

the foundations of EWOV

History

EWOV was formerly the Electricity Industry Ombudsman (Victoria) (EIOV), established in 1995 when the Victorian electricity industry was undergoing major restructuring. EIOV, with six original electricity members, emerged in response to strong lobbying from consumer groups for appropriate and effective consumer protection mechanisms to accompany the industry changes.

Early on, EIOV was considered to have the potential to provide a foundation for a broader utilities ombudsman scheme across the electricity, gas and water industries. From 1999, gas customers were given access to its services; from 2001, access was extended to Victoria's water customers; and from 1 July 2005 to customers of LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) retailers. EIOV's establishment was a significant and widely acclaimed milestone for electricity customers and companies. It was also a world first for the energy industry.

Jurisdiction

While EWOV's services are available to all customers, the scheme was essentially established to assist residential and small business customers.

We are able to deal with most of the issues that may arise between customers and their electricity, gas and water providers, including:

- the provision and supply of, or failure to provide or supply, electricity, gas or water services
- billing
- credit and payment services
- disconnections and restrictions
- bills, and billing and payment arrangements
- refundable advances (security deposits)
- land and land access, including vegetation management issues.

We can also investigate:

- matters raised with the scheme by the Essential Services Commission (ESC)
- matters referred to the scheme by a member, with the consent of the customer
- the concerns of third parties directly affected by the activities of an EWOV member (where the member's activity affects someone who is not their customer — for example, marketing of electricity or gas to the general public, vegetation management and network augmentation).

Funding

EWOV's services are free to customers. Funding comes from the scheme's members, on a 'user pays' basis. This method of funding provides a financial incentive for members to reduce the number of cases coming to EWOV, by resolving customer issues within their own internal dispute resolution processes.

A fixed fee applies to members when they join EWOV. This *start up levy* covers joining costs and contributes to the scheme's establishment costs, which were originally provided by the founding members.

An *annual levy* is applied to members each year to fund the scheme's operations. The *annual levy* is made up of a fixed fee to cover membership costs, and a variable fee based on each member's share of cases handled.

