

The concept of independent review is inherent in the eight principles guiding how EWOV works:

- **independence** — complaint resolution not advocacy
- **access** — readily accessible to individual consumers
- **equity** — fairness to all parties
- **quality** — highest professional standards
- **effectiveness** — high calibre people, supported by training and technology
- **efficiency** — optimal use of resources
- **community awareness** — foster community awareness
- **linkages** — effective links and working relationships

It's also explicit in EWOV's *Constitution*:

The Board shall conduct reviews of the Scheme and develop proposals for its continued operation. All reviews shall be conducted in consultation with interested parties, including groups representing customers of electricity, gas or water services and community groups representing public interest issues relevant to electricity, gas or water services. (Clause 24)

## A PROGRAMME OF CONTINUOUS REVIEW

Rather than wait three or five years before getting a picture of how we're operating, we've established EWOV's review process as an ongoing programme. In this way, we can more quickly focus in on particular aspects of our operation — to check how well our principles are being translated into actions and, as necessary, implement improvements.

Aspects under review generally fall into one of four categories — corporate governance, case handling policy and practice, how aware consumers are of our services, and how well we communicate with a range of stakeholders.

Reviews are carried out by respected independent consulting firms/consultants with recognised expertise in the aspect of our operation that's under review.

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

EWOV operates in accordance with a *Constitution* and *Charter*. Eight reviews of these key instruments have been undertaken since the scheme was set up in 1995, including in:

- November 1998, at the time of the proposed entry of the gas industry (retail sector)
- April 2001, at the time of the proposed entry of the water industry
- November 2001, at the time of the proposed entry of the gas industry (distribution sector)
- March 2005, at the time of the proposed entry of the liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) industry
- May 2006, at the time of the introduction of the concept of 'contracting participants' whereby other participants in the electricity, gas and water industries can join EWOV by agreement.

The Board has undertaken a benchmarking exercise against other energy and water Ombudsman schemes, using publicly available data from all schemes in 2005. This included *Charter* and *Constitution* comparisons.

The Board has also conducted four significant reviews, and six smaller reviews, of the scheme's charging model. In addition, the calculation of levies and audit of the billing system against case numbers is subject to annual audit by an accounting firm.

An independent review of Board performance is planned for late 2007.

# ONGOING PROCESS OF REVIEW CONTINUED

## CASE HANDLING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Independent customer satisfaction surveys undertaken in 1999 and 2004 have provided feedback on our case handling policies and practices for investigated complaints. The next survey is planned for late 2007.

As well, our Case Handling Advisory Committee meets twice a year. Through it, industry, consumers and independent procedural fairness/alternative dispute resolution experts provide input to our case handling policy and practice.

EWOV has one of the most extensive quality assurance programmes of any scheme in the country. It uses staff who weren't involved in collecting the original data and comprises:

- weekly checking for data quality/accuracy of customer contact and disconnection information
- monthly checking to validate case data, with a 20% minimum of all cases received fully checked, all cases reviewed by exception reporting, and 10 – 15% of all closed complaints fully reviewed
- regular independence and impartiality reviews of case handling policy and practice by an external reviewer
- annual satisfaction surveys of customers who are referred to providers' higher-level contacts
- activity reports on KPI achievement, case trends and outcomes
- checking of data for public reporting
- report generation for internal use and for distribution to scheme participants by the fifth working day of each month
- a data checking log — used to identify trends and training needs.

The internal auditing process is overseen by management to ensure accuracy and validity of information, and compliance with case handling policy and procedures. In 2005, the Case Analyst, independent of case management, completed a review of internal processes against the *ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management Systems Standard* to ensure that they were sufficiently robust.

## CONSUMER AWARENESS

In addition to the independent customer satisfaction surveys undertaken in 1999 and 2004, since early 2007, we've been undertaking independent general consumer awareness surveys.

We were also part of the Federal Government's *National Benchmarks* national survey of customers in 1999.

## COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

An independent stakeholder survey — of scheme participants, government, consumer groups and regulators — was undertaken in 2005. Following this, the Ombudsman, with the Board's endorsement, met with the CEO of every EWOV scheme participant over a 12-month period. This facilitated further face-to-face discussion about the scheme and any suggested improvements. The next stakeholder survey is scheduled for 2008/09.

In 2005, we commissioned an independent review of EWOV's public reporting regime, from which we took up a number of suggestions for improving how we presented our case information.

We regularly survey readers of our publications. In addition, at least twice a year, we undertake independent staff surveys on various aspects of our operations. An independent stocktake workshop is also undertaken every year, with EWOV staff.