



# resolutionbulletin11

Highlights from Resolution 26

September 2008

## HOW MANY CASES DID EWOV RECEIVE AND FINALISE FROM JANUARY – JUNE 2008?

(ALL CASES, ENQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS)

	TOTAL CASES	ENQUIRIES <sup>^</sup>	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINTS*				
				investigations finalised	complaints received for investigation	complaints referred to higher-level contact**	complaints referred to company	referred elsewhere and other complaints <sup>^^</sup>
Electricity	10,877	687	10,190	2,062	2,338	5,520	1,797	535
Natural gas	3,818	173	3,645	758	832	2,093	602	118
LPG	70	14	56	13	11	19	15	11
Dual fuel	232	12	220	36	45	129	37	9
Water	792	144	648	112	118	272	191	67
Other industry/non industry related <sup>#</sup>	163	163	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,952</b>	<b>1,193</b>	<b>14,759</b>	<b>2,981</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>8,033</b>	<b>2,642</b>	<b>740</b>

Reflects data run at 15 July 2008

<sup>^</sup> An **enquiry** is a request from a customer for general information.

\* A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction regarding a policy, practice or customer service performance of an energy or water company which is part of the EWOV scheme, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. If a customer has not yet spoken with the energy or water company about their complaint, EWOV generally refers them back to the company's contact centre. If the customer has spoken once with someone at the contact centre, EWOV usually refers them to a higher-level contact at the company. EWOV investigates complaints which remain unresolved following two or more contacts.

<sup>#</sup> Since 1 July 2006, EWOV has separated out other industry cases (e.g. a customer with an issue about their telephone company) and non-industry related cases (e.g. an enquiry about how EWOV resolves complaints).

\*\* 3,980 of the 8,033 complaints referred back to a higher-level contact would normally have been investigated, but for an interim process of offering customers a final opportunity for direct resolution, if they agree.

<sup>^^</sup> 371 complaints were referred elsewhere—to another Ombudsman (e.g. as the customer lived interstate), to a regulator (e.g. to the Essential Services Commission's website for detailed code information), to Government (e.g. about a water company's price increases) or to other bodies (e.g. to a body corporate). 369 other complaint issues didn't require referral or investigation (e.g. some customers wish to register marketing/transfer complaints with EWOV but don't seek referral or investigation).

### SNAPSHOT

#### JANUARY – JUNE 2008

(comparisons are with July – December 2007)

- 15,952 cases overall, up 69%
- 14,759 complaints, up 81%
  - 3,344 complaints received for investigation, up 65% (would have been up 107%, but for an interim process of offering customers a final opportunity for direct resolution if they agree)
  - 8,033 complaints referred to companies' higher-level contacts, up 109%
  - 2,642 complaints referred to companies' contact centres, up 52%
- 1,193 enquiries, down 9%
- 50% billing, 14% transfer, 12% credit
- 10,440 billing issues, up 107%
- 2,981 investigations finalised, up 39%
- \$678,853 in redress for customers
- Interim process retained to deal with increasing complaints
- Input to 20 public consultations

### COMPLAINTS SURGE

EWOV complaints have reached new record levels.

Comparing the first half of 2008 with the second half of 2007, our overall case receipt increased 69% to 15,952 cases. 14,759 of the 15,952 cases were complaints — an increase of 81%.

3,344 complaints were received for investigation — an increase of 65%. As noted at left, the increase would have been 107%, if we hadn't used an interim process.

As previously reported, in mid-2007 we started to see a noticeable increase in complaints for investigation — especially where the customer had contacted their company two or more times and, in some cases, more than six times.

One energy retailer's introduction of a new billing system in December 2007 brought some well-publicised billing issues. Its call centre was overwhelmed with enquiries and complaints, with flow-on effects on EWOV.

Then, in late March 2008, two national energy retailers transferred some 1.2 million customers across to their own billing systems — from the systems of the interstate electricity companies from which they were purchased. Account and billing issues were compounded by call centre resourcing issues, which led to longer call handling times for the retailers' customers in Victoria as well.

Managing the impacts — at a time when we've also been settling in new staff — has been quite a challenge. We've focused on streamlining our processes, while maintaining effectiveness and customer satisfaction.

Full story in *Resolution 26*.

*Resolution Bulletin* is a summary of matters raised in *Resolution*, the six-monthly report of the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV). If you'd like a copy of *Resolution 26*, please contact us, or you can download it from our website ([www.ewov.com.au](http://www.ewov.com.au)). If you're reading someone else's copy of *Resolution Bulletin*, and you'd like to be on our mailing list, please contact Candyce Presland, Community Liaison Administrator, on 1800 500 509.

## CASES BY INDUSTRY

JANUARY – JUNE 2008

### ELECTRICITY

#### Cases Overall

- 10,877 cases in total
- 687 enquiries and 10,190 complaints
- 2,338 new complaints for investigation
- 5,520 complaints referred to companies' higher-level contacts and 1,797 complaints referred to companies' contact centres
- 2,062 investigations finalised

#### Against last period

- Total cases up 83%
- New complaints for investigation up 73%

### GAS

#### Cases Overall

- 3,888 cases in total
  - 3,818 natural gas and 70 LPG
- 187 enquiries and 3,701 complaints
- 843 new complaints for investigation
- 2,112 complaints referred to companies' higher-level contacts and 617 complaints referred to companies' contact centres
- 771 investigations finalised

#### Against last period

- Total cases up 63%
- New complaints for investigation up 65%

### DUAL FUEL

#### Cases Overall

- 232 cases in total
- 12 enquiries and 220 complaints
- 45 new complaints for investigation
- 129 complaints referred to companies' higher-level contacts and 37 complaints referred to companies' contact centres
- 36 investigations finalised

#### Against last period

- Total cases up 38%
- New complaints for investigation up 67%

### WATER

#### Cases overall

- 792 cases in total
- 144 enquiries and 648 complaints
- 118 new complaints for investigation
- 272 complaints referred to companies' higher-level contacts and 191 complaints referred to companies' contact centres
- 112 investigations finalised

#### Against last period

- Total cases up 3%
- New complaints for investigation down 17%

## ISSUES WATCH

JANUARY – JUNE 2008

### MOST COMMON ISSUES

#### Energy

Billing  
Transfer  
Credit

#### Water

Billing  
Land  
Supply

#### Billing sub-issues

- error, high, meter (electricity)
- error, delay, meter (gas)
- high, error, fees & charges (water)

#### Credit sub-issues (energy)

- payment difficulties
- disconnection

#### Transfer sub-issues (energy)

- without consent
- site ownership

#### Supply sub-issues (energy)

- off-supply—unplanned

#### Land sub-issues (water)

- network assets

EWOV and the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW aligned issues categories in July 2007. The Glossary in *Resolution 26* contains explanations for all categories.

*Resolution 26* also contains recent electricity, gas, dual fuel and water case studies.

### ISSUES TRENDS

#### Jan – June 2008 vs July – Dec 2007:

- 10,440 billing issues, up 107%
  - 1,943 billing error issues, up 168%
  - 1,600 high bill issues, up 57%
- 2,511 credit issues, up 52%
- 682 transfer without consent issues, up 59%
- 585 transfer issues relating to site ownership, up 350%
- 335 misleading marketing issues, up 20%
- Cases about actual disconnection for account arrears:
  - 175 electricity cases, down 10%
  - 161 natural gas cases, up 33%
- 72 wrongful disconnection payments made by retailers in cases we investigated, down from 84

**EWOV can help if you have a problem with an electricity, gas or water company which you can't resolve directly with that company. Our services are free and available to everyone.**

**Freecall: 1800 500 509**

Calls from restricted phone services — ring 12550 (Telstra reverse charges) and quote (03) 9649 7599 — EWOV will accept the reverse charges and the call cost. Calls from mobile phones may attract charges — we can ring you back.

**Freefax: 1800 500 549**

**Interpreter service: 131 450**

**National Relay Service: 133 677**

**Email: ewovinfo@ewov.com.au**

**Website: www.ewov.com.au**

**Postal address: GPO Box 469 Melbourne 3001**

*EWOV's mission is to receive, investigate and facilitate the resolution of complaints between consumers of electricity, gas and water services in Victoria and EWOV scheme participants.*