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Energy and water cases up overall last year

The Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) received 19,158 cases in the 2004/05 year — this was up 39% on 2003/04, and followed previous annual case increases of 13%, 37% and 33%.

Enquiries were up 32%, from 10,658 to 14,069, and Complaints were up 64%, from 3,109 to 5,089. About 70% of the Enquiries were complaints referred back to the company or authority for resolution, as the customer either had not raised their complaint yet or had done so at the call centre once without success. The remaining 30% were general enquiries.

“The case increases were across all industries,” the Ombudsman, Ms Fiona McLeod, said as she released EWOV’s 2005 Annual Report today.

“Electricity cases were up 40%, from 9,624 to 13,491. Gas cases were also up 40%, from 2,769 to 3,882. Dual fuel cases were up 122%, from 238 to 529. Water cases were up 11%, from 1,136 to 1,256.”

Billing was the most common issue customers complained about — 65% of all EWOV cases and to do with a broad range of matters, including high bills, account arrears, delays, errors, backbills, bill formats, meter reading, application of tariffs and disconnection and restriction of supply.

Compared with the previous year, billing-related disconnection/restriction cases were down 11%, from 2,132 to 1,889. This was due to a fall of more than 50% in energy disconnection cases in the first six months of 2005.

“The fall in energy disconnection cases appears to have been triggered by the State Government’s introduction of wrongful disconnection payment (WDP) legislation from 8 December 2004,” Ms McLeod said.

After Billing, customers contacting EWOV most commonly complained about:

- Transfer — the process of transferring from one energy retailer to another
- Provision — to do with service provider and customer assets, such as wires, pipes and meters
- Market Conduct — electricity and gas retailers’ sales and advertising activities
- Supply — planned and unplanned outages, supply quality and supply reliability.

The full 2005 Annual Report is available in PDF format on EWOV's website — www.ewov.com.au (under Publications).

For more information:

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To arrange an interview with the Ombudsman:

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MEDIA RELEASE

Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

A.B.N. 57 070 516 175

ELECTRICITY: EWOV's most common case issues 2002 – 2005

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	% change 2003/04 to 2004/05
Total cases	8,815	9,624	13,491	+ 40%
Billing	5,640	6,548	8,712	+ 33%
Transfer	974	939	1,506	+ 60%
Provision	668	757	1,101	+ 45%
Supply	673	511	706	+ 38%

GAS: EWOV's most common case issues 2002 – 2005

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	% change 2003/04 to 2004/05
Total cases	2,333	2,769	3,882	+ 40%
Billing	1,548	1,948	2,631	+ 35%
Transfer	205	334	539	+ 61%
Provision	251	212	289	+ 36%

DUAL FUEL: EWOV's most common case issues 2002 – 2005

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	% change 2003/04 to 2004/05
Total cases	56	238	529	+ 122%
Billing	15	122	339	+ 178%
Market Conduct	19	48	92	+ 92%
Transfer	22	65	84	+ 29%

WATER: EWOV's most common case issues 2002 – 2005

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	% change 2003/04 to 2004/05
Total cases	990	1,136	1,256	+ 11%
Billing	507	583	710	+ 22%
Supply	184	186	202	+ 9%
Provision	141	145	146	+ 1%
Land	99	160	111	- 31%

The Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria (EWOV) is an industry-based customer dispute resolution scheme. It has dealt with electricity cases since 1996, natural gas cases since 1999, water cases since 2001 and LPG cases since July 2005. The Ombudsman has the power to investigate and resolve disputes between customers and their electricity, gas and water providers — fairly and independently. To 30 June 2005, EWOV had helped some 79,000 Victorian electricity, gas and water customers, mostly residential.