



## Winter 2012 issue

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EWOV opened in May 1996. By 31 May 2012, we had assisted over 335,000 energy and water customers, most of them residential.

We provide independent advice, information and referral regarding energy and water services.

We receive, investigate and facilitate the resolution of complaints involving customers and energy and water service companies in Victoria.

We identify, and where appropriate redress, systemic issues and refer these to energy and water companies and regulators.

We work with customer groups, industry and regulators to drive ongoing customer service improvement and to prevent complaints.

## Message from the Ombudsman

In this issue of *EWOV Connect*, you'll find two 'user guides' to our new website. In them, we highlight and link some of the parts of the site we think are particularly useful for customers and those who represent them, including community agencies.

For customers, the new website introduces 10 videos, presented by experienced EWOV team members. These take a practical, plain-English approach to topics customers often raise with us. There's also a new form for lodging complaints online. More on [page 2](#).

For community agencies, there's specific advice about how to represent a client in EWOV's process, as well as links to information we think you'll find particularly useful in the energy and water aspects of your work. More on [page 3](#).

On [page 4](#), there's a reminder about the first issue of *Res Online*. This is our longstanding half-year *Resolution* publication taken into an online format. Producing *Res Online* quarterly will mean our published complaints information is more current and accessible to all of EWOV's stakeholders.

On [pages 5 and 6](#), you'll find handy links to energy and water company hardship policies/programs and contacts.

Our aim with *EWOV Connect* is to provide, link or point to information that community agency workers can draw on. Please let us know if there's something you'd like us to cover.

Cynthia Gebert  
Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)

## EWOV website 'user guide' for customers

In developing our new website ([www.ewov.com.au](http://www.ewov.com.au)), we aimed for practical, up-to-date information for all of EWOV's stakeholders.

For customers, this includes more tips and information about rights, responsibilities and common issues—to help them be more confident about discussing the problem with their energy or water company and working towards an effective resolution.

### Learn from the experience of EWOV team members

Ten new customer education videos feature EWOV team members, experienced in dispute resolution, who go step-by-step through some things we regularly discuss with customers:

[What is EWOV and what does it do?](#)

[Resolving your own complaints](#)

[Victoria's Smart Meter rollout](#)

[Solar installations](#)

[Energy and water efficiency](#)

[Energy marketing and transfers](#)

[Common water issues](#)

[Disconnection and restriction](#)

[High energy and water bills](#)

[Financial hardship](#)

### Check whether the question is one we're asked a lot

If it is, the answer may be under our [frequently asked questions](#), which cover some of the more common questions customers ask us about energy and water companies, energy contracts, bills, meters, connection, supply quality and trees and power lines.

### Get some specific information on billing

Billing has always been the biggest source of complaints to EWOV. This section, split into [energy](#) and [water](#), covers bills, payment, moving house, meters and how to switch energy retailer.

### Get the plain facts

Our [fact sheets](#) are a popular resource. Recently updated, many of them also address aspects of the billing process.

### Check a particular company's complaints trends

Our [historical case data](#) goes back to 2006.

### What does this mean for you?

While some customers may always find it difficult to represent themselves, your being able to point them to basic information about their rights and responsibilities can help build their capability.

*Resources on our new site to help customers take complaints up with their company directly and more confidently*



*Our online forms make it easy to lodge a complaint or ask a question*

[FORM FOR COMPLAINTS](#)

[FORM FOR FEEDBACK & QUESTIONS](#)

Website resources you can draw on in your community agency work

## EWOV website 'user guide' for community sector workers

In addition to the customer information on [page 2](#), which you can use to help your clients, there are other parts of our website we think you'll find particularly useful in your work.

### Read the specific advice we've put together for community workers

Under [Complaints](#), you'll find a section called [Advice for community agencies](#). This covers things we think you may need to know when you're helping a client who has an energy or water problem:

- [Acting for a client](#)
- [What happens when you contact us on behalf of a client](#)
- [If your client is having financial difficulty](#)
- [Check their company's hardship policy](#)
- [Check for government assistance](#)
- [Energy disconnection or water restriction](#)
- [If the energy disconnection was wrongful](#)

### Find contact information for all of the energy and water companies

Under [Companies](#), you'll find links that take you through to more detailed pages with the phone numbers and website links for all the energy and water companies operating in Victoria.

### Get a feel for how certain types of complaints may be resolved

Under [Publications and media](#), you'll find electricity, gas, dual fuel and water [case studies](#) and information on [systemic issues](#) identified over the past few years.

### Request a visit from the EWOV team

Our [Community visits calendar](#) shows where we've been this year and where we're heading. If you'd like us to head your way, please ask.

### Understand how EWOV works

Under [About us](#), you'll find information about EWOV's history, jurisdiction, governance and relationships with other bodies.

### Read our public policy contributions

[Our public submissions](#) to regulatory and government consultations draw on the complaints we've received. The details in them may be another useful resource for you.



If you're looking at our website for information on something specific, don't forget you can use the **SEARCH FUNCTION.**

### What does this mean for you?

That may depend on your interests and needs, but it's worth remembering the range of information available on our website when something about energy or water comes up in your work.

## Resolution goes online quarterly

A reminder about the new online version of our regular *Resolution* publication. **Res Online** gives us scope to publish more regular, up-to-date and targeted information on energy and water complaints and issues. We can also integrate this information with the growing suite of online resources throughout our website.

### Not on the *Res Online* distribution list?

Kate Graham can help with that: [Kathryn.Graham@ewov.com.au](mailto:Kathryn.Graham@ewov.com.au)

### A quick guide to what's in the first issue of *Res Online*

[Complaints snapshot](#)

[Trends](#)

Most common issues [overall](#) and [by industry](#)

[Scheme participant](#) data and trends

*More accessible,  
quarterly updates  
on cases, trends  
and issues  
customers  
are raising  
with us most*

### Res Online feature

A closer look at [disconnection complaints](#)

Statistics, trends, disconnection case study, systemic issues

### Electricity retailer's response to the customer's financial situation didn't take enough account of her capacity to pay (WDP/2011/1677)

The customer had been with her electricity retailer since 2007. She'd received assistance through its hardship program and had consistently made payments. From January 2011 to August 2011, she paid \$50 a fortnight. She said that, in July 2011, the retailer asked her to increase her payments to \$85 a fortnight. She told the retailer she couldn't afford to do this and would speak with a financial counsellor. When the financial counsellor contacted the retailer on her behalf, the retailer asked for \$80 a fortnight. The financial counsellor said the customer couldn't afford this amount either. In the end, through the financial counsellor, the customer agreed to increase her payments to \$60. In October 2011, her supply was disconnected. Our investigation of whether the disconnection was wrongful found the electricity retailer was unable to demonstrate how, in seeking a \$30 a fortnight increase, it had taken account of the customer's capacity to pay. In addition, the retailer hadn't provided the customer with energy efficiency advice, despite her fortnightly consumption increasing over time. The customer received a wrongful disconnection payment of \$249.65.

### Recent systemic issues related to wrongful disconnection

- Full arrears not shown on electricity disconnection notices
- Pre-disconnection obligations to customers not fulfilled
- Limited notice of disconnection, then personal information sought

[More information](#) on these systemic issues

### **MORE FROM RES ONLINE**

*Read the  
[OMBUDSMAN'S  
UPDATE](#) on  
developments  
at EWOV  
as we tackle  
complaint  
increases  
head on*

**Latest hardship contacts for energy companies**

**Ask to be put through to the customer assistance or hardship team**

## Energy hardship policy links and contacts

Energy retailers (with links to hardship program/policy)	Contact points for customers	Contact points for financial counsellors
<a href="#">AGL</a>	1300 659 925	1300 659 925
<a href="#">Australian Power &amp; Gas</a>	1800 007 225	
<a href="#">Click Energy</a>	1800 775 929	(07) 3852 8311
<a href="#">Country Energy</a>	132 356	
<a href="#">Diamond Energy</a>	1300 838 009	
<a href="#">Dodo Power &amp; Gas</a>	1300 37 47 57	
<a href="#">EnergyAustralia</a>	1300 723 492	
<a href="#">Lumo Energy</a>	1800 989 321	
<a href="#">Momentum Energy</a>	1300 662 778	(03) 8612 6490
<a href="#">Neighbourhood Energy</a>	1300 764 860	(03) 9519 8018
<a href="#">Origin Energy</a>	13 24 61	1800 626 320
<a href="#">Powerdirect</a>	1300 559 432	1300 559 432
<a href="#">Red Energy</a>	131 806 or (03) 9425 2728	(03) 9425 2728
<a href="#">Simply Energy</a>	1800 094 121	1800 094 121
<a href="#">TRUenergy</a>	1800 558 643	

## Water hardship policy links and contacts

Water companies (with links to hardship program/policy)	Contact points for customers	Contact points for financial counsellors
<a href="#">Barwon Water</a>	1300 656 007	(03) 5226 9925 (03) 5226 9902 (03) 5226 9903
<a href="#">Central Highlands Water</a>	(03) 5320 3111 or 1800 444 553	(03) 5320 3324
<a href="#">City West Water</a>	131 691	
<a href="#">Coliban Water</a>	1300 363 200	
<a href="#">East Gippsland Water</a>	1300 720 700	
<a href="#">Gippsland Water</a>	1800 050 500	
<a href="#">Goulburn Valley Water</a>	1300 360 007	
<a href="#">Goulburn Murray Rural Water</a>	1800 013 357 or (03) 5833 5531	(03) 5833 5531
<a href="#">Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water</a>	1300 659 961	
<a href="#">Lower Murray Water</a>	(03) 5051 3400	
<a href="#">North East Water</a>	1300 361 633	(02) 6022 0518
<a href="#">South East Water</a>	131 851	
<a href="#">South Gippsland Water</a>	1300 851 636	
<a href="#">Wannon Water</a>	1300 926 666	
<a href="#">Western Water</a>	1800 093 558	
<a href="#">Westernport Water</a>	1300 720 711 or (03) 5956 4144	(03) 5671 3278
<a href="#">Yarra Valley Water</a>	131 721	1800 637 316

**Latest hardship  
contacts  
for water  
companies**

**Ask to be  
put through to  
the customer  
assistance  
or hardship team**

State Government changes to energy concessions due to compensation for carbon price

## Energy concessions change from 1 July 2012

### Annual Electricity Concession

The [Annual Electricity Concession](#) provides concession cardholders with a discount of 17.5% off household electricity bills all year round. From 1 July 2012, the concession will not apply to the first \$171.60 of a concession card holder's annual electricity bill. The Department of Human Services says that the change has been made because the Commonwealth Government is introducing a carbon price: *"Given the Commonwealth Government is on average providing full compensation to households for the impact of the carbon price on energy bills, the concession on that component of these bills is unnecessary. The Commonwealth Government estimates that the new carbon price will increase electricity bills by 10%. In dollar terms this equates to an average of \$3.30 per week or \$171.60 per annum. The State Government concession will not apply to that part of the energy bill covered by Commonwealth compensation, which represents a subsidy of \$2.50 a month for electricity across the year."*

### Winter Energy Concession (gas)

The [Winter Energy Concession](#) on gas provides concession card holders with a discount of 17.5% off mains gas bills from 1 May to 31 October of each year. From 1 July 2012, the concession will not apply to the first \$62.40 of a concession card holder's winter gas bill. The Department of Human Services says that the change has been made because the Commonwealth Government is introducing a carbon price: *"Given the Commonwealth Government is on average providing full compensation to households for the impact of the carbon price on energy bills, the concession on that component of these bills is unnecessary. The Commonwealth Government estimates that the new carbon price will increase gas bills by 9%. In dollar terms this equates to an average of \$1.50 per week or \$78 per annum. The amount of \$62.40 is worked out based on the winter usage of approximately 80% of gas costs."*

There's [more about energy and other concessions](#) on the Department of Human Services' website.

### Carbon compensation

The Commonwealth Government is also compensating low-income households for the impact of the carbon price on energy bills by providing increases in pensions, allowances and income tax cuts through the Commonwealth Clean Energy Future Household Assistance Package. [Clean Energy Future website](#).

*The Department of Human Services has issued its [State concessions and hardship programs 2010-11 report](#). The report sets out the concession programs provided for low-income Victorians during the 2010-11 financial year.*

## National Energy Customer Framework

On 13 June 2012, the State Minister for Energy and Resources announced that Victoria's transition to the national energy laws would be deferred.

In making the announcement, the Minister said ...

"Victoria has the strongest consumer protections in the country and we are not prepared to accept a dilution of key Victorian consumer protections as a result of this reform."

"The Essential Services Commission will continue to regulate the Victorian Energy Retail Code while Victoria undertakes further work with the Australian Energy Regulator regarding the administration of certain key state-specific retail regulations."

[Full announcement](#)

## Smarter Choice Retail Program

A new Victorian Government program will train retail sales staff from some 400 appliance, lighting and hardware retail stores in metropolitan and regional Victoria on how best to advise customers about the energy efficiency of appliances.

Customers will also be able to get in-store brochures outlining the running costs of appliances, energy and water efficiency tips and easy-to-use calculators showing the savings made by choosing higher efficiency products.

[Media release](#)

### **ON THE EWOV WEBSITE**

A [video about energy and water efficiency](#) with chapters on:

- *How to reduce the energy or water bill.*
- *Energy appliance cost and efficiency.*
- *What can a tenant do to be more energy or water efficient.*

*Protection of Victoria's consumer protections underpins Government's recent decision to defer*



**Working with community groups and agencies to build awareness and customer capability**

## **Contributing to community education**

### **Thomastown Library information day**

In mid-March, we took part in a Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) Information Day at Thomastown Library. With the help of one of EWOV's team members who is fluent in Arabic, we were able to assist about 70 people who spoke Arabic, along with other members of the community who popped in. We were also able to provide referrals to other services and organisations, on things such as energy efficiency, water rebates and landlord disputes. Many people thanked us for our help and it was a very rewarding day.



*You may find it useful to know that, among the EWOV staff we have people who speak:*

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Cook Island Maori</i>
<i>Filipino</i>	<i>Greek</i>
<i>Hindi</i>	<i>Indonesian</i>
<i>Italian</i>	<i>Macedonian</i>
<i>Malay</i>	<i>Maltese</i>
<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Tamal</i>

*We also use the TIS translation service –131 450 –through which we can organise translation or interpretation assistance.*

### **What does this mean for you?**

Energy and water issues can be quite complex and even English-speaking customers can find it hard to understand their rights and responsibilities—when English isn't the customer's first language, it may seem almost impossible. It's part of our role, in providing EWOV's independent dispute resolution service, to do what we can to provide equal access to information and assistance for all Victorians. If you're working with a client who's struggling with energy or water issues, you can ring us on their behalf for advice and assistance.

There's more about our community outreach and education on [page 10](#)

## EWOV in the community

So far this year, we've taken part in 17 community events, including:

- A Consumer Affairs Victoria information day at Thomastown Library (see [page 9](#)) and three other similar days.
- EWOV was represented in late March 2012 to some 100 students at an expo-style day at the Preston Reservoir Adult Centre for Education. The aim was to provide students with information and referral to financial, utility and other services. Most students were from non-English speaking backgrounds, including Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Somali, Tamil and Punjabi. We provided assistance, brochures and referrals to other organisations, where the matter wasn't within EWOV's jurisdiction.
- A stand at the External Dispute Resolution (EDR) Forum, run in conjunction with Financial Counselling Australia's 2012 Conference.



### COMING NEXT ISSUE

*We're hitting the road  
... details of our upcoming  
community road shows*

*Our new community resources  
... poster and basic fact sheet*

## EWOV essentials

We can help with electricity, gas (natural and LPG) and water problems that can't be resolved directly with an electricity, gas or water company. Our services are free and available to everyone.

### What kinds of problems?

- the provision and supply of a service (or the failure to provide or supply it)
- billing
- credit and payment services
- disconnections and restrictions
- refundable advances (security deposits)
- land and property issues

### How do we resolve problems?

Most things can be sorted out through discussion and agreement. In a small number of cases, the Ombudsman makes a final decision—just like an umpire. Decisions are binding on energy and water companies and may include awards of up to \$20,000 or, if all parties agree, up to \$50,000. Read more on our website: [www.ewov.com.au](http://www.ewov.com.au).

### Freecall 1800 500 509

If the phone service is restricted—ring 12550 (Telstra reverse charges) and quote this number: (03) 8672 4460—we'll accept the reverse charges and the call cost. Calls from mobile phones may attract charges — we can ring you back.

Free fax: 1800 500 549

Interpreter service: 131 450

National Relay Service: 133 677

Email: [ewovinfo@ewov.com.au](mailto:ewovinfo@ewov.com.au)

[Online complaint form](#)

Website: [www.ewov.com.au](http://www.ewov.com.au)

Post: GPO Box 469, Melbourne Vic 3001