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MEDIA RELEASE

A fall in energy and water cases, but greater complexity in casework

In 2016-17, the number of cases lodged with the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) by Victorian customers fell 11%. Cases were down across electricity, gas and water.

- › **EWOV registered 32,002 cases in 2016-17, down 11% from 36,152 in 2015-16.**
- › **Electricity cases fell 16%, gas cases fell 2% and water cases fell 12%.**
- › **The top customer complaint was energy disconnection/water restriction, followed by high bill, debt collection/credit default listing, provision at an existing connection, and billing error.**

In EWOV's 2017 Annual Report, Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) Cynthia Gebert attributes the overall fall to better complaint handling by energy and water companies, but remains concerned about the capacity of many customers to stay on supply.

"Affordability continues to loom large. EWOV is dealing with a high proportion of complex complaints, many of them from customers in vulnerable situations," said Ms Gebert.

"Often, this type of complaint involves very high arrears, which the customer cannot afford to pay. When direct negotiation between customers and companies about payment options isn't able to deliver an outcome that works for both parties, the complaint ends up at EWOV", Ms Gebert said.

"As the credit case studies in the report show, investigation of these types of complaints is very challenging and time-consuming – for us and for the company. It can also be very distressing for the customer."

Despite the overall falls in cases, EWOV reported increases over the past year in cases about:

- › provision of an energy or water connection (up 23%)
- › how company activities or network assets affect land or property (up 15%)
- › the actual supply of energy or water (up 11%)
- › marketing by electricity and gas retailers to gain new customers (up 8%).

The online version of EWOV's 2017 *Annual Report* is available at ewov.com.au

For more information or to arrange an interview with the Ombudsman, contact:

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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 2005. The Ombudsman has the power to investigate and resolve disputes between customers and their energy and water providers, fairly and independently. To 30 June 2017, EWOV had handled 620,224 Victorian electricity, gas and water cases, mostly residential.

