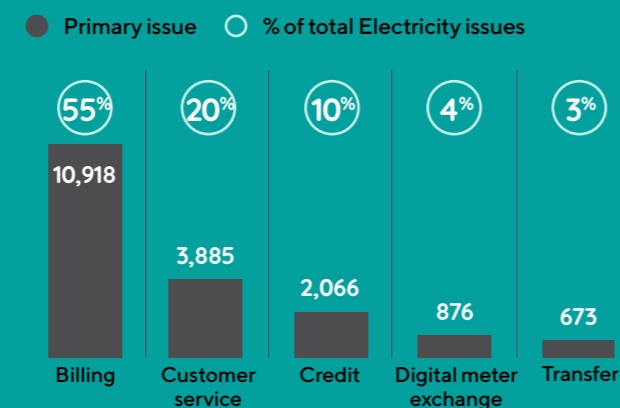
Marketing

Conduct by marketers, misleading information, pressure, non-account holder signed up.

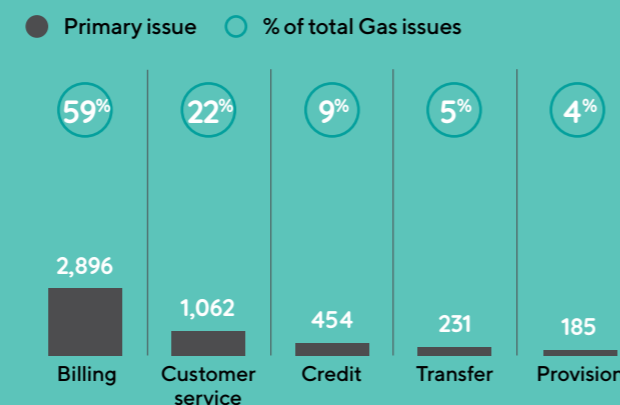
Privacy

Personal details released or obtained without customer consent, provider refusal to correct or disclose details, concerns about details requested by provider.

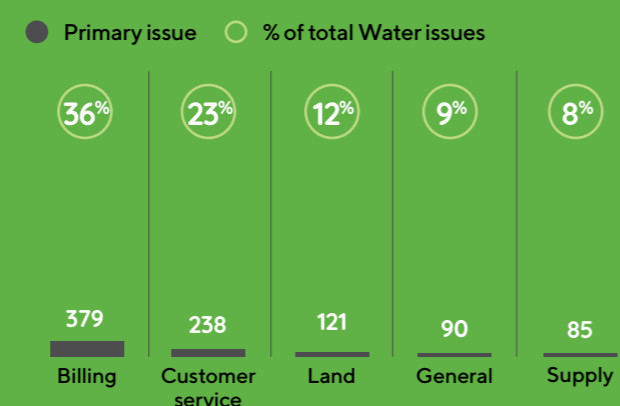
Top five complaint issues - Electricity



Top five complaint issues - Gas



Top five complaint issues - Water



Total complaint issues

Billing

Issue	No. complaints
High	5,095
Estimation	2,089
Error	1,340
Tariff	812
Contract terms	668
Account closing	653
Backbill	635
Account opening	513
Rebate / concession	490
Fees & charges	412
Other	378
Refund or credit	378
Period	365
Delay	278
Format	58
Debt transfer	29

Customer service

Issue	No. complaints
Poor service	2,688
Failure to respond	1,425
Incorrect advice / information	441
Failure to consult / inform	251
B2B / third parties	184
Online / application	79
Unprofessional attitude	67
Accessibility	50

Credit

Issue	No. complaints
Payment difficulties	1,200
Disconnection / restriction	759
Collection	626

Transfer

Issue	No. complaints
Site ownership	278
In error	186
Delay	180
Without consent	104
Cooling off rights	77
Error correction	47
Rejected	32

Digital meter exchange

Issue	No. complaints
Delay	231
Fault	184
Billing	149
Incorrect advice / information	92
Not installed	69
Other	63

Digital meter exchange

Issue	No. complaints
Terms and conditions	29
Opt in / opt out	20
Failure to notify	15
Failure to respond	13
Damage to property / appliances	11

Provision

Issue	No. complaints
Existing connection	353
New connection	160
Disconnection / restriction	19

Supply

Issue	No. complaints
Off supply (planned)	198
Off supply (unplanned)	191
Sewer overflow / blockage	44
Variation	36
Quality	25
Life Support protections	13
Water licensing	7
Water restriction	2

General

Issue	No. complaints
Energy / water	434
Non energy / non water	68

Land

Issue	No. complaints
Network assets	205
Property damage / restoration	94
Other	26
Vegetation management	24
Street lighting	18
Easement	11

Marketing

Issue	No. complaints
Misleading	123
Information	49
Method	19
Pressure	18
Other	17
Non account holder	4

Privacy

Issue	No. complaints
Other	26
Details obtained without consent	17
Details released	16
Details correction refused	9
Details requested by provider	7

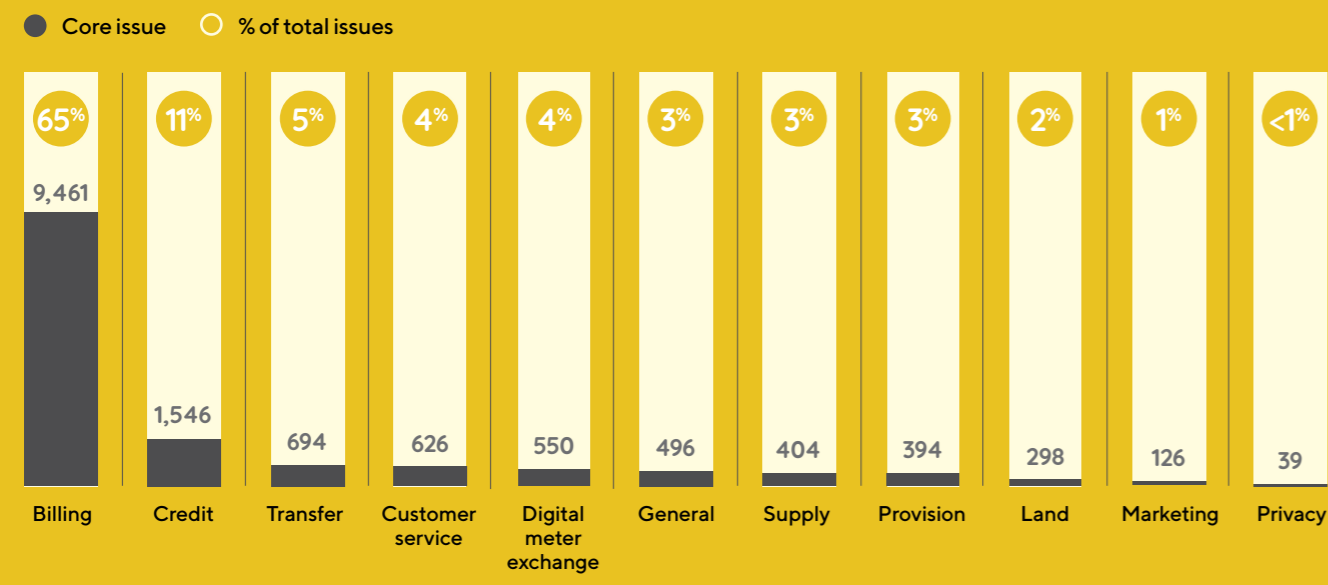
Focusing on the core issues

EWON has introduced a new process to identify the core issue in a customer's complaint. In each complaint EWON receives there may be multiple issues but there can be only one core issue. This data highlights the key issues driving customer complaints. For a customer who complains to EWON about a high bill and poor customer service, the high bill is usually the key complaint driver. This is the first year we have reported on core issues.

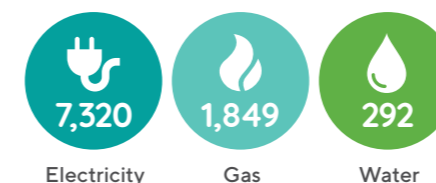
Why we're no longer looking at trends

In previous years, this report provided information on five-year historical complaint issue trends. This information has not been included this year due to the change in focus to core issues, as well as the unprecedented impact COVID-19 lockdowns have had on complaint numbers over the past two years.

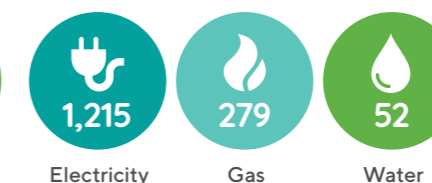
Total complaints by core issue



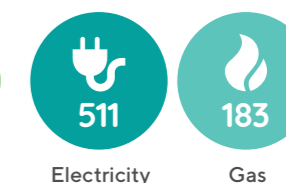
Billing



Credit



Transfer



Billing is the most common core issue among customers who contact EWON and was present in 65% of all complaints. Billing issues include higher than expected bills, problems with opening or closing accounts, billing errors or delays and disputed fees.

- > People spent more time at home during lockdowns, leading to increased consumption and higher bills.
- > Estimated bills were common during COVID-19 stay-at-home periods when meter reading was suspended. This resulted in higher than expected 'catch-up' bills once meters were read after lockdowns ended.
- > Some small business customers experienced billing problems related to COVID-19 lockdowns, such as continued billing after they had tried to close their account and business.

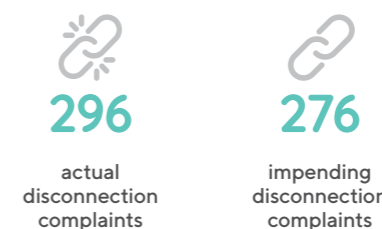
Credit-related issues were present as the core issue in 11% of complaints. Examples of credit issues include default listings for energy debts, difficulties paying bills, problems with payment arrangements, and customers whose supply has been disconnected for non-payment or are at risk of this occurring.

- > The AER's Statement of Expectations was lifted in October 2021, removing extra protections for people experiencing payment difficulties due to COVID-19. This affected customers and small businesses that continued to face affordability pressures.
- > Rising costs of living in the first half of 2022 increased affordability pressures, with many customers experiencing difficulty paying their bills.
- > In some areas of NSW these pressures were compounded by natural disasters.

Transfer issues were the main driver in 5% of complaints received. Transfer issues include errors or delays when transferring between retailers, problems with consent or cooling off rights, and incorrect address transfers.

- > A range of changes came into effect from October 2021 to enable faster energy account switching between retailers, including facilitating transfers based on estimated meter reads. This has increased the number of transfer complaints while the industry and customers adjust to the changes.
- > Transfer complaints were also spurred by customers seeking better energy deals, especially those whose retailers increased their prices due to factors such as high wholesale energy costs. Other customers were involved in Retailer of Last Resort (RoLR) events where their retailer stopped operating and they were automatically transferred to a retailer designated by the AER to ensure no interruption to their supply.

Disconnection



There are no transfer-related water complaints as water accounts are associated with property ownership.

“

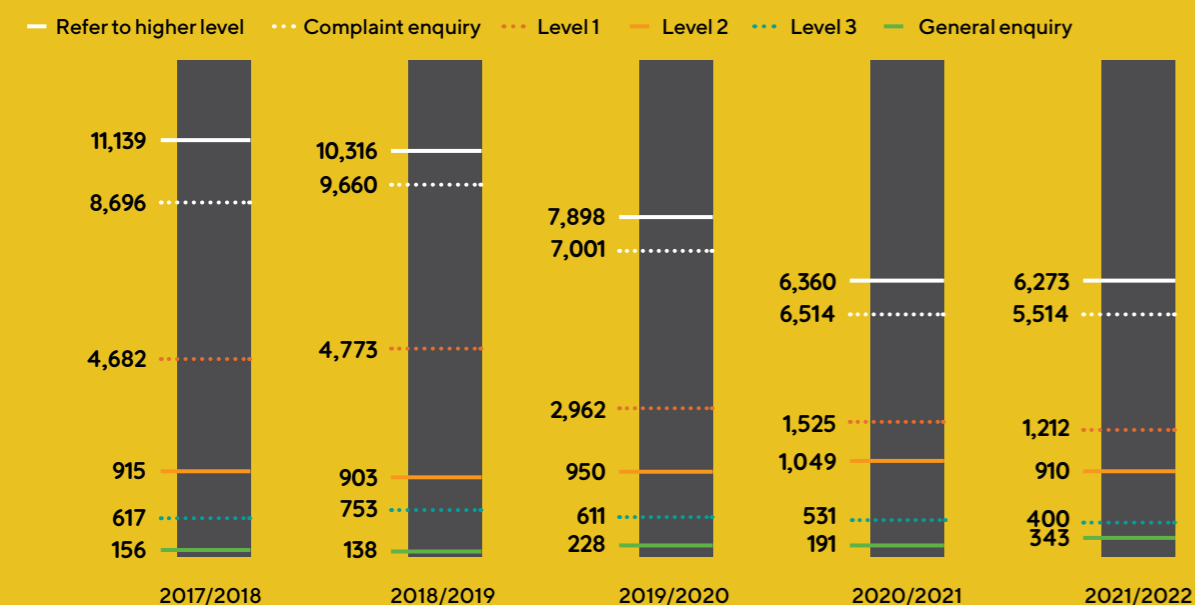
I have read and understand the outcome of your investigation. I agree with the review and will endeavour to bring my account up to date.

Customer

Resolutions and outcomes

Complaint closures

From 2017/2018 to 2021/2022



No wrong door

When a customer requires help that is outside EWON's jurisdiction, we refer them to the organisation that can best assist.

Procedural fairness

When a customer contacts us before contacting their energy or water provider, we register their complaint as a complaint enquiry, inform them of their rights and responsibilities, and refer the customer back to their provider's contact centre.



2,722

Referrals to provider contact centres or affordability teams

No wrong door referrals	No. complaints
EAPA/PAS/community agency	636
Fair Trading/NCAT	466
Other Government agency	386
AER/energymadeeasy	315
Another Ombudsman	253
Legal/tenancy advisor	238
Financial counsellor	231
Private contractor	213
IPART	24
DPE (Resources & Energy)/Minister	15
Total	2,777

INVESTIGATIONS OUTCOMES

44%

Facilitated resolution

When the customer and provider work with us to conciliate the resolution of less complex investigated complaints.

47%

Negotiated resolution

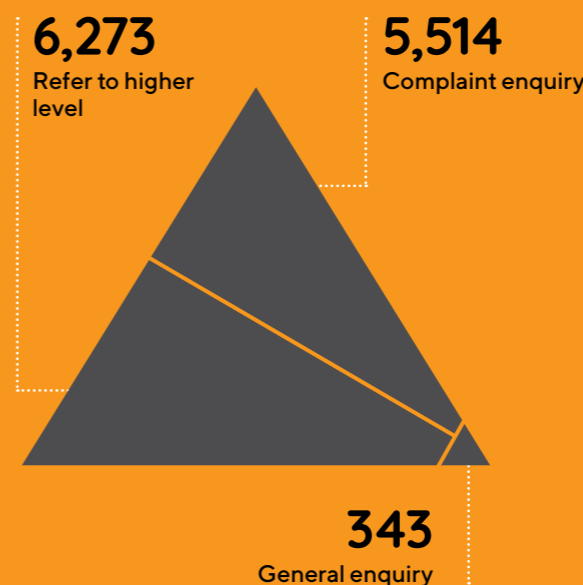
When we fully investigate and negotiate with both parties to arrive at a fair and reasonable outcome.

9%

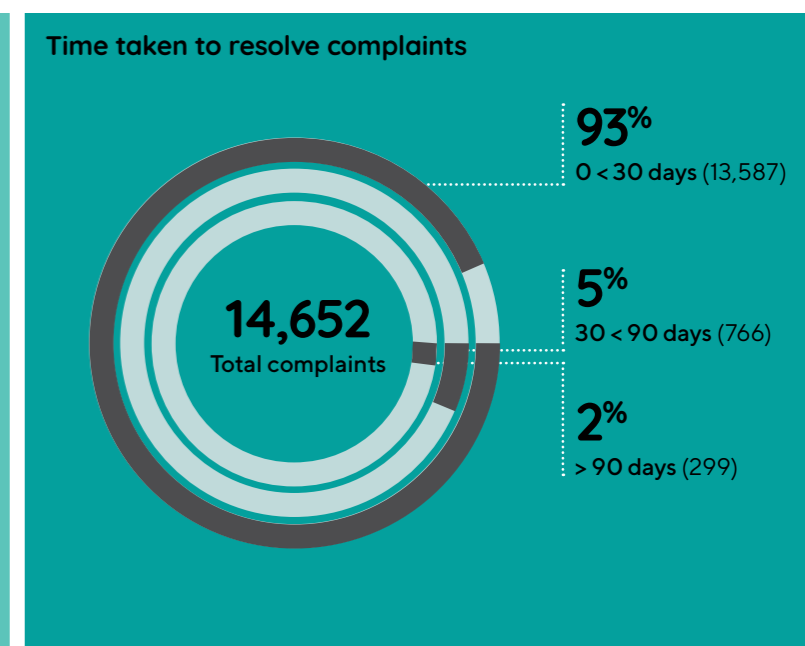
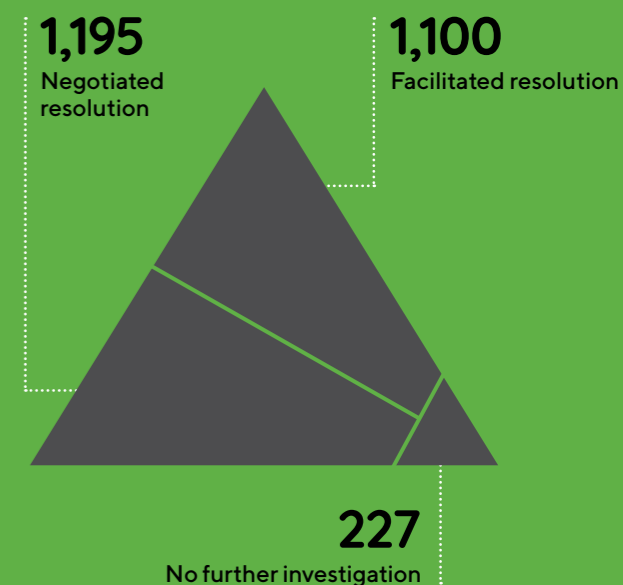
No further investigation

When our investigation finds that the provider's position is fair and reasonable; when the customer withdraws a complaint; or when the customer does not keep in contact with us.

Non investigated complaints



Investigated complaints



Our quality assurance work

We continually refine our quality assurance methods in our dispute resolution work. We do this by:

- > providing feedback on dispute resolution and customer service
- > ensuring the integrity of data recording through in-depth data checking
- > acknowledging performance success and identifying areas for improvement at individual and organisational levels.

Focused Reviews

After a trial in March 2021 the Quality Team adopted a new method to assess complaints covering a specific issue. These are Focused Reviews.

They aim to improve service in a range of priority areas. In addition to identifying learning opportunities, they enhance dispute resolution practices in particular customer issues.

Focus on complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers

We aim to deliver our services effectively, based on an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' needs and cultural practices. Our Focused Review on complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers began soon after EWON's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was launched in July 2021.

The review's findings support our understanding that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers who contact EWON experience vulnerability in multiple ways including residential location, literacy levels, financial and health issues and lack of access to services.

Our review identified EWON practices and processes that support the RAP, as well as procedures that sometimes prevent the effective handling of complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers. It also highlighted the positive outcomes achieved when flexibility and an appreciation of the circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers are incorporated in the complaint handling process. This flexibility can empower customers by developing and promoting positive relationships with their service providers.

The review led to 17 recommendations that have been completed or are under way. A follow-up review of complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers showed that coaching staff to handle complaints appropriately results in:

- > improvement in the number of complaints deemed appropriate for RHL
- > improvement in the number of complaints triaged due to vulnerability indicators
- > positive outcomes achieved through investigated cases
- > only a small number of cases being closed when no contact could be established with the customer and very little information was provided in their complaint.

Focus on EWON's jurisdiction

The Quality Team's Focused Review on EWON's jurisdiction provided insights into our approach to:

- > assessing jurisdiction
- > providing resources
- > complaint handling improvement.

The Focused Review found that EWON's "no wrong door" approach, where we help customers with out-of-jurisdiction complaints by referring them to a more appropriate forum for help, is highly recognised and valued. However, a broader approach to jurisdiction is appropriate when considering an issue that appears at first glance to be out of jurisdiction but can have a significant customer impact, for example a solar-related billing issue.

The Quality Team is working closely with key teams to address the recommendations of the review including:

- > sharing information about case management practices with the goal of continuous improvement
- > learning about current processes and identifying key issues
- > using resources as learning/coaching opportunities.

Internal reviews

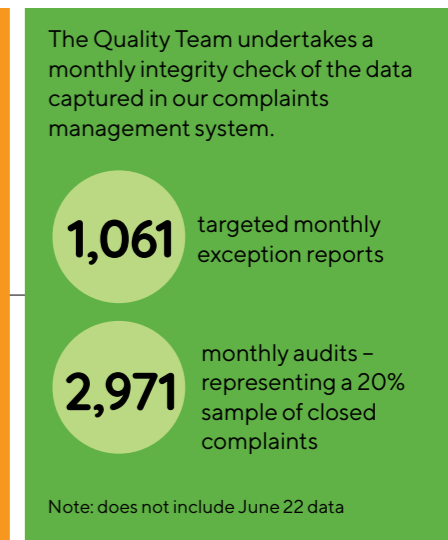
A customer can request an internal review of the outcome of an investigation if they believe EWON was biased, made an error, or if they provide relevant new information that was not available during the investigation. Possible outcomes of an internal review include:

- > review ground(s) not upheld – the decision to finalise the investigation is unchanged
- > review ground(s) upheld but the investigation outcome is not affected – the decision to finalise the investigation is unchanged
- > review ground(s) upheld – the decision to finalise the investigation is set aside and the investigation is reopened.

CASE MANAGEMENT REVIEWS



DATA INTEGRITY AUDITS



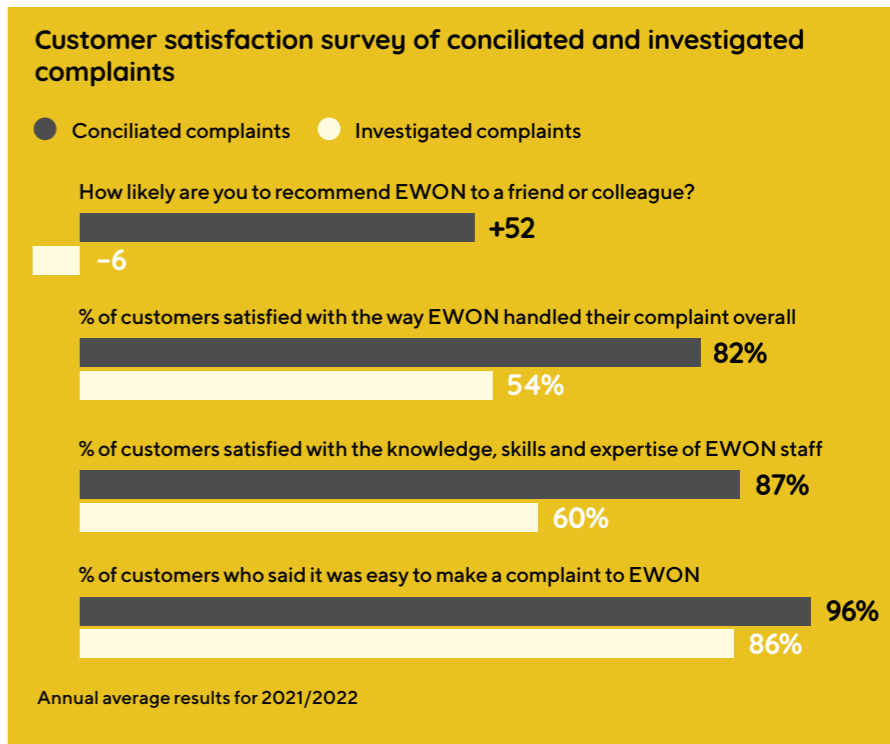
Internal reviews also help identify opportunities for improvement within EWON's complaint management process, and therefore play a key role in staff learning and training.

In 2021/2022 the Quality Team undertook 20 internal reviews. One of these was upheld, resulting in further investigation of the customer's complaint.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys: referred, conciliated and investigated complaints

Our quality work includes asking customers to provide feedback about their experience after their complaint is finalised. We send Customer Satisfaction Surveys to all customers with investigated complaints and to a sample of customers whose complaints we refer to their provider's specialist dispute resolution teams. The results, including free text comments, are used to monitor EWON's performance and inform our continuous improvement.

In 2021/2022, we conducted quarterly Customer Satisfaction Surveys and introduced a dedicated survey category for investigated complaints to distinguish between complaints finalised by conciliation and those we fully investigated.



“ Thank you so much. I truly appreciate your help in resolving the problem. ”

CUSTOMER

Our policy contribution

New pressures on energy costs as lockdowns end

At the beginning of the 2020–21 financial year, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on complaint trends and energy policy discussions was still apparent. Complaints to EWON about credit issues fell significantly by the second quarter of 2020 and remained low over the next 24 months, reflecting the impact of the AER's Statement of Expectations (SOE) on energy businesses in April 2020. At the AER's request, we advised on the development and modification of the SOE and after informing retailers of relevant cases, reported fortnightly on potential misalignment with the SOE.

Additional consumer protections in the SOE included asking retailers to:

- > offer a payment plan or financial affordability agreement to all residential and small business customers who indicated they were in financial stress, regardless of whether they met the "usual" criteria for such assistance
- > not disconnect any residential or small business customers who might have been in financial stress
- > defer referrals of customers to debt collection agencies for recovery actions or credit default listing.

The SOE provided credit and affordability protections to small business customers and customers with closed accounts for the first time. As the SOE significantly reduced credit complaint numbers, we believe further industry discussion about affordability protections for customers with closed energy accounts and small business customers is necessary. We explored this issue in our Spotlight On report on this topic.

As COVID-19 lockdowns ended in NSW and the AER lifted its SOE in October 2021, the State started to recover economically. However, at the start of 2022 customers in northern NSW faced extreme weather and flooding. While our energy network members worked hard to support affected customers, the AER wrote to all energy retailers in March 2022 requiring them to implement extra measures like those in the SOE. Again, the AER asked EWON to report on potential non-compliance of those expectations.

In the coming financial year, price increases will challenge NSW customers and affect affordability. In 2022/23, the default market offer for NSW residential customers will increase by 2.9% to 12.1% above expected inflation, and if customers have controlled load (8.5% to 18.3% increases in nominal terms). Small business customers will see price increases of 4.3% to 13.5% above expected inflation (10% to 19.7% increases in nominal terms).

EWON continues to push for more action from governments, regulators and EWON members to improve energy affordability. Our Spotlight On report on the [National Energy Affordability Framework](#) (December 2020) was referenced multiple times by the AER in its work on its Consumer Vulnerability Strategy, and we participated in AER project workshops.

In addition, we have contributed to multiple regulatory processes aimed at customers experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability. We have made submissions to:

- > [The Australian Retail Credit Association regarding changes to the Credit Reporting Code on hardship reforms](#). We drew on our complaints experience to provide advice on financial hardship arrangements, joint accounts and new energy retail business models.
- > [NSW Department of Customer Service's review of the Residential \(Land Lease\) Communities Act 2013](#). We commented on the proposed pricing methodology for customers in residential communities.
- > [The AER's Better Bills guideline](#). We provided our perspective on behavioural research undertaken on customers' bills and highlighted information about dispute resolution as a "must-have" on customer bills – a position the AER accepted. Once the guideline is implemented, EWON's contact details will be on the front page of customer bills.
- > [The Attorney General's review of the Privacy Act 1988](#). We addressed the Act's scope, regulation and enforcement, and elements relating to vulnerability, marketing issues and external dispute resolution (EDR).
- > [The NSW Information and Privacy Commissioner's review of the Privacy \(Credit Reporting\) Code 2014](#). We raised a number of issues including the business models of new market participants and their implications for credit; monitoring and compliance of the Code; the application and removal of credit default listings, including the very low threshold of \$150; notification of customers; correction provisions; complaint handling and dispute resolution; and how the code could better support customers affected by family violence or economic abuse.

“

Thank you so much for everything you did to help us. It is very much appreciated and makes life a lot less stressful.

CUSTOMER

New energy services and technologies

The evolution of the NSW energy market is reflected in the changing nature of electricity complaints that EWON resolves. In recent years we have seen complaints emerge about energy contracts that include participation in virtual power plants (VPPs). These complaints can be complex and often involve consumer issues relating to the bill a customer receives for energy they consume, credits they receive for energy they export to the grid, and the sale and installation of distributed or customer energy resources at their home.

Complaints involving new energy services often involve multiple providers and require the customer to make their complaint in several forums. In May 2022 EWON's [Spotlight On report on dispute resolution in the evolving energy market](#) explored issues with the current External Dispute Resolution (EDR) process for energy customers and examined how it is changing with new technologies and services. After the report's publication we held workshops with our ombudsman peers to further develop the issues raised and better understand the nature of future complaints. The workshops were also an opportunity to identify more avenues to influence reforms and ensure consumer protections and EDR are developed alongside, rather than after, them.

Multiple regulatory processes now under way will affect how customers use energy and require our assistance, including:

- > the Energy Security Board's (ESB) Customer Insights Collaboration, which focuses on key customer issues relevant to DER Implementation Plan reform activities. It has involved active engagement with stakeholders through iterative co-design workshops, in which EWON has participated.
- > the Australian Energy Market Commission's (AEMC) review of the regulatory framework for metering services, which aims to develop measures to accelerate the rollout of smart meters. We are preparing to contribute to this in 2022/2023.

- > the Flexible Trading Arrangements rule change request by the AEMO to the AEMC. This change would enable customers to distinguish between the energy they import from the grid and use and the energy they generate from their DER technologies and export to the grid. It would also allow them to manage these separate energy flows independently without a second connection point in their home. We will continue to contribute to this work in 2022/2023.

We have also made submissions to the following processes:

- > The [AEMC's review of the regulatory framework for hydrogen and renewable gases](#), where our focus was on the accompanying consumer protection framework.
- > The [NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment's discussion paper on promoting innovation for NSW energy consumers](#). We looked at the proposals on distributed energy resources and addressed likely customer complaints arising.
- > The [AER's retailer authorisation and exemption review](#). This relates directly to our Spotlight On reports on embedded networks. Our submission focused on the essentiality of energy, the need for evolving External Dispute Resolution and the fragmentation of energy services. We also provided detailed answers to the many questions the AER asked in its issues paper.



Embedded networks

Since the release of our 2016 report “Rising Inequality in the Energy Market” we have continued to bring to the attention of governments and regulatory bodies the inequity customers face with hot water or energy embedded networks. Since 2016 the number of customers in this situation has grown. Our recent two Spotlight On reports “Embedded networks – it’s time for change” and “Hot water embedded networks” directly address the detriment customers face and, equally importantly, our proposed solutions.

Electricity in Residential (Land Lease) Communities

In 2021/2022, the NSW Government released a report on the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013* Statutory Review. It considered the impact and possible solutions to long-term consumer issues that have plagued the onselling of electricity in residential parks. In 2018, the Supreme Court of NSW capped the price that residential park energy customers could be charged for energy use, causing confusion about how charges should be calculated and regulated. Subsequently, some residential park operators gave responsibility for onselling electricity within the park to authorised energy retailers who were not affected by the cap. This created more uncertainty for residents and opened new consumer protection gaps in land lease communities.

We worked with the NSW Government to quantify the problem by highlighting the complaints we receive from customers of authorised retailers within embedded networks about substantial price rises and an inability to switch providers. When the government released a paper looking into this issue we made a submission commenting on the proposed pricing methodology, including discounts for customers with a lower quality of power supply. We also raised the issues of metering upgrades and new distributor tariffs that must be considered when applying any pricing methodology.

A NSW Government report in December 2021 recommended more work on the potential price impacts of a maximum price cap for electricity sold within land lease communities based on the median market price. The report also recommended:

- > applying electricity pricing provisions in the Act to both community operators and contracted third-party electricity providers
- > clarifying in the Act that electricity billing must comply with the laws and rules contained in the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF)
- > further work to consider the complexities, barriers and costs associated with enabling the effective installation of sustainability infrastructure, most notably solar panels, in communities.

There is an urgent need for real reform and meaningful change for customers in land lease communities and we look forward to being involved in NSW Government action in this area.

Hot water embedded networks

Since Jemena Gas Network introduced a network tariff for boundary gas meters in 2015, EWON has engaged closely with government and regulators about the continued growth of gas embedded networks in NSW.

In 2022, more than 64,000 households were connected to a gas embedded network within Jemena’s network area. These embedded networks frequently provide two separate services:

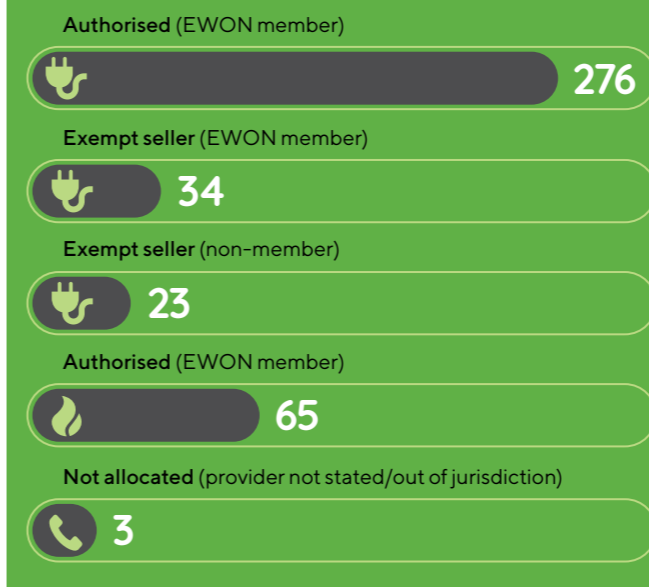
- > an unmetered gas supply for gas kitchen stoves
- > a gas supply for heating water in a centralised hot water system, which is then onsold to the customer via a hot water meter.

In most cases the cold water used by the centralised hot water system is bought by the strata and paid for by the owners or occupiers of each apartment. It is not onsold by the embedded network operator. Consequently, the service undertaken by the gas embedded network operator, which often is an authorised energy retailer, is to heat the water and onsell heated water to apartment owners/tenants. However, rather than charging the owner/tenant for the gas used to heat the water, the owner/tenant is charged for the hot water they use. Though hot water represents up to 40% of a typical household’s energy bill, its sale and supply in apartment buildings is not regulated as an essential service and customers with a centralised hot water service do not benefit from any energy-specific consumer protections including rebates, concessions and access to EDR.

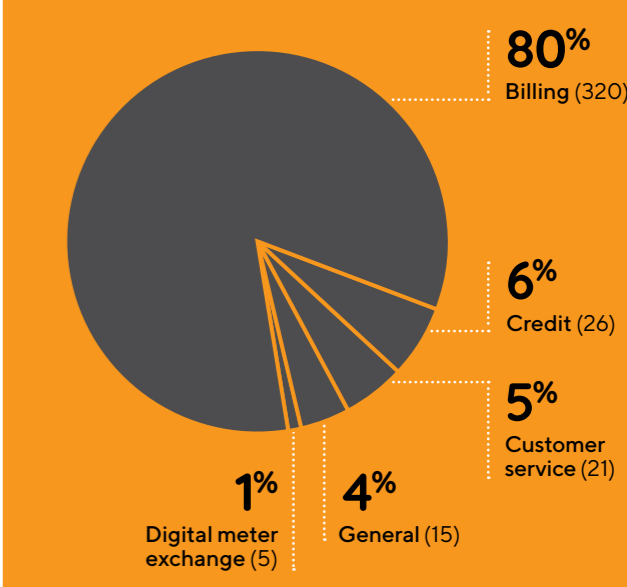
The release of our Spotlight On report on hot water embedded networks in March 2021 led to the following thought leadership initiatives.

- > EWON hosted a second workshop in August 2021 with key regulatory and government stakeholders to discuss solutions for hot water embedded networks.
- > The NSW Office of Energy and Climate Change included in an energy consumer consultation paper issues that our report raised about hot water embedded networks. The paper proposed a solution that had been developed at our workshop. Our submission strongly supported this proposal to treat the sale of hot water as the sale of energy.
- > The AER specifically consulted EWON on the issues the report raised in relation to the exempt selling guideline, exempt network guideline and authorisation and exemption framework.
- > Channel 10 News used our report as a resource and included an interview with the Ombudsman in a three-minute news story about hot water embedded networks in March 2022.
- > A NSW Legislative Assembly committee initiated an inquiry into law and safety in embedded networks in May 2022 and specifically consulted EWON in June 2022.

Complaint numbers for all embedded network providers

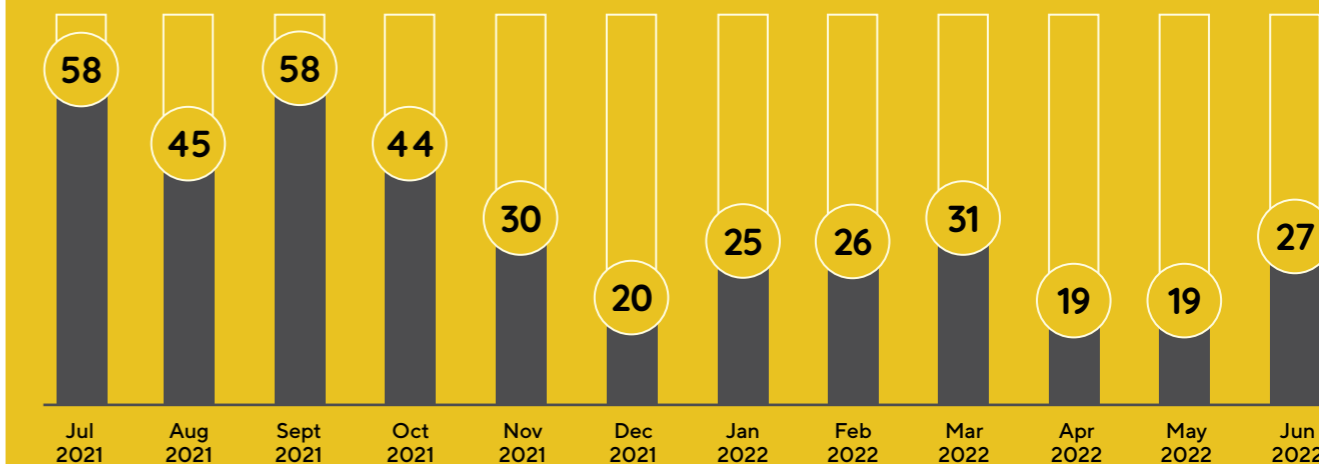


Top five embedded network issues



Embedded network complaints

July 2021 to June 2022



In 2021 the AER began a review of the Exempt Selling Guideline to establish which entities operating in embedded networks must register with the AER and the conditions they must follow. EWON has made two submissions to this review and called on the AER to create a registerable exemption class for gas embedded networks that also onsell gas used for centralised hot water services.

In March 2022 the AER published a draft guideline that did not include regulation of gas embedded networks. The AER noted that the sale of bulk chilled or hot water is unlikely to constitute the sale of energy for the purposes of the retail law. EWON recognises that the sale of water by the litre rather

than the energy used to heat/chill water is at odds with the legal definition of the “sale of energy” but this regulatory gap is detrimental to customers. EWON therefore continues to call on regulators and government to provide a regulatory solution that gives adequate protections to customers living in gas embedded networks.

EWON will continue this work in 2022/2023 including by responding to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety inquiry and through our continual identification of unresolved consumer issues in the embedded network industry.

Systemic issues

Systemic issues arise from providers' policies, practices or processes that have the potential to negatively affect numerous customers and lead to complaints and disputes. Systemic issues can also arise from regulatory issues that result in confusion, conflicting interpretations and/or unforeseen circumstances, or from issues beyond the control of providers or the industry generally. However, EWON can play a role in resolving these.

The EWON Charter requires us to use real-time insights from our complaints data to identify systemic issues and investigate them where appropriate.

In 2021/2022 EWON received and closed 14 systemic issues, including:

- > retailer marketing
- > life support registration
- > gas bill calculations
- > credit checks

Another 10 systemic issues remain under investigation.



Retailer marketing

We received complaints from customers who felt misled by a retailer's marketing. The retailer had offered one-off credit rebates to customers but it was not clear if these rebates were reflected in the advertised comparison to the Default Market Offer reference price. After we raised a systemic issue, the retailer advised it would review its marketing approach.



Life support registration

An EWON Community Engagement Officer noticed that information on a network provider's website about life support registration was confusing and open to misinterpretation. The network provider amended the information to make it clearer for customers.



Gas bill calculations

We received several complaints from customers who found a retailer's gas billing calculations confusing. After we raised this issue with the retailer, it amended its billing format to make the usage calculations more transparent.



Credit checks

We received a complaint from a customer who tried to sign up with a retailer online but was declined due to a failed credit check. The retailer was already responsible for the electricity supply at the customer's address, meaning it was required to open an account to meet its supply obligations under the National Energy Retail Law (NSW). Although the retailer resolved the customer's complaint by establishing an account in accordance with its obligations, we raised the matter with the retailer as a potential systemic issue.

On investigation it became clear that the retailer's system did not consider situations where it held the billing rights to the site, and the customer failed a credit check. The retailer agreed this was a breach of the Law and changed its system to bypass credit checks for customers signing up for online accounts at sites where it already holds the billing rights.



“ Thank you for sending the letter through to us. And thank you for your assistance, if it was not for the help of the Ombudsman team, I feel that we would be waiting a lot longer.
 Customer



LEVEL 3 INVESTIGATION

Case study

Marketer transfers customer without consent

Ms Redding was phoned by a third-party marketer on behalf of an energy retailer. The marketer told her she could save on her energy bills if she transferred her account to this retailer, which she agreed to do. After transferring, however, she received very high bills and eventually went into arrears that quickly accumulated to \$6,900. The retailer offered little information or support when Ms Redding tried to dispute the bills and an advocate acting on her behalf contacted EWON.

The advocate told us Ms Redding had received a disconnection notice from the retailer whose only offer of support was a payment plan. The advocate also explained that Ms Redding had difficulty reading and writing in English, was struggling to communicate with the retailer and to understand the information it provided.

When EWON contacted the retailer, it said Ms Redding had not disputed the transfer. However, it acknowledged that her advocate had raised concerns about the high bill and requested a payment plan. The retailer told us it had requested a recording of the initial sales call with Ms Redding to confirm whether she gave explicit informed consent (EIC) to be transferred. It said it would be willing to negotiate a bill reduction if the recording revealed Ms Redding had not given EIC and, in the meantime, placed a hold on the disconnection.

The third-party marketing company was unable to provide a recording of the original sales call. We told the retailer that Rule 57 of the National Electricity Retailer Rules (NERR) meant that without evidence of EIC, it shouldn't have transferred Ms Redding and was potentially unable to bill her. With permission from Ms Redding, we explained that the delay in her questioning the transfer was consistent with her difficulty communicating in English.

The retailer agreed that without proof of EIC, it had to comply with the NERR and cancelled Ms Redding's account and waived her outstanding balance of \$6,971 in full. Ms Redding and her advocate were satisfied with the outcome and agreed to contact her preferred electricity retailer to open a new account.

Issues
Transfer without consent, payment difficulties, impending disconnection

Outcome
Negotiated resolution

EWON's Spotlight On reports

In meeting EWON's Charter responsibilities to identify and resolve systemic issues affecting energy and water consumers, our focus is three-fold: to reduce complaints, strengthen consumer protection frameworks, and improve public trust in the energy retail market.

In 2019, an independent review of EWON recommended that we publish and promote themed reports on systemic issues. We have since published five Spotlight On reports, which have reinforced our influence in systemic issues and policy and in stakeholder engagement activities.

Spotlight On reports highlight consumer and sector-wide systemic issues identified through EWON's complaints handling work and provide a valuable source of data insights and customer stories. They outline policy changes, raise industry discussion points, and propose practical solutions to pressing problems. Engaging a broad readership, Spotlight On has gained the attention of media, regulators, energy and water providers, industry and community bodies, and other stakeholders.

Spotlight On: Consumer and small business energy debt solutions

The issue

This report focused on the lack of consumer protection faced by small business customers and customers with closed energy accounts who are experiencing financial difficulty. Both groups have fewer protections than residential customers with active accounts. Recently, this disparity was highlighted by the application and removal of temporary protections for small business customers and customers with closed energy accounts under the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) Statement of Expectations during COVID stay at home periods in NSW between April 2020 and October 2021.

This Spotlight On report explored the potential benefits of permanently aligning protections for small business customers and customers with closed energy accounts with protections for customers with active residential accounts.

Call to action

We called on government and policymakers to:

- > extend hardship provisions under the National Energy Retail Law (NERL) and the National Energy Consumer Framework (NECF) to small business customers and customers with closed accounts
- > extend the AER Sustainable Payment Plans Framework to closed accounts
- > develop a Retail Code or Best Practice Guidelines for small business accounts and closed accounts.

EWON's action plan

Our report sets out EWON's position for engaging with members, regulators and government. It has informed our submissions and feedback to the AER in developing its Consumer Vulnerability Strategy and to the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) in relation to a proposed rule change to increase protections for customers experiencing family violence. The report also provides a resource for industry bodies like the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA), that is using it alongside input from EWON's Policy & Research Team to inform its review of small business experiences during COVID stay at home periods.

Complaints to EWON



56%

of small business customers experiencing debt collection indicated they were also experiencing financial vulnerability

Spotlight On: Dispute resolution in the evolving energy market

The issue

This report focused on the fragmented external dispute resolution (EDR) experiences of customers with behind-the-meter technologies and products such as solar power and batteries. As the energy market evolves to incorporate renewables and move away from carbon-intensive energy sources, customers must increasingly deal with multiple service providers, consumer frameworks and EDR mechanisms to resolve a single energy complaint. This fragmentation will only intensify as new behind-the-meter products, services and technologies emerge.

Call to action

We called on government and policymakers to put customers at the centre of energy innovation and consumer protections. Fit-for-purpose EDR must be built into sector change to address fragmentation and to mitigate future complexity so that EDR works for everyone. This approach will make energy EDR more easily and effectively accessible for customers who need it.

EWON's action plan

Our report sets out EWON's position for engaging with multiple state and national organisations that are fostering energy market evolution, such as consultations with the NSW Government on promoting energy innovation for NSW customers. It is also a resource for engaging with other industry bodies that share areas of energy jurisdiction with EWON, such as NSW Fair Trading.

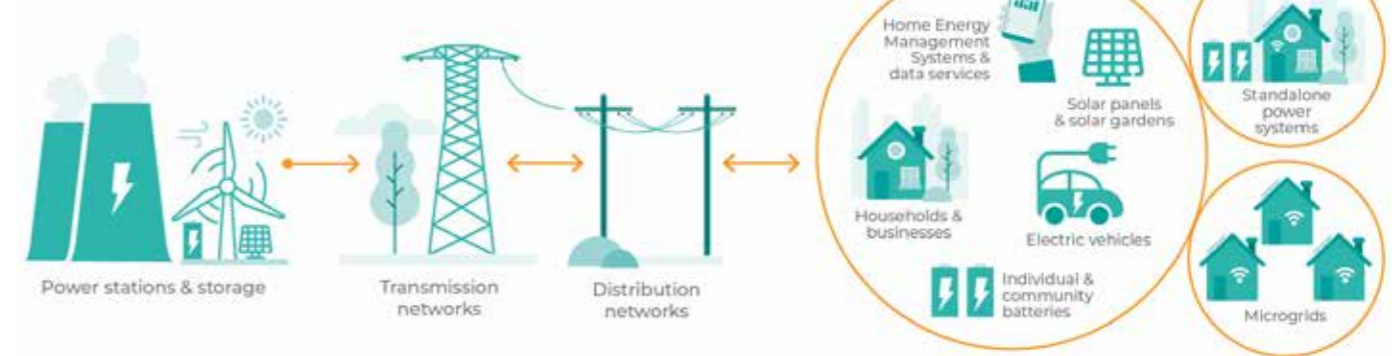
Earlier reports

Spotlight On reports are designed to have sustained impact. Reports published in the previous financial year played a key role in EWON's policy influence and stakeholder engagement activities in 2021/2022, and will no doubt continue to do so.

Yesterday



Today



LEVEL 2 INVESTIGATION

Case study

Meter read error leads to 10,000 kL/
\$23,500 water overcharge



Mr Zhou, a business owner, contacted his water provider in January 2020 to advise that he suspected his water meter was faulty. However, an independent testing agency tested the meter and found it "reliable". A year later, after a new meter was installed at Mr Zhou's premises, he received a bill for 869kL of consumption during a 6-month period in 2020. He compared this with a previous bill for a 3-month period over late 2019 and early 2020 plus five days in February 2020, when he was charged for 13,382kL of consumption at a cost of \$33,513. Mr Zhou disputed the earlier bill with his provider, who responded that because an independent testing agency had deemed his meter reliable, the bill was

payable. He contacted EWON for advice.

Mr Zhou told EWON that he considered the disputed bill extremely high and didn't think it was physically possible for his business to consume the amount stated. We referred the complaint back to his provider who reviewed it again and identified a fault with the dials on Mr Zhou's meter. They noted that the first dial incorrectly showed a '1' instead of a '0', meaning Mr Zhou should have been billed for 3,382kL of consumption and not 13,382kL.

The provider calculated that Mr Zhou had been overcharged by \$23,500 and agreed to credit this amount to Mr Zhou's account, leaving a balance payable of

\$6,359, which he considered reasonable. It also agreed to waive the \$255 meter test fee on the basis that the meter was in fact faulty, even though the test did not identify this. After explaining the fault with his meter, we walked Mr Zhou through the provider's calculations to explain how the overcharge amount was determined. Mr Zhou was satisfied with this outcome.

Issues

Disputed high bill, billing arrears

Outcome

Negotiated resolution

LEVEL 3 INVESTIGATION

Case study

Bill shock due to
a \$61K error



Ms Rooney received an electricity bill of \$61,387 for a 27-month period between 2019 and 2021. She contacted her retailer to dispute the amount but was not satisfied with its response. Shortly after, her retailer direct debited her bank account for the full outstanding amount, causing her account to become overdrawn. Alarmed by the financial implications, Ms Rooney asked EWON to review the disputed bill and ask the retailer to reverse the direct debit.

Ms Rooney told us meter readers had struggled to access her meter since 2007 when it was moved to inside her building. Because of this, she routinely provided self-readings and received regular bills of about \$450 a quarter.

Our investigation found that in early 2021 the basic meter at the property was replaced with a remotely read digital meter. After this, Ms Rooney's energy network sent through adjusted meter data for the previous, estimated bills from February 2019 to February 2021 that caused the account to be rebilled. Upon further investigation, we also found the adjusted data was inaccurate.

The retailer agreed to reverse the disputed invoice of \$61,387 and issued a correct bill of \$3,516 for the disputed period, February 2019 to February 2021. Considering the amount that Ms Rooney had already paid, this correct bill reduced her balance owing to \$491. Furthermore,

the retailer acknowledged that the ordeal had caused Ms Rooney significant distress and offered a customer service gesture of \$200.

EWON also successfully negotiated pay-on-time discounts totalling \$168 which, applied alongside the customer service credit, reduced Ms Rooney's amount owing to \$123. She was relieved and satisfied by this outcome.

Issues

Back bill, disputed high bill, billing error

Outcome

Negotiated resolution

Collaborating with our peers

ANZOA

After two years as the elected Chair of the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA), our Ombudsman Janine Young was appointed the Association's Secretary/Treasurer in 2021. As the ombudsman peak body in Australia and New Zealand, ANZOA is a valuable forum for members to continue their professional development and support one another in upholding high standards of independence, effectiveness and impartiality. All ANZOA members are bound to the Benchmarks for Industry-based Customer Dispute Resolution.

In 2021/2022 ANZOA members discussed ways to provide flexible, fit-for-purpose dispute resolution services in a changing complaints landscape and as COVID lockdowns lifted, including:

- > balancing staff needs with meeting service expectations
- > identifying emerging systemic issues
- > adapting outreach and communications strategies to include online options and prioritise health and safety
- > improving accessibility through flexible work practices
- > supporting and training staff to effectively manage unreasonable customer conduct while working from home.

In June 2022 EWON staff joined colleagues from other ANZOA members for a webinar about cultural engagement and communications with First Nations people. Hosted by ANZOA's Indigenous Engagement interest group, the hour-long session featured Leanne Liddle, the 2022 Northern Territory Australian of the Year, and explored different approaches to communicating and connecting with Aboriginal communities in an effective and culturally appropriate manner.

ANZEWON

The Ombudsman is a member of the valuable Australia & New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON). This gives energy and water ombudsmen and commissioners across Australia and New Zealand opportunities to work together to develop effective ways of addressing industry and policy developments that affect consumers.

In the past year ANZEWON launched initiatives to leverage the work of each member organisation and encourage consistency across ombudsman schemes, particularly those that fall within the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF) and National Energy Retail Rules (NERR). The scope of initiatives is broad and includes complaint process simplification, funding reform, complaints management systems, and the expansion of scheme jurisdiction to include new energy technologies such as solar storage.

Meetings

In 2021/2022, ANZEWON members held three meetings to share insights on quarterly complaints and outreach data, policy submissions, research projects, and systemic and emerging issues. The meetings also provided a forum to discuss complaints management policy and opportunities for process improvement.

Guest speakers included Australian Energy Regulator (AER) Chair Clare Savage; Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) Commissioner Allison Warburton; and Thriving Communities Partnership CEO Ciara Sterling. ANZEWON members also heard about customer experiences of energy transition from Australian National University researcher and battery storage and grid integration expert Dr Hedda Ransan-Cooper.

Submissions

EWON contributed to joint ANZEWON submissions, taking a lead role in responding to:

- 1 [Federal Treasury's consultation on the Consumer Data Right](#) in which we discussed data types, internal dispute resolution and external dispute resolution (with EWON, EWOSA and EWOQ).
- 2 the [AEMC's rule change to protect customers affected by family violence](#). While we supported the overall aims of the proposal, we also addressed the governance arrangements for the development and review of retailers' family violence policies and made several suggestions on how retailers should respond to family violence situations (with EWOSA and EWOQ).
- 3 [Federal Treasury's National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment Regulations](#). We supported the exposure draft's requirement that previously unregulated entities obtain an Australian credit licence but expressed concern that the conditions of the licence would not apply to the conduct of those entities in relation to energy or water debts. We also raised concerns about credit repair agents and their lack of regulation (with EWON, EWOSA and EWOQ).
- 4 [AER's draft Better Bills Guideline](#). With our EWO peers we strongly supported the draft design principles and the inclusion of information about energy ombudsman schemes. Once the guideline is implemented, EWON's contact details will be on the front page of all customers' bills. We also urged the AER to reconsider its draft decision to exclude rebate information from its required information tiers (with EWOSA and EWOQ).

Our work with government and regulators

EWON informs regulators and government agencies of industry trends and issues identified through our complaint handling, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities. We make significant contributions to government submissions about energy and water policy, which are detailed on page 36 of this report.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)

Alongside other state energy ombudsman services, we met quarterly with the ACCC and AER to discuss complaint trends and issues. We provided both with complaint statistics on ad-hoc topics they were interested in investigating.

And we had discussions with the ACCC on the Commonwealth Treasury's proposal to extend the price cap protections provided by the Default Market Offer to customers in embedded networks.

Customer Data Right (CDR)

We continued to engage with Commonwealth Treasury staff and the ACCC on finalising the energy CDR. We made a submission in the last stage of consultation and had regular discussions on effective dispute resolution models for responding to energy complaints relating to the CDR. This important reform has now been finalised and will come into operation in November 2022. We are now collaborating with the Australian Financial Complaints Authority to develop a "no wrong door" policy allowing customers to deal with

either of our organisations regarding complaints about CDR involving energy and finance issues.

Australian Energy Regulator (AER)

As well as providing quarterly compliance and complaints insight reports to the AER, we made submissions to the following AER processes:

- > Better Bills Guideline consultation, including participation in the AER's advisory working group
- > Consumer Vulnerability Strategy
- > Retail Exemption Guidelines
- > Retailer Authorisation and Exemption Review.

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART)

We provided quarterly complaints insight reports to IPART and made two submissions to its review of Hunter Water's operating licence.

Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

In May 2022, the Ombudsman was asked by AEMC Chair, Anna Collyer to represent ANZEWO through participation in a Consumer Strategy Group involving six other key leaders, whose advice, via six monthly meetings, would inform the AEMC's focus on the energy transition from a consumer perspective.

Our engagement with the AEMC also included:

- > membership of its Consumer Strategy Group
- > quarterly reporting of complaints insights
- > provision of statistics and case studies that informed AEMC rule changes and reviews, including the Annual Retail Competition Review
- > regular meetings individually, or with other state ombudsman schemes, often including other regulators and government departments
- > membership of its reference group to advise on its review of the regulatory frameworks for metering services.

We made submissions to the AEMC in response to:

- > review of the regulatory framework for metering services
- > review into extending the regulatory frameworks to hydrogen and renewable gas
- > rule change to protect customers affected by family violence.



Financial Counsellors Australia Conference, Cairns. Left to right: Janine Young, Ombudsman, EWON; David Locke, Chief Ombudsman and CEO, AFCA; Cynthia Gebert, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman; June Smith, Deputy Chief Ombudsman, AFCA; Jane Pires, Ombudsman, EWOQ.

NSW Government

We provided complaint insight reports and met quarterly with the NSW Office of Energy and Climate Change (OECC). We also attended its quarterly Energy Consumer Reference Group and Energy Retailer Working Group meetings.

We met regularly with NSW Fair Trading to discuss matters including issues facing customers in residential parks, complaint referral between our organisations, and opportunities for cross-collaboration with outreach events.

We made submissions to:

- > the Department of Customer Service's review of residential land lease communities
- > OECC's Promoting Innovation for NSW Energy Customers consultation paper
- > OECC's terms of reference for its coming review of the Energy Accounts Payments Assistance (EAPA) scheme.

Other government

We made several submissions to other government regulatory processes:

- > [Australian Retail Credit Association's Credit Reporting Code hardship reform changes](#)
- > [Attorney-General's review of the Privacy Act 1988](#)
- > [Information and Privacy Commissioner's review of the Privacy \(Credit Reporting\) Code.](#)

We also made two submissions to the federal Department of Industry, Science and Resources' post-implementation review of the Competition and Consumer (Industry Code – Electricity Retail) Regulations.

Office of Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)

As an approved external dispute resolution scheme under the Privacy Act 1988, EWON reports to the OAIC on complaints relating to privacy and credit reporting. In 2021/2022, we reported 199 complaints related to customers' concerns about credit reporting, and 68 potential privacy breaches by providers.

“

Many thanks for your email and status update. You have been a great help and very reassuring, making the process run very smoothly from my side of things. Thanks again.

CUSTOMER

Our members

NSW electricity and gas networks and retailers, as well as exempt sellers and networks that supply residential customers in embedded networks, must join EWON. Similarly, water providers such as Sydney Water, Hunter Water, Water NSW and licensees under the Water Industry Competition Act 2006 are required to be EWON members. Membership is optional for councils that provide water to their residents.

As an independent organisation, EWON works closely with members and advises on their customer service and complaint handling processes. We also provide information and insights about key industry issues, common customer problems, and advice on handling complaints quickly and effectively.



Member webinars

Our webinars, which feature presentations from senior EWON staff and encourage input from participants, are popular, interactive resources that keep members informed about EWON. In 2021/2022, we delivered a webinar to 84 participants in partnership with the NSW Ombudsman on managing unreasonable conduct by complainants (UCC). As a leader in this field, the NSW Ombudsman provided valuable insights into systemic approaches to dealing effectively and confidently with UCC.

“It was so good to have another perspective for approaching complaints/customers with unreasonable expectations. Loved the webinar with practical tips that I can apply as a small retailer. Keep up the good work.”



Member inductions

Member inductions give an overview of EWON's operations, investigation processes, and procedures for new EWON members and new staff of existing members. The sessions demonstrate efficient complaint resolution processes and introduce members to our member portal, including how to generate their own complaint reports.

In October 2021 we hosted an online member induction for 24 participants from 16 member organisations. All respondents rated the induction as excellent or good and said they would participate in a similar event again. Many identified case studies and discussion questions as a highlight.

At our most recent induction in May 2022, we hosted 60 participants from 19 member organisations and included virtual breakout rooms to generate deeper discussions.



EWON's Manager Governance and Dispute Resolution Manager (Investigations) hosted online Member inductions.

MEMBER APPLICATIONS



57

applications received



16

current applications in progress



7

authorised retailer applications pending



9

exempt entities applications pending

Current members

Retailer type	Total
Authorised retailers	64
Licensed networks	10
Water	14*
Exempt entities	272**
Residential complex (includes Individual exemption)	81
Retirement village	44
Residential parks	148
Total	351

*includes Altogether which is also an authorised retailer, and Essential Energy which is also a licensed network.

**includes Altogether, Arc Energy, OC Energy, Origin Energy, Real Utilities, Savant Energy, The Embedded Network Company and WINConnect which are also authorised retailers, and Narara Eco Village which is also a water provider.

New members

Authorised retailers	9
iGENO	
Telstra	
Amber Electric	
Powow	
Brighte	
Flow Power	
Localvoltz	
Microgrid Power	
Smart Energy	
Water	1
Exempt entities	33
Residential complex (includes Individual exemption)	8
Retirement village	9
Residential parks	16
Total	43

Member numbers

As at 30 June 2022

57

30 June 2018

201

30 June 2020

351

30 June 2022

86

30 June 2019

318

30 June 2021

Terminated memberships = 11

- Amaysim
- Deemay Enterprises TA
- The Middlerock Trust
- The Trustee for Weekes Family Trust No 2
- Alceon Group No.74 Pty Ltd ATF Tweed Shores Trust Ltd
- Alceon Group No.74 Pty Ltd ATF Chinderah Lakes Trust
- Vivacity Property Pty Ltd as trustee for the Rosevale Unit Trust
- Failford Waters Pty Ltd
- Colonial Tweed Unit Trust
- Pooled Energy
- Enova Energy
- Secura Lifestyle Countryside Kalaru



Member surveys

EWONLink survey

In December 2021 we surveyed members to learn more about how they use EWONLink, our member portal. We found members use it frequently and find it useful and easy to navigate, with many singling out historical reporting and the ability to create custom reports as particularly helpful.

EWONLink reporting enhancements

This year we introduced new reporting tools on EWONLink. Members can now access complaint data including their top 10 core issues and compare this to the top 10 core issues for members overall. Members can also access reports on customer complaints that have returned to EWON following a Refer Higher Level (RHL) case.

RHL survey

In June 2022, we surveyed the 20 members that received the most RHLs from EWON to gather feedback about the referral process and inform future improvements. Part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the RHL member survey sits alongside our work to harmonise operations across the energy and water ombudsman schemes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our processes.

A total of 95% of approached members responded to the survey and they provided valuable insights into their experiences and suggestions for improvements. The results will be further analysed and inform the continued review of our case handling processes across schemes.

EWON Operational Advisory Group, exempt entities and WICA

The EWON Operational Advisory Group was established in 2018 to give exempt entities and small water providers a voice within EWON. In 2021/2022, the Group's focus included issues affecting embedded networks and proposed changes to the regulatory framework as set out under the Water Industry Competition Act (WICA). As an important part of EWON's expanding jurisdiction work, the Group offers a valuable platform for stakeholders to engage with exempt entities and small water providers.

EWON Operational Advisory Group members include representatives from:

- > Altogether Group
- > Narara Eco Village
- > Austin Tourist Park
- > WINconnect
- > Energy Locals
- > Treehaven Tourist Park
- > Hampshire Property Group
- > Solo Water
- > Energy Intelligence.

In March 2022, the Ombudsman addressed the Group about EWON initiatives that affect embedded networks, including our quarterly systemic issues report, Spotlight On, and the media attention it received. The Group also heard detailed updates from EWON's Deputy Ombudsman, the Manager Governance and the Manager Policy & Research. Speakers from the Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Fair Trading and the Australian Energy Regulator updated the Group on their work with embedded networks, including the department's review of the regulatory framework for NSW small water providers.

Member newsletter – EWONow

EWONow, our member newsletter provides readers with a snapshot of the previous quarter's news, industry updates, reports, and coming events. It also encourages members to visit our member portal, EWONLink.

Since launching EWONow in June 2021, we have sent five editions to more than 650 member contacts. EWONLink usage has increased consistently with each issue and has grown by almost 40% over the past five quarters. We will continue to track the readership of EWONow and use of EWONLink to measure the effectiveness of this member engagement strategy.

“

On behalf of [customer], in Lismore NSW, I thank you for all your prompt and respectful assistance with this matter. The retailer was immediate in their response and cancelled this bill with profound apologies.

CUSTOMER



Promotion of External Dispute Resolution

Over time, EWON has noted that the information members give customers about their right to contact us is not always clear and accessible, and few customers tell us their provider advised them of their right to contact us. This trend is occurring across all jurisdictions. EWON first identified the issue during a 2016 audit of member activities to promote their own internal dispute resolution and external dispute resolution (EDR).

We identified that:

- > only three members (6%) complied with the requirements of membership in EWON's Constitution
- > 28 members (57%) complied with the requirements of the National Energy Retail Rules
- > eight members (16%) provided no information about how to lodge a complaint on their website and made no mention of EWON's services or other relevant schemes.

The audit prompted us to assess compliance when considering applications for EWON membership and report this to the EWON Board to inform their decisions on applications. While our 2019 Independent Review noted some compliance progress by members since 2016, it also found areas for improvement and recommended that EWON strengthen its work to ensure members are appropriately promoting EDR.

EWON staff joined Essential Energy at the Farmers Community Connect Day in Lismore in June 2022, hosted by Rapid Relief Team AU.



Promotion of EDR builds consumer confidence and trust in the sector. It demonstrates energy and water businesses' commitment to effective internal dispute resolution and consumer protections, and in turn empowers customers.

This year we worked closely with our energy and water ombudsman peers on a joint initiative to promote EDR. We are now collaborating with our members to ensure they advise customers about their right to free, fair and independent advice and EDR if they cannot resolve their complaint.

Our joint resource Telling Customers About External Dispute Resolution provides a guide for businesses seeking to review their commitment to regulatory requirements. Aligned with the recently released AS 10002:2022 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations (ISO 10002:2018, NEQ), the resource also provides an opportunity for energy and water businesses to elevate the standards of their customer service.

Next steps

Telling Customers About External Dispute Resolution is the first step in our 12-month plan to work with members to implement change or enhance processes to ensure customers are aware of their right to EDR. In the next year we will continue to promote the initiative, assess member progress against regulatory requirements, and update members on the progress of the initiative.

LEVEL 3 INVESTIGATION

Case study

Property owners are responsible for bushfire mitigation



Mr Reyes was building a shed on his property and received a defect notice from his electricity network advising that the power line on his property posed a bushfire risk as it was too close to the ground. He responded that he considered the poles to be the network's responsibility, and that a nearby fence prevented anyone driving beneath the wire which minimised the risk. Mr Reyes also noted there was no bush around the area. His network gave him the option to install a new pole for \$2,300 or re-tension the wire on the existing pole for \$6,500. Frustrated by this response, Mr Reyes complained to EWON.

Mr Reyes told us that after receiving the defect notice he modified the design of his shed to include underground supply and remove the fence. He said the modifications were a direct result of his

network refusing to discuss the defect notice with him and cost him \$8,968 to carry out. Mr Reyes reported that after undertaking this costly construction work, his network gave him a new option to sign a waiver declaring that nobody would travel under the power line in question. But with the fence now gone, Mr Reyes couldn't ensure this.

EWON referred Mr Reyes back to his network at a higher level, and he refused its second offer to re-tension the line at its expense. Given the stress, cost and time the defect notice had caused him, he felt his network should compensate him for half of the cost of modifying his shed design.

Our investigation found that the two poles on Mr Reyes' property were in fact private poles in accordance with the

Service & Installation Rules NSW and that the defect notice was warranted because the wire did not comply with the rules. We told him that since the network had not required him to relocate or remove the shed, there was no basis for it to contribute to the cost of his construction work. We also determined that the offer to re-tension the line at no cost to Mr Reyes was reasonable. Mr Reyes did not accept this outcome and in accordance with our complaint handling policy, we finalised the complaint on a no-further-investigation basis.

Issues

Network asset maintenance, poor customer service

Outcome

No further investigation

COMPLAINT ENQUIRY

Case study

Customer disputes damage to water connection



Mr Randel's water connection ran through the back of his property and into his neighbour's property, where construction works were taking place. During the works, the water connection to Mr Randel's property was accidentally severed. His water provider established a temporary water connection from another nearby connection point and advised Mr Randel to contact the neighbour and their builder to fix the severed connection. However, neither the neighbour nor the builder accepted responsibility for restoring the original connection. Unsure what to do next, Mr Randel contacted EWON for advice.

EWON confirmed that the connection between his property and the water main was a private water system, and therefore advised him it was his responsibility to maintain and repair it. We noted that while his provider had established a temporary water service to his property as a goodwill gesture, this action did not make it responsible for restoring the original connection.

Mr Randel accepted our advice and told EWON that he intended to apply for a new connection to the water main at the front of his property. We provided a referral to a licenced plumber who could

scope the work and costs and assist with his application to the provider. We also referred him to his local community justice centre and LawAccess NSW to resolve his dispute with his neighbour and their builder.

Issues

Connection maintenance

Outcome

Out of jurisdiction referral

EWON's Consultative Council meetings

Our biannual Consultative Council Meetings (CCM) bring together EWON members, government and industry stakeholders, and community group representatives. At each meeting, the Ombudsman provides an update on EWON's activities, initiatives and complaint trends.

The future of energy and water

The CCM in November 2021 focused on the future of energy and water. Ombudsman Janine Young shared the highlights of our 2021 Annual Report and gave an overview of complaint trends and our current initiatives. The chief executive of Energy Consumers Australia (ECA), Lynne Gallagher, then spoke about ECA's work within the changing energy market and highlighted the importance of strong consumer protections for behind-the-meter products.

Seventy-one participants attended including representatives of 18 EWON members from regional and metropolitan NSW and interstate. Community organisations including NSW Aboriginal Land Council, the Community Migrant Resource Centre, Focus Connect, and Carers NSW also attended.

Insights from the NSW and Queensland floods

The CCM in April 2022 focused on organisational responses to flooding in northern NSW and Queensland in February and March, one of the nation's worst flood disasters on record. Ciara Sterling, chief executive of Thriving Communities Partnership, explained how her organisation worked with the sector to provide efficient and timely assistance to flood-affected communities, and stressed the importance of collaboration during a crisis. Danielle Manley from Endeavour Energy and Belinda Kallmier from Essential Energy spoke from the perspective of energy networks, highlighting their responses to the floods and how they engaged with their respective customers.

Seventy-two participants attended including 16 EWON members and various community representatives from the Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW, Council on the Ageing NSW, St Vincent de Paul and Anglicare.

“CCM attendees

“There is much work about addressing the high cost of energy bills for people in our community who often don't have a voice in these matters. I found the meeting informative in terms of advocacy in this area. Thank you for organising.”

“Informative, well organised, and I like the ability to ask questions and for the speakers to address them on the day.”

“CCM attendees

“As an energy advocate for my organisation, I find EWON's consultation meeting a valuable source of information.”



94%

of participants rated the meeting excellent or good

Top three issues by provider

Authorised and licenced providers only

Provider	First issue	%	Second issue	%	Third issue	%
1st Energy	Billing	50%	Credit	21%	Customer service	19%
ActewAGL Retail	Billing	54%	Customer service	20%	Credit	20%
AGL	Billing	58%	Customer service	20%	Credit	13%
Alinta Energy	Billing	57%	Customer service	22%	Credit	11%
Allgas Energy	Land	100%	-	-	-	-
Altogether	Customer service	36%	Provision	25%	Billing	25%
amaysim Energy	Billing	50%	Customer service	25%	Credit	25%
Amber Electric	Billing	47%	Customer service	26%	Credit	11%
Arc Energy	Billing	69%	Customer service	19%	Credit	13%
Ausgrid	Supply	40%	Customer service	22%	Provision	20%
Australian Gas Networks (Albury)	Provision	100%	-	-	-	-
Australian Gas Networks (NSW)	Provision	100%	-	-	-	-
BlueNRG	Billing	60%	Customer service	18%	Digital meter exchange	9%
Bright Spark Power	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
Brighte	Billing	50%	Customer service	50%	-	-
CleanPeak Energy	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
CovaU	Billing	55%	Customer service	19%	Credit	15%
Diamond Energy	Billing	43%	Credit	26%	Digital meter exchange	17%
Discover Energy	Billing	69%	Customer service	26%	Transfer	5%
Electricity in a Box	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
Elysian Energy	Billing	51%	Customer service	24%	Transfer	15%
Endeavour Energy	Supply	38%	Customer service	23%	Land	22%
Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)	Billing	42%	Billing	20%	Customer service	16%
EnergyAustralia	Billing	61%	Customer service	21%	Credit	10%
Enova Energy (in Administration)	Billing	48%	Credit	21%	Digital meter exchange	15%
Essential Energy	Supply	33%	Land	25%	Customer service	22%
Evergy	Billing	57%	Customer service	21%	Credit	21%
Future X Power	Billing	39%	Customer service	20%	Transfer	17%
GEE Energy	Billing	67%	Customer service	22%	Digital meter exchange	11%
GloBird Energy	Billing	69%	Customer service	14%	Digital meter exchange	7%
Glow Power	Transfer	39%	Credit	18%	Billing	18%
Humenergy	Billing	72%	Customer service	16%	Credit	4%
Hunter Water	Billing	34%	Customer service	23%	Land	14%
Jemena	Provision	45%	Customer service	38%	Land	9%
Locality Planning Energy	Billing	57%	Credit	29%	Customer service	14%
Lumo Energy	Billing	40%	Credit	40%	Customer service	20%
M2 Energy	Billing	57%	Customer service	20%	Credit	13%
Member Not Named	Billing	41%	Credit	26%	General	21%
Mojo Power	Billing	68%	Customer service	18%	Digital meter exchange	7%

Provider	First issue	%	Second issue	%	Third issue	%
Momentum Energy	Billing	60%	Customer service	15%	Credit	12%
Nectr	Billing	68%	Customer service	18%	Credit	7%
Next Business Energy	Billing	78%	Customer service	11%	Digital meter exchange	11%
Origin Energy	Billing	60%	Customer service	18%	Credit	11%
OVO Energy	Billing	50%	Customer service	31%	Credit	6%
People Energy	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
Pooled Energy (in Administration)	Billing	55%	Customer service	32%	Marketing	14%
Power Club (RoLR)	Billing	47%	Customer service	33%	Marketing	13%
Powerdirect	Billing	56%	Customer service	19%	Credit	10%
Powershop (includes Kogan Energy)	Billing	42%	Digital meter exchange	17%	Customer service	14%
QEnergy	Billing	73%	Customer service	13%	Credit	7%
Radian Energy	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
Real Utilities	Billing	50%	Customer service	50%	-	-
ReAmped Energy	Billing	63%	Customer service	23%	Transfer	5%
Red Energy	Billing	61%	Customer service	20%	Credit	8%
Savant Energy	Credit	60%	Billing	20%	Customer service	20%
seene	Billing	100%	-	-	-	-
Shell Energy	Billing	91%	Customer service	9%	-	-
Shoalhaven Water	Billing	39%	Provision	22%	Customer service	22%
Simply Energy	Billing	59%	Customer service	23%	Transfer	7%
Smart Energy	Customer service	41%	Billing	24%	Digital meter exchange	18%
Social Energy	Customer service	75%	Billing	17%	General	8%
Solo Water	Billing	80%	Customer service	20%	-	-
Sumo	Billing	55%	Customer service	21%	Credit	10%
Sydney Water	Billing	36%	Customer service	25%	Land	14%
Tango Energy	Billing	56%	Customer service	15%	Digital meter exchange	10%
TransGrid	Land	85%	Customer service	15%	-	-
Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies	Customer service	100%	-	-	-	-
Water NSW	Billing	43%	Customer service	27%	Supply	12%
WINconnect	Billing	78%	Customer service	13%	Credit	5%

Electricity

Customer numbers

- <3,000
- 3,001-10,000
- 10,001-100,000
- 100,001-500,000
- 500,001-1,000,000
- >1,000,000

11,224
electricity
complaints received
in 2021/2022

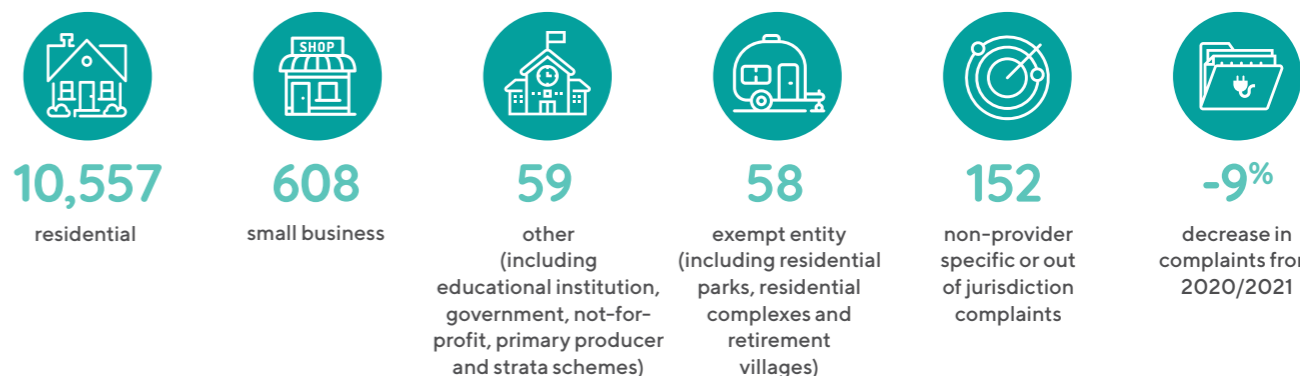
Provider	Electricity customer numbers*	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2021/2022	Complaints received 2020/2021	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level		
									1	2	3
Retailer											
1st Energy	●	114	95	114	-19	1	26	43	15	9	1
ActewAGL Retail	●	21	62	86	-24	1	20	29	5	5	2
AGL	●	21	1,831	2,115	-284	17	677	829	196	83	29
Alinta Energy	●	51	524	424	100	6	148	278	42	35	15
BlueNRG	●	86	53	42	11	0	20	24	1	5	3
CovaU	●	75	92	38	54	0	30	43	9	6	4
Elysian Energy	●	338	82	6	76	0	22	40	11	6	3
Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)	●	30	136	115	21	3	61	46	9	8	9
EnergyAustralia	●	24	2,274	2,159	115	38	777	1,045	198	150	66
M2 Energy	●	39	270	285	-15	3	83	115	26	31	12
Momentum Energy	●	36	112	117	-5	1	46	50	10	3	2
Origin Energy	●	24	2,644	3,413	-769	47	934	1,205	225	164	69
Powerdirect	●	28	61	65	-4	1	20	31	4	4	1
Poweshop (includes Kogan Energy)	●	10	88	73	15	4	54	26	0	3	1
ReAmped Energy	●	73	136	75	61	0	42	72	10	8	4
Red Energy	●	19	557	534	23	6	192	267	38	40	14
Simply Energy	●	65	387	422	-35	2	121	192	38	25	9
Sumo	●	104	142	94	48	1	52	62	13	11	3
WINconnect	●	72	55	82	-27	2	26	21	1	3	2
Distributor											
Ausgrid	●	2	307	420	-113	4	178	81	18	18	8
Endeavour Energy	●	2	162	167	-5	3	101	43	7	8	0
Essential Energy	●	3	265	315	-50	2	128	72	29	18	16

*Only providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table. Retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 30 December 2021. Distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2021.

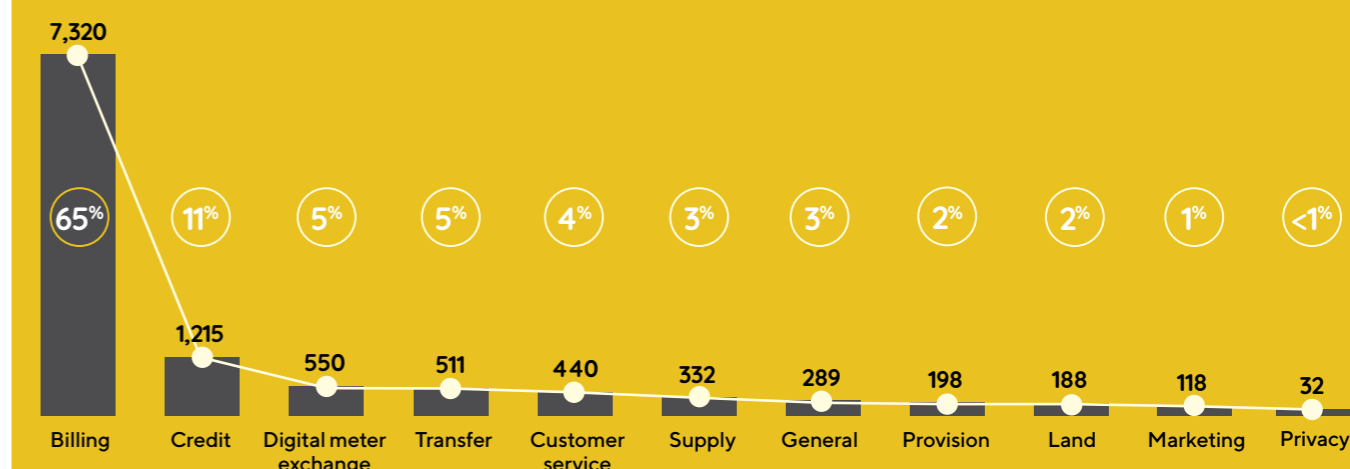
- Electricity providers with no complaints**
- CPE Mascot
 - Flow Power
 - Localvolts
 - Microgrid Power
 - OC Energy
 - Powow Sanctuary Energy
 - Telstra Energy
 - iGENO

- Electricity providers with fewer than 50 complaints**
- | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Altogether | Electricity in a Box | Locality Planning | People Energy | Smart Energy |
| Amber Electric | Energy | Energy | Pooled Energy* | Social Energy |
| Arc Energy | Future X Power | Lumo Energy | QEnergy | Tango Energy |
| Bright Spark Power | GEE Energy | Mojo Power | Radian Energy | TransGrid |
| Brighte | GloBird Energy | Nectr | Real Utilities | amaysim Energy |
| CleanPeak Energy | Glow Power | Next Business | Savant Energy | Enova Energy* |
| Diamond Energy | Humenergy | Energy | seene | Power Club** |
| Discover Energy | | OVO Energy | Shell Energy | |

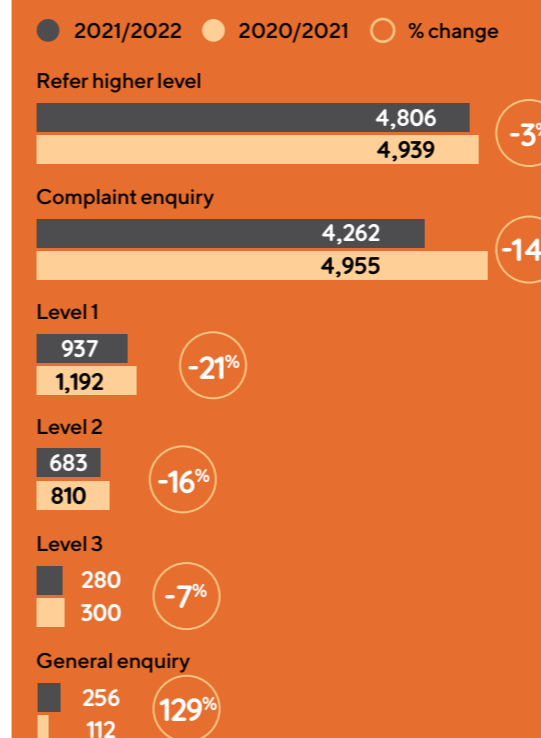
*provider in administration **exited the market



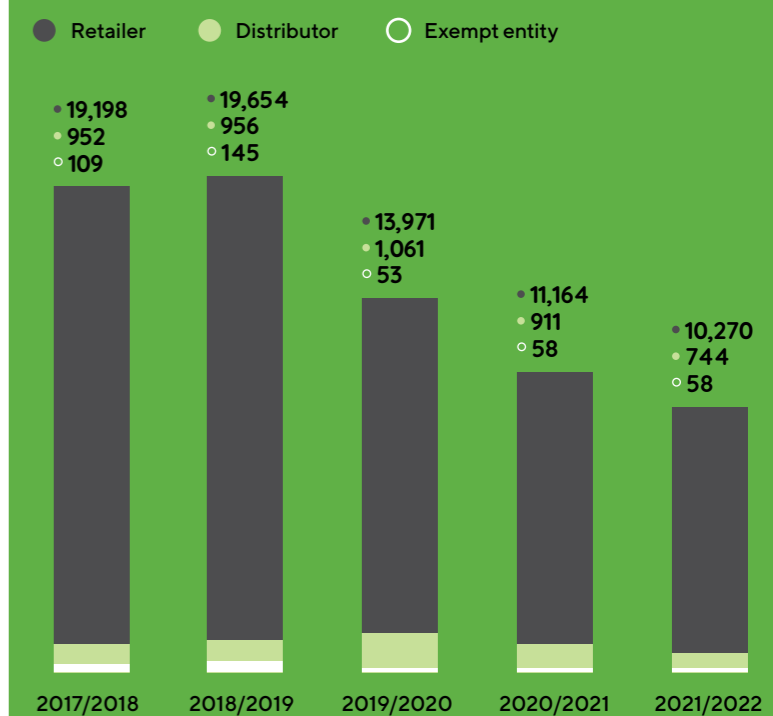
Electricity complaints by core issue



Total electricity complaints



Electricity trends





2,680
gas complaints
received in
2021/2022

Customer numbers

- <3,000
- 3,001-10,000
- 10,001-100,000
- 100,001-500,000
- 500,001-1,000,000
- >1,000,000

Provider	Gas customer numbers ^a	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2021/2022	Complaints received 2020/2021	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level		
									1	2	3
Retailer											
AGL	●	12	772	998	-226	3	239	386	95	42	7
Alinta Energy	●	24	96	71	25	0	22	53	8	11	2
EnergyAustralia	●	16	618	577	41	3	167	310	67	57	14
M2 Energy	●	20	55	58	-3	0	12	25	6	10	2
Origin Energy	●	19	598	618	-20	7	201	282	58	37	13
Red Energy	●	9	72	90	-18	0	22	34	3	13	0
Simply Energy	●	52	141	125	16	0	43	67	16	13	2
Distributor											
Jemena	●	1	160	171	-11	3	60	67	26	2	2

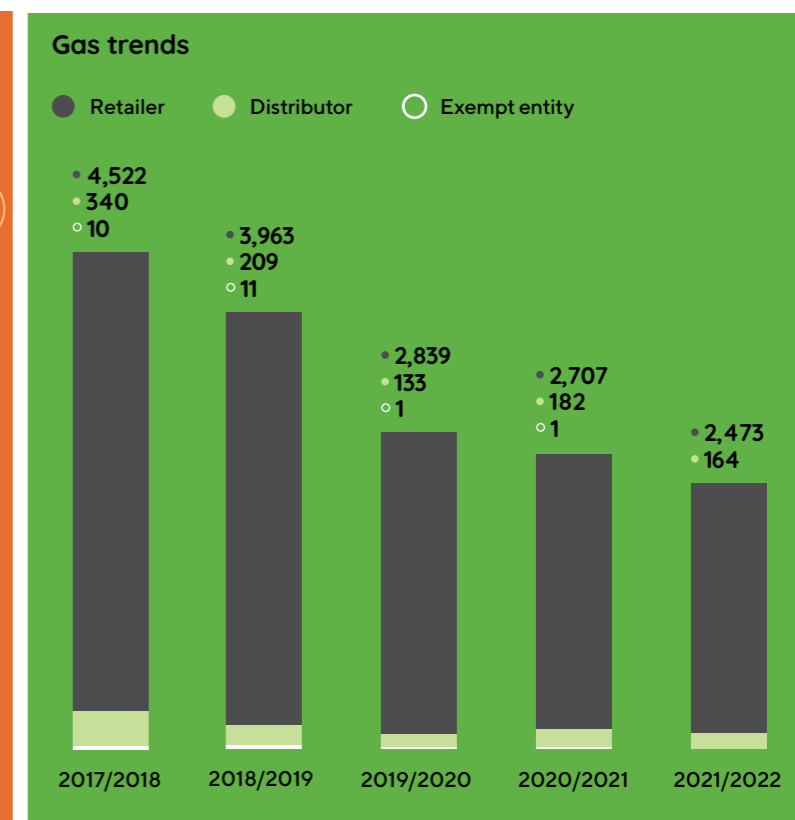
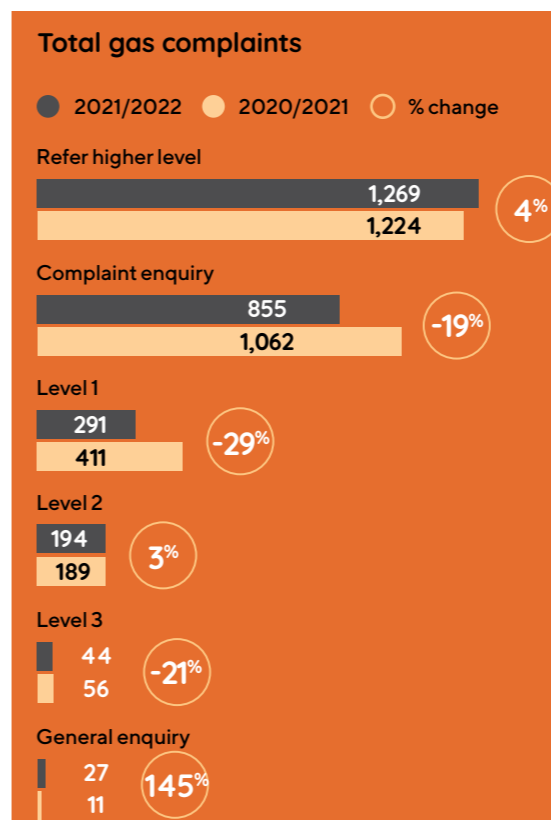
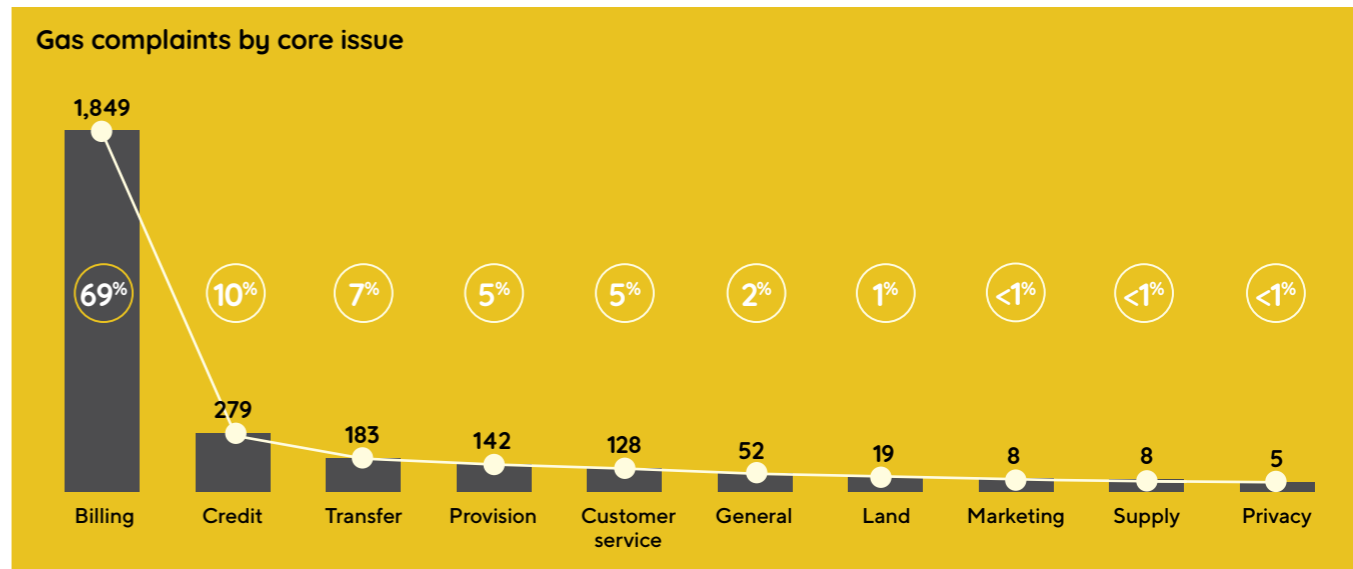
^aOnly providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table. Retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 30 December 2021. Distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2021.

Gas providers with no complaints

- Central Ranges Pipeline
- Evoenergy
- Lumo Energy
- OVO Energy
- Real Utilities
- ReAmped Energy
- Savant Energy
- Shell Energy
- Tango Energy
- Telstra Energy
- iGENO

Gas providers with fewer than 50 complaints

- ActewAGL Retail
- Allgas Energy
- Australian Gas Networks (Albury)
- Australian Gas Networks (NSW)
- CovaU
- Discover Energy
- Energy Locals (includes Energy Trade)
- GloBird Energy
- Momentum Energy
- Powerdirect
- Powershop (includes Kogan Energy)
- Sumo
- WINconnect





Water

Customer numbers

- <3,000
- 3,001-10,000
- 10,001-100,000
- 100,001-500,000
- 500,001-1,000,000
- >1,000,000

704

water complaints received in 2021/2022

Provider	Water customer numbers ^a	Complaints received per 10,000 customers	Complaints received 2021/2022	Complaints received 2020/2021	Variance	General enquiry	Complaint enquiry	RHL	Investigation level		
									1	2	3
Network/Retail											
Hunter Water	●	1	53	64	-11	1	27	18	0	5	2
Sydney Water	●	1	469	458	11	11	208	181	35	22	12

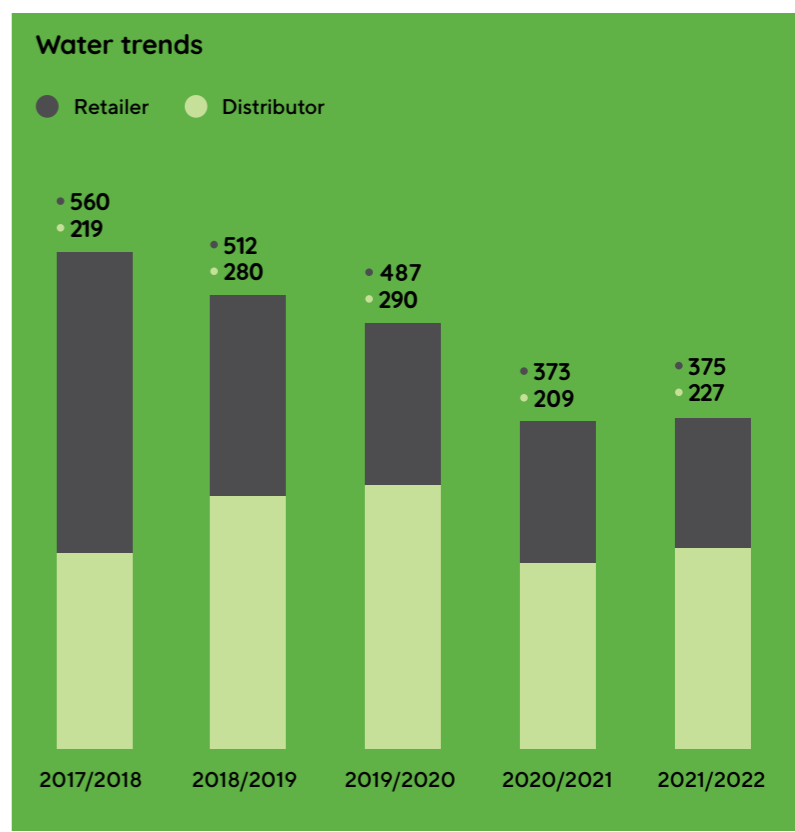
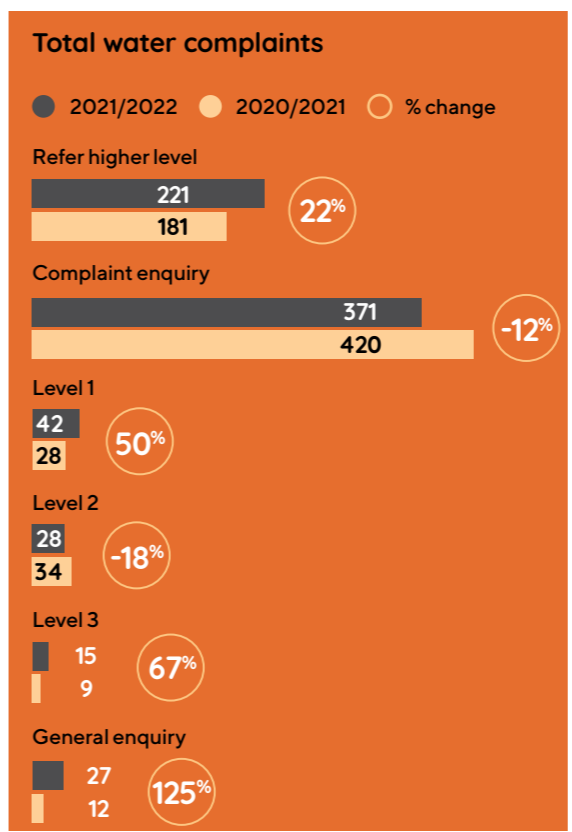
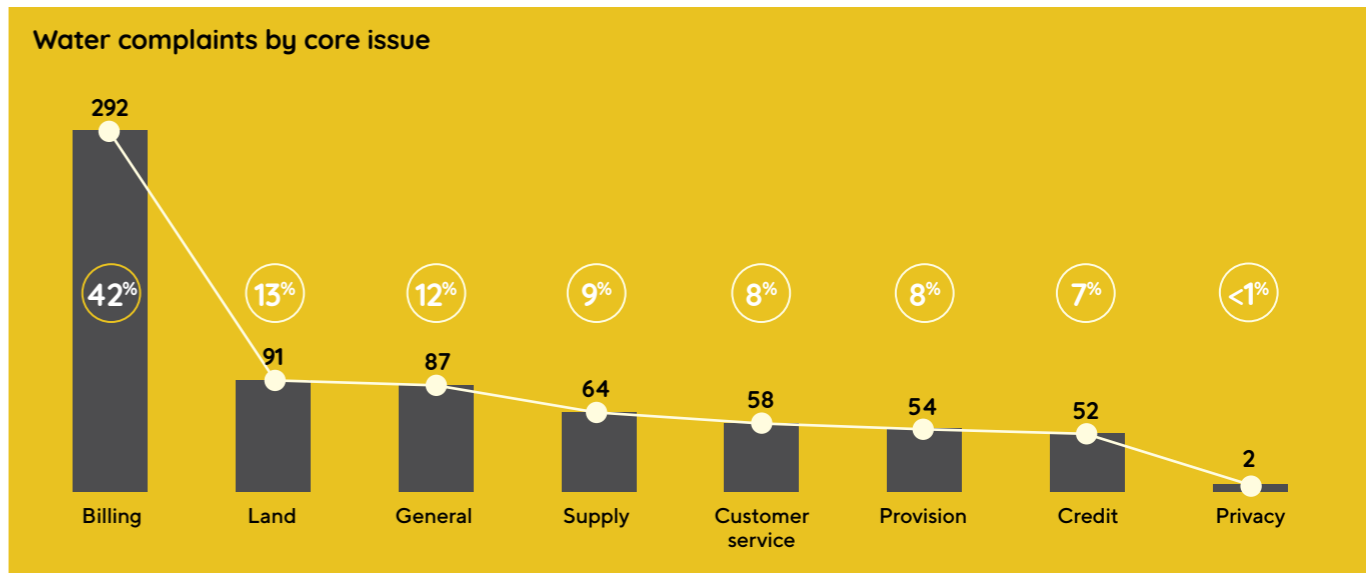
^aOnly providers with over 50 complaints have been included in this table. Retailer customer number data reported by the AER as at 30 December 2021. Distributor customer number data provided by IPART as at 30 June 2021.

Water providers with no complaints

- Aquacell
- AquaNet
- Narara Ecovillage
- Podium Asset Services
- Rosehill Network
- Sydney Desalination Plant

Water providers with fewer than 50 complaints

- Altogether
- Essential Energy
- Shoalhaven Water
- Solo Water
- Veolia Water Solutions & Technologies
- Water NSW



EWON is committed to gender equality and we support International Women's Day annually.



Supporting our people

Employee engagement

Always On, our anonymous online feedback portal, enables EWON staff to respectfully voice their opinions and is one of our tools for understanding what support team members may require. Reviewed monthly and shared with staff quarterly, feedback from Always On has allowed us to monitor staff responses to EWON's flexible working arrangements and our approach to returning to the office.

Every three years, EWON measures staff engagement through an organisation-wide engagement survey. With no survey this year, we had an opportunity to review and refine our approach to responding to survey feedback. As we embrace a hybrid work environment, we will begin more regular engagement surveys, each with a targeted theme next year. The first will focus on EWON's values.

COVID-19 initiatives

After working at home for most of 2021/22, staff returned to the office two days a week from March 2022. We developed working from home guidelines and a self-assessment checklist to ensure employees' home workstations are ergonomically suitable and safe. All new staff receive an allowance to assist with the cost of setting up their home office.

Be Safe and Well@EWON

In the first half of the year, we circulated an anonymous wellbeing survey inviting employees to nominate activities for EWON's Wellbeing Calendar.

Highlights from the past year include our healthy snack and tea boxes that were delivered to all staff at home in January, on-site massages to welcome everyone back to the office, an onsite flu vaccination clinic, and a virtual trivia night.

We gathered in person to celebrate the Biggest Morning Tea for the first time since 2020, raising more than \$600 for the Cancer Council Australia.

Cultural protocols

EWON developed a cultural protocols program to help staff better understand and appreciate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and how to respectfully and effectively interact and work with communities.

We improved the program by delivering:

- > training to new employees as part of their induction—a Reconciliation Action Plan deliverable
- > specific training for the Investigations Team including case studies from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers.



EWON staff took part in The Biggest Morning Tea in May 2022 to raise funds for The Cancer Council.

“

Thank you for the professional and caring service you provided me. The overpayment was credited to my account today. It was a relief to see it there.

Customer

EWON Masterclass

The EWON Masterclass program focuses on four streams: dispute resolution, technical knowledge, leadership, and personal and professional effectiveness.

Dispute resolution for frontline staff

Building on the skills in managing difficult behaviours that frontline staff have developed over years of training and experience, we engaged external consultants to facilitate unreasonable complaint conduct training. Selected staff members also attended external training sessions on de-escalating agitated callers, where they learnt how to deal with upset or angry customers—a skill that proved particularly important throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technical knowledge

Sharing resources with EWOV, we engaged an independent technical consultant who supported training in areas including:

- > point of connection
- > solar
- > voltage and voltage variation

- > power quality and event log data
- > vegetation management.

Continuous training in these technical areas allows Dispute Resolution Officers to quickly identify issues and resolve complaints in a timely manner.

Personal and professional effectiveness

This year all staff completed mental health training workshops with the Black Dog Institute. The sessions upskilled staff in identifying signs of poor mental health and how to support colleagues and team members, ensuring EWON continues to build a resilient culture.

We also offered staff writing training in line with the “Compelling Communication” aspect of our capability framework. The training upskilled team leaders in clear, written communication techniques. This training will be extended to all staff in the coming financial year, along with training in Microsoft Excel.

Understanding different working styles and personalities is crucial to effective collaboration. To help deepen this understanding, EWON participated in personality profiling sessions, allowing staff to identify the behavioural traits of

team members, and foster best working practice by:

- > increasing emotional intelligence
- > increasing understanding of the actions and reactions of others
- > knowing how to leverage people's strengths
- > uncovering the most effective communication strategies.

First Principles revamp

Staff and Board members are required to complete the First Principles online training course as part of their induction, with refresher training every second year. The course covers workplace essentials including health and safety, workplace behaviour expectations, privacy, and more.

The HR Team regularly reviews the courses to ensure they are interactive, easy to digest, and engaging. Recent redesigns include the addition of interactive components tailored to EWON policies and procedures within the Whistleblowing and Privacy training modules.

Best practice complaints management

We recently restructured our Dispute Resolution Team (DRT). Responding to recommendations from our 2019 Independent Review, the restructure equips the DRT to deliver best practice complaints management and drives implementation of the Board-approved Business Plan.

Changes in Early Resolution and Conciliation

The names of two teams within the DRT were changed to better reflect their work and align more closely with other energy and water ombudsman schemes. The Initial Response Team is now the Early Resolution Team and manages general and complaint enquiries and Refer Higher Level

(RHL) complaints. All other cases and assessments of whether complaints must be escalated to investigations are handled by the Conciliation Team, formerly the Rapid Response Team. All complaints that are not resolved within six weeks must be assigned to the Investigations Team. Both teams are led by an experienced Investigations Manager.

A second lead role has been introduced to both the Early Resolution and Conciliation Teams to reduce the number of team members reporting to one lead and increase the level of daily support provided to each team member. Individual role titles within these teams have also been changed and new position descriptions developed to ensure future business requirements are met.

A refreshed Investigations Team

EWON's two investigations teams have been merged into one. Led by an Investigations Manager and a lead role for daily operations support, this team is responsible for all Level 2 and Level 3 complaint investigations. To facilitate resolution of these complaints, the Investigations Team discusses all complaints allocated to it on receipt to understand provider involvement to date and to identify those with significant complexity for allocation to Investigations Officers experienced in those areas.

The General Manager Dispute Resolution also introduced an Operations and Improvement Lead role responsible for project delivery and the implementation of DRT process improvement.

Financials

Balance Sheet	2022 \$	2021 \$
Total Current Assets*	11,114,094	8,711,656
Total Non-current Assets*	4,291,906	5,721,619
Total Assets	15,405,999	14,433,275
Total Current Liabilities	9,248,929	7,947,101
Total Non-current Liabilities	2,719,674	3,468,021
Total Liabilities	11,968,602	11,415,122
Net Assets	3,437,397	3,018,153
Funds		
Unrestricted funds	3,437,397	3,018,153
Total Funds	3,437,397	3,018,153

Cash Flow Statement

Cash flows from operating activities		
Funding received (Members)	14,157,796	13,830,035
Payment to suppliers, employees and other	-10,887,672	-13,959,664
Net cash inflow from operating activities	3,270,124	-129,629
Cash flows from investing activities		
Interest received	7,540	10,688
Payment for plant, equipment and intangibles	-194,074	-457,640
Net cash flow used in investing activities	-186,534	-446,952
Cash flows used in financing activities		
Interest paid on lease liabilities AASB 16	-108,149	-144,210
Principal paid on lease liabilities AASB16	-736,464	-752,581
Net cash flow used in financing activities	-844,613	-896,791
Net increase in cash held	2,238,977	-1,473,372
Cash at the beginning of year*	4,435,664	5,909,035
Cash at the end of the year*	6,674,641	4,435,663

Statement of income and operating expenditure

Funding Received		
Annual case fees	10,813,548	10,413,283
Annual fixed fees	2,083,606	1,996,628
Joining fees	56,500	45,850
Interest received and sundry income	16,415	68,373
Gross Income	12,970,069	12,524,134
Less Expenditure		
Salaries and on-costs	8,721,941	8,719,141
Communications	105,065	127,945
Information Technology	1,136,970	1,071,424
Occupancy costs	233,475	231,685
Depreciation and Amortisation	1,227,164	1,296,301
Interest expense - Lease Liabilities	108,149	144,210
General and Administration	1,018,061	769,428
Total Expenditure	12,550,825	12,360,134
Net Surplus	419,244	164,000

* Term Deposit of \$641,335 was incorrectly classified as Cash and cash equivalents in FY21 and reclassified as Non-current deposit in CY as the term is more than 12 months.



EWON's Outreach & Engagement during 2021/2022

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KEEP IN TOUCH

