

**EMBARGOED UNTIL MIDNIGHT 11 OCTOBER 2022**

12 October 2022

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## **Cost of living pressures may signal shift in complaints**

While overall case numbers were down in 2021-22, the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) warns that price increases toward the end of the financial year could lead to sustained impacts for Victorians.

- **EWOV received 16,038 cases in 2021-22, down 18%**
- **\$1,541,815.57 went to customers in the form of billing adjustments, service payments and debt waivers through EWOV Investigations**
- **160 wrongful disconnection payment assessments were finalised, with \$126,064 paid to customers.**

“Developments in the energy sector are moving quickly,” says Ombudsman, Catherine Wolthuizen. “Rising energy prices are presenting new affordability challenges for consumers and small businesses who may struggle to pay electricity, gas and water bills.

“The 2022-23 financial year is likely to look very different to 2021-22. Cost of business pressures are coinciding with cost of living pressures and with expenses rising faster than incomes, complaints may also rise.

“Energy and water businesses do have important duties to help customers struggling to pay their bills, and have dedicated staff to provide this support. But consumers who find it hard to get the help they need can complain to their provider, and then to EWOV if they remain dissatisfied.”

In EWOV’s 2022 Annual Report, the Ombudsman also draws attention to case studies that show critical impacts of social and economic influences, such as family violence, and how they intersect with the operations of energy and water companies.

“Several of our case studies highlight the importance of clear and consistent policies and practices for energy and water companies, when it comes to issues such as family violence. The way companies interact with victim-survivors can have significant effects on their lives,” Ms Wolthuizen says.

We continued to engage with industry, regulators and consumers on how the energy transition is changing the sector and what it needs to do to adapt. As part of that work, we published *VOICES*, a collaborative report on consumer experience that found consumers are ready and willing to engage with new products and services but lack the support, including external dispute resolution, that would meet their expectations.

“We’re committed to engaging with the crucial changes to energy generation and consumption, and reports like *VOICES* are an important part of that job,” Ms Wolthuizen says.

The online version of EWOV’s 2022 *Annual Report*— with links to the full report, cases and complaint trends for individual energy and water companies and embedded network entities, and case studies around common issues — is available at [ewov.com.au](http://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, extending to natural gas cases in 1999, water in 2001, LPG in 2005 and embedded networks in 2018. The Ombudsman has the power to investigate and resolve disputes between customers and their energy and water companies, fairly and independently.**

