



20 March 2015

United Energy
EDPR Feedback
PO Box 449
Mount Waverley VIC 3149

By email: yourenergy@ue.com.au

Dear Sir/Madam

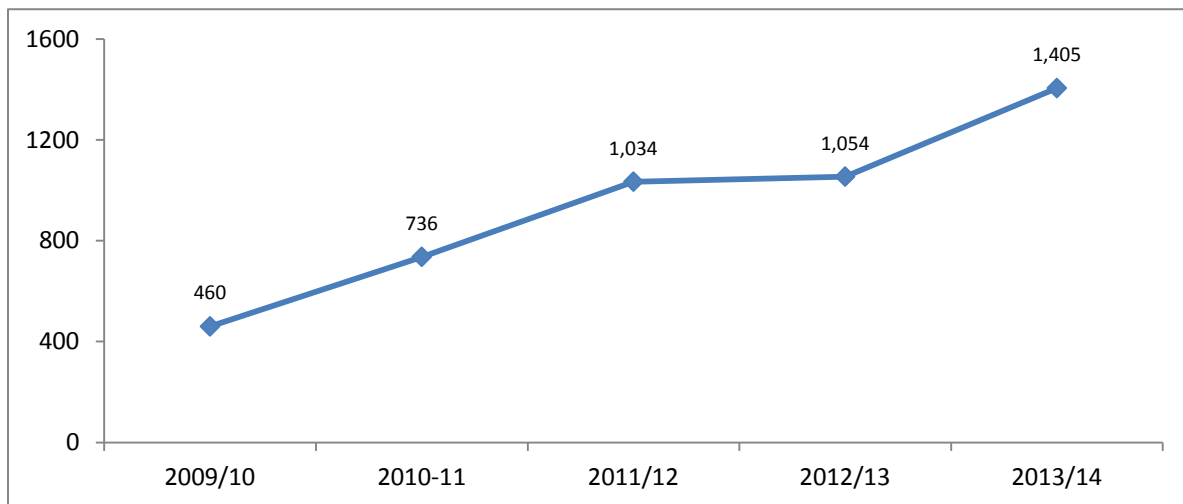
Re: *Shape our energy future together – Customer and Stakeholder Consultation Paper*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on United Energy's (UE) *Shape our energy future together – Customer and Stakeholder Consultation Paper*. We welcome UE's emphasis on customer and stakeholder engagement throughout the Electricity Distribution Pricing Review process, as well as its plans to engage with, empower and improve service to customers in the coming regulatory period.

As an industry-based external dispute resolution scheme, the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) provides alternative dispute resolution services to Victorian energy and water customers by receiving, investigating and facilitating the resolution of complaints. Our comments in this submission are based on our experience handling complaints from UE customers.

EWOV cases from UE customers have increased steadily and substantially over the past five years.

EWOV United Energy cases, 2009/10 to 2013/14



In 2013/14, we received 1,405 UE cases. This was a 33% increase over the previous year's case total, and more than three times as many cases as received in 2009/10. UE is not unique in this regard: all Victorian electricity distributors saw cases increase over the same period, driven in large part by the smart meter rollout. Nevertheless, UE cases have risen more than those of most other distributors. In 2013/14, UE served 25% of Victorian electricity distribution customers, but contributed 37% of EWOV electricity distribution complaints.

EWOV welcomes UE's proposed strong customer focus for the 2016–2020 regulatory period, and suggests a focus on the areas that drive most customer complaints. Close to half (46%) of UE's 2013/14 cases primarily concerned a provision issue, while a further 30% were about supply. The top contributors to UE cases were meter exchanges; damage or loss as a result of unplanned outages and voltage variations; and supply upgrade issues, including delays.

Results of our recently released research into EWOV scheme participants' Internal Dispute Resolution processes may also inform UE's efforts to improve customer service and resolve complaints. We surveyed 1,645 energy and water customers about their experiences and perceptions of the customer service they received from their company both before and after coming to EWOV with a complaint. The survey found that customers are investing substantial time and effort to resolve complaints with their energy company before coming to EWOV, and highlighted customers' primary focus on seeing their problem fixed. The findings also suggest that energy companies may be able to improve IDR outcomes and prevent complaints coming to EWOV by:

- ensuring that staff are trained, resourced and empowered to fix the customer's issue and provide accurate information, and
- being more willing to escalate complaints at an earlier stage.

More detail on the survey findings is available in the report [*"Can I speak with a manager?" An analysis of energy and water company performance in handling your complaint.*](#)

We hope the above comments are helpful. Should you require further information or have any queries, please contact Caitlin Whiteman, Senior Research and Communications Officer, on 03 8672 4273 or at caitlin.whiteman@ewov.com.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cynthia Gebert', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Cynthia Gebert
Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)