

Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

2011 Annual Report

15 years of contributions to the Victorian community



ENERGY AND WATER
OMBUDSMAN

Victoria **Listen Assist Resolve**

About EWOV

The Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) is an external dispute resolution scheme, operating on an independent industry-based Ombudsman model. Our services are free to customers.

We can assist with most issues that arise between customers and electricity, gas and water companies—including the provision and supply of a service, the failure to provide or supply a service, billing, credit, payment arrangements, disconnection and restriction, marketing, transfer, poles, wires, pipes, vegetation management and access to land.

We provide impartial advice, information and referral in response to enquiries.

We use alternative dispute resolution processes to resolve energy and water complaints impartially, informally and speedily. Our aim is to achieve fair and reasonable outcomes, having regard to good industry practice and the law.

From the cases we receive, we identify potential systemic issues and, as appropriate, report these to the relevant energy or water company and industry regulator.

We put information about energy and water complaints, issues and trends into the public arena.

We work with energy and water companies, regulators and consumer groups to drive customer service improvements and help prevent complaints.

Our policies and processes comply with the *Benchmarks for Industry-Based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes (National Benchmarks)* published in 1997 by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Science and Tourism. These *National Benchmarks* focus on the principles of accessibility, independence, fairness, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

About this report

EWOV's *Annual Report* is prepared and distributed in accordance with the Ombudsman's responsibility under the *EWOV Charter* and the *National Benchmarks*. This year's theme highlights EWOV's 15 years of contributions to the Victorian community.

Our vision

EWOV will be the most effective and highly regarded Ombudsman scheme in Australia and among the world's best practice schemes. We will be responsive to consumer and customer needs, and respected by energy and water providers, regulators and legislators. We will be an employer of choice.

Our mission

We will achieve our vision by:

- vigorously maintaining our independence and high professional standards
- living our cultural values
- implementing effective and efficient processes
- continuously benchmarking our performance against world's best practice and introducing improvement
- maintaining consumer awareness
- building customer capability
- working with energy and water providers to encourage the ownership and sustainable resolution of complaints
- developing our staff through training, and professional and personal mentoring
- valuing and acknowledging the contribution of our staff
- providing a safe, healthy and flexible working environment
- evaluating and applying new technologies
- looking ahead for social, economic and legislative issues likely to impact on EWOV's policies or processes.

Our guiding principles

Independence: impartial complaint resolution not advocacy

Access: ready access for individual consumers

Equity: fairness to all parties

Quality: highest professional standards

Effectiveness: high calibre people, supported by training and technology

Efficiency: optimal resource use

Community awareness: community awareness building

Linkages: effective stakeholder links and working relationships

15 years of contributions to the Victorian community

Set up in 1995 and 'opening for business' on 1 May 1996, we started out resolving complaints between electricity customers and their companies. In 1999, our services were extended to gas, from mid-2001 to water and from mid-2005 to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The number of electricity, gas and water companies participating in our scheme has grown from six to 66. By 30 June 2011, we had received almost 276,000 electricity, gas and water cases.

Over the years, several large increases in complaints and quickly-emerging complex issues have required agile responses from us to review and streamline our policies and processes. By doing so, we've helped minimise resolution delays for customers and we've helped energy and water companies bring about quicker and direct resolution.

The energy and water landscape has become increasingly complex, especially for customers. We've built our capability to translate complex technical and billing information into simple explanations to help customers understand the issues and work towards resolution of their complaints.

Our complaint handling role is a unique source of independent research about the energy and water customer experience. Through a regular e-newsletter, extranet and annual conference, we've shared our experience with energy and water companies, to help drive customer service improvements. Since 2004, we've facilitated 145 complaint handling workshops for company staff.

We've made 177 formal submissions to state and national regulatory, government and industry policy consultations.

We've been publicly reporting on individual electricity, gas and water companies since 2000. Response to our doing this—from all stakeholders, including the companies themselves—has been positive. Our aim has always been to ensure important information on customer complaints and systemic issues is accessible to customers, industry, government and regulators, in meaningful and useful ways.

When voltage variation complaints emerged early on, we reported the trend to regulators. This prompted a series of meetings with companies and regulators on power surge insurance and surge protection devices. The Ombudsman's Binding Decisions on voltage variation cases in 1996 prompted changes in company behaviour, and regulatory action to introduce a voltage variation compensation guideline.

In late 2001, concerned at receiving more cases about payment difficulties, we convened our first conference on financial hardship issues. Drawing together customer, industry, government and regulatory representatives, this event stimulated discussion and highlighted the leading role of water company hardship programs. It led to new thinking on the part of energy retailers who, over the next year, started to develop programs of their own. It also led regulators and government to change regulations to require energy and water companies to have such programs.

In 1998, one company took action in the Victorian Supreme Court, after the Ombudsman made Binding Decisions in three voltage variation cases. We defended and won the action, with the judge vindicating the Ombudsman's power to determine jurisdiction and finding the Binding Decisions to be sound.

We've tracked and reported on trends in energy supply disconnection for non-payment. Analysis we presented to the Essential Services Commission in 2004 indicated a systemic issue around electricity and gas customers having their supply disconnected, or being threatened with disconnection, despite evidence of their incapacity to pay their bills. In December 2004, the Victorian Government introduced a payment for wrongful energy disconnection, with accompanying immediate and significant reductions in electricity and gas disconnections.

Our contact with customers means we're sometimes the first to detect problems with energy and water company processes. By drawing potentially systemic issues to the attention of the companies, we've facilitated early action by them to address the problems. The benefits have gone beyond the customers who complained to us to thousands of customers who were also affected but didn't complain or didn't know about the problem. It's also enabled regulators to take action. In the past four years, we identified systemic energy issues affecting some 263,204 energy customers and 60,215 water customers.

Full electricity retail competition from January 2002, and gas retail competition from October 2002, brought choice of energy retailer for some two million residential and small business customers. Our reporting on energy retail competition trends has informed customers and helped industry, regulators and government address related issues. Consumer Affairs Victoria has issued several enforceable undertakings and agreements following our referrals of energy marketing complaints.

We're working with the other energy and water Ombudsman schemes around Australia towards consistency of our policies and procedures. This is benefitting companies, government, regulators and customers.

We've trained hundreds of our own staff in alternative dispute resolution methodologies—skills and knowledge they've carried into subsequent employment in all sectors of the community.

For the last six years, we've tracked financial redress from the complaints EWOV has investigated. In that time, energy and water companies have provided \$16,342,720 to customers in billing adjustments, fee waivers, payments in recognition of poor customer service, guaranteed service level payments and debt reductions/waivers.

Following approaches by community and government agencies, we've been pleased to become involved in some really innovative community projects—including the Committee for Melbourne's 'Utility Debt Spiral Project', Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services' 'Utilities Project for Women in Prison', the 'Transitional Housing Management Project' co-ordinated by WAYSS, outreach programs run by Consumer Affairs Victoria's Indigenous Consumers Unit and Footscray Community Legal Centre's 'Bring your bills days'. We've made 91 regional and rural community visits with a community education focus.

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A snapshot of 2010–11

Customers and issues

51,143 residential customers

whose main issues were

- high bills
- supply disconnection
- billing errors
- tariffs
- provision at an existing connection

3,035 business customers

whose main issues were

- estimated bills
- high bills
- billing errors
- backbills
- supply disconnection

111 not-for-profit/government customers

whose main issues were

- provision at an existing connection
- backbills
- tariffs
- estimated bills
- billing errors

More on pages 11-25

Cases

54,289 cases received

28% more than the year before
197% more than five years ago

4,709 enquiries received

16% more than the year before
15% more than five years ago

49,580 complaints received

29% more than the year before
250% more than five years ago

48,785 complaints finalised

28% more than the year before
241% more than five years ago

11,960 complaints investigated

51% more than the year before
131% more than five years ago

More on pages 26-32

Outcomes

11,164 complaint investigations finalised

44% more than the year before

110% more than five years ago

9,642 investigations conciliated (86%)

5,212 apologies provided to customers

3,601 payment plans arranged

\$3,448,051 in redress for customers

\$2,042,033 in billing adjustments

\$980,783 in recognition of customer service issues

\$303,014 in debt reductions/waivers

\$91,601 in waived fees

\$30,620 in guaranteed service level payments

More on pages 33-35

By industry

37,829 electricity cases

31% more than the year before

218% more than five years ago

50% billing

15% credit

13% transfer

More on pages 41-43

13,272 gas cases

25% more than the year before

241% more than five years ago

38% billing

21% transfer

21% credit

More on pages 44-46

2,230 water cases

19% more than the year before

50% more than five years ago

59% billing

8% land

8% credit

More on pages 47-49

93 dual fuel cases

865 other industry cases

Reflections on 2010-11

From the Chair



The Chairperson of EWOV Limited,
Tony Staley and the Ombudsman,
Fiona McLeod

2010-11 was the most difficult year yet for EWOV.

The Board focused on working with the Ombudsman to ensure that, as customers contacted the scheme in increased numbers, they were provided with a satisfactory level of service.

Independent surveying of customers indicates this aim was achieved.

However, in 2010–11, we did not see signs that case volumes would fall, so 2011–12 may turn out to be equally or more difficult.

Since my appointment as Chairperson of EWOV Limited in November 1998, I have seen our scheme respond positively and effectively to challenge after challenge. As you will see, this year's Annual Report reflects on some of EWOV's significant contributions to the community over its 15 years of operation.

Not surprisingly, the expanded EWOV organisation of 2011 is somewhat different to the one I knew back in 1998, and the transition to a medium-sized organisation is bringing a whole new set of challenges. The Board is very aware of this and will be supporting the Ombudsman and her team as they take the resourcing decisions necessary to ensure this transition is successful.

We were pleased to see the move to new EWOV premises achieved so smoothly, a compliment to the enormous amount of planning the staff put into it.

We were also pleased that the early reconciliation of scheme participant fees was handled so well by the Ombudsman and EWOV's Business Manager. Feedback from scheme participants has been very positive.

The Board tracks developments in the broader energy and water landscape which are likely to affect the EWOV scheme. A National Energy Customer Framework will be implemented from 1 July 2012, bringing new national rules and changed regulatory responsibilities. Important to the successful implementation of this new regulatory framework will be equipping

customers and their representatives to resolve complaints directly with their energy and water companies. To this end, we support the Ombudsman's view that EWOV's communications should increasingly focus on building customer capability, with less focus on building awareness of our service, which is already very good.

We saw some changes in the Board during the year. Gas industry director Karen Moses, Origin Energy, resigned in November 2010 after five years' service. Electricity industry director David McNeil, AGL Energy, resigned in April 2011 after one and a half years. The Board extends its appreciation to both Karen and David for their significant contributions.

In February 2011, we welcomed a new gas industry director in Christina Wilson of Origin Energy and, as I write, the appointment of a new electricity industry director is pending. For my part, I was delighted to be reappointed in November 2010 for a further three years.

As well as being rapidly changing industries, energy and water services are critical to the day-to-day lives of all Victorians. The importance of EWOV's role is widely acknowledged. The Board is very engaged in the challenges presented and again congratulates the Ombudsman and her team on excellent work.

While it falls outside the year of this report, I must make mention of a most significant matter. The Ombudsman recently advised the Board that she was resigning as of early next year. She is not retiring, but is to pursue non-executive directorships. Fiona is wise, passionate, committed and scrupulously fair and independent. She has been a joy to work with and leaves with the heartfelt thanks of the Board and the staff. We believe that she has been Australia's greatest Ombudsman.



Hon Tony Staley AO
Chairperson, EWOV Limited Board

By 30 June 2011, EWOV had received almost 276,000 electricity, gas and water cases. Average monthly case receipt has increased from around 246 cases in the early years to 555 cases in our 5th year, 1,480 cases in our 10th year and 4,521 cases in our 15th year.

From the Ombudsman

1 May 2011 marked 15 years of full operation for EWOV. It's been quite a journey, with no year unfolding quite the same as the year before.

I'm enormously proud of the contributions the EWOV team has made to the independent and impartial resolution of energy and water complaints and to the broader energy and water landscape, in Victoria and nationally. The foldout introduction to this year's report illustrates very well the multi-faceted and influential nature of EWOV's role—the resolution of individual complaints, the provision of information and advice, the identification and reporting of systemic issues and our work with stakeholders to prevent complaints.

Our 2010-11 year

2010-11 was a very big year for us. In saying that, I'm conscious I've said the same thing about earlier years as well. The fact is that each year of our operation, as well as unfolding differently to the year before, has been harder than the one before.

Cases increased to 54,289 (up 28% from the year before). 4,709 of these were enquiries (up 16%) and 49,580 were complaints (up 29%). Driving the growth in complaints were customer concerns about rising energy and water prices, associated affordability issues, systemic billing issues, the marketing and transfer practices of second tier energy retailers, energy retail issues generally and problems around solar installations and smart meters. We investigated 51% more complaints that the year before, which was 12% more than projected in our 2010-11 business plan.

Overall, our performance throughout the year was high, despite some operational challenges. We moved office in late 2010. This was a huge logistical exercise, but it's wonderful to have enough space to accommodate us after some months in very cramped conditions. However, it took us a long time to recruit suitable staff when our cases started to go up again. For much of the 2010-11 year, we operated with fewer staff than

we needed to properly manage the incoming complaint volumes.

This affected our capacity to close complaints in line with some of the key performance indicators (KPIs) set by the Board. That said, we finalised 11,164 complaint investigations, 44% more than the year before and we kept our aged complaint volumes well within KPI targets. We also maintained active programs of stakeholder engagement, contribution to public policy consultations, community education activities and complaint handling training for scheme participant staff.

Our strategic plan sets out our goals and KPIs in six focus areas—customer service, reach/influence, human resources, innovation, finance and scheme participant management. On pages 36 to 40, there's a summary of our performance across those six areas.

Our people and organisation

In May 2011, Aon Hewitt undertook a survey of EWOV staff. This survey focused on employee engagement—defined as how much people want to (and actually do) improve business results. Three key behaviours indicate strong engagement—say, stay and strive. With 76% of EWOV staff responding, it has enabled us to measure current employee engagement and benchmark ourselves against 'best employers'. I'm pleased with our overall engagement score of 64% as a very good first result. It's one percentage point off the best employer range and positions us well to join the ranks of 'best employers' next year.

On the EWOV organisation, we've now reached what the literature calls, the 'magic 150'. This is the staffing point at which the nature of an organisation is said to change. Management, supervision, communication and connectedness become higher order challenges and it's exponentially harder to connect with, learn from and collaborate with each other. We've been feeling this very strongly.

Over the next 12 months, we'll be reviewing our case handling and other functions to ensure we're structured the right way for the size of organisation we've become. This will include assessing how our ways of working together need to change in response to the organisation's growth. The review will come up with proposed solutions in the areas of people, policies, processes and systems.

Publicity driving case increases

Over the years, I've spoken about different drivers of EWOV case increases. There's no doubt customers are increasingly better informed about some aspects of their energy and water service and more aware of their rights. On top of this, barely a day passes when something about energy or water isn't in the news. It's no surprise, therefore, to see customers questioning energy or water company or government actions more, looking to better understand and assert their rights, and pursuing issues they perceive to be problems. This is not a bad thing of course, but it has had (and continues to have) a flow-on effect on EWOV cases, as companies struggle to satisfy customer complaints.

An example from the past year is the many Victorians who have contacted EWOV about the State Government-mandated rollout by electricity distributors of advanced interval meters (commonly called smart meters). While it's said that more technologically advanced metering will bring a range of benefits for the electricity companies, their customers and the community, it's our experience that new technology confuses and alarms some people. The meter rollout has generated more requests for information, more concerns about bills and a range of other issues of complaint around changes to existing electricity installations. Some of these we were able to investigate and some not. You'll find more about smart meter complaints on pages 24 and 25.

It's been a similar situation with solar power cases. Again, we've been able to address customer enquiries with independent information and referral. Some complaints we've had to refer to Consumer Affairs Victoria—for example where the customer was complaining about the actions of a solar installation company, not an electricity retailer or distributor. Other complaints we've investigated reveal issues around Premium Feed-in Tariffs, systems problems with the application of solar credits and delays in general. There's more about solar power complaints on pages 24 and 25 also.

We believe that better informed staff in the call centres of electricity retailers and distributors, and better targeted public information, would have meant quite a number of these customers didn't feel the need to contact EWOV at all.

Customer financial hardship

The issue of customer financial hardship is still very obvious in our cases. Given energy and water are essential services, this is of great concern. Our Credit issues category is about customers being able to pay their bills and stay on supply. In 2010-11, 8,566 customers raised Credit as their main issue of complaint and a further 6,029 customers raised Credit as an associated issue. Electricity, gas and water prices are up. People are facing other cost of living pressures. Many of the customers who contacted us were concerned about paying their bills and making ends meet. It was also evident that energy retailers were taking a harder line on account arrears and pursuit of energy debt.

2,396 customers raised debt collection as their main Credit issue and 4,079 customers (mostly energy customers) raised disconnection/restriction as their main Credit issue. We arranged 3,601 payment plans, 46% more than in 2009-10 and 254% more than five years ago. On pages 22 and 23, we take a look at some of the stories behind the credit complaints we received over the past year.

Similarly, on pages 20 and 21, we take a look at some of the stories behind the high bill complaints we received. Billing remains the single biggest issue of customer complaint and, within that, high bills. Many things can be at the heart of a suspected high bill. Increasingly, we're finding that what the customer presents as a high bill issue is essentially one of affordability. Other more traditional causes were problems within company billing systems (often due to system upgrades), meter reading errors, estimated bills and increased usage. Emerging causes include the installation of a smart meter (often because the new meter reads more accurately than the old one) and feed-in credits related to solar installations not being applied to customer accounts.

Customer service shortcomings

In our mid-year publication, *Resolution 29*, I highlighted the issue of poor customer service on the part of energy and water companies. In 2010-11, 495 customers raised Customer Service as their main issue of complaint and a further 17,934 customers raised it as an associated issue. This was almost double the number of customers who raised the issue of Customer Service the year before. It's clear that customers continue to be frustrated by failure to respond appropriately (and in some cases at all) to their concerns, failure to consult or inform them, and provision of incorrect advice or information.

Commercial 'consumer help'

Using slogans such as 'eliminate your debt' and 'repair your credit rating', credit repair companies make much of offering people a quick fix for their financial problems. We're concerned for vulnerable consumers and urge people to think carefully before signing up to these commercial 'help' services, when other assistance is available to them through their utility companies and government at no charge. The State Government's MoneyHelp website (<http://www.moneyhelp.org.au/>) is a good source of information on available assistance.

Customers should also ask their electricity, gas or water company about assistance available to them through its hardship program.

Similarly, as the energy landscape becomes more and more complex, we're seeing the emergence of more commercial price comparison services. These services, usually online, offer customers a way to cut through the complexity and the paperwork to get the 'best deal' on their electricity and/or gas. Customers should be aware that these price comparators don't necessarily offer the full range of retailer contracts.

We believe the emergence of these new 'players' in the energy market needs careful regulatory oversight.

Thank you

I often receive unsolicited feedback about the good work being done by members of the EWOV team—some of this comes from customers who've contacted us with a complaint and some comes from the other community, government, regulatory and industry stakeholders with whom we come into regular contact. EWOV is very fortunate to have professional, innovative staff, focused on providing good customer service and making worthwhile contributions to the community. It was a challenging 12 months and staff worked well to deliver on the strategic goals and objectives set by the Board. Thank you to them all.

Thank you also to EWOV Chairperson, Tony Staley, and the EWOV Board for their ongoing support, in particular the focus on ensuring our scheme is properly resourced to handle its growing caseloads and maintain its high standards.



Fiona McLeod

Energy and Water Ombudsman
(Victoria)

Governance

EWOV Limited is a company limited by guarantee. The company is legally separate from, and independent of, the energy and water companies and government.

The principal activity of EWOV Limited is to receive, investigate and facilitate the resolution of customer complaints about electricity, gas and water services. For this purpose, the company has set up an external dispute resolution scheme—the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV)—and has appointed an Ombudsman.

The roles of the Board and the Ombudsman are complementary. The Ombudsman is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the EWOV external dispute resolution scheme. The Board is responsible for the business affairs and property of the company, including corporate governance, the setting of budgets, risk management, strategic planning and ensuring the Ombudsman's independence.

The Board has nine directors—an independent chairperson, four consumer directors nominated by the Essential Services Commission, and four industry directors elected by the energy and water companies which are the EWOV Limited Participants. At 30 June 2011, one industry director position was vacant and an election process underway.

Hon. Tony Staley AO

Chairperson,
appointed 30 November 1998
Made an Officer of the Order of Australia in January 2007, Tony Staley is also Chairman of the internet regulator, auDA, the Cooperative Research Centres Association of Australia, and the Board of Advice, Partners in Performance International. A former Commonwealth Government Minister, he is educated in law and political science.

Carolyn Bond

Consumer Director,
appointed 27 June 2007
Co-Chief Executive Officer of the Consumer Action Law Centre, Carolyn Bond brings to the Board over 20 years experience working in the consumer advocacy field. A past Chair of the Consumers' Federation of Australia, she represents consumer interests on a range of bodies.

Neil Brennan

Industry Director,
appointed 22 August 2002
Managing Director, Central Highlands Water, Neil Brennan has over 25 years experience in the water industry. A Past President of the Institute of Water Administration, he is also a director of Goldfields Superpipe Joint Venture Company and of the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project.

Alternate: Stephen Bird, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Water Industry Association

Richard Gross

Industry Director,
appointed 14 December 2001
Richard Gross is General Manager Regulation for Powercor Australia Ltd. A member of the original Electricity Industry Ombudsman (Victoria) Council, he brings to the Board extensive experience in network revenue/pricing, financial planning and analysis.

David Headberry

Consumer Director,
appointed 20 June 2002
David Headberry is Managing Director, Headberry Partners P/L, which specialises in assisting energy customers secure low-cost, reliable, energy supplies and providing customer input to government and regulatory reviews and investigations on energy supply issues. A qualified engineer, he is also the Public Officer for Major Energy Users Inc, a national group which represents the views of major energy consumers.

John Mumford

Consumer Director,
appointed 30 June 2004
John Mumford is a financial counsellor at Bass Coast Regional Health in Wonthaggi. He brings to the Board a strong background in grassroots consumer advocacy, specialising in issues affecting rural consumers.

Mark O'Brien

Consumer Director,
appointed 30 June 2004
Chief Executive Officer of the Tenants Union of Victoria, Mark O'Brien has worked in tenancy advice and advocacy, in both paid and unpaid capacities, since 1987. He previously worked in government and the construction industry as a civil and structural draftsman.

Christina Wilson

Industry Director,
appointed 10 February 2011
As Retail Executive – Customer Sales and Operations, Christina leads Origin Energy's consumer facing business. She joined Origin Energy in 2009 from senior roles in the banking and retail sectors. A chemical engineer by profession, Christina commenced her career as a process engineer and quality leader.



The Hon. Tony Staley AO



Carolyn Bond



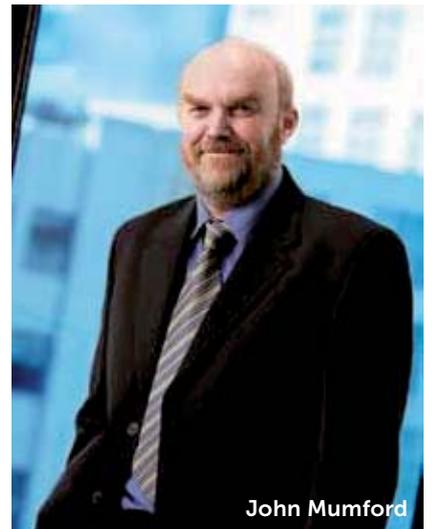
Neil Brennan



Richard Gross



David Headberry



John Mumford

Karen Moses

Industry Director,
*appointed 20 October 2005;
resigned 19 November 2010*

David McNeil

Industry Director,
*appointed 21 August 2008;
resigned 14 April 2011*

Christopher See

Company Secretary,
appointed 21 October 2008



Mark O'Brien



Christina Wilson

Scheme participants

66 EWOV Limited participants at 30 June 2011

21 electricity retailers

AGL Sales Pty Ltd
Aurora Energy Pty Ltd
Australian Power & Gas Pty Ltd
CitiPower Pty #
Click Energy Pty Ltd
Country Energy*
Diamond Energy ##
Dodo Power & Gas Pty Ltd
EnergyAustralia (TRUenergy)
Integral Energy Australia **
Lumo Energy Australia Pty Ltd +
Momentum Energy Pty Ltd
Neighbourhood Energy Pty Ltd
Origin Energy Electricity Limited
Powerdirect Pty Ltd (AGL)
Powerdirect Australia Pty Ltd
Red Energy Pty Ltd
Simply Energy
SP AusNet (SPI Electricity Pty Ltd)
Sun Retail Pty Ltd <
TRUenergy Pty Ltd

5 electricity distributors

CitiPower Pty
Jemena Energy Networks Pty Ltd
Powercor Australia Limited
SP AusNet [SPI Electricity Pty Ltd]
United Energy Distribution Pty Ltd

2 electricity transmission companies

Basslink Pty Ltd
SP AusNet (SPI PowerNet)

10 natural gas retailers

AGL Sales Pty Ltd
AGL Sales (Queensland) Pty Ltd
Australian Power & Gas Pty Ltd
EnergyAustralia
Lumo Energy Australia Pty Ltd +
Origin Energy Retail Ltd
Origin Energy (Vic) Pty Ltd
Red Energy Pty Ltd
Simply Energy
TRUenergy Pty Ltd [SPI Retail Pty Ltd]

4 natural gas distributors

Envestra Limited
Multinet Gas Pty Ltd
SP AusNet [SPI Networks (Gas) Pty Ltd]
Vic Gas Distribution Pty Ltd

5 liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) retailers

Elgas Limited
Origin Energy Retail Ltd
OE-Powergas Pty Ltd
Supagas Pty Ltd
Wesfarmers Kleenheat Gas Pty Ltd

3 metropolitan water retailers

City West Water Limited
South East Water Limited
Yarra Valley Water Limited

1 metropolitan water wholesaler

Melbourne Water

11 regional urban water corporations

Barwon Region Water
Central Gippsland Region Water °
Central Highlands Region Water
Coliban Region Water
East Gippsland Region Water
Goulburn Valley Region Water
North East Region Water
South Gippsland Region Water
Wannon Region Water
Western Region Water
Westernport Region Water

2 rural water corporations

Goulburn-Murray Rural Water
Gippsland and Southern Rural Water

2 rural urban water corporations

Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
Lower Murray Urban and Rural Water

NOTES

CitiPower remains an electricity retail participant, although Origin Energy purchased its retail electricity business in 2002. In February 2011, CitiPower notified us that it had relinquished its retail licence. It is serving out EWOV's required 12 months scheme participation notice.

* Country Energy was purchased by Origin Energy in March 2011.

Diamond Energy joined EWOV in December 2010.

** Following its purchase by Origin Energy, Integral Energy relinquished its electricity licence in May 2011. It is serving out EWOV's required 12 months scheme participation notice.

° Central Gippsland Region Water Corporation is commonly known as Gippsland Water.

+ In July 2010, Victoria Electricity Pty Ltd became known as Lumo Energy Australia Pty Ltd.

< Sun Retail Pty Ltd (Origin) remains an electricity retail participant, but is not active.

About the customers

In 2010-11, we assisted 51,143 residential customers (94%), 3,035 business customers (6%) and 111 not-for-profit or government customers (<1%).

76% were from metropolitan Melbourne and 24% were from regional and rural Victoria. 52% of contacts with us were made by women and 48% by men.

89% of customers contacted us by phone, 9% by email or through our website and 2% wrote to us or faxed.

Asked how they found out about us, 33% of customers said they were already aware of our services and 15% said they found out about us from their electricity, gas or water company. Word of mouth followed at 9% and our community outreach at 8%.

Asked why they contacted us, 68% of customers said they were dissatisfied with the outcome of the contact they'd had with their company. 13% were referred to us or preferred to contact us directly.

Figure 7 tracks trends in EWOV cases received from residential customers in each Victorian Council and Shire area for the past three years. In 2010-11, the parts of Victoria with the highest rates of EWOV cases (energy and water combined) per 1,000 of population were again City of Banyule, Mount Alexander Shire and Hepburn Shire.

Fig 1: Residential, business and other customers

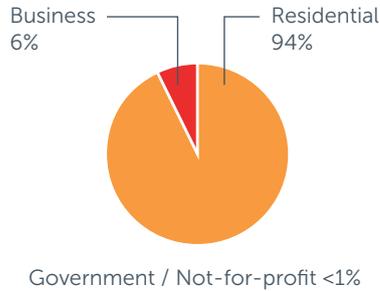


Fig 2: Metropolitan and regional/rural

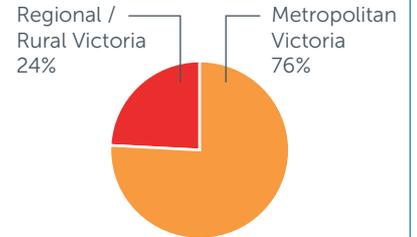


Fig 3: Females and males

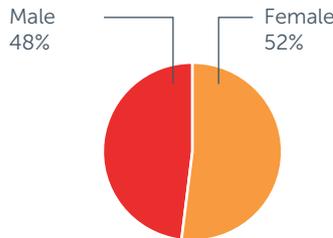


Fig 4: How customers contacted us

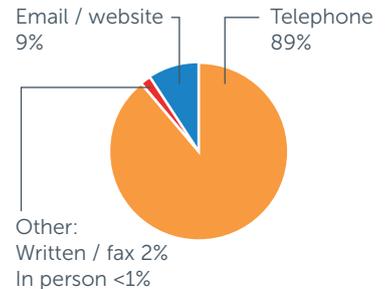


Fig 5: How customers found out about us



Fig 6: Why customers contacted us



About the customers continued

Fig 7: By Council/Shire, EWOV cases received from residential customers

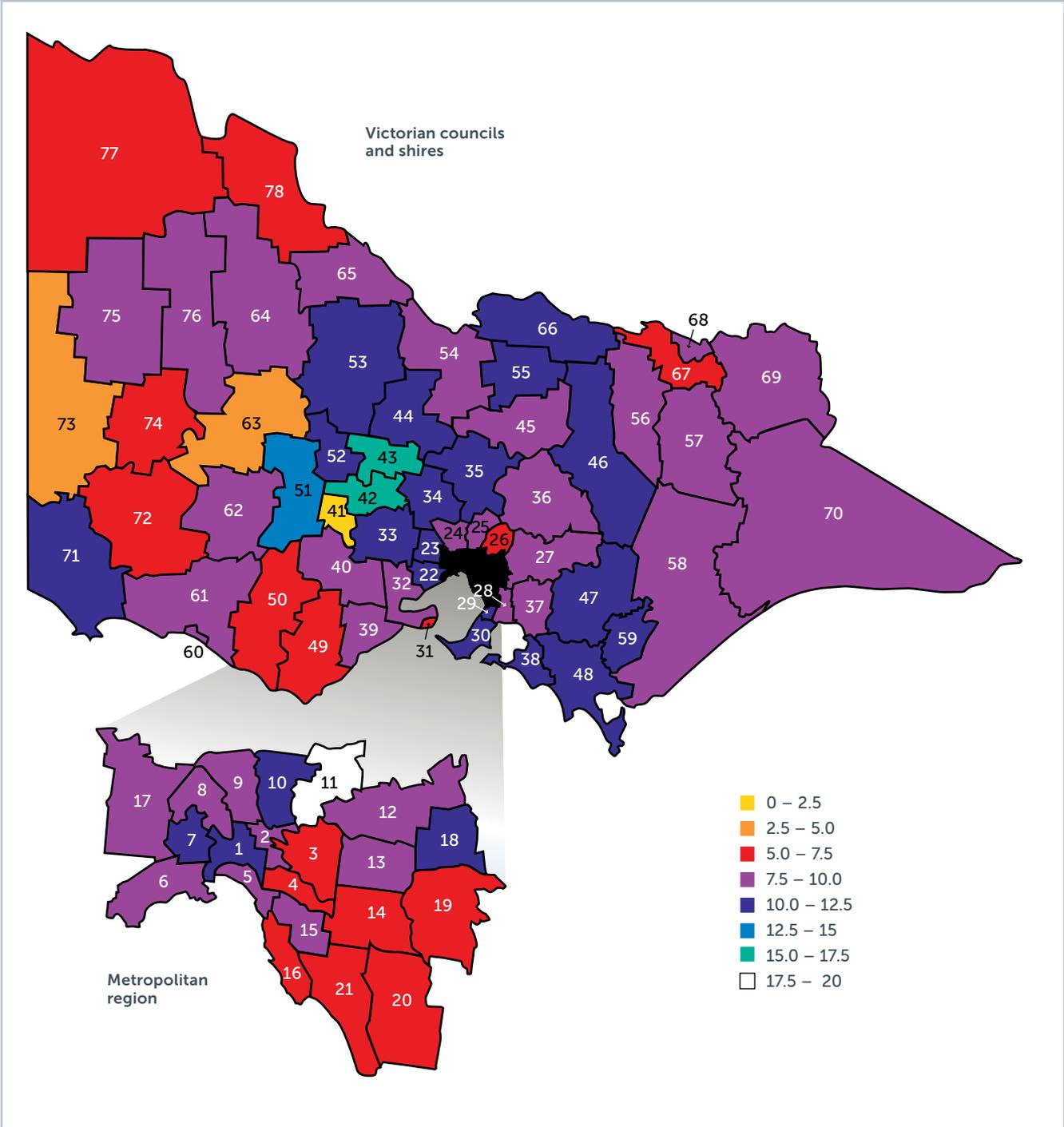
Council/Shire area	map no.	Population 2010-11	Residential cases 2010-11	Residential cases per 1,000 population		
				2010-11	2009-10	2008-09
Alpine S	57	12,690	105.00	8.27	6.90	4.26
Ararat RC	62	11,752	113.00	9.62	8.42	5.49
Ballarat C	41	91,787	103.00	1.12	0.75	0.71
Banyule C	11	121,409	2216.00	18.25	12.53	11.31
Bass Coast S	38	28,802	343.00	11.91	7.90	6.41
Baw Baw S	47	40,114	458.00	11.42	8.10	6.31
Bayside C	16	94,618	708.00	7.48	7.45	9.64
Benalla & Mansfield	46	21,712	224.00	10.32	8.89	5.71
Boroondara C	3	165,393	962.50	5.82	4.76	4.06
Brimbank C	17	181,115	1694.00	9.35	6.26	5.94
Buloke S	64	7,051	59.00	8.37	6.36	3.83
Campaspe S	54	38,339	381.00	9.94	8.50	5.96
Cardinia S	37	64,310	607.00	9.44	5.46	4.62
Casey C	28	238,336	1832.00	7.69	5.37	4.28
Central Goldfields S	52	12,766	141.00	11.04	9.07	6.92
Colac Otway S	49	21,448	147.00	6.85	7.11	6.62
Corangamite S	50	17,270	96.00	5.56	5.07	4.46
Darebin C	10	137,360	1638.00	11.92	9.28	9.08
East Gippsland S	70	42,742	417.00	9.76	6.56	6.28
Frankston C	29	125,728	1557.00	12.38	10.28	9.97
Gannawarra S	65	11,630	104.00	8.94	7.78	5.42
Glen Eira C	15	133,807	1161.00	8.68	7.88	9.28
Glenelg S	71	20,871	219.00	10.49	6.97	5.56
Golden Plains S	40	17,681	153.00	8.65	5.70	4.62
Greater Bendigo C	44	100,054	1153.50	11.53	8.19	5.28
Greater Dandenong C	20	135,243	949.50	7.02	6.21	6.73
Greater Geelong C	32	211,841	1906.00	9.00	6.93	6.02
Greater Shepparton C	55	61,014	682.50	11.19	8.88	6.13
Hepburn S	42	14,489	227.00	15.67	11.26	8.43
Hindmarsh S	75	6,179	60.00	9.71	6.31	3.56
Hobsons Bay C	6	86,121	765.00	8.88	6.33	6.18
Horsham RC	74	19,648	127.00	6.46	7.00	3.51
Hume C	24	162,260	1463.00	9.02	7.27	7.65
Indigo S	67	15,710	113.00	7.19	5.76	4.58
Kingston C	21	143,727	1031.00	7.17	6.66	7.81
Knox C	19	153,988	1090.00	7.08	5.08	5.01
Latrobe C	59	73,982	779.00	10.53	7.76	5.81
Loddon S	53	8,073	93.00	11.52	7.66	8.71
Macedon Ranges S	34	40,939	436.00	10.65	7.69	6.18
Manningham C	12	116,983	963.00	8.23	6.16	6.89
Maribyrnong C	7	69,825	739.00	10.58	7.67	9.18
Maroondah C	18	104,297	1071.00	10.27	6.10	5.30
Melbourne C	1	89,759	991.00	11.04	7.76	7.69
Melton S	23	92,465	1070.00	11.57	7.02	5.71
Mildura RC	77	53,122	382.00	7.19	5.31	5.30
Mitchell S	35	33,374	345.00	10.34	7.49	5.00
Moira S	66	28,752	289.00	10.05	7.32	6.03
Monash C	14	172,740	1165.00	6.74	6.31	7.05
Moonee Valley C	8	108,909	1004.00	9.22	8.57	9.46
Moorabool S	33	27,247	340.00	12.48	8.56	6.61
Moreland C	9	145,900	1207.00	8.27	6.71	6.46
Mornington Peninsula S	30	145,356	1661.00	11.43	10.19	10.13
Mount Alexander S	43	18,116	309.00	17.06	17.40	9.05
Moyno S	61	16,405	138.00	8.41	6.55	5.27
Murrindindi S	36	14,369	135.00	9.40	6.69	4.51
Nillumbik S	26	63,181	407.00	6.44	3.89	3.79
Northern Grampians S	63	12,322	48.00	3.90	3.47	2.88
Port Phillip C	5	93,752	919.00	9.80	8.36	8.69
Pyrenees S	51	6,800	88.00	12.94	7.48	7.21
Queenscliffe B	31	3,256	18.00	5.53	4.30	6.14
South Gippsland S	48	27,165	295.00	10.86	7.45	6.02
Southern Grampians S	72	17,451	126.00	7.22	6.88	5.19
Stonnington C	4	97,711	568.00	5.81	5.90	5.00
Strathbogrie S	45	9,855	87.50	8.88	6.04	5.53
Surf Coast S	39	24,442	212.00	8.67	6.24	3.40
Swan Hill RC	78	21,765	148.00	6.80	5.24	5.61
Towong S	69	6,273	49.00	7.81	4.86	4.38
Wangaratta RC	56	28,117	254.00	9.03	7.13	6.46
Warrnambool C	60	32,712	261.00	7.98	7.17	5.46
Wellington S	58	42,576	407.00	9.56	7.07	5.00
West Wimmera S	73	4,597	22.00	4.79	4.13	2.83
Whitehorse C	13	153,407	1262.50	8.23	6.21	6.22
Whittlesea C	25	139,250	1084.00	7.78	4.31	3.15
Wodonga RC	68	35,064	316.00	9.01	6.45	4.66
Wyndham C	22	132,793	1418.00	10.68	6.25	4.12
Yarra C	2	76,402	717.00	9.38	5.36	5.70
Yarra Ranges S	27	146,886	1344.00	9.15	6.05	4.94
Yarriambiack S	76	7,658	60.00	7.83	7.18	5.48

NOTES:

Excludes residential cases where the customer didn't disclose a Victorian suburb/postcode or was from interstate or overseas, as well as non-residential cases.

* Populations are based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

^ Cases allocated to Council/Shire areas based on the suburb/postcode. Where a suburb/postcode bridges more than one Council/Shire, cases have been divided across those Councils/Shires. The sum of cases for each Council/Shire has then been rounded to the nearest whole number.



About the issues

OUR ISSUES CATEGORIES – A QUICK GUIDE

Billing: billing and payment processes

Credit: unpaid bills

Customer Service: service received or not received

Land: effect on property of company activities or network assets

Marketing: how energy retailers go about winning new customers

Provision: connection of a property to the energy or water network

Supply: physical delivery of the energy or water service

Transfer: switching an account to a new energy retailer

Some customers contact us with one (main) issue of complaint.

Others raise a main issue, together with associated issues. For example, their main issue may be a high bill, with associated issues of imminent disconnection of supply and poor customer service from the retailer when they tried to resolve the problem directly.

We record the customer's main issue and any associated issues they may raise.

Billing was the main issue for 46% of customers.

In 2010-11, 25,243 customers raised Billing as their main issue of complaint. A further 13,137 customers raised Billing as an associated issue.

Within the Billing category, the main issue raised by electricity, gas and water customers was high bills.

After high bills:

- electricity customers complained about tariffs, billing errors, billing delays and estimated bills
- gas customers complained about billing errors, estimated bills, backbills and billing delays
- water customers complained about fees and charges, billing errors, meters and backbills.

Residential customers were most concerned about high bills, billing errors and tariffs. Business customers were most concerned about estimated bills, high bills and billing errors.

On pages 20 and 21, we look behind the high bill complaints at the causes and highlight the stories of some of the customers whose high bill complaints we investigated in 2010-11.

Credit was the main issue for 16% of customers.

Our Credit category is about the capacity of customers to pay their bills and stay on supply.

In 2010-11, 8,566 customers raised Credit as their main issue of complaint. A further 6,029 customers raised Credit as an associated issue.

98% of Credit issues were raised by energy customers, with issues about electricity or gas disconnection for account arrears, payment difficulties and debt collection all higher than the year before.

4,079 customers raised disconnection/restriction of supply for account arrears as their main Credit issue. A further 492 customers raised it as an associated issue. Cases about disconnection or restriction (actual and imminent) for account arrears were up 58% from the year before.

2,396 customers raised debt collection as their main Credit issue. A further 1,758 customers raised it as an associated issue. We think this reflects a harder line being taken by energy retailers on account arrears and pursuit of energy debt.

2,085 customers raised payment difficulties as their main Credit issue. A further 3,778 customers raised it as an associated issue. We arranged 3,601 payment plans, 46% more than we arranged the year before and 254% more than five years ago.

On pages 22 and 23, we take a look behind the credit complaints to highlight the stories of some of the customers whose credit complaints we investigated in 2010-11.

Transfer was the main issue for 14% of customers.

Transfer is an energy issue only. It's about the process of switching an electricity or natural gas account from one energy retailer to another. In 2010-11, 7,593 customers raised Transfer as their main issue of complaint. A further 3,168 customers raised Transfer as an associated issue.

The main Transfer issue for both electricity and gas customers was contract terms—70% of the time the customer was disputing contract termination fees.

After contract terms, electricity customers complained about:

- transfer without consent, most commonly after door-to-door sales and, to a slightly lesser extent, phone sales—customers found their account transferred to another retailer even though they said they hadn't agreed to that—often these cases were closely linked to misleading or pressure sales behaviour; sometimes they were linked to customer confusion around what they were agreeing to
- transfer in error—for some reason other than marketing, the customer found their account was with a different retailer—billing systems problems, use of incorrect meter details and the customer's quoting of an incorrect address were all common causes.

After contract terms, natural gas customers complained about:

- site ownership—often their account was transferred based on an incorrect meter number or site address
- transfer in error—similar to electricity complaints of this nature, the customer's account was transferred to another retailer due to a billing systems problem, incorrect meter details or the quoting of an incorrect address.

Fig 8: The main issues customers raised with us

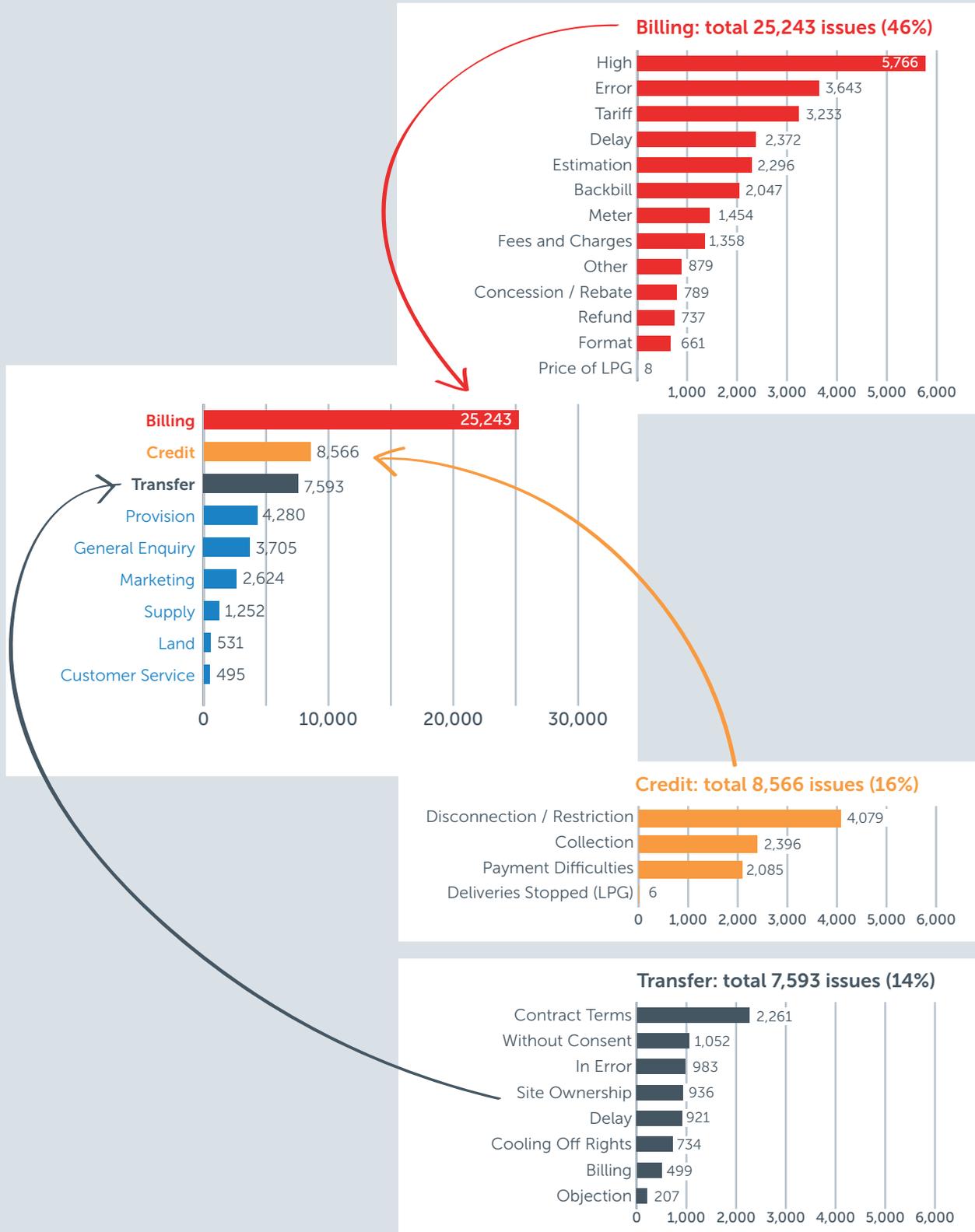
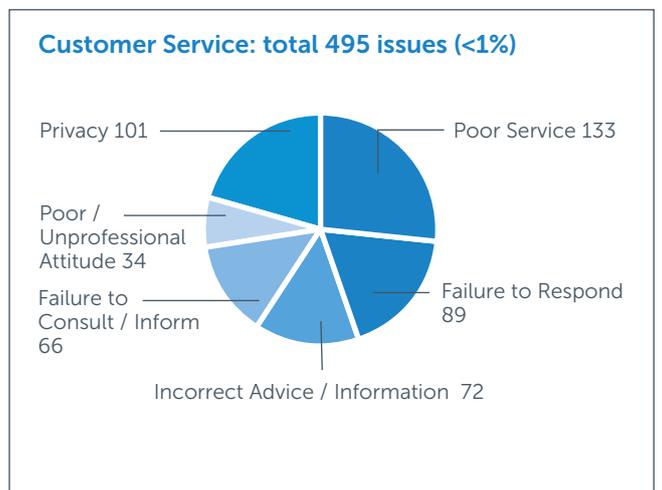
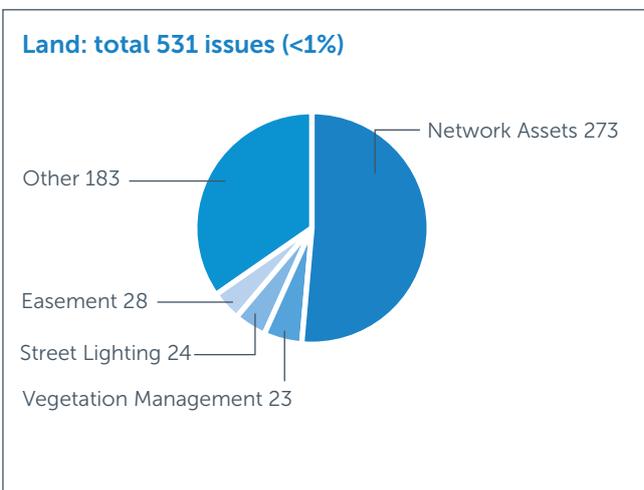
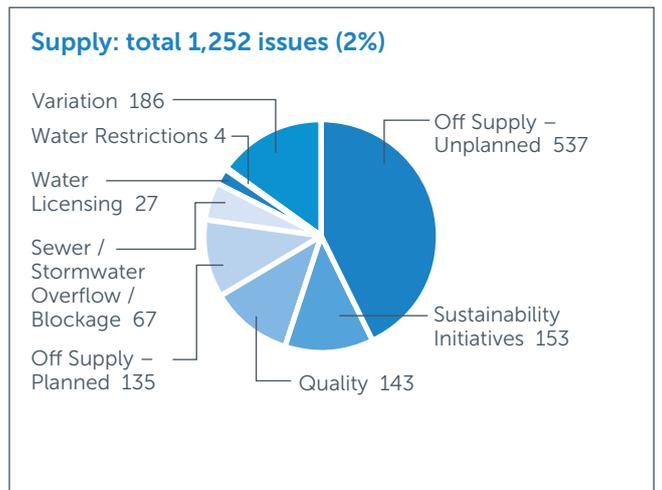
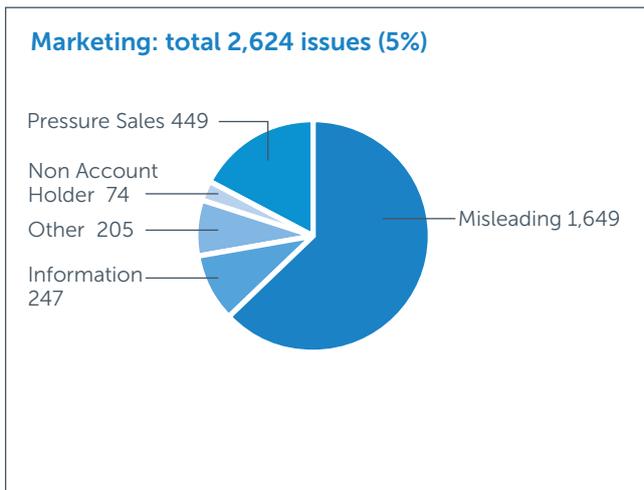
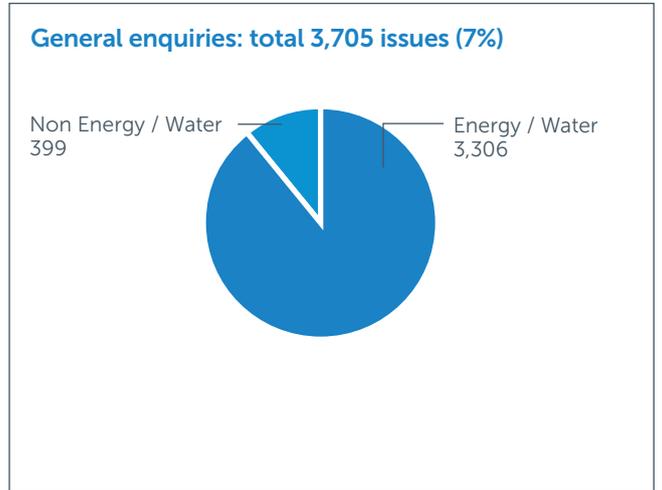
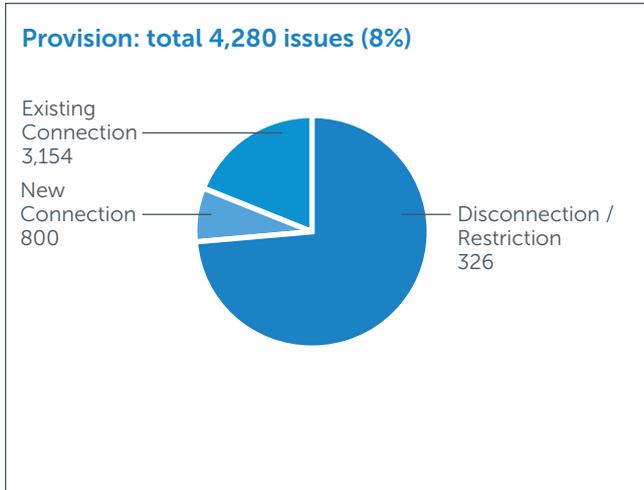


Fig 8: The main issues customers raised with us continued



About the systemic issues

WHAT'S A SYSTEMIC ISSUE?

It's an issue, problem or change in company policy or practice that affects, or has the potential to affect, a number of customers. It may be caused by, but isn't limited to, one or more of the following: a system change, an alteration in performance levels (i.e. quality of supply, access to call centre), a policy or procedure change, a lack of clear regulatory guidelines, regulatory non-compliance, the conduct of an energy or water provider's employee, agent, servant, officer or contractor or the action of a stakeholder (e.g. legislative or regulatory change leading to misunderstanding or misapplication of the change).

Under the EWOV Charter, we have a responsibility to identify potential systemic issues and, as appropriate, report these to relevant companies and regulators.

We identify them through the cases we receive and the complaints we investigate. A systemic issue may also be identified by the company itself and notified to us. Some affected customers contact us and some don't. By being proactive about reporting potentially systemic issues, we can work with companies and regulators to bring about redress for everyone affected (not just those who complain), reduce possible wider impact and minimise complaints.

Where there is a systemic aspect to a complaint, this is handled by our Systemic Issues Specialist, separately to the resolution of an individual customer's concern/s.

Our systemic issues responsibilities differ slightly between energy and water. In energy, we identify potential systemic issues and report them to the Essential Services Commission (ESC) for investigation and action. They are then discussed with the ESC at our monthly meetings. We now also report them to the Australian Energy Regulator. In water, we identify, investigate and seek redress for affected customers—with a report to the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) on the outcome and whether the company has co-operated with us to resolve the issue appropriately.

Systemic issues – energy

Supply interruptions due to water in gas lines SI/2010/26

Billing delays after manual account adjustments SI/2010/33

Recovery of undercharges SI/2010/41

Marked increase in marketing complaints SI/2010/46

Significant increase in transfer in error cases SI/2010/48

Cooling-off requests not actioned SI/2010/47

Retailer of Last Resort (RoLR) letter issued in error SI/2010/50-52

Using misinformation about advanced interval (smart) meters to gain sales SI/2010/43, SI/2010/44 & SI/2011/11

High bills after solar power installed SI/2011/14

Time-of-use pricing applied incorrectly possibly back to 2005 SI/2011/3

Inadequate disconnection warning notices sent to dual fuel customers SI/2011/7

SMS messages about overdue accounts sent in error SI/2011/6

Electricity company bills sent on gas company letterhead SI/2011/15

Delays in transferring accounts to other retailers SI/2011/21

Billing delays for solar customers SI/2011/23

EWOV's phone number on South Australian customers' bills SI/2011/26

Supply interruptions due to water in gas lines

Identified from one EWOV complaint in July 2010, this issue affected some 80 customers in a particular gas distribution area. The distributor expedited a mains upgrade in the affected area (at no cost to the customers) which resolved the issue. SI/2010/26

Billing delays after manual account adjustments

We identified customers whose bills were delayed after manual adjustments (such as credits being applied or changes in meter read data) were made to their accounts. The energy retailer said its billing system wasn't able to process the manual changes properly. It advised that all affected customers were billed within approximately two months of the issue being identified. *SI/2010/33*

Recovery of undercharges

An energy retailer advised us it was recovering undercharges from 1,493 business and residential customers on quarterly billing, who had been billed for one month only. The retailer later confirmed that it had recovered the undercharges in line with the backbilling provisions of the Energy Retail Code. It said it had also discounted the backbills by 10%, sent each customer an explanation, information on how to read the amended bill and a written apology. We advised the ESC of the issue. *SI/2010/41*

Retailer of Last Resort (RoLR) letter issued in error

The ESC advised us of this issue. After their retailer went into administration, some 350 customers received a letter with their bills welcoming them to the default RoLR energy retailer. They should have received a letter encouraging them to remain with that retailer (to which they were automatically transferred at the time of the RoLR event). These customers were in fact free to choose any energy retailer, after their initial allocation to the default retailer. *SI/2010/50-52*

Using misinformation about smart meters to gain sales

We identified that door-to-door sales representatives for three electricity retailers were providing misleading information about advanced interval (smart) meters to gain sales. Over 50 customers were known to be affected. Some told customers that the retailer they represented would cover the cost of the smart meter if the customer switched. Some used discussions about smart meters as a way to ask to see the customer's bill and discuss tariff rates and charges. Each retailer took action. Some sales representatives were sacked, while others were formally cautioned and underwent retraining. We advised the ESC of these issues. *SI/2010/43, SI/2010/44 & SI/2011/11*

High bills after solar power installed

We received multiple high bill complaints from residents of a retirement village after a solar photovoltaic (PV) system was installed at the village. The bills were estimated, up to four times more than the customers' usual bills and didn't appear to be based on historical usage data. 166 customers were affected. The retailer rebilled all affected residents based on special meter reads. We referred the issue to the ESC. *SI/2011/1*

Systemic issues – water

Hardship customer charged interest on arrears *SI/2010/35*

Parks charge wrongly applied *SI/2010/27*

Estimated bills *SI/2010/36*

Delays in applying concessions *SI/2010/38*

Wrong BPAY reference on bills *SI/2010/39*

Debt collection action following no final bill *SI/2010/37*

Poor water quality after water main burst *SI/2010/45*

Water quality issues *SI/2011/29*

Water quality issues

A water company notified us of severe water quality issues for some residents after heavy rainfall washed ash, debris, soil and rocks into a catchment previously destroyed by bushfires. It said it had notified residents in the affected areas and advised them to boil drinking water. It said it was testing options for improving the water quality and had held community meetings to discuss these options and customer concerns. *SI/2011/29*

Estimated bills Delays in applying concessions Wrong BPAY reference on bills Debt collection action following no final bill

A water company alerted us that, following its billing system transition, several systemic issues emerged:

- 1,052 customers with remote meters received estimated bills, even though actual reads were obtained—the company said it reviewed the bills of all affected customers
- some 3,000 customers faced delays receiving concessions when their details couldn't be entered into its new billing system—the company said affected customers received their concessions and system changes had been made to ensure it didn't happen again
- some 9,775 bills were sent out with the wrong BPAY reference digit—the company said the problem had been fixed quickly; customers using the incorrect reference encountered a minor delay in the payment being applied to their account
- a group of customers wasn't final billed and, as a result, a collections agency pursued them for payment—the company said it withdrew all the bills from the collections agency and ceased debt referrals as a precaution; affected customers were issued with a final bill and an assurance that their credit rating hadn't been affected. *SI/2010/36, SI/2010/38, SI/2010/39 & SI/2010/37*

Behind the high bill complaints

Across all three industries, Billing has always been the most common issue customers raise with us. In 2010-11, 25,243 customers raised Billing as their main issue. A further 13,137 customers raised it as an associated issue.

High bills has always been at the top, or close to the top, of the list of Billing issues. In 2010-11, 5,766 customers raised high bill/s as their main Billing issue. A further 1,538 customers raised high bill/s as an associated issue.

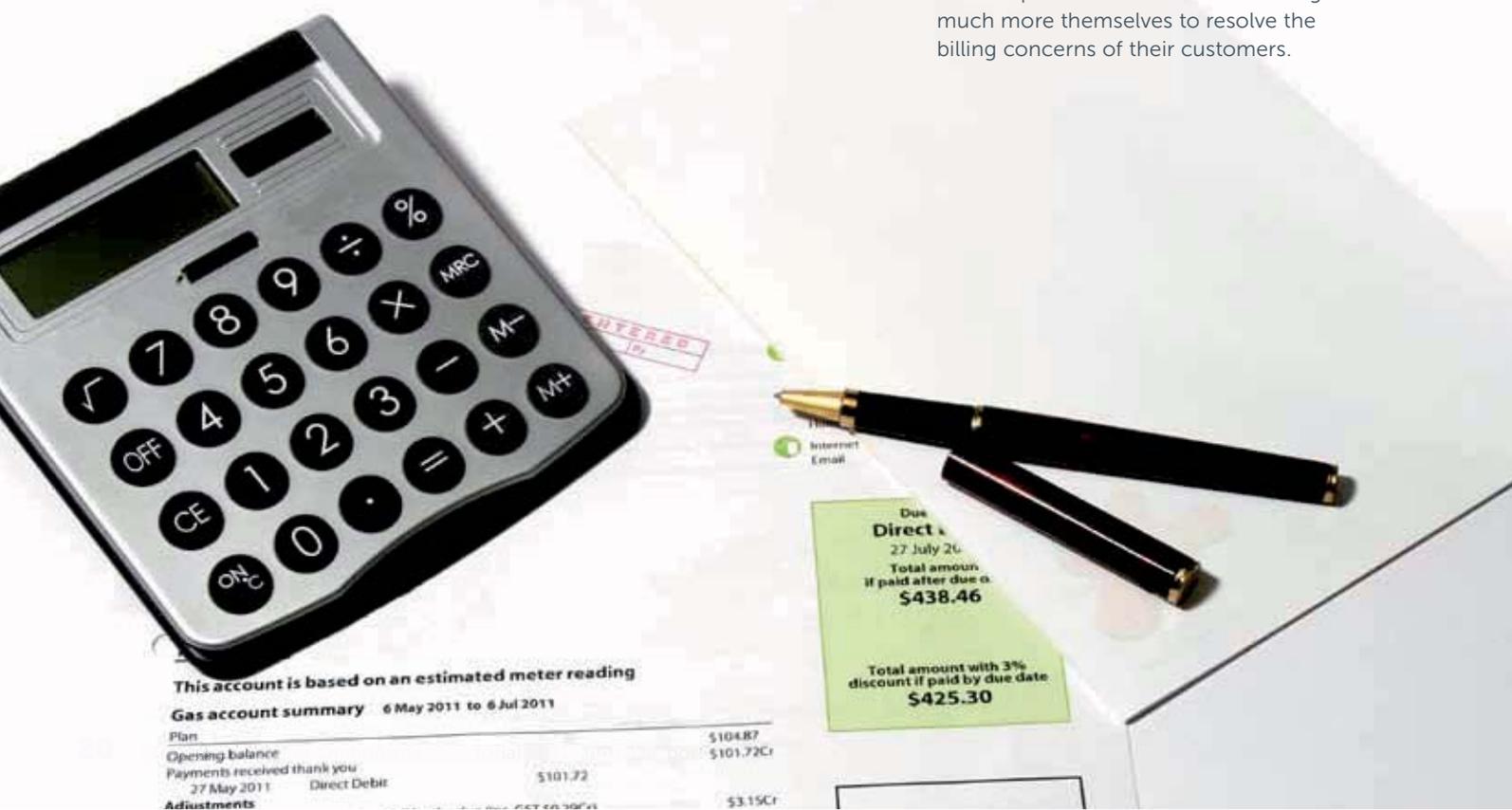
Customers are increasingly aware of how much electricity, gas or water they use and how much that should cost them. Over the past year, growing customer awareness was heightened by constant media coverage (especially around electricity prices and bills), rising household and business costs, and talk of a carbon tax. Customers were comparing their bills against those for the same time the previous year, finding them higher, thinking they must be wrong and questioning them.

Often the bill was wrong. Billing systems problems and meter reading errors were some of the more common causes. More unusual, but evident, was the issue of electricity company billing systems being unable to handle solar billing automatically, so bills were calculated manually.

Sometimes, even though the bill was higher than the customer expected, it was correct.

With bill estimation a more common practice, some seemingly high bills were in fact catch-up bills after the meter was read. Old analogue meters have a tendency to 'run slow' so, in some cases, the installation of a new meter (smart or otherwise) delivered more accurate, and therefore higher, billing. Some customers had simply used more energy or water without much thought to the fact that they were doing so. Some customers hadn't paid all of a previous bill. Sometimes the problem was an undetected water or gas leak. For some customers complaining about a high bill, the issue was more to do with the affordability of the bill than its accuracy.

It was common for customers to complain to us about an unhelpful response from call centre staff when they rang their company to question a high bill. Dismissive responses were often cited—to the effect that the bill was correct because the system said so and the customer just had to pay it. These served to make the situation worse and often meant the customer called us. Given the volume of billing complaints we received, and the billing issues which emerged from the ones we investigated, it was clear to us that the companies could have been doing much more themselves to resolve the billing concerns of their customers.



High backbill after a series of estimated bills

The customer's complaint was about a high backbill and disconnection warning notice. Our investigation found that the retailer had been billing the customer on estimated meter readings, not actual readings. The retailer said it had used best endeavours to advise the customer the bills were estimated. We found that the bills sent to the customer didn't show the readings were estimated. Over \$3,000 was waived from the customer's account balance.

C/2011/10483

High bill after several years on the wrong tariff

The customer received an unexpectedly high bill that left her owing over \$1,000. After investigation, a meter test, an energy audit, the analysis of her air-conditioner usage and a reconciliation of her account, it was found that she'd been billed on the wrong tariff for the property's meter configuration. This had been happening since September 2006 when the electricity retailer changed a product class. The retailer apologised and, with corrections, the customer ended up in credit for \$997.70. This was paid to her by cheque as, by that time, she'd switched to another retailer.

C/2011/3322

High bill due to no solar credits

Because the inverter on her solar system wasn't working correctly, the customer wasn't receiving solar credits (Premium Feed-in Tariff) on her account. Her electricity distributor made a site visit but said the problem wasn't its responsibility. It told the customer to contact her solar installer, because the inverter is part of the customer's installation. The customer's electricity retailer assumed the solar system had been installed by an independent solar installer. It wasn't until some way into the investigation of this complaint that the retailer realised it had in fact installed the system. In the meantime, the customer was subject to debt collection action. Once the

retailer realised it was responsible, it arranged for a temporary inverter to be installed until a permanent one could be installed a couple of months later. It then set about trying to work out how much the customer would have been credited had the inverter been working. This was problematic, because there was no way to measure solar feed-in which hadn't been recorded. In the end, the customer was given \$781.43 in credits, in line with an estimated number of solar credits that an average household would use.

C/2010/23539

High bill due to water leak

The customer received a water bill of \$1,200. The water company said it was caused by a burst water pipe on the customer's property. When the customer provided the water company with a plumber's report on the burst pipe, his bill was reduced to \$649.33. The customer remained dissatisfied, arguing that this was still too high. Responding to our investigation, the water company said it had calculated the customer's credit in line with industry standards. To resolve the complaint, it offered a further credit of \$170. It pointed out that customers are responsible for all water that enters their property and for the condition of the pipes and fixtures within the property in accordance with the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

W/2011/271

High bill after meter reading error

The customer, whose household bills were usually between \$200 and \$300, contacted us about a bill for over \$20,000. He said his gas retailer had acknowledged there had been a misreading of the meter. Twice a special meter reading had been arranged and someone stayed at home to provide meter access, but the meter reader didn't turn up. Our investigation revealed that the customer had been billed to a 5 digit meter reading rather than a 4 digit meter reading. His billing was corrected and a customer service payment of \$300 credited to his account.

G/2011/2860

High bill after installation of a smart meter

Receiving his first bill after the installation of a smart meter, this customer found his average daily usage had increased from 15kWh to 194kWh. He said his electricity retailer told him it was likely that his old meter wasn't operating properly and the readings on the smart meter would be correct. He was offered a payment extension, but no further investigation. As a result of our investigation, the retailer said the higher than average usage was the result of incorrect distributor data. It reissued the bill based on the correct data, cutting it by two-thirds.

C/2010/31052

High bill because customer's usage changed

The customer received two consecutive higher than expected bills of \$850 and \$920, when her usual quarterly bills were around \$600. Despite several contacts with her retailer, she remained dissatisfied. Responding to our investigation, the energy retailer apologised for not being able to resolve her concerns. The manually read interval meter (MRIM) at the customer's premises was tested and found to be operating correctly. The retailer confirmed the billing was on actual meter readings, not estimated or substituted data. It graphed the seasonal fluctuations in the customer's electricity use since July 2007. The customer accepted the results of our investigation, saying she now understood that her son and daughter moving back home and the increased use of air conditioning may have contributed to the higher than expected bills. She said she'd monitor her usage more closely.

C/2010/28593

Behind the credit complaints

Credit is essentially about affordability—the capacity of customers to pay their bills and stay on supply. In this issues category, we record cases about disconnection or restriction for arrears, payment difficulties and debt collection.

In 2010-11, 8,566 customers raised Credit as their main issue of complaint. A further 6,029 customers raised it as an associated issue. 97% of Credit issues were raised by energy customers.

The biggest Credit issue was disconnection/restriction of supply for account arrears. 4,079 customers raised this as their main Credit issue. A further 492 customers raised it as an associated issue. Most of these were energy customers.

In 2010-11, we received 2,636 cases about disconnection (actual and imminent) of electricity for account arrears, up 74% from 2009-10 and up 429% from 2006-07.

We received 1,399 cases about disconnection (actual and imminent) of natural gas for account arrears, up 34% from 2009-10 and up 282% from 2006-07.

Figure 9 tracks EWOV cases about actual and imminent electricity and gas disconnections and water restrictions against the Essential Services Commission's published data for unrequested electricity and gas disconnections and water restrictions which, as we observed in last year's annual report, have been rising for some years now.

2,396 customers raised debt collection as their main Credit issue, likely reflecting the harder line taken by energy retailers on pursuit of energy debt.

2,085 customers raised payment difficulties as their main Credit issue. We arranged 3,601 payment plans, 46% more than in 2009-10 and 254% more than five years ago.

As affordability issues grow, we note with concern the emergence of 'credit repair' companies, which make much of providing people with a quick debts fix. We're particularly concerned for vulnerable consumers who take this path, when there is free assistance available to them through their energy or water company's hardship program or through government assistance programs.

Financial hardship, but disconnection not wrongful

The customer said her gas supply was disconnected without warning and her gas retailer wanted \$800 to put it back on. She said she'd told the retailer she could afford only \$50 a fortnight, but was told she couldn't be reassessed for hardship assistance because she'd already had that assistance and had failed to keep up with her payments. The retailer told us it was aware the customer was in hardship before disconnecting her supply, because her account showed few payments, multiple payment plans, reminder and disconnection notices and relief grant applications and she'd been on its hardship program. It said that, before disconnecting her gas supply, it had provided three payment plans under its hardship program and, in line with her capacity to pay, had organised a utility relief grant, offered a financial counsellor assessment, provided an energy saver booklet and discussed concessions. Our investigation of whether the disconnection of the customer's supply was wrongful concluded that it wasn't. The retailer offered a further payment plan of \$68 a fortnight under its hardship program, with incentives, but it also said this would be her final opportunity to participate in the hardship program.

WDP/2011/218 G/2011/1407



Default listed because of retailer errors

The customer had been with her electricity retailer a long time, when she received a call saying she owed \$694. She said she told the retailer she'd never lived at the property in question, but was told the bills were sent to a post office box. The customer said she didn't have a post office box and thought she'd sorted the problem out but, in 2011, she was default-listed by the retailer for the \$694. When she questioned this, she was told her driver's licence number was the identification used for the account, so she became concerned about possible identity fraud. Even though she signed the statutory declaration the retailer required of her, and made several calls to the retailer (including to its credit department), the problem remained unresolved. As a result of our investigation, the retailer discovered that its account set-up and record-keeping processes were to blame. It apologised, removed the default listing on the customer, reversed all charges and credited her account with \$145.51.

C/2011/13719

Affordability and high usage

This complaint highlights credit issues we see all too commonly. The customer and her family of four moved into their large home in regional Victoria some four years earlier. She had arrears of just under \$8,400, had received a Utility Relief Grant, had dropped out of her retailer's hardship program due to non-payment of agreed instalments, had stopped making payments and was facing disconnection. She thought there may be a problem with the meter at her property. The retailer told us the customer's bills averaged \$1,000 a quarter. It said it had tested the meter and found no problem. We arranged for an independent financial situation assessment and an energy audit. This revealed a low income family with three children at high school living in a 160-year-old house in need of repair, dealing with mortgage arrears, other debts of around \$32,000, illness and other difficult personal circumstances. Most of their appliances were electric. Column heaters were used 24/7, electric blankets were left on all day and the clothes dryer was used daily for each load of washing. The family had recently replaced a gas instantaneous hot water unit with three separate 2.9 kilowatt,

315 litre, heat pump hot water units (providing 945 litres of stored hot water) and installed a 2 kilowatt electric wall mounted heater. It was found that the family was using the electricity they were billed for. As a result of our investigation, this customer recognised that she and her family needed to take more responsibility for their electricity use. She also took up her electricity retailer's offer of an incentive plan, where if she paid an agreed amount each fortnight, she'd receive matching payments to help reduce her arrears.

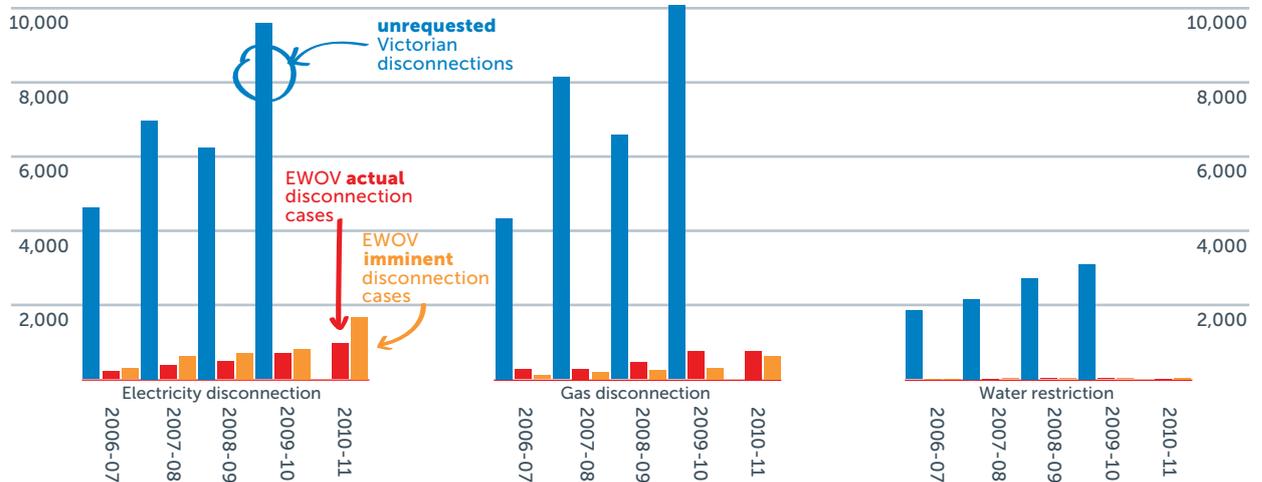
C/2010/9260

Debt collector behaviour

The customer said she was called by a debt collection agency, even though (after an EWOV referral) she'd arranged a payment extension with her retailer. She said she told the debt collector this and he requested her EWOV letter. When she rang her retailer, she was told the debt collector wouldn't contact her again. Despite that reassurance, she received an 8pm call. Responding to our investigation, the retailer confirmed the debt collection activity would cease and it would honour the customer's agreed payment plan.

C/2011/9391

Fig 9: Tracking EWOV's credit-related actual and imminent energy disconnection and water restriction cases against unrequested disconnections and restrictions by energy and water companies



The data on unrequested electricity and gas disconnections and water restrictions in Figure 9 has been published in the Essential Services Commission's Comparative Performance Reports. The corresponding data for 2010-11 has not been published yet.

Behind the electricity interval meter complaints

We track and report on complaints about three types of electricity interval meter—meters for solar installations, advanced interval (smart) meters and manually read interval meters.

Solar meters

It's common that customers installing solar panels to gain feed-in credits and reduce their electricity bills have very big expectations of cost savings, which aren't always delivered. Delays in installing solar meters have left some customers without the feed-in tariffs due to them, sometimes for months. Not all electricity retailers operating in Victoria are able to bill correctly for a solar installation. The rollout of smart meters has confused some solar customers, especially how the new meter will or won't work with a solar installation.

Some customers contacted us about the solar installation company, not the electricity distributor or retailer, complaining about delays in submitting paperwork, delays in refunding deposits, not completing the solar installation and the quality of the work undertaken. We referred these customers to Consumer Affairs Victoria.

Smart meters

Since September 2009, as part of a State Government program, electricity distributors have progressively installed smart meters in homes and businesses across Victoria. The rollout has attracted much publicity and customers have been contacting us with enquiries and complaints. We have been able to investigate many of the complaints, but not all. For example, the advanced meter charge introduced by the government in January 2010 falls outside of our

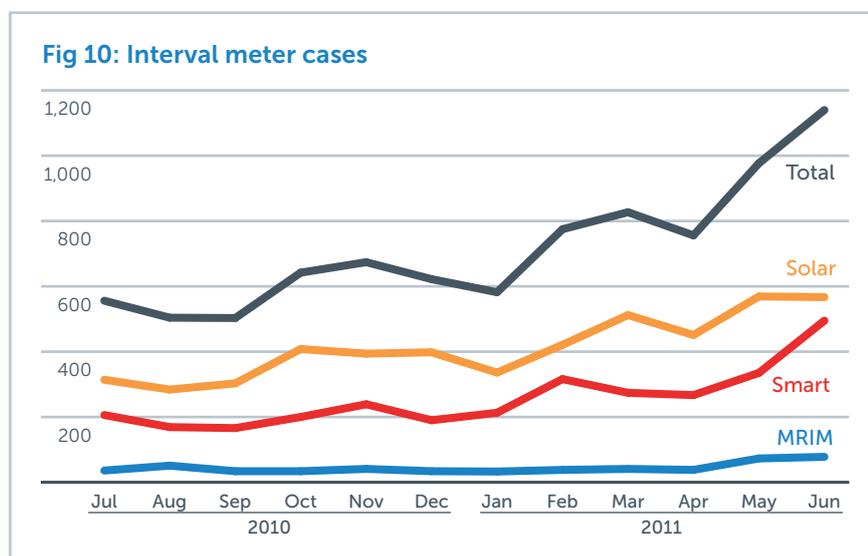
jurisdiction because it is government policy. Similarly some people don't want a smart meter installed or want installation delayed. While the new Victorian Government has made it clear that people can defer the installation until it makes a decision on the rollout, customers have complained about installers ignoring the note they left to this effect on the existing meter.

Where a smart meter was installed, customers complained about receiving higher than expected bills, interference with other appliances and property damage associated with the installation. A common complaint was around the customer's inability to read the new meter—under current legislation, electricity retailers don't have to provide start and end reads on smart meter bills, so customers found they could no longer check the usage they were billed for against the usage on the meter.

We think that better training of company call centre staff and access for customers to specialists in interval meter issues would go a long way to addressing many of the complaints EWOV has been receiving.

Manually read interval meters

Some business customers and large residential customers still have a manually read interval meter (MRIM). The main issues these customers raised with us were to do with high bills, loss of off-peak rates and customer service.



Solar meter – long delays in installation

Four months after the installation of her solar panels, the customer's solar meter hadn't been installed. While she'd had several contacts with her electricity retailer, she said she was refused escalation to a manager. She said the electricity distributor and the retailer had been blaming each other for the delay, while she was missing out on Premium Feed-in Tariff (PFIT) credits. The complaint was resolved when her electricity retailer admitted that a processing error in its system meant that her distributor didn't receive the request to install her meter. The retailer apologised for not keeping her informed about the delay and for the loss of feed-in credits. It applied credits of \$550 to her account and the solar meter was installed.

C/2011/939

Solar meter – delays, estimations, systems unable to bill

The customer's solar panels were installed in October 2009 and a bi-directional meter in November 2009. She expected to get solar credits, the agreed off-peak tariff rates and the Premium Feed-in Tariff (PFIT) applied to her account from this time. Her first bill, received seven months later, didn't include any solar credits and was based on a peak tariff only. The retailer told her the bill was estimated because its system was unable to bill solar customers. She said it couldn't tell her when this would be fixed. After we referred the customer to someone at a higher level within the retailer, the meter was reconfigured and the PFIT applied. She received an amended bill, but this was still based on an estimate and didn't include an off-peak tariff rate. After unsuccessfully trying to arrange a special meter read so she could get an accurate bill, the customer rang us again. Following our investigation, the retailer apologised and provided a \$400 credit to reflect the contractually agreed off-peak tariff rates that hadn't been applied and \$100 for the inconvenience caused to her. It arranged a special meter read and said that all future bills would include the PFIT and off-peak rates.

C/2010/32207

Smart meter – safety switch preventing installation

The customer had been issued with a defect notice requiring him to pay for a new safety switch at his property to enable the installation of a smart meter. He said the builder who built his house in 1980 said the property was compliant for smart meter installation. Our investigation found that the positioning of the customer's safety switch on the meter panel was in breach of the Service and Installation Rules which applied at the time it was installed. An electrician would have to remove the switch from the meter panel before the smart meter exchange could go ahead. The customer accepted this advice and the cost of the work, and the distributor waived an associated truck visit fee.

C/2011/2624

Smart meter – customer wanted old meter back

A smart meter was installed at the customer's property, despite the electricity distributor agreeing to place a temporary hold on the installation. When the customer complained, the smart meter was removed and a basic analogue meter installed. The customer said the display on the replacement basic meter wasn't the same as that on her old meter, which had been replaced only five years earlier and had an easy-to-read display. The customer said she wasn't happy with this outcome. Responding to our investigation, the distributor said the basic analogue meter it installed was a newer model, with exactly the same capabilities as the previous basic meter and a clearly visible display. The older meter which had been installed at the customer's premises was no longer available. The customer accepted the replacement meter.

C/2011/7353

Manually read interval meter – loss of off-peak rates

Because of a faulty interval meter time switch, all of the customer's electricity was billed at the peak rate for nine months. While the retailer arranged for the faulty time switch to be repaired by the distributor, it didn't ever adjust the customer's bills. As a result of our investigation, the retailer used the customer's current usage patterns to calculate that he'd used about 40% of electricity at off-peak times. His account was adjusted for the period the time switch was faulty, giving him an account credit of \$250.

C/2010/15888

The cases

We use the overall term 'case' for all customer contacts with EWOV. Each case is registered and classified as either an enquiry (a request for information) or a complaint (an expression of dissatisfaction).

In 2010–11, EWOV recorded a total of 54,289 cases.

Enquiries

When a customer contacts us with an enquiry, we provide them with general information and, usually, we also refer them to their energy or water company. Sometimes we refer them to another body, such as a regulator or a government department. In 2010-11, we responded to 4,709 enquiries, 16% more than the year before. 61% of them were about electricity, with many callers seeking information about the rollout of smart meters and solar installations.

Complaints

Customers lodged 49,580 complaints with us in 2010-11, 29% more than the year before. We finalised 48,785 complaints, 28% more than the year before.

We define a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction regarding a policy, practice or customer service performance of an energy or water company, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. A complaint may be referred back to the company or investigated, depending on the number of contacts already made and the customer's wishes.

Complaint types

- Unassisted Referral: After providing an overview of the customer's rights and responsibilities, we refer the customer to their energy or water company's call centre—this is because the customer hasn't had any contact with their company.

- Assisted Referral: After providing an overview of the customer's rights and responsibilities, we refer the customer to a higher level contact within their energy or water company—this is because the customer has had only one contact with the company or, having had more than one contact, they have chosen to give the company a final opportunity for direct resolution at a higher level rather than an investigation by us.
- Stage One: These complaints are resolved within fourteen days through negotiation between us and the energy or water company's complaints team.
- Stage Two: These complaints are fully investigated by us.
- Stage Three: These are investigated complaints which have been upgraded from Stage Two, due to lack of resolution at that stage.
- Final Stage: These are investigated complaints which have been upgraded from Stage Three, due to lack of resolution at that stage. If a conciliated outcome is not achieved within 60 days, the complaint is referred to the Ombudsman for Binding Decision, or closed if we assess that further investigation is not warranted. It hasn't been necessary for the Ombudsman to make a Binding Decision since 2003.

Figure 12 shows complaint receipt trends overall and by industry for the past five years. In that time, there's been an overall 250% increase in complaints.

The graphs in Figure 13 are for individual companies and track each company's EWOV complaint trends for the past five years.

Fig 11: All cases received by EWOV in 2010-11

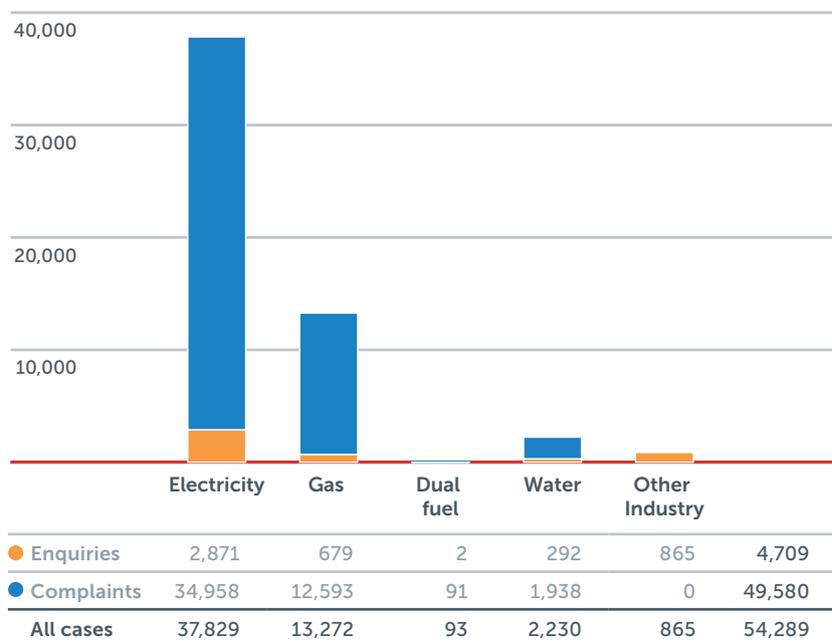
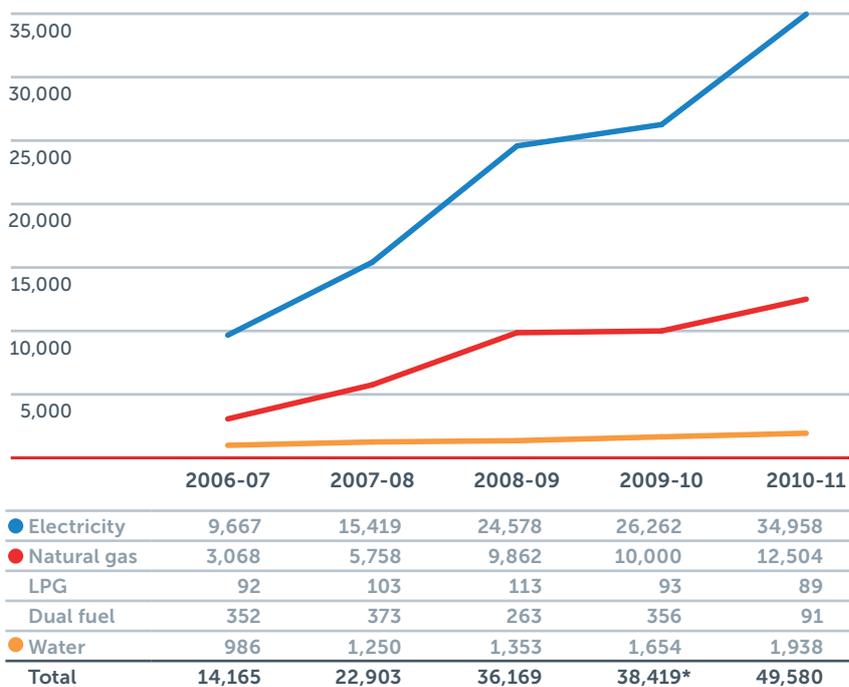


Fig 12: Complaints received – by overall and by industry 5 years of data



*also included 54 complaints about other industries

OUR APPROACH TO DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Our processes are informal, rather than legalistic and based on the process of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Our work is often described as external dispute resolution (EDR), because we are independent, impartial and external to the companies participating in our scheme (the scheme participants).

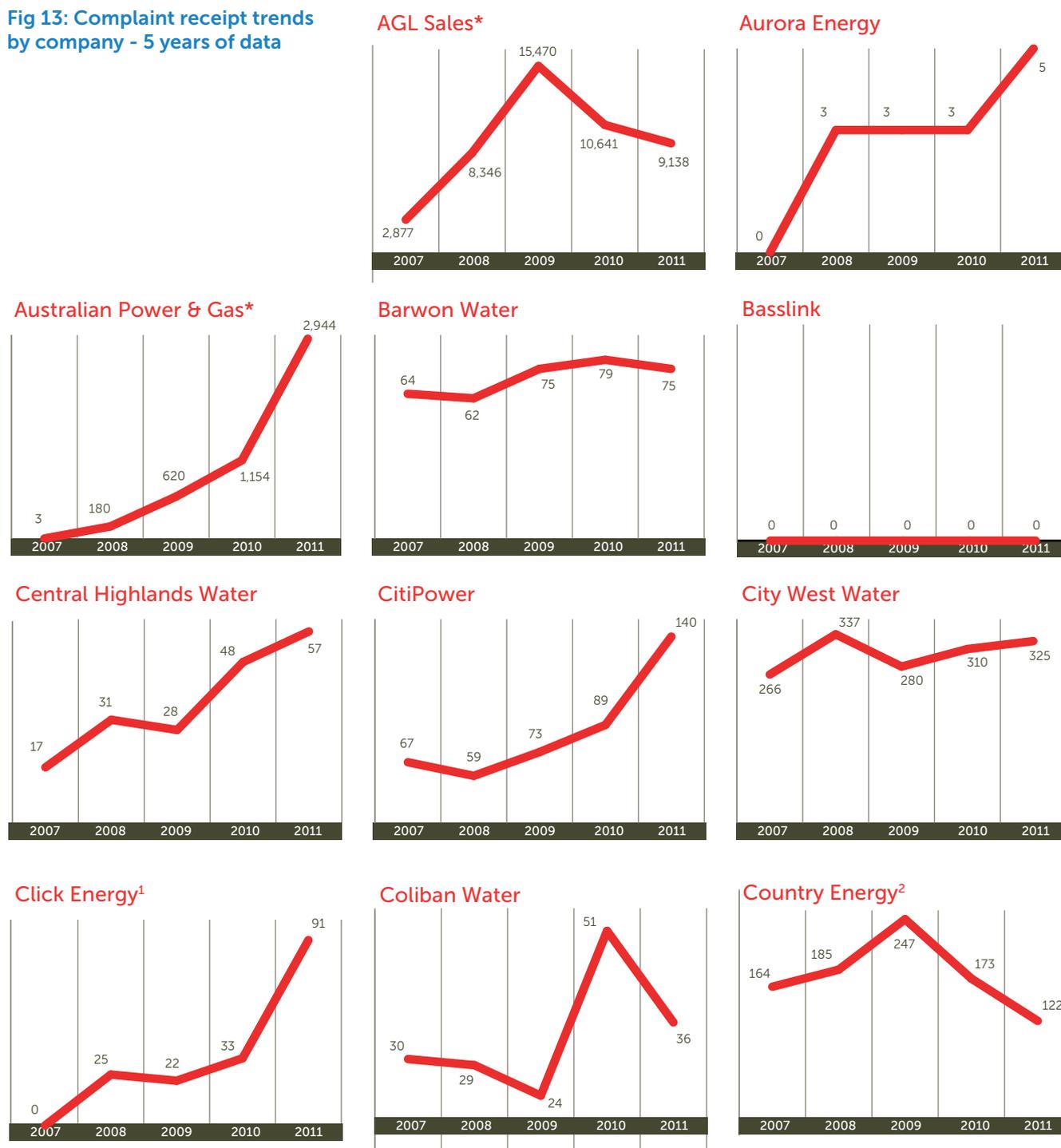
Before we accept a complaint for investigation, the company must have had a reasonable opportunity to resolve it through its own internal dispute resolution (IDR) process. This generally means the customer must have made at least two attempts to resolve it directly with the company.

We aim for a conciliated outcome, with the customer and the company agreeing on a resolution and what needs to be done to achieve it. We uncover the facts, helping both parties better understand the issues and each other's point of view. This is particularly important where the relationship between them has broken down and would benefit from rebuilding. Among our resolution tools, we find site visits and conciliation conferences (independently facilitated by us and attended by the customer and the company) particularly useful.

In arriving at an independent view of what happened, we take account of what's fair and reasonable, good industry practice and current law. If, in the end, the complaint can't be conciliated, the Ombudsman has the power to make a decision. This decision is binding on the company, if the customer accepts it. Otherwise, the customer may choose to take action in another forum, such as a court.

The cases continued

Fig 13: Complaint receipt trends by company - 5 years of data



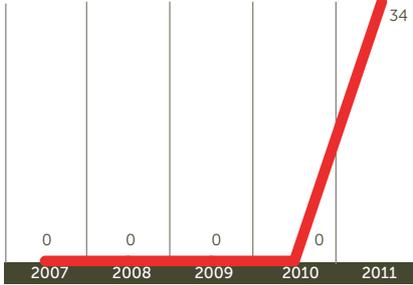
NOTES:

* Where a company retails both electricity and gas, its complaint numbers are combined as 'energy' and include dual fuel complaints.

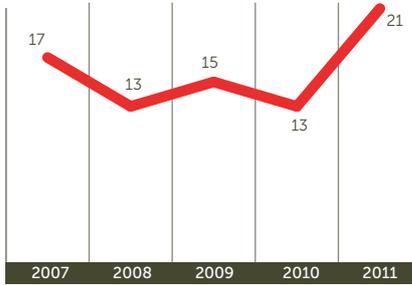
1 Click Energy joined EWOV in May 2007.

2 Since 1 March 2011 when it was purchased by Origin Energy, Country Energy cases have been recorded as Origin Energy (Country Energy).

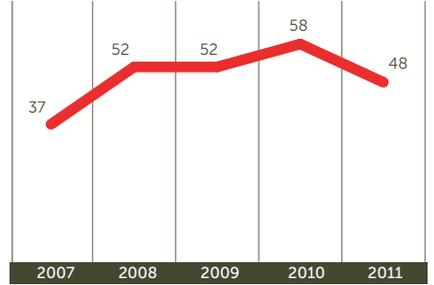
Dodo Power & Gas³



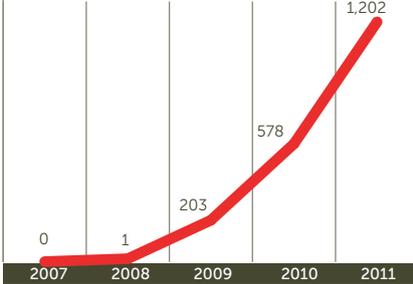
East Gippsland Water



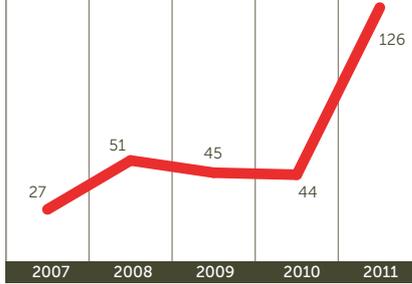
Elgas



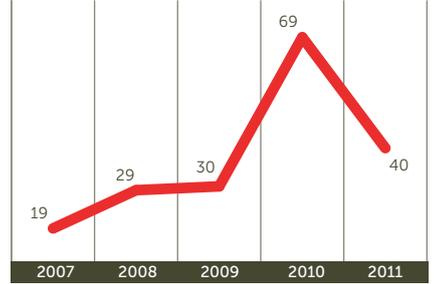
EnergyAustralia**4



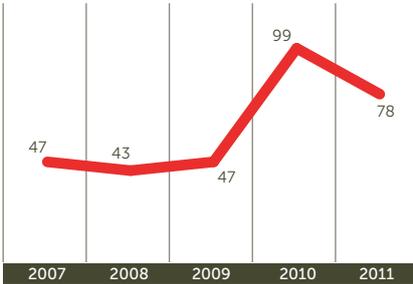
Envestra



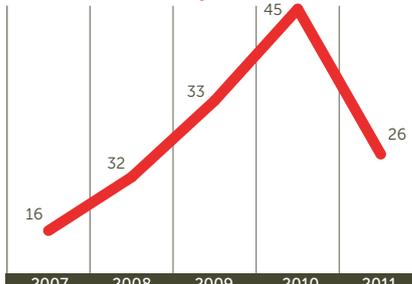
Gippsland Water



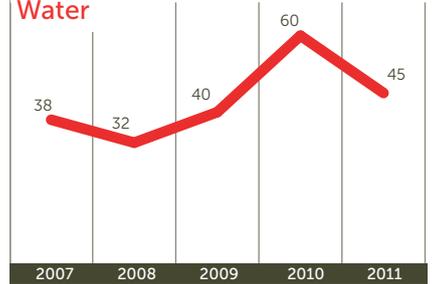
Goulburn-Murray Water



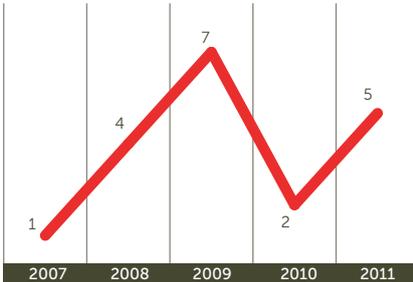
Goulburn Valley Water



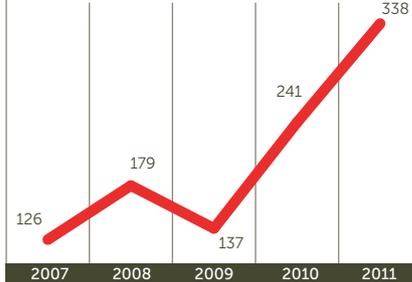
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water



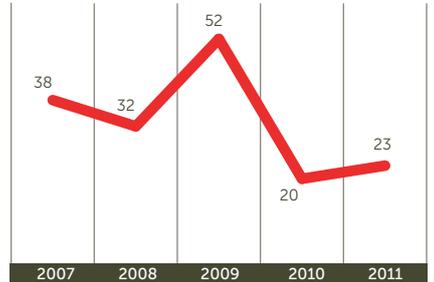
Integral Energy



Jemena Electricity Networks



Kleenheat



NOTES:

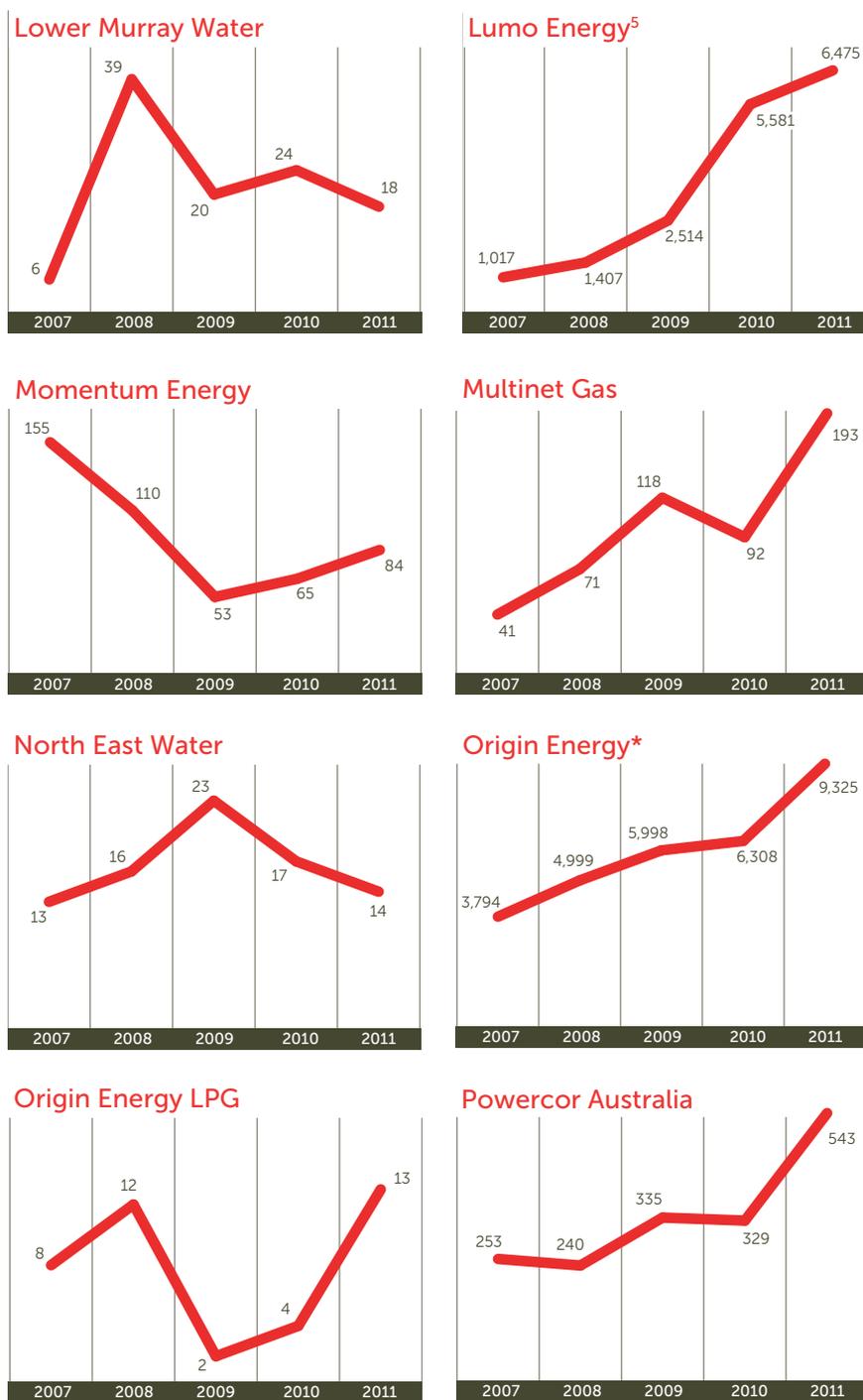
* Where a company retails both electricity and gas, its complaint numbers are combined as 'energy' and include dual fuel complaints.

³ Dodo Power & Gas joined EWOV in December 2007.

⁴ Energy Australia re-entered the Victorian market in May 2008, retailing electricity to residential and small business customers.

The cases continued

Fig 15: Complaint trends by company – 5 years of data continued



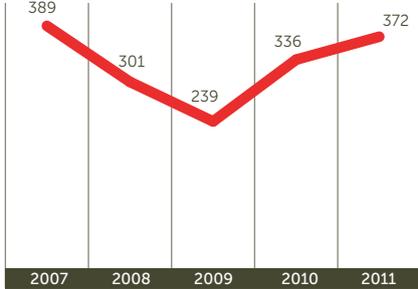
NOTES:

* Where a company retails both electricity and gas, its complaint numbers are combined as 'energy' and include dual fuel complaints.

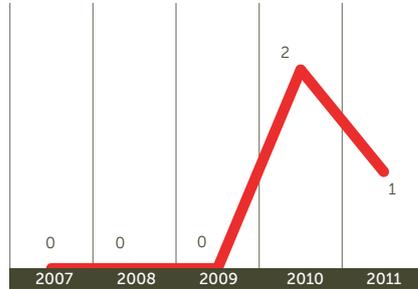
⁵ Since July 2010, Victoria Electricity has been known as Lumo Energy.

Since 1 March 2011 when it was purchased by Origin Energy, Country Energy cases have been recorded as Origin Energy (Country Energy).

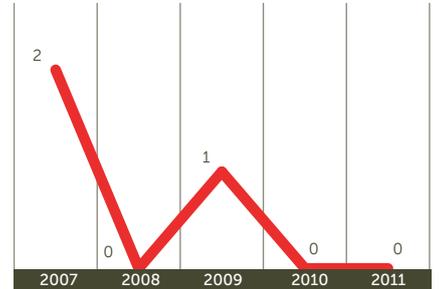
Powerdirect



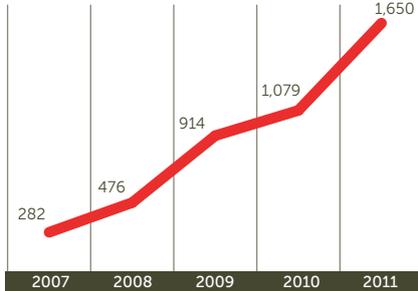
Powerdirect Australia



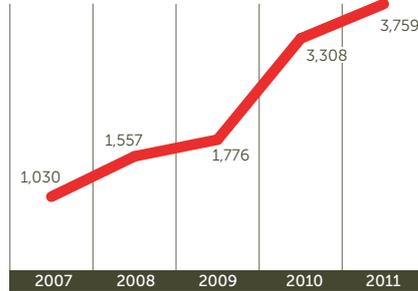
Powergas



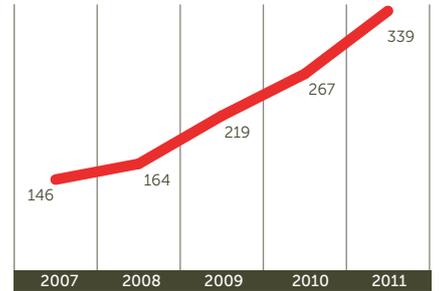
Red Energy*



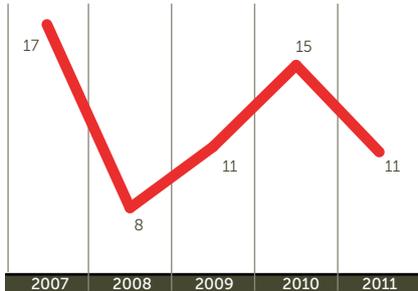
Simply Energy*



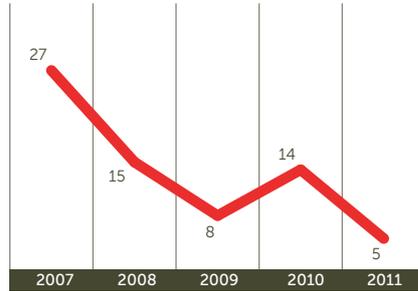
South East Water



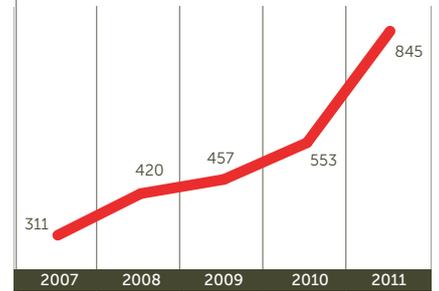
South Gippsland Water



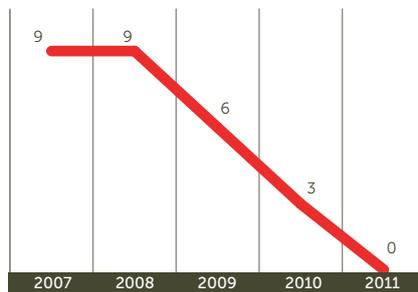
Southern Rural Water



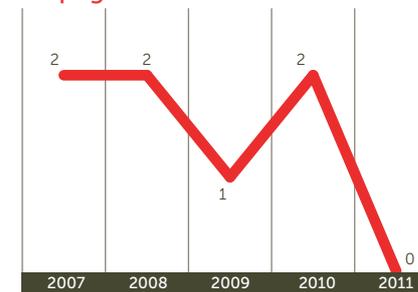
SP AusNet⁶



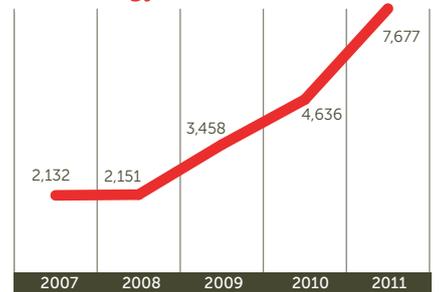
SP AusNet (SPI PowerNet)



Supagas



TRUenergy*



NOTES:

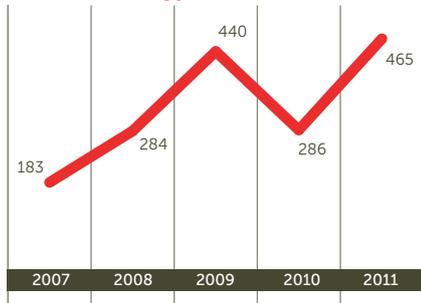
* Where a company retails both electricity and gas, its complaint numbers are combined as 'energy' and include dual fuel complaints.

⁶ SPAusNet is a distributor of both electricity and gas.

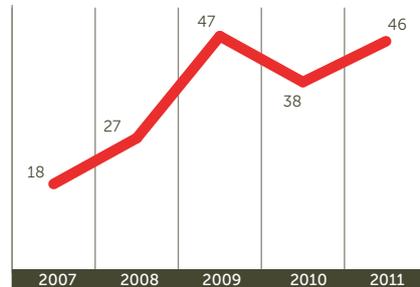
The cases continued

Fig 13: Complaint receipt trends by company – 5 years of data continued

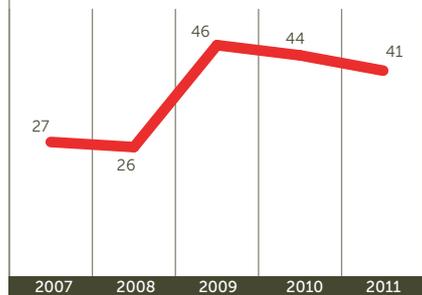
United Energy Distribution



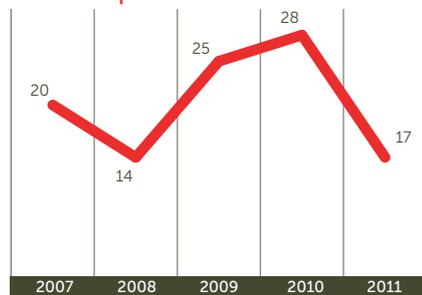
Wannon Water



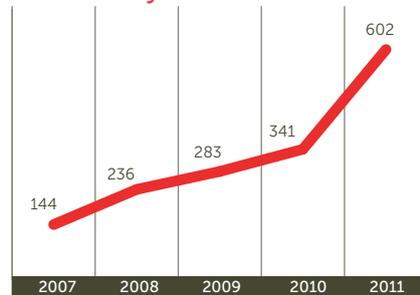
Western Water



Westernport Water



Yarra Valley Water



The outcomes

Figure 14 on page 34 shows the outcomes from the enquiries and complaints we finalised in 2010-11. Figure 15 provides information on the complaints finalised overall, by industry and by company, including average days to close.

Enquiries

We responded to 4,709 enquiries, providing information and referral where appropriate. Of these, 2,020 people were referred on to their energy or water company and 1,119 people to a regulator, other Ombudsman, government or another body.

Complaints

We finalised 48,785 complaints.

9,927 complaints were referred back to the energy or water company call centres, because the customer hadn't contacted the company before contacting EWOV.

24,670 complaints were also referred back to companies, but at a higher level. Included in these were complaints from 5,780 customers who had made one unsuccessful attempt to resolve the issue, usually at call centre level (EWOV's process generally requires two attempts). Also included were 18,890 complaints which qualified for investigation by EWOV, but the customer opted to give their company a final opportunity for direct resolution.

1,881 complaints were referred to a regulator, other Ombudsman, government or another body.

1,143 complaints didn't require referral or investigation—some customers simply wish to register their complaint with us but don't want a referral or an investigation.

11,960 complaints were investigated by EWOV and 11,164 complaint investigations finalised.

86% of investigated complaints were conciliated, down slightly from 89% the year before. A further 13% of investigated complaints were closed because the customer didn't stay in contact with us during the investigation or take some action required of them as part of our conciliation process, e.g. not taking up a referral to a financial counsellor for an assessment of their capacity to pay. This was up from 9% the year before. Overall, the average days to close EWOV complaint investigations was 54 days, up from 50 days the year before.

From the 9,642 complaints investigated and conciliated:

- 5,212 apologies were provided to customers
- 3,601 payment plans were arranged
- \$3,448,051 was achieved in redress for customers:
 - » \$2,042,033 in billing adjustments
 - » \$980,783 in recognition of customer service issues
 - » \$303,014 in debt reductions/waivers
 - » \$91,601 in waived fees
 - » \$30,620 in guaranteed service level payments

The outcomes continued

Fig 14: Outcomes from all finalised cases



* 18,890 of the complaints referred back to a higher level company contact qualified for an EWOV investigation, but the customer chose to give the company another chance for direct resolution.

** Some customers wish to register their complaint with us, e.g. about energy marketing, but don't seek referral or investigation.

For example, a customer not taking part in EWOV's conciliation process, including not taking up a referral to a financial counsellor for an assessment of the customer's capacity to pay. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Fig 15: Complaint investigations finalised and average days to close – overall, by industry and by company

	Investigations finalised	Average days to close		Investigations finalised	Average days to close
OVERALL	11,164	54	WATER	306	61
ENERGY	10,858	53	Metropolitan retail	200	55
Electricity	7,803	56	City West Water	52	51
Electricity retail	7,544	55	South East Water	48	50
AGL Sales	1,757	63	Yarra Valley Water	100	58
Australian Power & Gas	454	45	Metropolitan wholesale	13	114
Click Energy	26	55	Melbourne Water	13	114
Country Energy ¹	26	107	Regional urban	66	60
Dodo Power & Gas	1	6	Barwon Water	8	64
EnergyAustralia	109	24	Central Highlands Water	6	59
Lumo Energy ²	1,206	55	Coliban Water	11	42
Momentum Energy	18	63	East Gippsland Water	6	49
Neighbourhood Energy	87	56	Gippsland Water	3	104
Origin Energy	1,492	54	Goulburn Valley Water	2	39
Origin Energy (Country Energy) ¹	11	49	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	3	86
Powerdirect	117	74	Lower Murray Water	3	46
Red Energy	265	65	North East Water	3	46
Simply Energy	632	50	South Gippsland Water	1	13
TRUenergy	1,343	51	Wannon Water	10	67
Electricity distribution	259	68	Western Water	8	62
CitiPower	11	80	Westernport Water	2	155
Jemena Electricity Networks	32	47	Rural	27	82
Powercor Australia	60	78	Goulburn-Murray Water	14	85
SP AusNet	96	67	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	8	62
United Energy Distribution	60	70	Lower Murray Water	3	61
Gas	3,019	48	Southern Rural Water	2	176
Gas retail	2,947	48			
AGL Sales	786	53			
Australian Power & Gas	238	36			
EnergyAustralia	50	23			
Lumo Energy ²	607	51			
Origin Energy	449	45			
Red Energy	81	58			
Simply Energy	253	47			
TRUenergy	483	43			
Gas distribution	60	47			
Envestra	147	35			
Multinet Gas	30	58			
SP AusNet	16	38			
LPG	12	25			
Elgas	8	20			
Kleenheat	2	6			
Origin Energy (LPG)	2	66			
Dual fuel	36	48			
Lumo Energy	36	48			

NOTES:

This list shows only complaints investigated by EWOV.

Companies with no investigated complaints are not included.

One complaint that takes a long time to resolve can affect the average, especially where the number of complaints is small.

Complaint complexity contributes to the time taken to finalise an investigation. Our seeking of technical or legal advice and delays in customer action/replies may also have an effect.

Investigation finalisation times may also be affected by factors internal to the company, such as the time required for company field testing and site inspections and its resourcing for complaint handling

1 Since 1 March 2011, Country Energy cases have been recorded as Origin Energy (Country Energy).

2 Since July 2010, Victoria Electricity has been known as Lumo Energy.

Our performance

EWOV's strategic plan focuses on six areas—customer service, reach/influence, human resources, innovation, finance and scheme participant management.

Customer service

Our goal is to provide quality service to energy and water customers contacting EWOV

We focused on closing complaints at Stage One. This is where complaints are resolved within fourteen days through negotiation between us and the energy or water company's complaints team. By expanding our Stage One team and making some process changes, we closed 5,206 complaints at Stage One, 75% more than we did the year before. This delivered speedy resolution for customers and time, resources and case cost savings of some \$2.6 million to scheme participants.

We increased resources in our Intake area over the 10am – 3pm peak period.

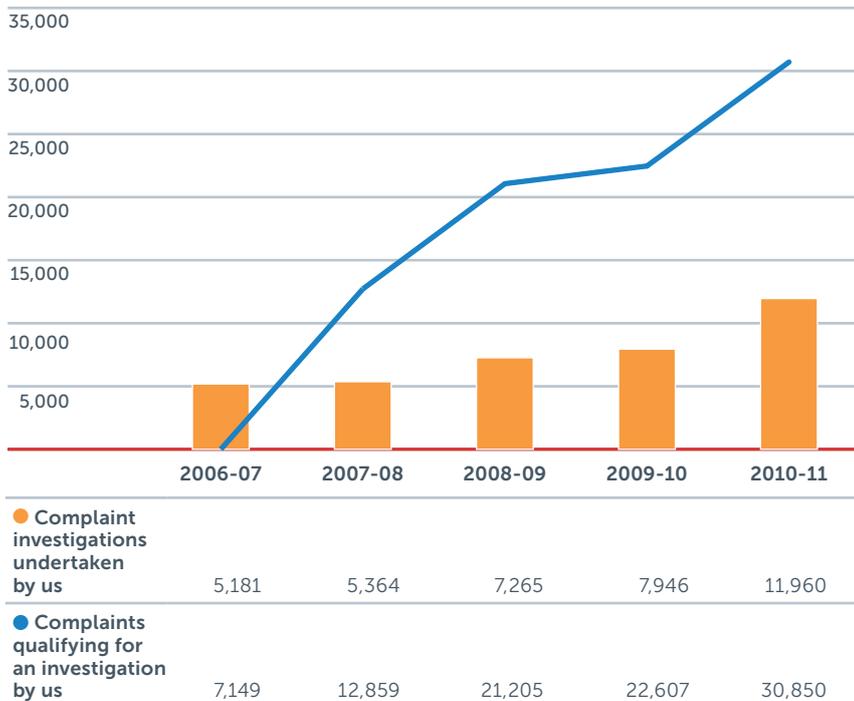
We expanded the Quality Assurance team in direct response to the growing number of staff requiring quality audits each month.

While we didn't quite meet all of our case closure key performance indicators (KPIs), we achieved very solid results—despite growing complaint volumes and the difficulties we faced recruiting suitable staff. We also performed extremely well on all aged complaint KPIs.

By using online customer surveys for the first time, we were able to survey more customers over a longer period and closer to the time of their contact with us—our previous approach was a one month sample surveyed over the phone.

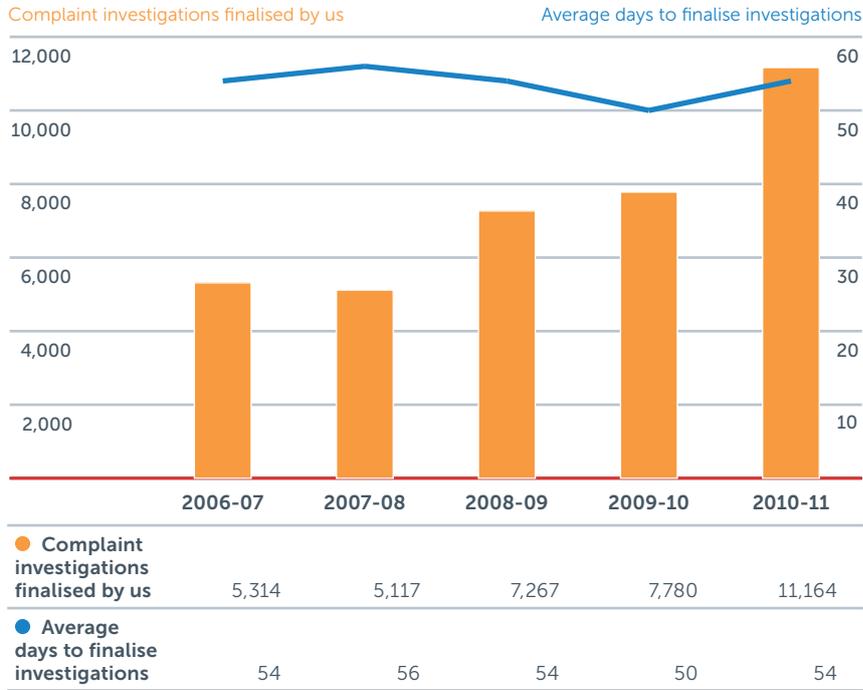
Customers who had experienced our Unassisted Referral and Assisted Referral processes were surveyed. 79% of Unassisted Referral customers were satisfied with the process, while customer satisfaction with the Assisted Referral process was 73%. These results are lower than we achieved in 2009/2010. The feedback provided in these surveys has been candid and honest, perhaps because customers felt more comfortable responding online than over the phone and had more time to consider their responses. It could also be that the online surveying, compared with the previous phone surveying, was closer in time to the customer's interaction with us. A rolling online survey will continue in 2010-11.

Fig 16: Impact on EWOV complaint investigations of customers choosing to be referred back to their company



We undertook 11,960 complaint investigations in 2010-11. It would have been 30,850 investigations though, if 18,890 customers hadn't chosen to give their company a final opportunity to resolve their complaint.

Fig 17: Tracking finalised complaint investigations



We finalised and closed **11,164** of the **11,960** complaint investigations undertaken. It took us an average of **54** days to finalise and close each investigation, up from **50** days the year before.

Fig 18: Time taken to finalise complaint investigations

	Number	%
Within 28 days	4,265	38
Within 60 days	7,688	69
Within 90 days	9,318	83
More than 90 days	1,846	17
Total	11,164	

Our performance continued

Reach/influence

Our goals are to:

- build customer capability for handling their own complaints
- provide effective input into public policy dialogue
- foster effective stakeholder relationships

We set up a new Research and Communications Team. It's focused on integrating our data collection and dissemination processes, to ensure we're providing all of our external stakeholders with timely, relevant information that they value, keeping our own staff up-to-date with complaint data and trends, and helping increase customer capability to resolve complaints themselves directly with their company.

We introduced interactive web broadcasts for the Ombudsman's release of major EWOV publications, such as the Annual Report and Resolution. Stakeholder response was overwhelmingly positive, we increased the size of our audience, stakeholders in regional locations were saved hours of travel and we can now make the release briefings generally available on our website.

We maintained a high level of public policy participation, with 28 public submissions to regulatory and government consultations.

We continued our community education visits, including participation in support activities for migrant and Indigenous communities.

Human resources

Our goal is to foster a stimulating and healthy workplace

A successful office relocation helped us accommodate staff growth of 32.6%.

We introduced a new remuneration model to support and recognise performance across EWOV.

A new organisation structure has created new career pathways and increased staff retention.

A new human resources information system provides our staff with self-service functionality for leave processing and reporting.

We completed a learning and development review, providing a new framework for staff training and development for implementation in the second half of 2011.

The staff satisfaction survey conducted by Aon Hewitt in May 2011 has enabled us to measure current employee engagement and benchmark ourselves against 'best employers'. Our overall engagement score of 64% was a very good first result (one percentage point off the best employer range).

We continued to deliver high quality skills and technical training to our staff—55 training sessions, up from 43 the year before, for 754 participants, with an average feedback rating of 4.7 out of 5.

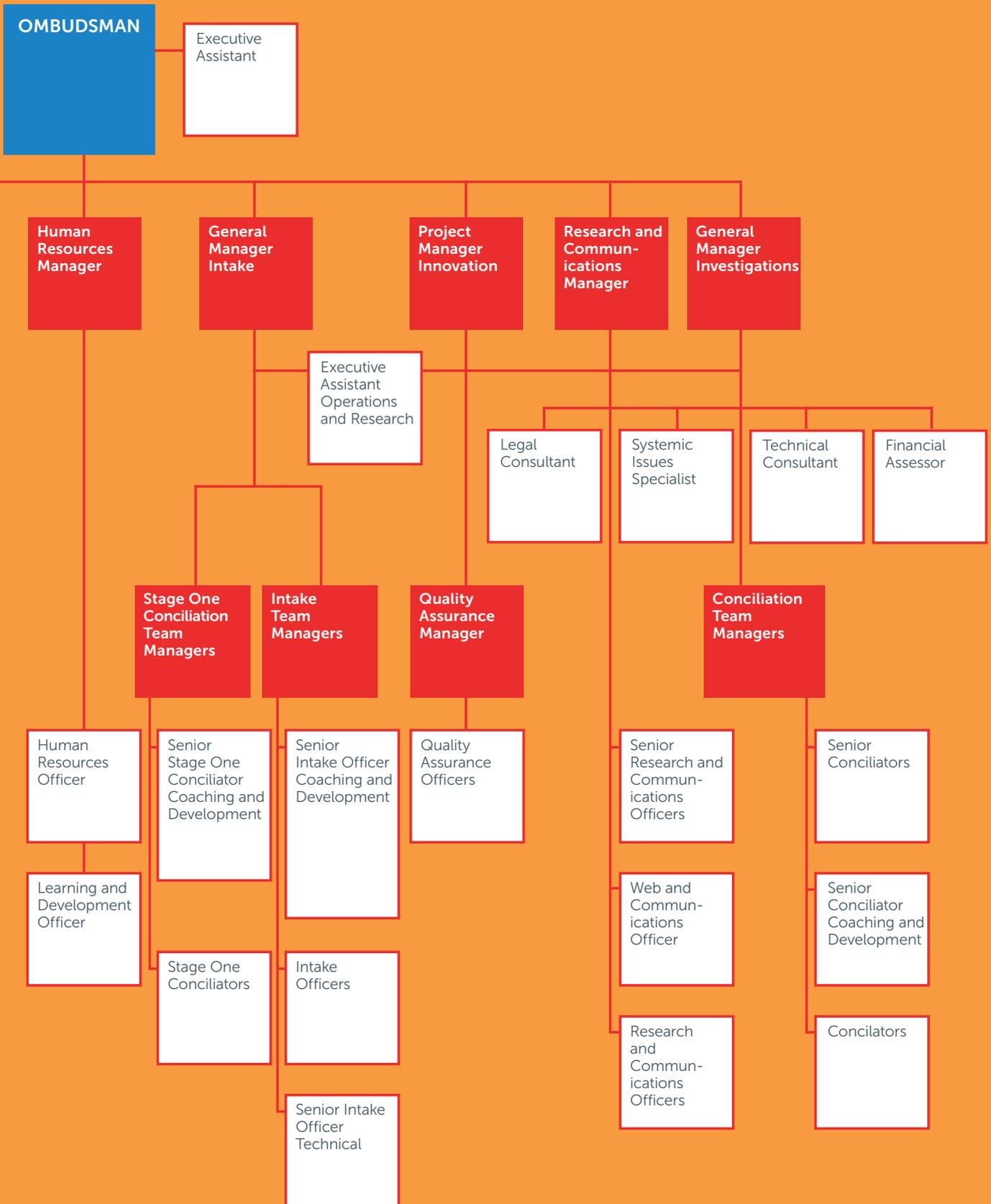
Finance

Our goal is to responsibly manage scheme resources—efficiencies balanced with effectiveness

We brought EWOV's 2010-11 costs in at \$12,969,000, which was \$410,000 (3%) below the budget of \$13,379,000. The savings were achieved in the office relocation and general administration.

Figure 19: Our structure at 30 June 2011





Our performance continued

Innovation

Our goal is to pursue continuous improvement, and as complaint volumes increased, innovation remained a key driver for us.

A staff innovation workshop came up with a list of 200 innovations. Some of these we were able to implement with minor changes or corrections to our processes. Many would require larger systems and/or process changes and will be considered as part of the people, policies, processes and systems review now underway.

Batching of Stage One complaints delivered annual efficiency savings equivalent to almost one full-time employee.

By emailing information on individual complaints to scheme participants directly from our case management system, we delivered efficiency savings of half a full-time employee.

Online surveying of customers saved us 112.5 hours in casual staff time.

Introduction of an IT portal to handle helpdesk requests improved the visibility and efficiency of IT resource allocation across the office.

We improved reporting and accountability within the Administration Team.

We employed a Financial Assessor to assist with hardship and affordability complaints and a Technical Advisor to assist with high bill complaints.

We established Senior Intake Officer (Coaching and Development) and Senior Conciliator (Coaching and Development) roles to improve our capacity to deliver ongoing and targeted coaching of staff to improve their case handling.

We introduced subject matter experts across some key complaint handling areas—water, electricity interval meters, solar, LPG, distribution, energy and water tariffs, hardship and wrongful disconnection payments.

Scheme participant management

Our goal is to foster effective scheme participant relationships and drive continued customer service improvement

We increased the frequency of our complaint review meetings with the companies. Benefits included focused, timely discussions about complaints (rather than email exchanges) and the opportunity for face-to-face contact.

We met regularly with General Managers of the companies with the highest complaint volumes.

We introduced Skype as an additional means of communication.

We facilitated 13 training sessions, attended by 140 scheme participant staff, with the average rating of each type of training being 4.5 out of 5 or higher.

We arranged five independently-facilitated complaint handling workshops, attended by 84 scheme participant staff, with an average rating of 4.7 out of 5.

We implemented a new case and funding model, supported by new reports for each company, available to them in the scheme participant extranet.

By industry

Electricity

At 30 June 2011, 21 retailers, 5 distributors and 2 transmission companies were electricity participants in the EWOV scheme.

All Victorian electricity customers can choose their electricity retailer.

Customers can't choose their electricity distributor, because each of the 5 distributors owns the 'poles and wires' network in a specific part of the state.

Cases

37,829 cases received, up 31%

93% residential and 7% business

2,871 enquiries received, up 11%

34,958 complaints received, up 33%

8,432 complaints investigated, up 57%

7,803 investigations finalised, up 49%

Main issues and sub-issues

50% billing—high bills, tariffs, billing errors

15% credit—disconnection, collection, payment difficulties

13% transfer—contract terms, without consent, in error

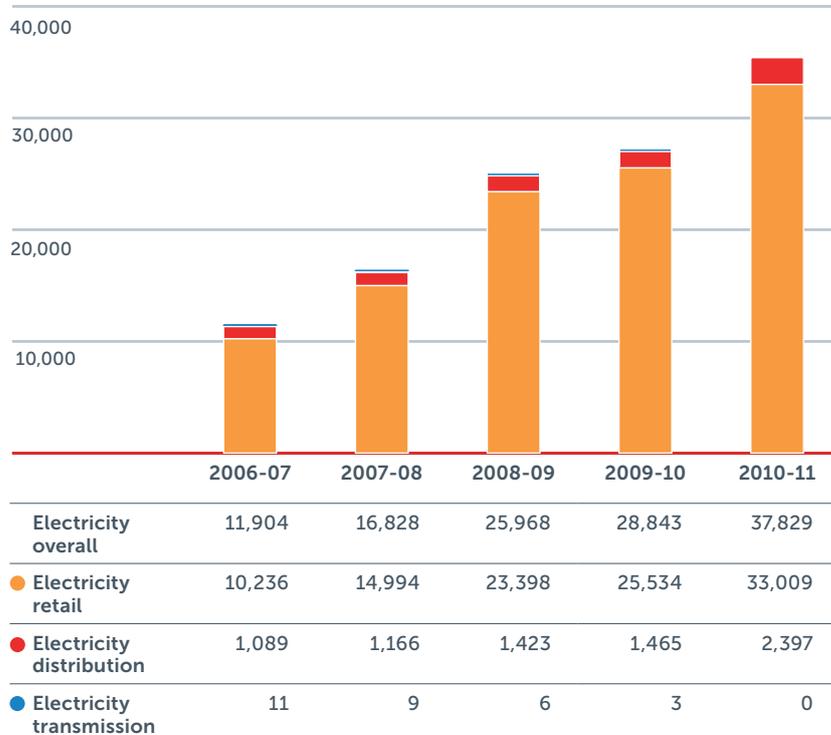
For a closer look

Behind the high bill complaints pages 20-21

Behind the credit complaints pages 22-23

Behind the electricity interval meter complaints pages 24-25

Fig 20: Trends in electricity cases



Note: the overall cases for each year also included a number of cases which were 'non company specific'.

By industry

Electricity continued

Fig 21: Electricity cases we received and finalised in 2010-11

	CUSTOMERS	OVERALL CASES		ENQUIRIES	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINTS			
		2010-11	2009-10			investigated complaints	assisted referrals	unassisted referrals	complaint investigations finalised
RETAIL									
	bandwidth ^								
AGL Sales	☺☺☺	6,488	7,418	279	6,209	1,721	3,187	1,301	1,757
Aurora Energy	☺	5	5	0	5	0	2	3	0
Australian Power & Gas	☺	2,015	826	110	1,905	505	982	418	454
Click Energy	☺	96	35	5	91	28	39	24	26
Country Energy ¹	☺	132	182	10	122	23	68	31	26
Dodo Power & Gas	☺	46	0	12	34	1	18	15	1
EnergyAustralia	☺	920	434	88	832	120	464	248	109
Energy One ²	☺	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Integral Energy ³	☺	8	4	3	5	0	0	5	0
Jackgreen ⁴	☺	0	86	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lumo Energy ⁵	☺	4,546	3,873	191	4,355	1,221	2,188	946	1,206
Momentum Energy	☺	88	71	4	84	19	40	25	18
Neighbourhood Energy	☺	535	455	34	501	86	284	131	87
Origin Energy	☺☺☺	7,717	5,044	392	7,325	1,696	3,919	1,710	1,492
Origin Energy (Country Energy) ¹	☺	86	0	9	77	20	35	22	11
Powerdirect (AGL)	☺	389	358	17	372	114	179	79	117
Powerdirect Australia (AGL)	☺	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	0
Red Energy	☺	1,339	869	80	1,259	264	647	348	265
Simply Energy	☺	2,808	2,412	99	2,709	730	1,450	529	632
TRUenergy	☺☺☺	5,790	3,459	194	5,596	1,594	2,896	1,106	1,343
TOTAL RETAIL		33,009	25,534	1,527	31,482	8,142	16,396	6,942	7,544
DISTRIBUTION									
	per cent ~								
CitiPower	12%	150	94	10	140	12	48	80	11
Jemena Electricity Networks	12%	368	251	30	338	44	124	170	32
Powercor Australia	27%	592	340	49	543	62	185	296	60
SP AusNet	24%	791	478	58	733	97	307	329	96
United Energy Distribution	25%	496	302	31	465	75	187	203	60
TOTAL DISTRIBUTION		2,397	1,465	178	2,219	290	851	1,078	259
TRANSMISSION									
Basslink		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SP AusNet		0	3	0	0	0	2	2	0
TOTAL TRANSMISSION		0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
NON COMPANY SPECIFIC									
Non company specific		2,423	1,841	1,166	1,257	0	0	1,257	
ELECTRICITY TOTALS		37,829	28,843	2,871	34,958	8,432	17,249	9,277	7,803

NOTES:

195 electricity investigations were upgraded to Stage 2 during the year, 813 were upgraded to Stage 3 and 174 were upgraded to Final Stage.

Retailers engaged in marketing activities take the view that their marketing may have an impact on their case numbers from time to time.

^ Customer bandwidths ☺ denotes less than 250,000 customers at 30 June 2010; ☺☺ 250,001 - 500,000 customers; ☺☺☺ 500,001 - 750,000 customers.

This is based on information provided to EWOV by each retailer.

~ Electricity distributors' customer shares are based on 2009 customer numbers in the *Australian Energy Regulator's (AER's) Victorian Electricity Distribution Businesses - Comparative Performance Report 2009* (November 2010).

1 Since 1 March 2011, Country Energy cases have been recorded as Origin Energy (Country Energy).

2 Energy One has now left the EWOV scheme.

3 Following its purchase by Origin Energy, Integral Energy relinquished its electricity licence in May 2011. It is serving out EWOV's required 12 months scheme participation notice.

4 Jackgreen went into voluntary administration on 18 December 2009. Its customers were transferred to default retailers from midnight that night.

5 Since July 2010, Victoria Electricity has been known as Lumo Energy.

Diamond Energy joined EWOV as an electricity retail participant in December 2010, but was not marketing in Victoria in 2010-11.

Fig 22: Time we spent, on average, finalising each type of electricity case

	number of cases	minutes
Enquiry	2,871	10
Unassisted referral	9,277	17
Assisted referral	17,249	22
Stage 1 complaint	3,452	114
Stage 2 complaint	3,587	311
Stage 3 complaint	593	475
Final Stage complaint	171	639

Fig 23: Electricity customers who contacted us

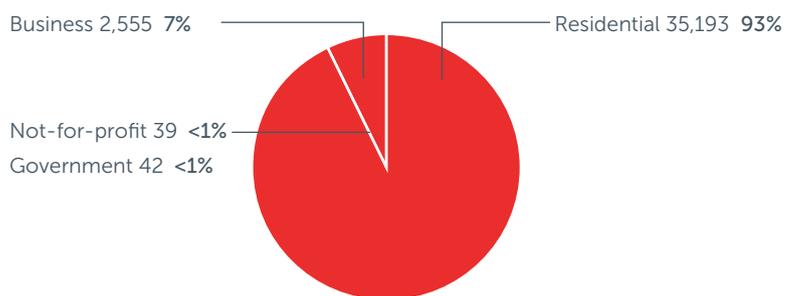
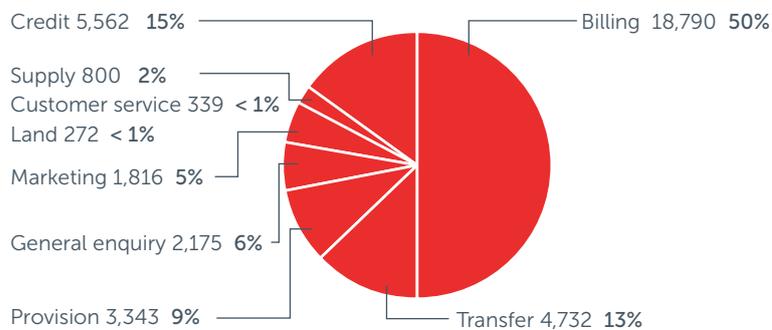


Fig 24: Main issues raised by electricity customers



Gas

At 30 June 2011, 10 natural gas retailers, 4 natural gas distributors and 5 liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) retailers were gas participants in the EWOV scheme.

All Victorians can choose their natural gas retailer. They can't choose their natural gas distributor, because the distributors each own the network of pipes in a specific part of the state.

Customers using LPG at home, or in their business, can choose to purchase it from LPG retailers or resellers operating in their area. EWOV's jurisdiction extends to LPG retailers only.

Cases

13,272 cases received, up 25%

98% residential and 2% business

679 enquiries received, up 36%

12,593 complaints received, up 25%

3,141 complaints investigated, up 39%

3,019 investigations finalised, up 35%

Main issues and sub-issues

38% billing—high bills, billing errors, estimated bills

21% transfer—contract terms, site ownership, without consent

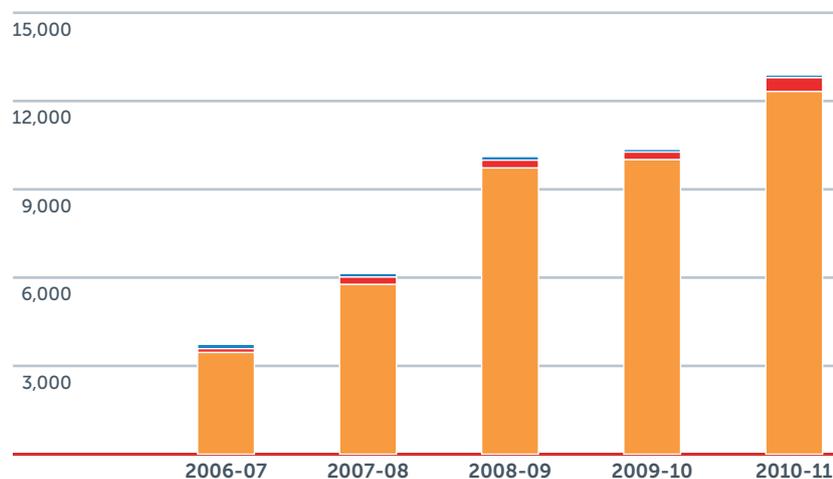
21% credit—disconnection, collection, payment difficulties

For a closer look

Behind the high bill complaints pages 20-21

Behind the credit complaints pages 22-23

Fig 25: Trends in gas cases



Gas overall	3,888	6,278	10,314	10,592	13,272
● Natural gas retail	3,456	5,767	9,726	10,006	12,323
● Natural gas distribution	129	251	263	259	469
● LPG	149	124	125	93	94

Note: the overall cases for each year also included a number of cases which were 'non company specific'.

Fig 26: Gas cases received and finalised in 2010-11

	CUSTOMERS	OVERALL CASES		ENQUIRIES	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINTS			
		2010-11	2009-10			investigated complaints	assisted referrals	unassisted referrals	complaint investigations finalised
RETAIL bandwidth ^									
AGL Sales	☺☺☺	3,027	3,496	98	2,929	771	1,597	561	786
AGL Sales Qld	☺	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australian Power & Gas	☺	1,081	390	42	1,039	253	552	234	238
EnergyAustralia	☺	391	178	21	370	52	207	111	50
Lumo Energy #	☺	2,088	1,604	45	2,043	606	1,056	381	607
Origin Energy	☺☺☺	2,117	1,687	117	2,000	480	1,086	434	449
Red Energy	☺	400	260	9	391	83	200	108	81
Simply Energy	☺	1,083	1,023	33	1,050	280	556	214	253
TRUenergy	☺☺	2,136	1,368	69	2,067	533	1,105	429	483
TOTAL NATURAL GAS RETAIL		12,323	10,006	434	11,889	3,058	6,359	2,472	2,947
NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION per cent ~									
Envestra	30%	143	58	17	126	17	62	47	14
Multinet Gas	39%	205	101	12	193	38	95	60	30
SP AusNet	31%	121	100	9	112	16	54	42	16
TOTAL NATURAL GAS DISTRIBUTION		469	259	38	431	71	211	149	60
NON COMPANY SPECIFIC									
Natural gas		381	222	197	184	0	0	184	0
LPG		5	12	0	5	0	0	5	0
LPG (RETAILER SPECIFIC)									
Elgas		55	64	7	48	8	19	21	8
Kleenheat		25	22	2	23	2	10	11	2
Origin Energy LPG		13	5	0	13	2	7	4	2
Powergas		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Supagas		1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL LPG (RETAILER SPECIFIC)		94	93	10	84	12	36	36	12
GAS TOTALS		13,272	10,592	679	12,593	3,141	6,606	2,846	3,019

NOTES:

45 gas investigations were upgraded to Stage 2 during the year, 190 were upgraded to Stage 3 and 34 were upgraded to Final Stage.

Gas retailers engaged in marketing activities take the view that their marketing may have an impact on their case numbers from time to time.

^ Customer bandwidths: ☺ denotes less than 250,000 customers at 30 June 2010; ☺☺ 250,001 - 500,000 customers; ☺☺☺ 500,001 - 750,000 customers.

This is based on information provided to EWOV by each natural gas retailer. LPG customer numbers are not currently available.

~ Natural gas distributors' customer shares are based on 2008 customer numbers in the *Australian Energy Regulator (AER)'s Victorian Gas Distribution Businesses - Comparative Performance Report 2008* (May 2010).

Lumo Energy was formerly known as Victoria Electricity.

Gas continued

Fig 27: Time we spent, on average, finalising each type of gas case

	number of cases	minutes
Enquiry	679	10
Unassisted referral	2,846	17
Assisted referral	6,606	21
Stage 1 complaint	1,613	112
Stage 2 complaint	1,204	284
Stage 3 complaint	171	392
Final Stage complaint	31	484

Fig 28: Gas customers who contacted us

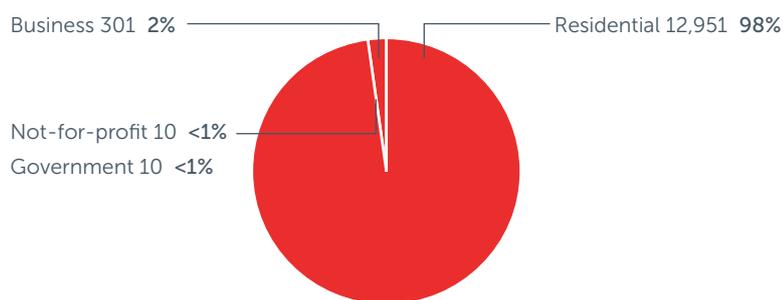
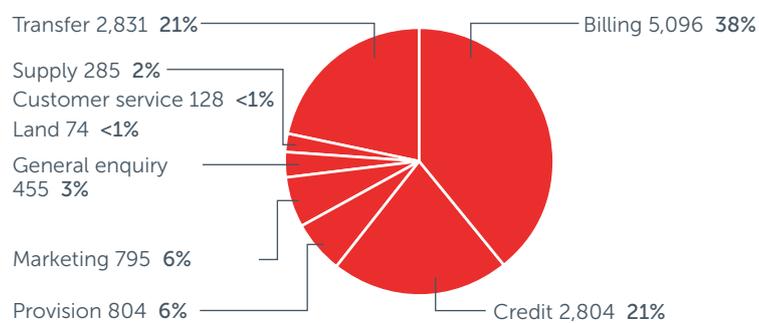


Fig 29: Main issues raised by gas customers



By industry

Water

At 30 June 2011, 3 metropolitan retailers, 1 metropolitan wholesaler, 11 regional urban water corporations, 2 rural water corporations and 2 rural urban water corporations were water participants in the EWOV scheme.

Victoria's water companies are State Government-owned corporations.

They operate in 5 sectors. All, except the metropolitan wholesaler, have both retail/billing and distribution/supply functions.

Cases

2,230 cases received, up 19%

93% residential and 7% business

292 enquiries received, up 32%

1,938 complaints received, up 17%

355 complaints investigated, up 39%

306 investigations finalised, up 28%

Main issues and sub-issues

59% billing—high bills, fees and charges, billing errors

8% land—network assets, property damage/restoration, easement

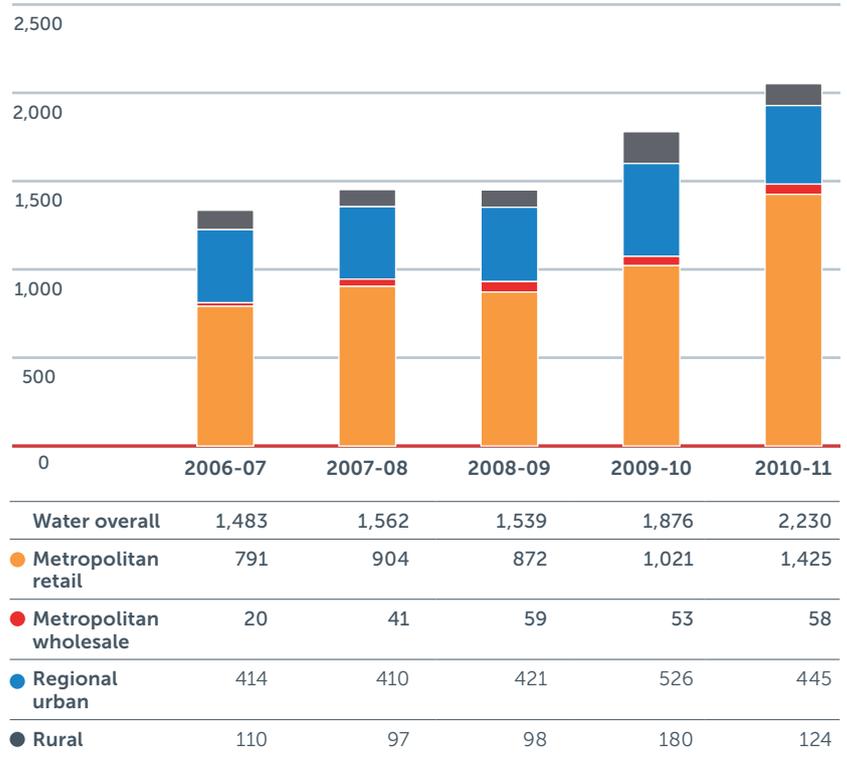
8% credit—collection, payment difficulties, supply restriction

For a closer look

Behind the high bill complaints pages 20-21

Behind the credit complaints pages 22-23

Fig 30: Trends in water cases



Note: the overall cases for each year also included a number of cases which were 'non company specific'.

Water continued

Fig 31: Water cases we received and finalised in 2010-11

	CUSTOMERS	OVERALL CASES		ENQUIRIES	TOTAL COMPLAINTS	COMPLAINTS			
		2010-11	2009-10			investigated complaints	assisted referrals	unassisted referrals	complaint investigations finalised
METROPOLITAN RETAIL (sector share)									
City West Water	21%	364	354	39	325	65	126	134	52
South East Water	38%	388	298	49	339	59	149	131	48
Yarra Valley Water	40%	673	369	71	602	125	264	213	100
TOTAL METROPOLITAN RETAIL		1,425	1,021	159	1,266	249	539	478	200
METROPOLITAN WHOLESALE									
Melbourne Water		58	53	5	53	10	19	24	13
REGIONAL URBAN									
Barwon Water	21%	82	88	7	75	9	34	32	8
Central Highlands Water	10%	59	50	2	57	7	27	23	6
Coliban Water	11%	42	55	6	36	12	13	11	11
East Gippsland Water	3%	21	14	0	21	5	7	9	6
Gippsland Water	10%	43	70	3	40	1	22	17	3
Goulburn Valley Water	8%	31	54	5	26	2	8	16	2
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	5%	22	20	2	20	2	12	6	3
Lower Murray Water	5%	9	15	1	8	3	1	4	3
North East Water	7%	14	21	0	14	2	4	8	3
South Gippsland Water	3%	13	16	2	11	1	6	4	1
Wannon Water	6%	46	44	0	46	11	16	19	10
Western Water	8%	43	48	2	41	7	13	21	8
Westernport Water	2%	20	31	3	17	1	11	5	2
TOTAL REGIONAL URBAN WATER		445	526	33	412	63	174	175	66
RURAL									
Goulburn-Murray Water	55%	81	106	3	78	18	37	23	14
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	23%	27	48	2	25	10	10	5	8
Lower Murray Water	7%	10	11	0	10	4	2	4	3
Southern Rural Water	15%	6	15	1	5	1	2	2	2
TOTAL RURAL WATER		124	180	6	118	33	51	34	27
NON COMPANY SPECIFIC									
Non company specific		178	96	89	89	0	0	89	0
TOTALS		2,230	1,876	292	1,938	355	783	800	306

NOTES:

8 water investigations were upgraded to Stage 2 during the year, 10 were upgraded to Stage 3 and none were upgraded to Final Stage.

Metropolitan and regional urban water companies' sector shares are based on the water customer numbers in the ESC's *Water performance report - Performance of urban water businesses 2009-10* (December 2010).

Rural water companies' sector shares are calculated from data provided to EWOV by those businesses.

Fig 32: Time we spent, on average, finalising each type of water case

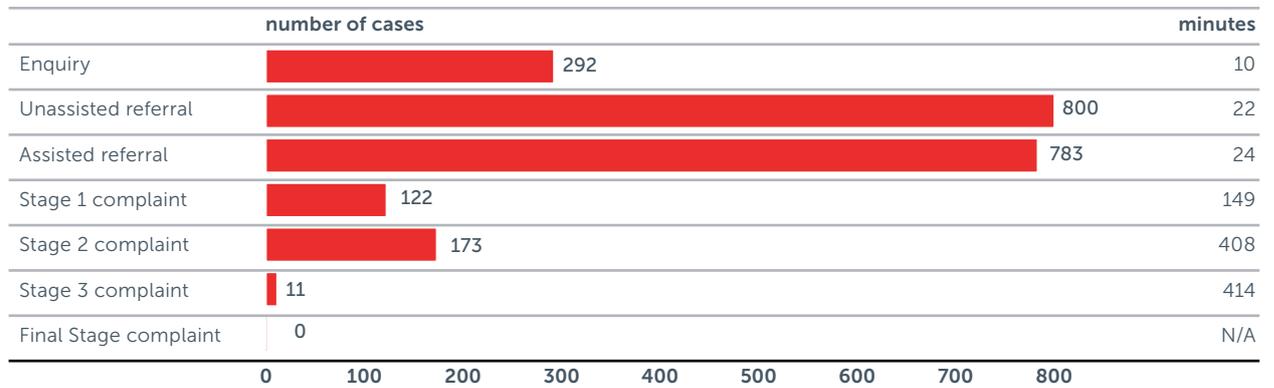


Fig 33: Water customers who contacted us

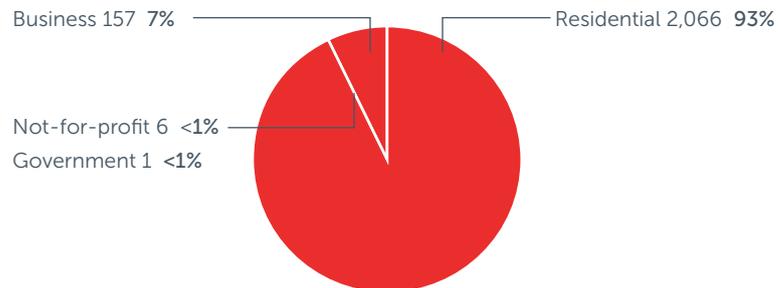
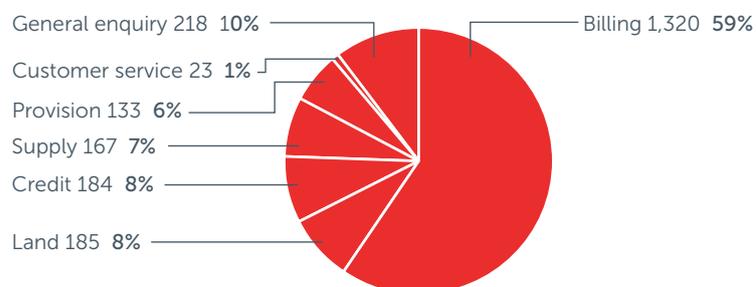


Fig 34: Main issues raised by water customers



Financial statements

Statement of Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 30 June 2011

	2011	2010
	\$	\$
Revenue	12,826,134	11,963,669
Employee benefits expense	(8,773,093)	(6,893,010)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(339,450)	(573,934)
Loss on disposal of plant and equipment	(6,470)	(949)
Rental expense	(976,312)	(393,537)
Administration expenses	(1,163,116)	(850,738)
Consultancy expenses	(535,537)	(555,068)
Marketing expenses	(103,539)	(83,110)
Training and development	(235,176)	(263,414)
Office lease make good obligations	(20,670)	(200,000)
Bad debts written off	0	(10,411)
Surplus before income tax expense	672,771	2,139,498
Income tax expense	-	-
Surplus for the year	672,771	2,139,498
Other Comprehensive Income	-	-
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	672,771	2,139,498

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2011

	2011	2010
	\$	\$
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	5,465,652	8,834,196
Trade and other receivables	10,606	7,370
Other	145,483	80,879
Total Current Assets	5,621,741	8,922,445
Non-Current Assets		
Plant and equipment	1,170,980	656,468
Total Non-Current Assets	1,170,980	656,468
Total Assets	6,792,721	9,578,913
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	1,990,190	5,447,088
Provisions	587,256	663,367
Total Current Liabilities	2,577,446	6,110,455
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	168,842	94,796
Total Non- Current Liabilities	168,842	94,796
Total Liabilities	2,746,288	6,205,251
Net Assets	4,046,433	3,373,662
Members' Equity		
Retained surplus	4,046,433	3,373,662
Total Members' Equity	4,046,433	3,373,662

Financial statements continued

Statement of Cash Flows

For the year ended 30 June 2011

	2011	2010
	\$	\$
Cash Flows from Operating Activities		
Levy receipts from Members (inclusive of goods and services tax)	10,765,736	13,533,517
Payments to suppliers and employees (inclusive of goods and services tax)	(13,669,755)	(9,544,699)
Interest received and other income	395,907	282,746
Net cash outflows/inflows from operating activities	(2,508,112)	4,271,564
Cash Flows from Investing Activities		
Payments for plant and equipment	(863,390)	(386,545)
Proceeds from sale of assets	2,958	554
Net cash (outflow) from investing activities	(860,432)	(385,991)
Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents	(3,368,544)	3,885,573
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the Financial Year	8,834,196	4,948,623
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the Financial Year	5,465,652	8,834,196

Quick guide to acronyms used in this report

ADR	alternative dispute resolution
CAV	Consumer Affairs Victoria
EDR	external dispute resolution
ESC	Essential Services Commission
EWOV	Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)
IDR	internal dispute resolution
KPI	key performance indicator
LPG	liquefied petroleum gas (also known as bottled gas)
MRIM	manually read interval meter
PFiT	Premium Feed-in Tariff
WDP	wrongful disconnection payment

Quick guide to tables/graphs/charts in this report

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Contacting EWOV

We 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.

For calls from restricted phone services, ring 12550 (Telstra reverse charges) and ask for (03) 8672 4450. EWOV will accept the reverse charges and the call cost.

Calls from mobile phones may attract charges—we can ring you back

Freecall: 1800 500 509

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

ABN: 57 070 516 175



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