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MEDIA RELEASE

1 August power price rise prompts warning for fixed rate mortgage holders

With electricity prices increasing for many Victorian energy consumers from today, the Energy and Water Ombudsman in Victoria is urging people to seek help if they are struggling with power bills this winter.

Today's price rises are in addition to the 1 July increase for over half a million Australian households on standing offers. There are around 2 million Victorian electricity customers on market offers who may be subject to price rises from today.

The Ombudsman, Catherine Wolthuizen, had a particular message for mortgage holders who are coming off fixed interest rates to avoid defaulting on their energy bills.

"There are up to 900,000 Australian households coming off fixed interest rates at the same time as electricity prices are increasing, and during winter," Ms Wolthuizen said.

"If these households put off paying their energy and water bills, they could put their credit rating at risk, impacting their ability to refinance their mortgage or switch lender when their interest rates suddenly and steeply rise.

"We are seeing more people put off paying energy and water bills to cover rising housing costs, and they are risking their personal credit rating or even disconnection.

"But many people don't realise that there are options available to them so they don't have to risk their financial security or ration energy use over winter.

"Most energy consumers in Victoria who need help will be entitled to tailored assistance, like a payment plan based on what they can pay on a regular basis.

"Energy providers are required to regularly advise consumers about their 'best offer'. Consumers should check out their latest energy bill or call their provider and switch to the best plan."

Further actions that people can take include:

- Applying for the Victorian Government's Utility Relief Grant Scheme and the Energy Bill Relief payment which applies directly to eligible bills from 1 July. More information is available at www.energy.vic.gov.au
- Accessing the latest round of the \$250 Power Saving Bonus **before it ends on 31 August** by visiting Victorian Energy Compare at www.compare.energy.vic.gov.au
- Contacting your provider with complaints about energy and water bills. If you still need help, contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria on 1800 500 509 and at www.ewov.com.au

The Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria provides free, fair and independent dispute resolution for Victorian energy and water consumers.

Last financial year, the Ombudsman's office assisted 16,000 customers with complaints about energy and water companies, with \$1.5 million provided to customers through the dispute resolution process.

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