

EMBARGOED UNTIL 13 MAY 2010

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More customers seek an independent EWOV investigation

The mid-year report of the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) shows that Victorian customers lodged a total of 20,642 energy and water cases with EWOV in the second half of 2009 (18,149 complaints and 2,493 enquiries).

Resolution 28 reports that EWOV investigated 3,972 complaints in the second half of 2009 — the highest number of investigations for any six-month period since the scheme opened in 1996.

In releasing the report today, the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), Fiona McLeod, highlighted some of the actions EWOV took to deal with the complaint increases.

“1,744 of the 3,972 investigated complaints were identified, by us or the company, as able to be resolved quickly. Under a new process, we negotiated quick resolution of these complaints with the company, rather than move to a full investigation.

“Another 4,959 customers — whose complaint qualified for an EWOV investigation because they’d already had at least two contacts with their company — chose to give the company another opportunity for direct resolution, through our ‘assisted referral’ process,” Ms McLeod said.

“By working in this way, we avoided an investigations backlog within EWOV and minimised the risk of further inconvenience to customers. It also gave the companies another opportunity to reconnect with their customers, resolve the problem quickly and restore the customer/company relationship. That said, many of these complaints could, and should, have been resolved by the companies themselves, without the need for EWOV to become involved.”

In the second half of 2009, EWOV closed 91% of cases within 28 days, with 91% of investigated complaints conciliated. 1,067 payment plans were negotiated. 1,536 apologies were provided by companies. \$1,508,809 was provided in billing adjustments, fee waivers, debt reductions/waivers and other service payments.

Resolution 28, and *Resolution Bulletin*, a two-page summary of it, are both available 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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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 energy and water companies — fairly and independently. At 30 April 2010, EWOV had handled almost 215,000 Victorian electricity, gas and water cases, mostly residential.

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