

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 24



ENERGY & WATER
OMBUDSMAN SA

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ABOUT THE ENERGY & WATER OMBUDSMAN SA

Our role is to facilitate the prompt resolution of disputes between the consumers of energy and water services and the providers of those services, by providing a free, independent, accessible, fair and informal service to consumers.

Who we are

Our Scheme

Energy and water services are important to all stakeholders because they are essential community services; they are not considered optional. That is why independent ombudsman schemes exist across Australia to deal with issues that arise between service providers and customers.

The Energy & Water Ombudsman SA is the approved independent Scheme in South Australia.

Our Role

Our role is to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and disputes between the consumers of energy, water and sewerage services and the providers of those services (our Members) by providing a free, independent, accessible, fair and informal service to consumers. We are also recognised as an external dispute resolution (EDR) Scheme to handle privacy-related complaints under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

Our Principles

The principles that guide our activities are:

- dealing with complaints in a fair, just, informal and expeditious manner
- acting independently, while maintaining good working relationships with Members and other stakeholders
- being accessible to energy and water consumers in South Australia regardless of their geographic location, language, physical or mental capacity, or financial status
- providing a free service to consumers
- making effective use of technology to assist in quality complaint handling, referral and reporting
- working together with Members, other complaint-handling bodies, government agencies, and consumer and community organisations.

Our Origins

The Energy & Water Ombudsman SA originated from the privatisation of the South Australian electricity industry in 1999.

It became a license condition for all entities providing electricity services to participate in an independent dispute resolution Scheme.

This ensures fair practice and effective dispute resolution between the electricity providers and their customers.

The Scheme was subsequently expanded to include customers of gas and water services.

In 2012, we also became an external dispute resolution (EDR) Scheme to handle privacy-related complaints.

Our Industry

Our service ensures fair practice and the effective resolution of complaints between service providers and their customers.

Our Members are:

- licensed or authorised electricity and gas distribution, transmission and retail entities
- providers of water and sewerage services
- exempt embedded networks
- exempt network service providers
- exempt energy sellers
- small-scale networks.

A list of current Members can be found under [Our Organisation](#).

Our Functions

In any customer setting, things can go wrong, that is why it is important that customers have access to the Energy & Water Ombudsman SA.

What we do

Our role is to facilitate the prompt resolution of disputes between the consumers of energy and water services and the providers of those services, by providing a free, independent, accessible, fair and informal service to consumers. Customers can contact us about a range of issues including:

- connection, supply and sale of energy or water services by a Member
- disconnection or restriction of supply
- billing disputes
- administration of credit and payment services
- security deposits
- the impact of actions by a Member on land or other property
- the conduct of Members' employees, servants, officers, contractors, or agents
- complaints about acts or practices of Members that may interfere with the privacy of an individual under the *Privacy Act 1988*
- any other matters referred by a Member by agreement with the Ombudsman and the persons affected.

This report explains our full range of services and how we have provided them during the past financial year. It also describes our complaint resolution process.

What we don't do

Our functions do not extend across all areas. We cannot deal with:

- the setting of prices and tariffs
- commercial activities outside the scope of a Member's authorisation or license
- the content of government policies, legislation, licenses, and codes
- matters before a court, tribunal, or arbitrator
- customer contributions to the cost of capital works
- disputes between Members.

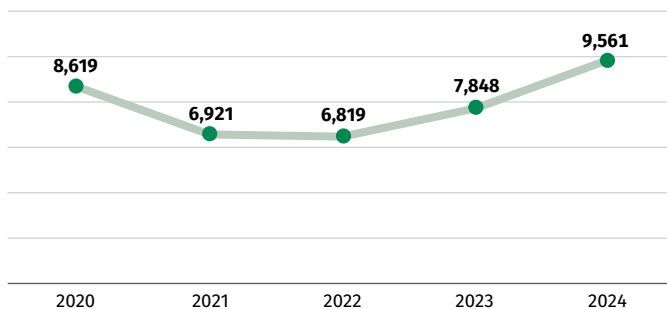
Our Approach

We put our emphasis on working with our Members and their customers to help solve problems. We want to find solutions that not only deal with a single problem, but also minimise future complaints and help Members build more responsive and robust complaint-handling systems. We are not an advocacy service for either party in a dispute, nor can we provide legal advice. We are also not a government department.

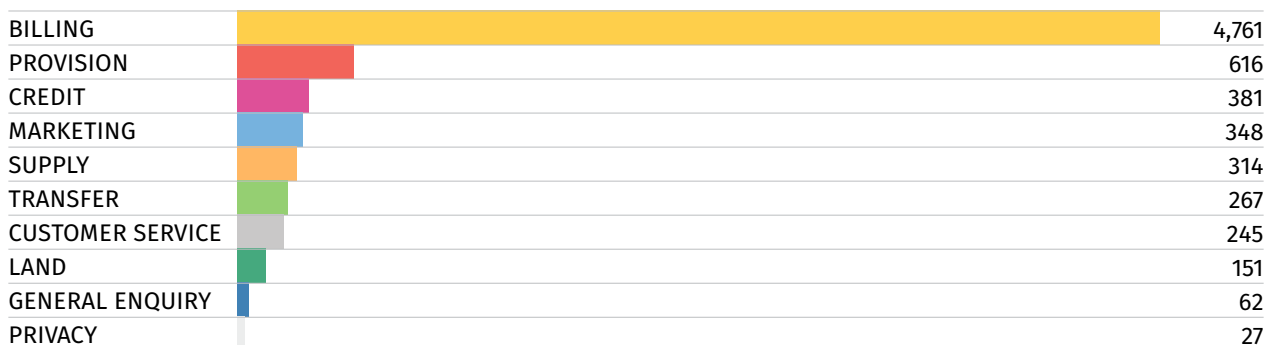
AT A GLANCE 2023 - 24



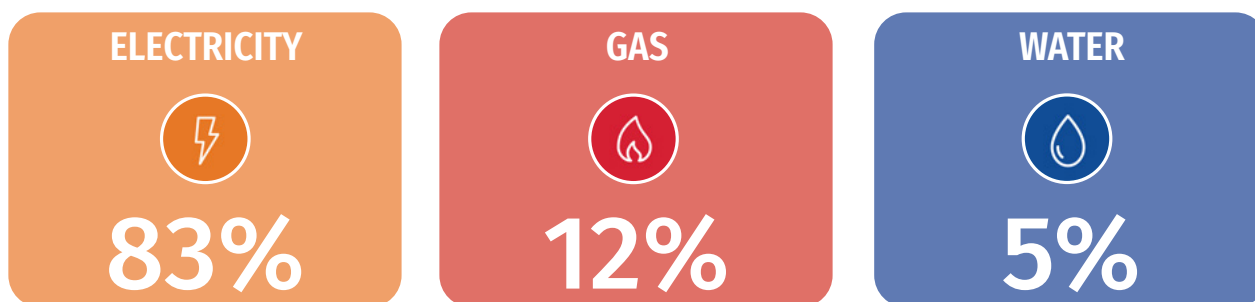
Case history



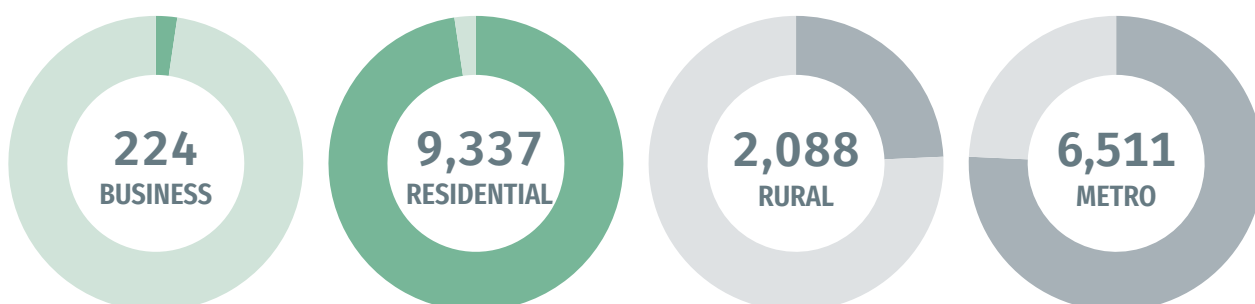
Complaint issue



Cases by industry



Where cases came from



NOTE: 962 cases unconfirmed

Top four reasons for contact



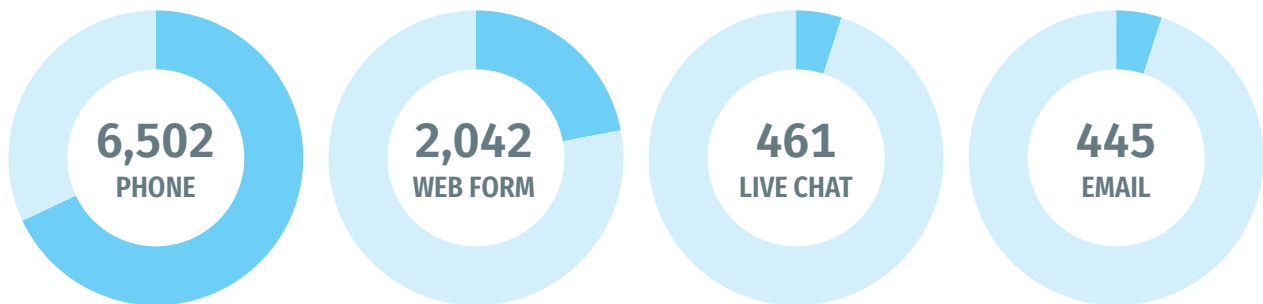
Resolution time



Cases received compared to 2022-23



Main methods of contact



EWOSA customer satisfaction



MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints and disputes between consumers of electricity, gas and water services and Members of the Scheme by providing a free, independent, accessible, fair and informal service to consumers.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Greg May
Chair

Geoff Barton
Industry Director

Sue Chase AM
Consumer Director



Nadia Moffatt OAM
Consumer Director

Mark Henley
Consumer Director

Kylie Johnson
Industry Director



Patrick Makinson
Industry Director

Kay Matthias
Consumer Director

Anthony Sinclair
Industry Director

CHAIR'S REPORT

On behalf of the Board, I am pleased to provide this introduction to the 2023-24 Annual Report of the Energy and Water Ombudsman SA.



It is with great pleasure that I provide my first Chair's Report for the Energy and Water Ombudsman SA's Annual Report.

Ours is an effective and well-respected organisation that provides a vital dispute resolution service for customers who have complaints with their energy and water providers. I am honoured to be a part of it and am looking forward to tackling any challenges alongside the Board, the Ombudsman and his team. I also look forward to working with colleagues from other Energy and Water Ombudsman schemes around the country and contributing to better outcomes for customers who require access to a free, fair, and independent dispute resolution service.

I replaced Peter Bicknell as Chair in March 2024 and would like to thank him for the significant contribution he has made to the Scheme over the last 15 years, as well as his leadership over the past nine years.

There have been other changes to the Board in the past year. In October 2023, we welcomed a new Consumer Director, Nadia Moffatt. Nadia is a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia for services to community health, and a valued addition. At the same time, Margaret Cross left the Board after nine years of service and I would like to thank her for her work and particularly for representing consumers so effectively throughout that period. On the 28th of June 2024, our Water Industry Director, Kylie Johnson left the Board after almost three years of service, and I would also like to thank her for her contributions to the Board. A new Water Industry Director has since been appointed. In addition, two Consumer Directors, Susan Chase and Mark Henley, had their terms extended for a further three years, from October 2023 and February 2024, respectively.

An important part of the work in the years ahead will be positioning the Scheme to ensure it remains fit for purpose as changes in energy and water markets continue. One of the biggest challenges is the energy transition, as renewables become a larger part of the energy market and new products and services are provided to consumers through solar panels, battery storage and electric vehicles. Some of these new products and services are exposing gaps in customer protections, including access to external dispute resolution services.

The Scheme has been working with other Ombudsman and has also been in consultation with regulators and other stakeholders about potential approaches – such as changes to legislation, regulations, guidelines or licensing conditions – that would enable consumers of some of these products and services to have access to dispute resolution schemes like ours.

The Board, the Ombudsman and his team are working to ensure the Scheme can make the appropriate changes should there be a requirement to take on new types of energy service providers as Members. On the back of a year in which we have seen the highest case levels since 2018-19, this would create a likely increase in the quantity and complexity of complaints, as well as pose the challenge of dealing with different membership types. But this is a challenge the Scheme is up to.

I would like to close by thanking the Board, the Ombudsman and his staff for a warm welcome and also for performing well during another challenging year. Together, they contribute to an effective and widely respected Scheme, which our surveys tell us continues to provide excellent customer service. As a team, they also show great adaptability to change, which is likely to be vital in the future as energy and water markets transition.

Greg May
Chair
Energy and Water Ombudsman SA

**The Energy and Water
Ombudsman SA ...
is an effective and well-
respected organisation
that provides a vital
dispute resolution
service for customers
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with their energy and
water providers.**

OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT

I am delighted to provide you with an overview of the key events and challenges that helped shape the work of the Scheme in 2023-24.



It has been yet another interesting year for the Scheme and I would first like to thank outgoing Chair, Peter Bicknell, for his dedicated service in that position over the last nine years and welcome the new Chair, Greg May, into the role. Peter was a Board member for a total of 15 years and made a significant contribution to the Scheme.

Greg is a prominent Adelaide lawyer who also served as South Australia's first Legal Profession Conduct Commissioner from 2014 to 2022. I look forward to working with him.

Many other developments over the past twelve months have been important for us and for energy and water consumers as well. With the energy transformation continuing apace and cost of living pressures impacting households and small businesses alike, complaints and enquiries to our office are trending higher.

This year we received 7,172 complaints, which was the highest volume received in five years. The most significant increases were with Billing issues across the range of billing sub-issues. There was also a significant increase in Marketing complaints, including an increase in customers encountering issues with their energy contracts.

Details on our complaint handling processes and data on complaints and enquiries can be found in the [Case Management](#) section of this Annual Report.

The implementation of the Better Bills Guideline by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), in September 2023, was an important change for consumers and the Scheme. The Guideline requires energy retailers to include EWOSA's telephone number on customers' bills. This increased the visibility of the Scheme with 'Member Invoice or Bill' rising to be the third most frequent response to how customers had heard about the Scheme (a 17-fold increase on the previous year). This also resulted in a significant increase in the number of customers contacting the Scheme in error, to the highest volume on record. Our staff often have to refer the caller back to the energy company when this occurs.

Customer protections

Other efforts are being made by energy market agencies to improve customer protections for energy consumers, but they are struggling to keep pace with changes in the energy industry and with consumer expectations.

The AER has been implementing changes as part of its "Towards Energy Equity" strategy and also released a "Game Changer" package of reforms in November 2023. We hope to see the following

outcomes for energy consumers who are experiencing hardship and vulnerability:

- they receive any concessions they are entitled to
- they receive their retailer's best offer
- financial counselling is readily available
- debt relief is available for customers who are genuinely unable to pay
- energy efficiency assistance would be more accessible.

The AER also completed a review of the National Energy Customer Framework (NECF) in light of the growth of Consumer Energy Resources (CER), such as solar PV, storage batteries and electric vehicles. It reported in November 2023 that there were growing gaps in consumer protections and the NECF was no longer fit for purpose. The report was passed onto Energy Ministers, who are considering possible changes to electricity market rules to better accommodate CER.

Finally, the AER commenced a review of payment difficulty protections in the NECF to consider whether any improvements are necessary to help energy consumers who are struggling to pay their bills. Given cost of living pressures, this is a timely review - especially as we have witnessed a rise in complaints about payment difficulties over the last year. This year we received 175 complaints about Payment Difficulties, which was 58% more than in the previous year and the highest figure in four years.

The Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) has been considering a rule change request on the rollout of smart meters. The draft determination included a number of customer protections, including no fees and charges and retailer notification requirements. With the roll out of smart meters, most consumers will go onto time-of-use tariffs. It is vital they receive the right information so they can make appropriate changes to their energy use and reduce their bills. We have been advocating on these information requirements and also for consumers to have the option of a single rate tariff after they have received a smart meter.

On the water front, the Essential Services Commission of South Australia (ESCOSA) released the regulatory determination for SA Water for 2024-28 in June. This provided a number of important enhancements to consumer protections, including improved provisions for customers experiencing family and domestic violence, for water consumers who are tenants, and for customers who are having difficulties paying their water bills.

With the roll out of smart meters, most consumers will go onto time-of-use tariffs. It is vital they receive the right information so they can make appropriate changes to their energy use and reduce their bills.

With the energy transformation continuing apace and cost of living pressures impacting households and small businesses alike, complaints and enquiries to our office are trending higher.

The Scheme has been involved in providing information and recommendations to regulatory bodies on all of these reviews. More on these activities can be found in the *Our Organisation* section of the Annual Report.

Energy transition

Energy markets are undergoing significant transformation, with more renewable energy entering the system and consumers increasingly adopting CER.

New business models and services are being developed to take advantage of CER. At the household level, the aim is to improve energy consumption patterns and reduce bills. At the system-wide level, the focus is on greater security, stability and reliability of the network. Hopefully, this will cut electricity costs going forward.

While some of these business models have been developed by electricity retailers, some are also third-party providers of services and can include Virtual Power Plant operators, Home Energy Management System operators, aggregators, and demand response or management companies. Through the management of CER, these providers can influence the supply of electricity to their customers, as well as how and when the electricity is consumed, stored or exported.

The growth in renewable energy has also resulted in a need for social license to be established for projects that impact landholders and communities. Reviews have been undertaken by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC), the AER, and the AEMC. One of the recommendations from the AEIC was for an Ombudsman to handle complaints between landholders and renewable energy project proponents/operators.

Meanwhile, the *Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Act 2023* is being implemented in South Australia. This includes clauses for dispute resolution. While protracted complaints are to be considered by the Environment, Resources and Development Court, the processes for lower-level mediation were not finalised at the time of writing.

The AER has been reviewing the regulatory framework for embedded networks and while no decisions have been made at this stage, there may be more protections for customers of these providers and there may be a requirement for all residential embedded networks to register with the AER.

EWOSA jurisdiction

In light of the above developments, the Scheme has been preparing for possible expansions in our jurisdiction. With the growth in CER, the possibility of complaints from landowners about renewable energy projects and from more embedded network customers, we may need to take on new categories of membership and more Members.

We have been in discussions with stakeholders, including regulators and our interstate Ombudsman colleagues, about potential ways to accommodate new Members and manage some of the issues involved. In doing so, we know this would most likely lead to increased complaints and greater complexity in complaints, so it is important that the Scheme is prepared.

Operational changes

As part of this preparation and to continuously improve, the Scheme has implemented enhancements to our dispute resolution workflow and Case Management System, to reduce case handling times and mitigate risks in the case management process.

A Learning and Operational Excellence Manager was hired in April 2024. Their role is to drive the Scheme's training and development activities and contribute to efficiencies, by identifying further areas for improvement in our complaint handling processes and broader operations.

In addition, with the rise in complaints and enquiries the Scheme received in 2023-24, we employed two additional Dispute Resolution Officers during the year.

On a green note, the Scheme established an Environment Sustainability Committee and has implemented changes to improve energy efficiency, recycling and waste management in the office. More details on this can be found in the *Our Organisation* section of this Annual Report.

In closing, I would like to thank my staff for their efforts and dedication during a challenging year. I would also like to acknowledge that the effectiveness of the Scheme is dependent upon the work of our Members, and we are thankful for their support and ongoing commitment to finding solutions for their and our customers.

Sandy Canale

Energy & Water Ombudsman SA

...the Scheme has implemented enhancements to our dispute resolution workflow and Case Management System, to reduce case handling times and mitigate risks in the case management process.

CASE MANAGEMENT

The difference between Enquiries and Complaints

A **CASE** is a contact with us, registered and classified as either an 'enquiry' or a 'complaint'.

An **ENQUIRY** is a request for information or assistance, where we do our best to provide the most appropriate response. On occasion, we refer an enquiry to another body, such as a regulator or a government department.

A **COMPLAINT** is an expression of dissatisfaction with a Member (an energy or water service provider) regarding a policy, practice or customer service performance. We endeavour to provide a response or resolution to the complaint using various means, such as conciliation or direct intervention through an Ombudsman's determination.

We use the following categories within our complaint-handling process:

- Referral to Customer Service
- Escalated Referral
- Consultation
- Early Resolution
- Investigation
- Explanation of Outcome
- Binding Decision

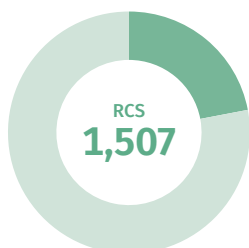
The figures in this section are the number of cases resolved.



Enquiries

The provision of timely and accurate information is an important component of our role. Typically, one of our staff will provide information on industry codes and regulations that may apply to a customer's issue or will explain details shown on a bill. Staff may advise on how to raise an issue with the customer's provider.

If the issue is outside the jurisdiction of the Scheme, we refer the customer to the appropriate organisation.



Complaints

Referral to Customer Service

Under our Charter, an energy or water service provider must have the opportunity to consider a complaint before we do. If they have not, the contact with us is recorded as a Referral to Customer Service complaint and the customer is asked to contact the provider's customer service section to try to resolve the issue.

Before doing this, we provide the customer with an overview of their rights and responsibilities.

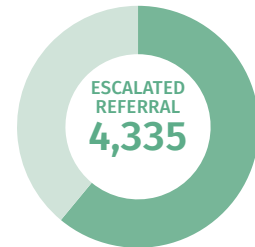
Escalated Referral

If a customer has been unable to resolve an issue with an energy or water service provider, we accept the issue as a complaint.

If the customer has contacted the Member, we will refer the complaint to the Member's higher-level dispute resolution section under our Escalated Referral procedure. This type of referral provides the Member with an opportunity to resolve the customer's complaint at a more senior level.

We tell customers that if they are not satisfied with the resolution or the time taken to resolve their complaints, they should contact us again.

We do not close Escalated Referral complaints until advised by the Member that the complaint has been resolved. This way, we maintain a watching brief over the resolution. If the customer tells us they are not satisfied with the outcome, or the complaint is not resolved within the specified timeframe, it may be upgraded as a case-managed complaint and is not recorded in our statistics as a new complaint.



Consultation

We open a Consultation case where the customer has been unable to resolve a complaint with their provider and is without supply or will imminently be without supply.

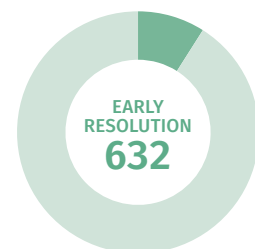
This includes disconnections for non-payment, water restrictions for non-payment, connection or metering delays and errors causing no or partial supply. These cases are fast-tracked and after the immediate supply issues are resolved the complaint is managed like an Escalated Referral.



Early Resolution

If a complaint is not resolved under our Escalated Referral or Consultation process, then we will often attempt an Early Resolution before investigating.

Where appropriate, the aim is to facilitate an agreed resolution between the customer and the energy or water service provider, instead of investigating. We write to the customer and provider with details of the agreed outcome of an Early Resolution case.



Investigation

When a case has been accepted for Investigation, the Member is asked to provide information on the case. This may include details about the customer's billing history, previous contacts between the Member and the customer relevant to the complaint, the cause of



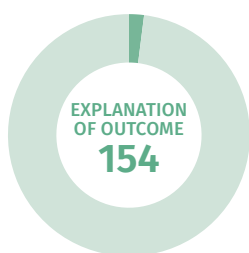
Investigation continued

any outage, or whether informed consent was given to a market contract. If the customer has supporting information, we ask that they also provide it.

Where appropriate, we may also seek independent technical or legal advice, or the opinion of a regulatory body such as the Australian Energy Regulator, the Essential Services Commission (of South Australia) or the Office of the Technical Regulator.

Investigations will normally also include reviews of whether the requirements and provisions of the relevant energy and water codes and regulations have been met.

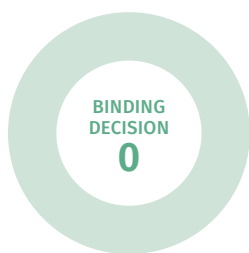
Our aim is to establish an objective and independent view of the issues and to negotiate a fair and reasonable outcome.



Explanation of Outcome

A case is classified as Explanation of Outcome where the customer is not satisfied with the resolution provided by the Member, even though we consider it to be fair and reasonable, or is dissatisfied with the outcome of our Investigation but there are no grounds for re-investigation.

In this instance, we provide an explanation and any relevant information to the customer about why the resolution is considered to be fair and reasonable.



Binding Decision

At the completion of an Investigation, and in the absence of a conciliated settlement of a complaint, the Ombudsman can make a Determination to resolve the complaint.

Internal Review

A customer has a right to an independent review if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of our Investigation and can request us to consider a review of our decision.

The customer must explain how one or more grounds for an internal review are established and how each ground would change the outcome or decision. An independent Dispute Resolution Officer will then be assigned the matter to complete an Internal Review.

If the independent Dispute Resolution Officer finds that one or more of the grounds for review would not affect the Investigation outcome, then the complaint will remain closed.

If the independent Dispute Resolution Officer finds that one or more of the grounds for review are justified and would have affected the outcome, the Investigation will be reopened.

RESOLUTIONS

SUBJECT:	INSTALLATION OF AN ISOLATION SWITCH
ISSUES:	PROVISION – EXISTING CONNECTION – SUPPLY UPGRADE COST
UTILITY:	ELECTRICITY
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	EARLY RESOLUTION

THE ISSUE

Mr. R highlighted that despite having a solar meter installed, the technician neglected to include an isolation switch.

OUR REVIEW

The provider initially contested responsibility for installing the isolation switch. However, according to the SA Power Networks Service and Installation Rules, the installation of a meter isolator is mandated for existing setups when an additional tariff, like the solar tariff in this instance, is requested.

RESOLUTION

In response, the provider rectified the situation by installing the meter isolator at no expense to the customer, thus resolving the issue.

SUBJECT:	DISPUTE USAGE DUE TO INCORRECT WIRING OF A SMART METER
ISSUES:	BILLING – ERROR – NO BILL RECEIVED
UTILITY:	ELECTRICITY
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Mr. T reported that after his solar meter was upgraded in December 2022, he stopped receiving bills from the provider. Additionally, once the bills were issued, the usage and solar export readings were incorrect.

OUR REVIEW

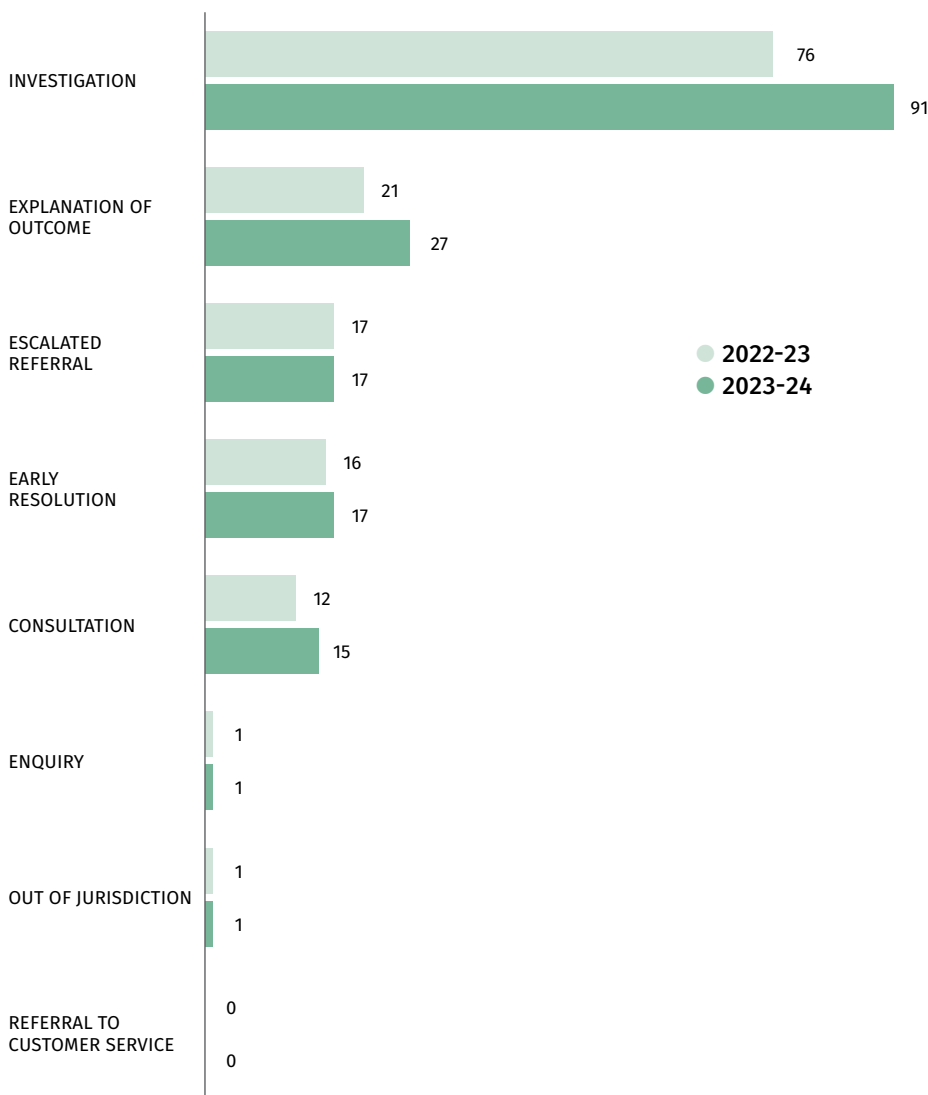
Upon examination, we discovered that during the installation of the solar meter, the wiring to the solar system and battery was improperly done. As a result, the data recorded on the meter was unreliable, making it impossible for us to conduct an independent billing review.

RESOLUTION

Considering these circumstances, Mr. T accepted a \$1,500 credit to resolve the complaint, understanding that we were unable to verify the billing accurately due to the wiring issues during the solar meter installation.

Resolution of cases within timeframes

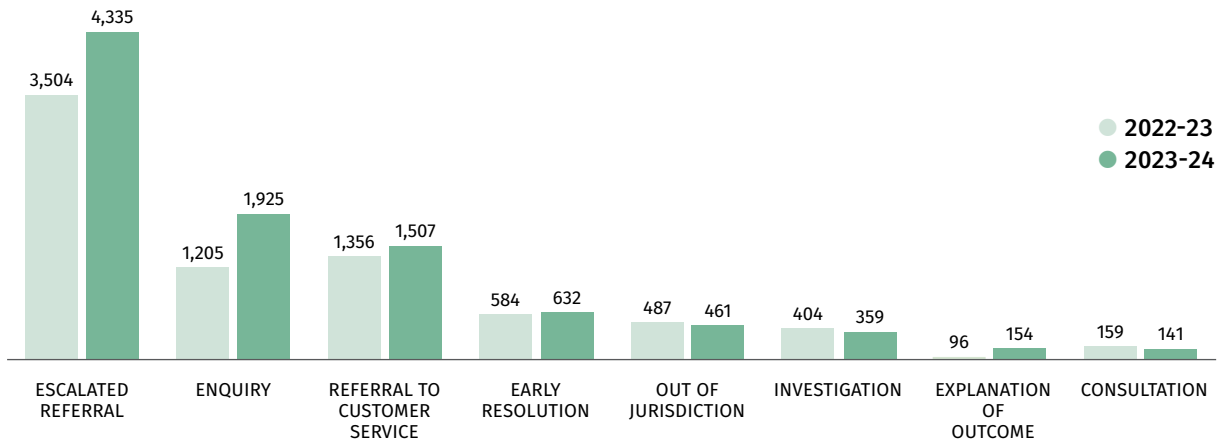
The figures below show our performance for this financial year in relation to the amount of time taken to resolve cases.



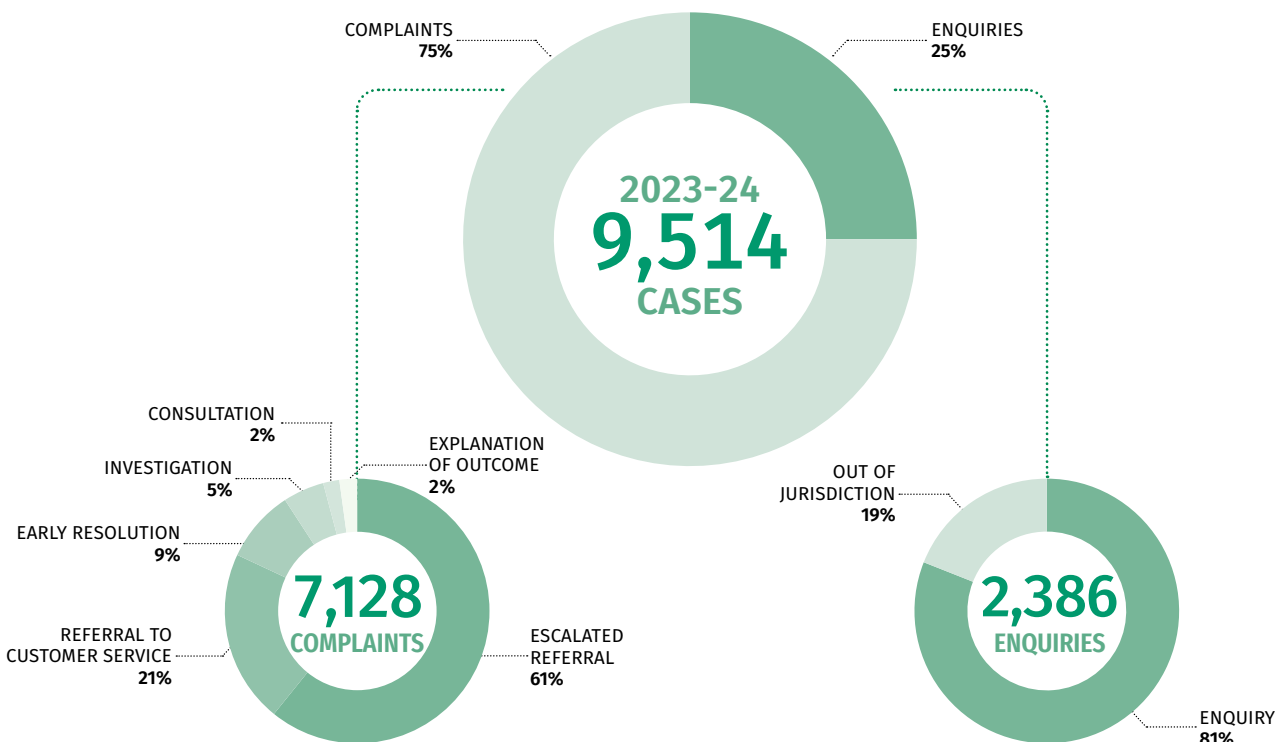
AVERAGE TIME (DAYS) TO RESOLVE

Cases resolved

The following charts show cases resolved during 2023-24, compared with the previous year. The 2022-23 cases include some Refer to Higher Level and Conciliation cases, counted as part of the Escalated Referral and Early Resolution count respectively, during the transition period.



CASES RESOLVED, BY CASE TYPE



CASES RESOLVED, BY LEVEL

Cases received: yearly and monthly trends

The volume of cases received this year, 9,561 in total, is the highest since 2018-19. The increase has been influenced by a combination of economic conditions, energy price increases and the Better Bills Guideline, which has increased awareness of EWOSA.

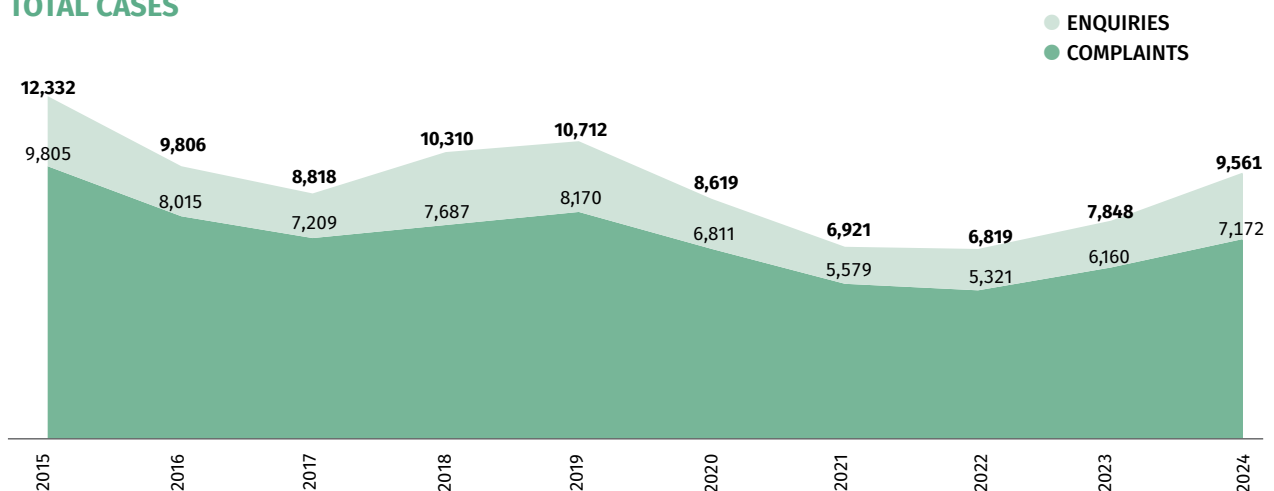
With 7,172 complaints received this year, it has been the highest volume of incoming complaints for five years.

Over the previous ten years, the proportion of complaints has been relatively steady at about 80% of all cases each year. This year it fell to 75%, as there was a higher proportion of enquiries coming from customers seeing EWOSA's phone number on their energy bill who were intending to contact their provider.

Before 2016, there had been a period of elevated case volumes related to billing system conversions. Following this period there was a steady decline to just 8,818 cases by 2016-17, which was followed by two years of increases largely caused by an influx of cases about metering competition.

Case volumes again decreased significantly in 2019-20 influenced by regulatory changes and other economic conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of complaints received in 2021-22 was the lowest since 2008. There had been a consistent decline in the number of complaints and overall case volume each year since 2018-19, then 2022-23 marked the first year of increased volume.

TOTAL CASES



NUMBER OF CASES RECEIVED BY YEAR OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS (FY)

The next chart shows the number of cases received monthly for three successive years, up to 2023-24.

The volume of cases received in 2023-24 was higher in every month compared to the previous two years, peaking in August with 926 cases and then a secondary peak in May with nearly 900 cases. August was also the peak month in 2022-23, consistent with the established trend of annual peaks following the winter billing periods, where energy use is relatively high. Other factors including the timing and extent of tariff rate increases in this period has influenced the monthly trend.

Over recent years, April has featured as the month with the lowest volume of cases received, partly due to the number of public holidays in April. However, this year 726 cases were received in April and the lowest month was December at 580 cases.

COMPLAINTS BY INDUSTRY SECTOR



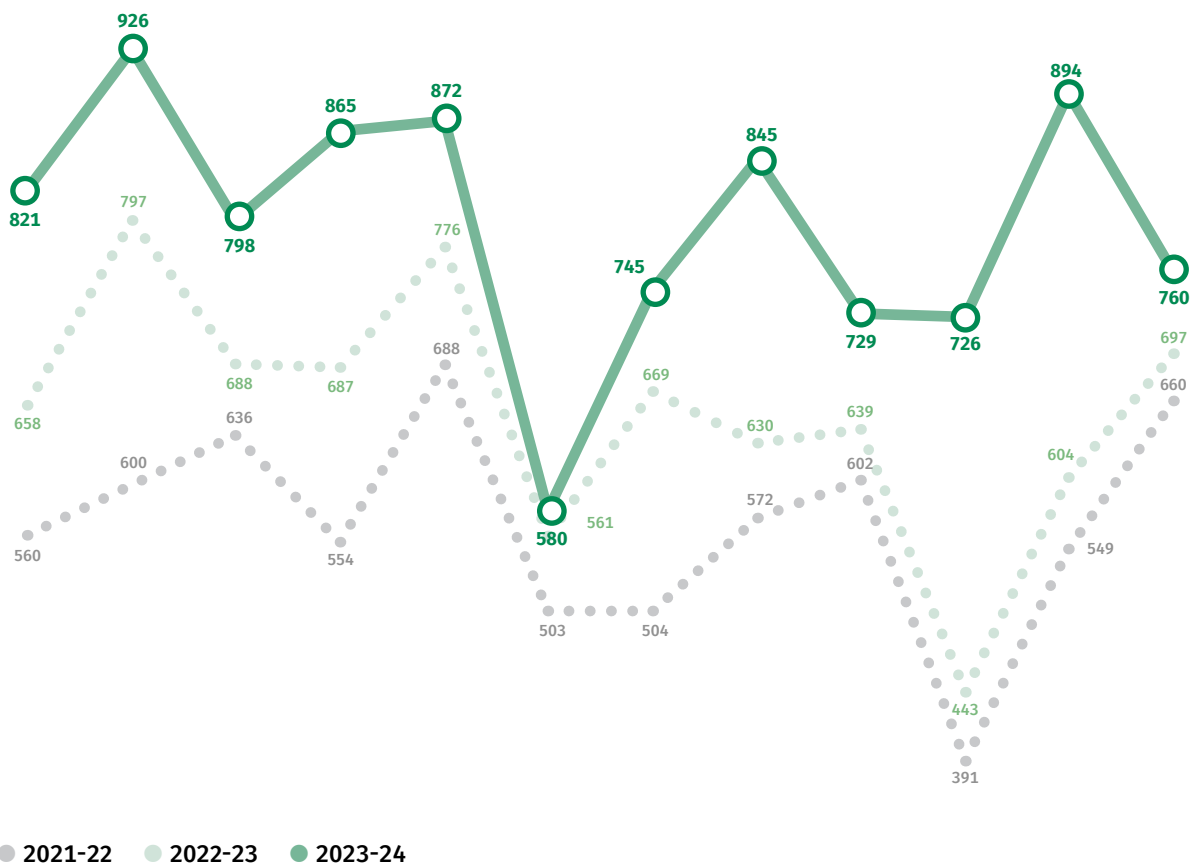
ELECTRICITY 83%



GAS 12%



WATER 5%



NUMBER OF CASES RECEIVED MONTHLY OVER THE LAST 3 YEARS

Outcomes recorded on Investigation Cases

Complaints reach Investigation level if they are unable to be resolved at lower case levels or otherwise require investigation following an assessment. The outcomes of the 359 Investigation cases closed this year are presented in the table below. Overall, 67% of Investigations resulted in an outcome that was at least partly in the complainant's favour.

	2023 - 24	
	Cases	Proportion
Investigated Outcome - in Complainant's favour	136	38%
Investigated Outcome - partly in Complainant's favour	103	29%
Investigated Outcome - not in Complainant's favour	116	32%
Other	4	1%
Grand Total	359	100%

OUTCOMES RECORDED ON INVESTIGATION CASES

Primary and Additional Issues

The Scheme assigns a primary issue to each complaint received, though there may also be additional issues attached. These represent other major issues that are relevant to the complaint. The table below includes both primary and additional issues. In 2023-24, Customer Service was the most frequent additional Issue, closely followed by Billing.

	2023 - 24		
	Primary Issues	Additional Issues	Total
Billing	4,761	2,039	6,800
Customer Service	245	2,240	2,485
Provision	616	328	944
Credit	381	268	649
Marketing	348	208	556
Supply	314	122	436
Transfer	267	104	371
General Enquiry	62	300	362
Land	151	74	225
Privacy	27	30	57
Grand Total	7,172	5,713	12,885

PRIMARY AND ADDITIONAL ISSUES – COMPLAINTS ONLY

RESOLUTIONS

SUBJECT:	SEWERAGE OVERFLOW PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE
ISSUES:	SEWERAGE OVERFLOW SHORTLY AFTER PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE SEWER CLEAN
UTILITY:	WATER/SEWERAGE
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Ms P reported that she experienced a sewerage overflow two weeks after the water provider had completed sewer cleaning on a preventative maintenance schedule. Ms P was concerned that the sewer cleaning may not have been completed appropriately.

OUR REVIEW

Our review encompassed:

- The provider's engineering standard
- The records of preventative maintenance completed
- The type and quantity of debris removed
- The cause of the blockage
- The actions taken by the provider to prevent blockages and overflows.

We found the provider:

- completed preventive maintenance on the sewer mains on a six-monthly cycle for the past 9 years
- has an established Engineering Technical Standard that documents approved cleaning methods and debris removal, including record keeping
- maintained records in accordance with the documented standard that evidenced that cleaning was completed appropriately
- recorded, at the time of preventative maintenance and at the time of the blockage the removal of debris, that should not be deposited into the sewer network

- wrote to residents in the area, to raise awareness of items that should not be deposited into the sewer mains, to seek assistance to help keep the sewers healthy and to reduce blockages and overflows
- cannot prevent unsuitable items being deposited into the sewer network, which contributed to the blockage and overflows Ms P experienced.

RESOLUTION

There was no evidence that preventative maintenance was not completed appropriately on a six-month cycle by the provider.

The provider will continue to complete preventative maintenance on a six-month cycle.

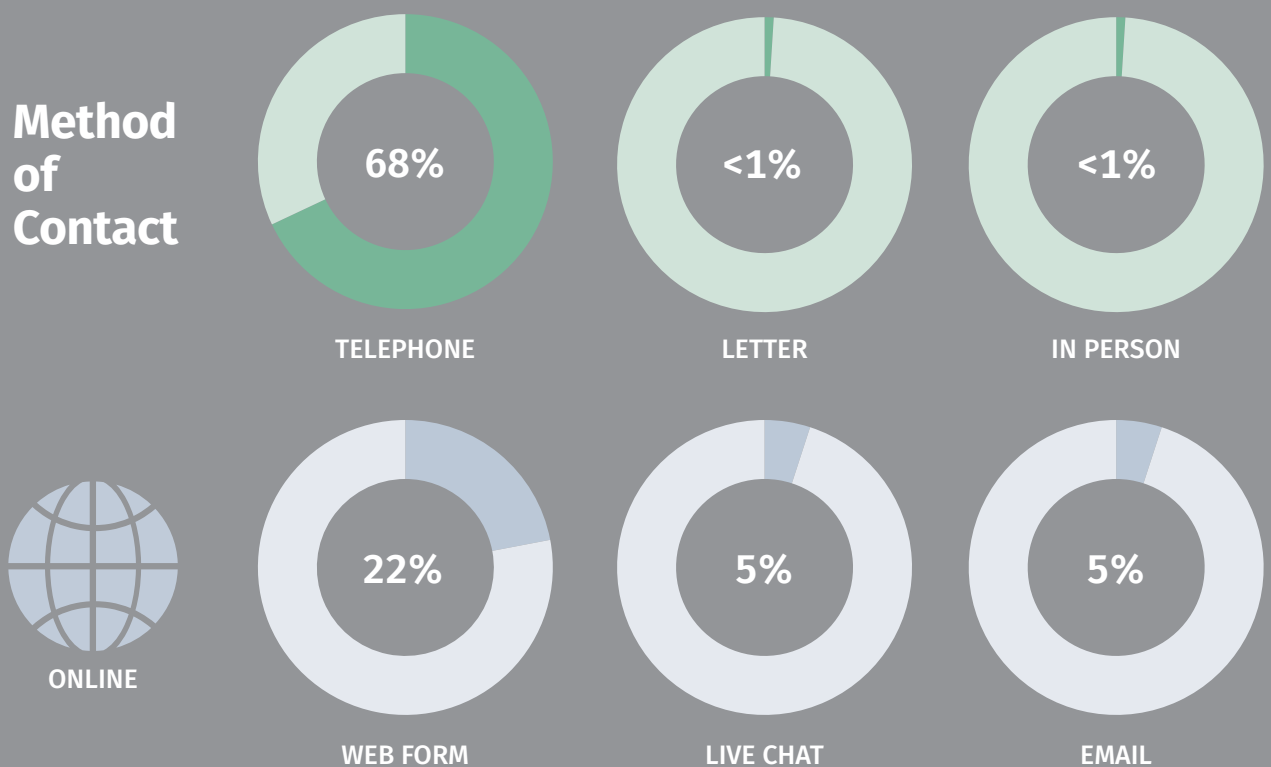
The provider will take CCTV footage of the sewer mains before and after the next preventative maintenance to provide evidence that it is completed appropriately.

The provider gave Ms P information about the equipment she may consider installing to prevent a sewerage back flow onto her property if sewer mains blockages occurred in the future.

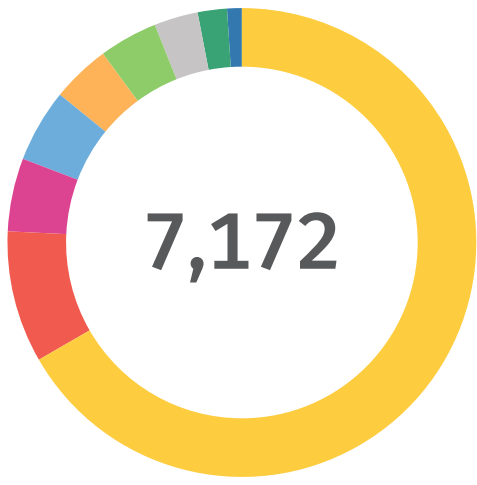
Reasons for Contact (all cases received)



Method of Contact

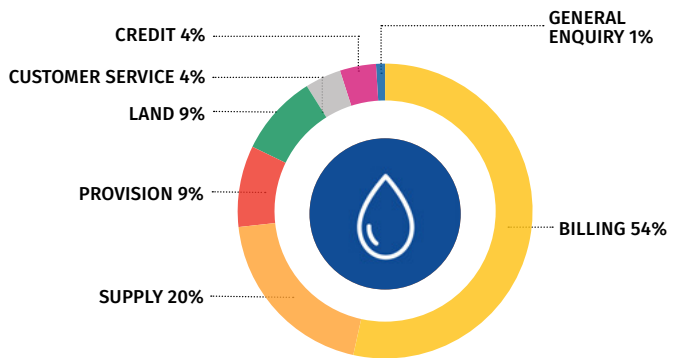
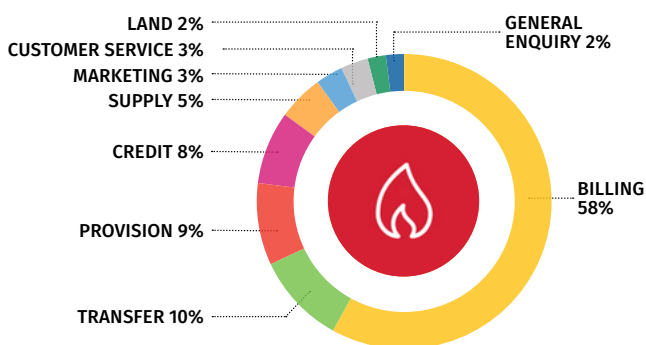
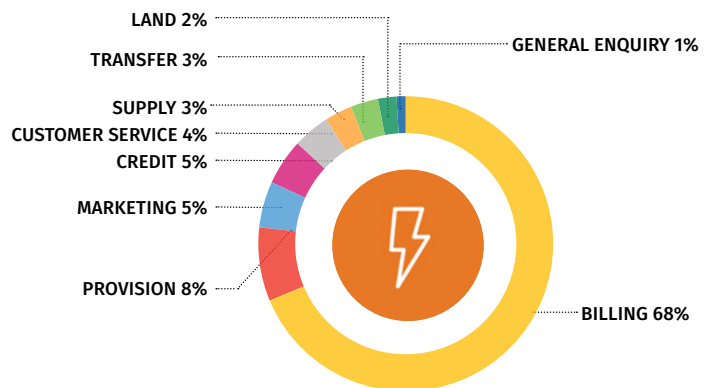
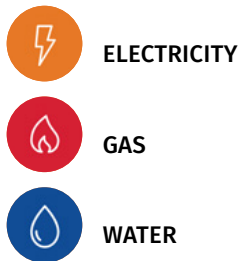


Complaints received by type



BILLING	4,761	66%
PROVISION	616	9%
CREDIT	381	5%
MARKETING	348	5%
SUPPLY	314	4%
TRANSFER	267	4%
CUSTOMER SERVICE	245	3%
LAND	151	2%
GENERAL ENQUIRY	62	1%
PRIVACY	27	<1%

Complaints received by industry

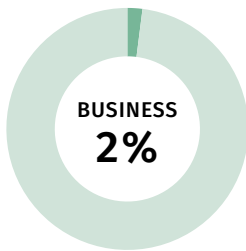
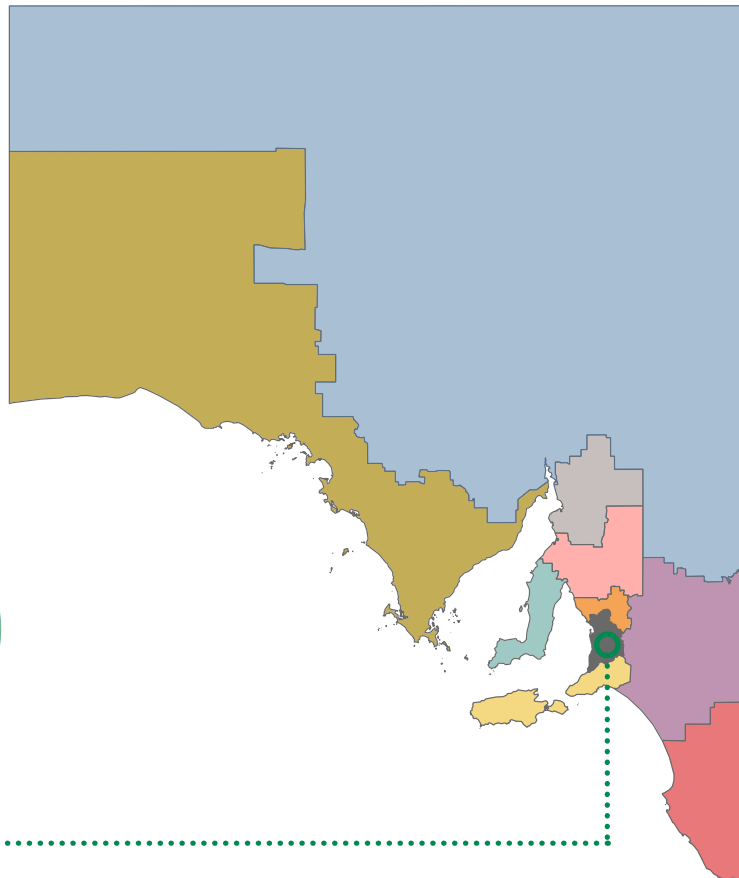


Where Complaints came from

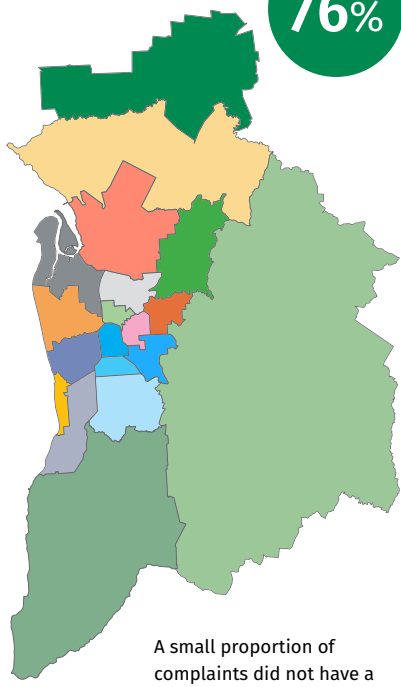
Complaints received per 10,000 population

REGIONAL AREAS

- Barossa
- Eyre Peninsula and South West
- Fleurieu - Kangaroo Island
- Limestone Coast
- Lower North
- Mid North
- Murray and Mallee
- Outback - North and East
- Yorke Peninsula



SOURCE OF CONTACT (BUSINESS OR RESIDENTIAL)

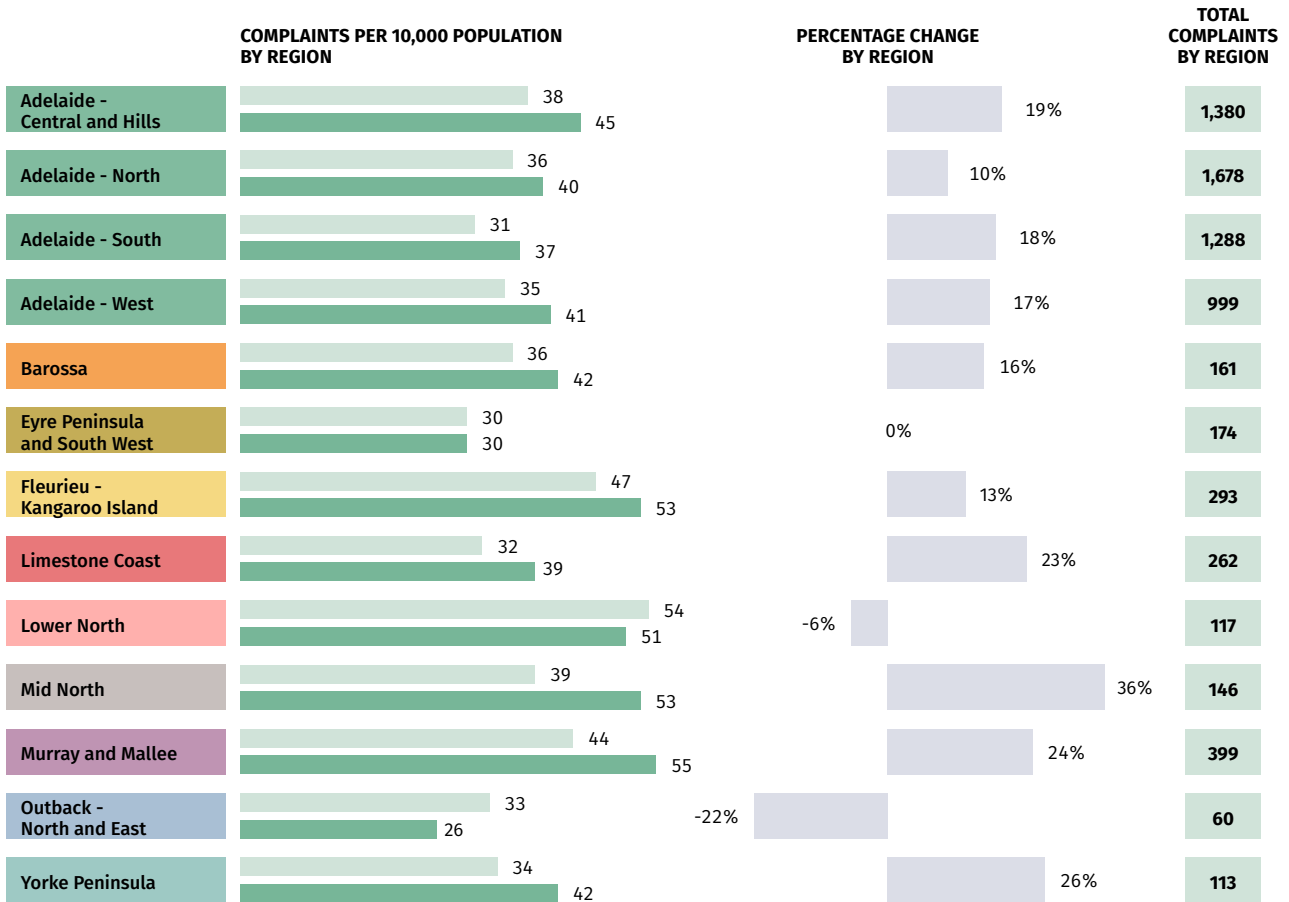


A small proportion of complaints did not have a confirmed address.

METROPOLITAN AREAS

	COMPLAINTS	% OF TOTAL	COMPLAINTS PER 10k
● Adelaide City	199	4%	77
● Port Adelaide - East	288	5%	62
● Adelaide Hills	389	7%	49
● Norwood - Payneham - St Peters	171	3%	46
● Gawler - Two Wells	169	3%	45
● Prospect - Walkerville	130	2%	43
● Port Adelaide - West	260	5%	43
● Playford	418	8%	42
● West Torrens	272	5%	42
● Onkaparinga	626	12%	41
● Charles Sturt	467	9%	40
● Campbelltown (Sa)	201	4%	37
● Unley	142	3%	36
● Salisbury	500	9%	35
● Mitcham	228	4%	34
● Holdfast Bay	118	2%	33
● Marion	316	6%	33
● Burnside	148	3%	32
● Tea Tree Gully	303	6%	31

COMPLAINTS PER 10K POPULATION – METRO ADELAIDE

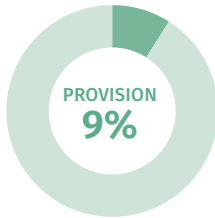


COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 POPULATION BY REGION ● 2022-23 ● 2023-24

	YEAR OF RECEIVED DATE	METROPOLITAN				RURAL & REGIONAL SA
		ADELAIDE - NORTH	ADELAIDE - CENTRAL AND HILLS	ADELAIDE - WEST	ADELAIDE - SOUTH	
BILLING	FY 2023	64.8%	62.2%	61.0%	67.0%	65.2%
	FY 2024	66.4%	69.2%	65.8%	66.2%	67.7%
PROVISION	FY 2023	9.5%	12.9%	13.9%	10.2%	12.2%
	FY 2024	7.9%	8.8%	7.7%	7.4%	10.3%
CREDIT	FY 2023	7.6%	5.0%	5.5%	4.6%	5.5%
	FY 2024	6.0%	5.1%	5.4%	5.2%	4.5%
MARKETING	FY 2023	3.7%	4.0%	3.3%	4.3%	3.9%
	FY 2024	4.2%	4.1%	6.8%	5.8%	4.3%
SUPPLY	FY 2023	3.6%	6.0%	4.2%	3.3%	4.4%
	FY 2024	3.9%	4.4%	2.8%	4.7%	5.6%
TRANSFER	FY 2023	3.8%	2.7%	3.6%	3.6%	3.3%
	FY 2024	4.8%	3.6%	3.3%	4.9%	2.4%
LAND	FY 2023	3.4%	3.1%	3.5%	1.9%	1.7%
	FY 2024	2.1%	1.5%	3.1%	1.7%	2.0%
OTHER	FY 2023	3.5%	4.0%	5.0%	5.0%	3.8%
	FY 2024	4.8%	3.2%	5.1%	4.1%	3.2%

COMPLAINTS BY ISSUE AND REGION

TOP 3 COMPLAINTS



Major issues

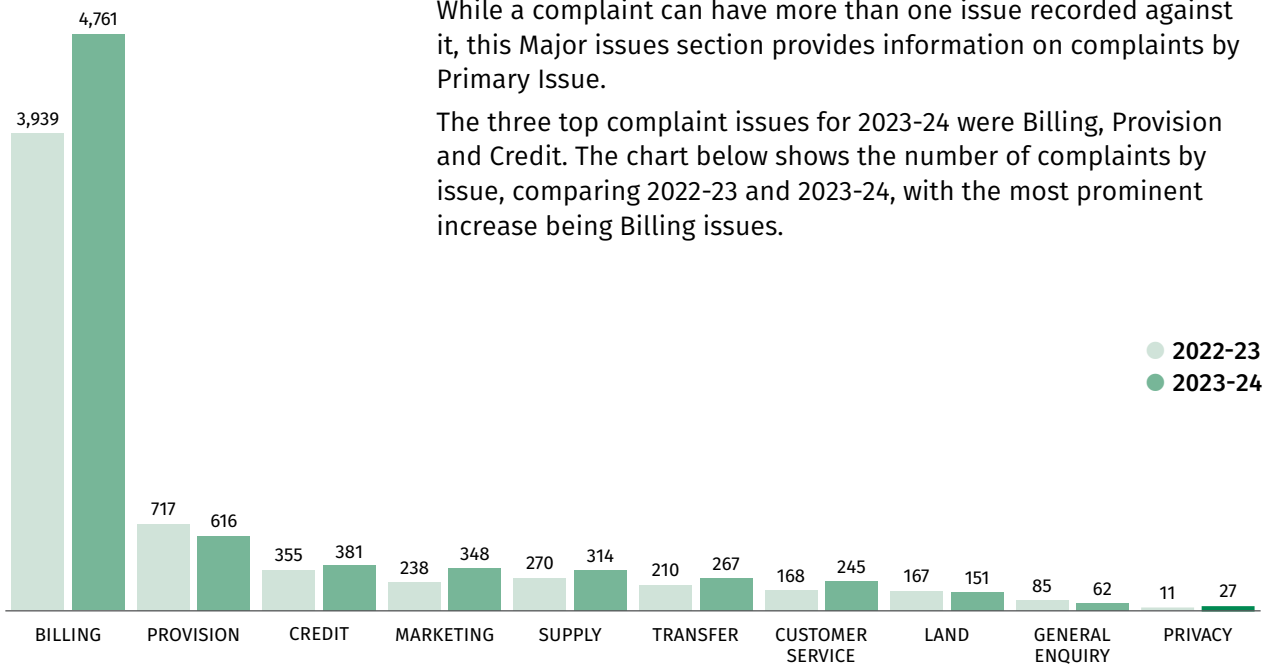
This section focuses on complaints and excludes discussion of enquiries and out-of-jurisdiction issues. The Scheme received 7,172 complaints during 2023-24. We categorise issues as follows:

Complaint

Type	Description
Billing	Complaints about tariff costs, conditions, timing, charges applied and other billing matters
Provision	Provision of service: connection, disconnection, meter reading and other meter complaints
Credit	Payment difficulties, disconnection (imminent and actual), liability and problems with credit references
Marketing	Market and retailer conduct, contract issues
Supply	Outages, variations in voltage or flow, quality
Transfer	Transfers of the customer's account
Land	Issues relating to the customer's property

While a complaint can have more than one issue recorded against it, this Major issues section provides information on complaints by Primary Issue.

The three top complaint issues for 2023-24 were Billing, Provision and Credit. The chart below shows the number of complaints by issue, comparing 2022-23 and 2023-24, with the most prominent increase being Billing issues.



COMPLAINTS RECEIVED BY ISSUE TYPE

Billing

Billing complaint numbers increased by 21% in 2023-24. This coincided with a significant increase in costs experienced by customers in 2023-24. In common with other Ombudsman Schemes, Billing issues continue to generate the highest number of complaints.

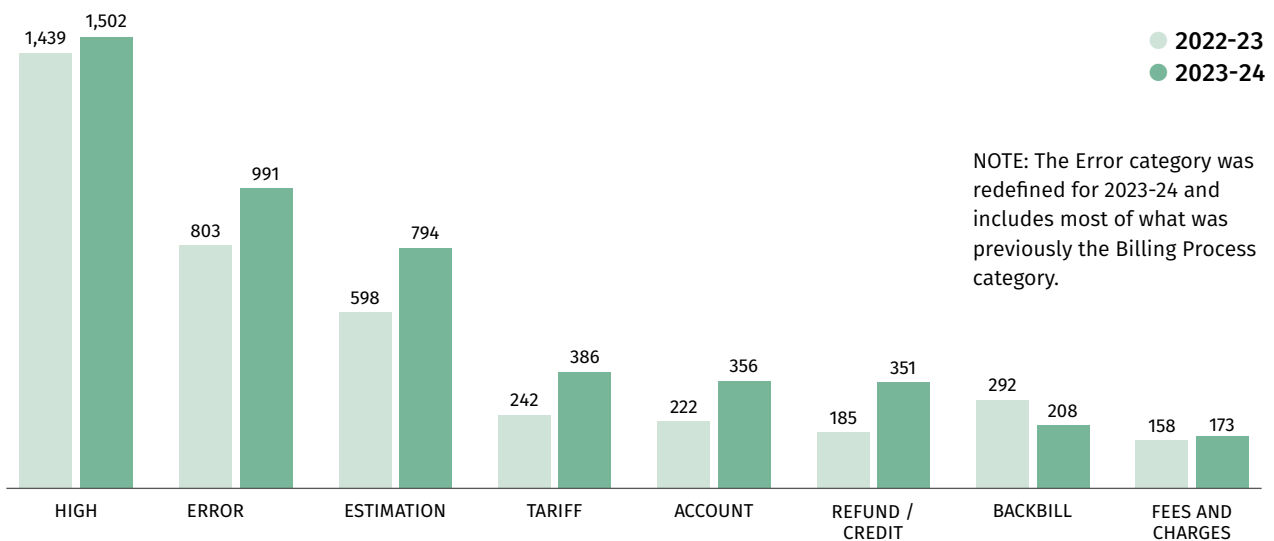
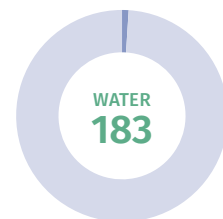
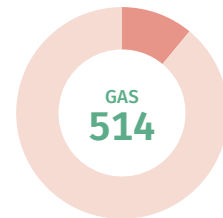
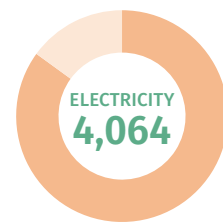
The increases by sub-issues were:

- Refund / Credit (90%)
- Account (60%)
- Tariff (60%)
- Estimation (33%)
- Error (23%)
- Fees and Charges (9%)
- High (4%).

The Backbill sub-issue decreased by 29%.

This year the Billing Process sub-issue was recategorised into the Error category. There is a range of perceived billing errors from the customer's perspective, which includes missing or delayed bills. While Error was the second highest Billing sub-issue, it is only when cases are Investigated that the Scheme can verify if errors occurred.

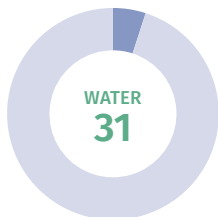
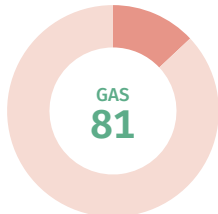
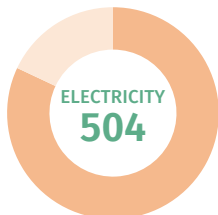
BILLING COMPLAINTS



NOTE: The Error category was redefined for 2023-24 and includes most of what was previously the Billing Process category.

BILLING COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

PROVISION COMPLAINTS



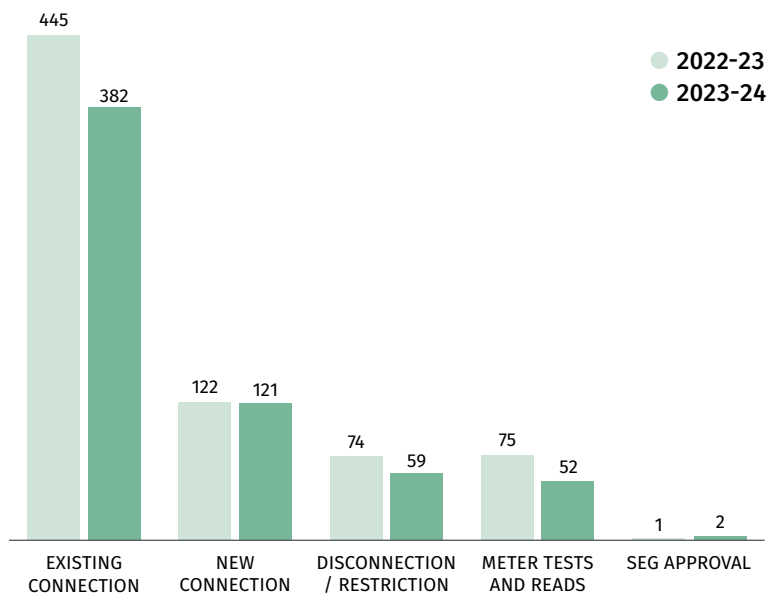
Provision

Provision was the second most significant issue for the Scheme in 2023-24, but complaint numbers decreased by 14% compared to the previous year.

There were significant decreases in the following sub-issues:

- Meter Test and Reads (31%)
- Disconnection / Restriction (20%)
- Existing Connection (14%).

There was only one less complaint about New Connection compared to the previous year and there was a small increase in Small Embedded Generation (SEG) approval complaints.



PROVISION COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

Credit

Credit was the third most significant issue for the Scheme in 2023-24 which increased by 7% compared to the previous year.

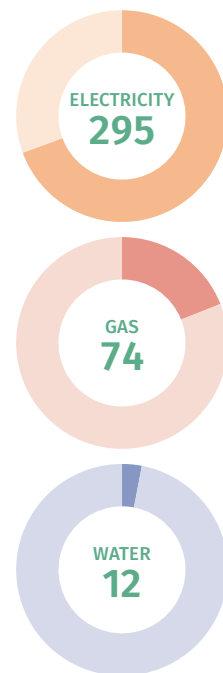
Payment Difficulty increased by 58% and was the only sub-issue to increase, however the volume of these complaints remains relatively low compared to earlier years.

In 2023-24, the former Credit Action sub-issues were recategorised into Collection, which decreased by 16% compared to the previous year.

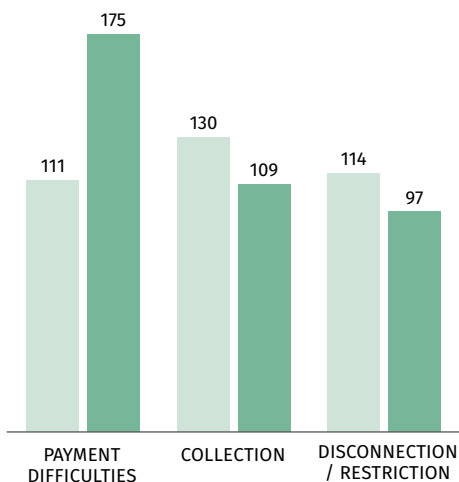
There was also a decrease in Disconnection/Restriction complaints (15%).

The Scheme continues to work closely with regulators to identify and address any systemic issues associated with credit complaints.

CREDIT COMPLAINTS

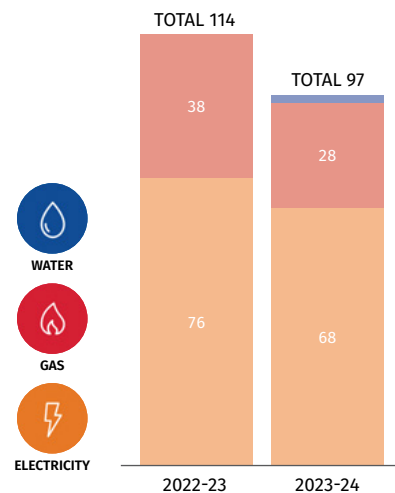


Disconnection complaints represented 25% of all Credit complaints



- 2022-23
- 2023-24

NOTE: The Collection category was redefined for 2023-24 and includes what was previously the Credit Action categories.



CREDIT COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

DISCONNECTION BY PRODUCT TYPE

Credit – Payment Difficulty

Rural and Metropolitan Areas

The number of Payment Difficulty complaints increased by 58% in 2023-24, compared to the previous year. The table below provides a detailed breakdown by region.

REGION	2022-23			2023-24			% CHANGE IN NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS	
	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS	% OF TOTAL PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES	COMPLAINTS PER 100,000 PEOPLE	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS	% OF TOTAL PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES	COMPLAINTS PER 100,000 PEOPLE		
ADELAIDE - CENTRAL AND HILLS	20	18%	6.5	32	18%	10.3	12	60%
ADELAIDE - NORTH	36	32%	8.5	47	27%	11.1	11	31%
ADELAIDE - SOUTH	18	16%	5.1	32	18%	9.1	14	78%
ADELAIDE - WEST	15	14%	6.2	23	13%	9.5	8	53%
RURAL & REGIONAL SA	21	19%	5.4	34	19%	8.7	13	62%
ADDRESS NOT CONFIRMED	1	1%		7	4%		6	
TOTAL	111	100%		175	100%		64	58%

PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES BY RURAL AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

Marketing and Transfer

Marketing complaint numbers increased significantly by 46% in 2023-24, compared to the previous year.

The Contract sub-issue had the largest increase at 54%.

The Market Conduct sub-issue also increased by 10%.

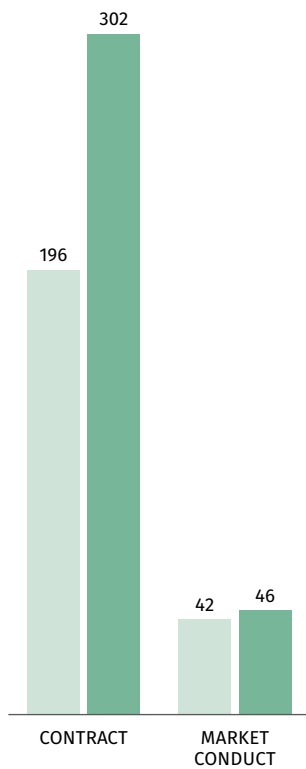
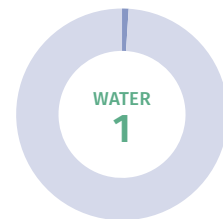
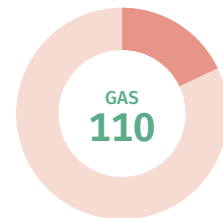
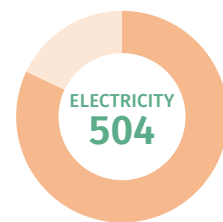
Transfer complaint numbers also increased significantly by 27%.

The following Transfer sub-issues increased:

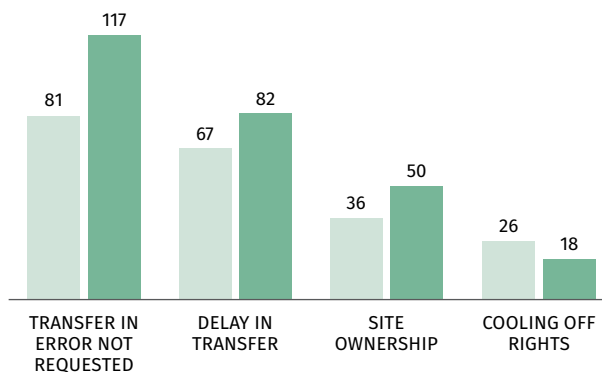
- Transfer in Error Not Requested (44%)
- Site Ownership (39%)
- Delay in Transfer (22%).

Cooling Off Rights decreased by 31%.

MARKETING AND TRANSFER COMPLAINTS



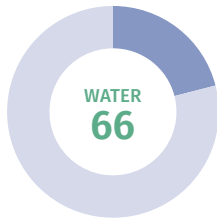
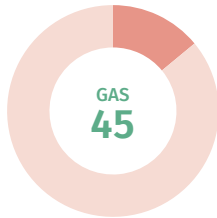
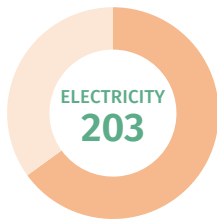
MARKETING COMPLAINTS BY TYPE



TRANSFER COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

● 2022-23
● 2023-24

SUPPLY COMPLAINTS



Supply

Supply complaint numbers increased by 16% in 2023- 24 compared to the previous year.

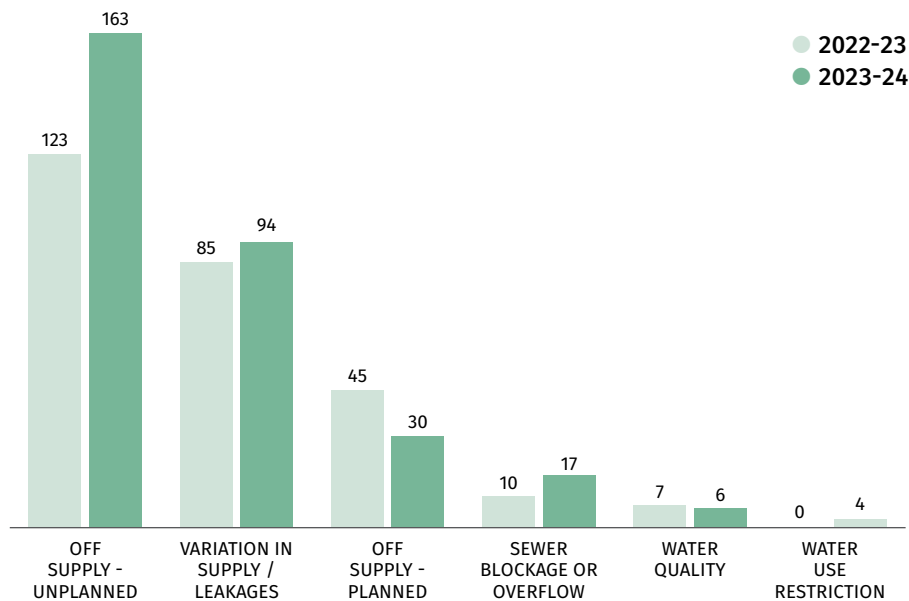
The following sub-issues increased:

- Sewer Blockage or Overflow (70%)
- Off Supply – Unplanned (33%)
- Variation in Supply/Leakages (11%).

The following sub-issues decreased:

- Off Supply – Planned (33%)
- Water Quality (14%).

There were a small number of Water Use Restriction complaints in 2023-24.



SUPPLY COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

Land

Land complaint numbers decreased by 10% compared to the previous year.

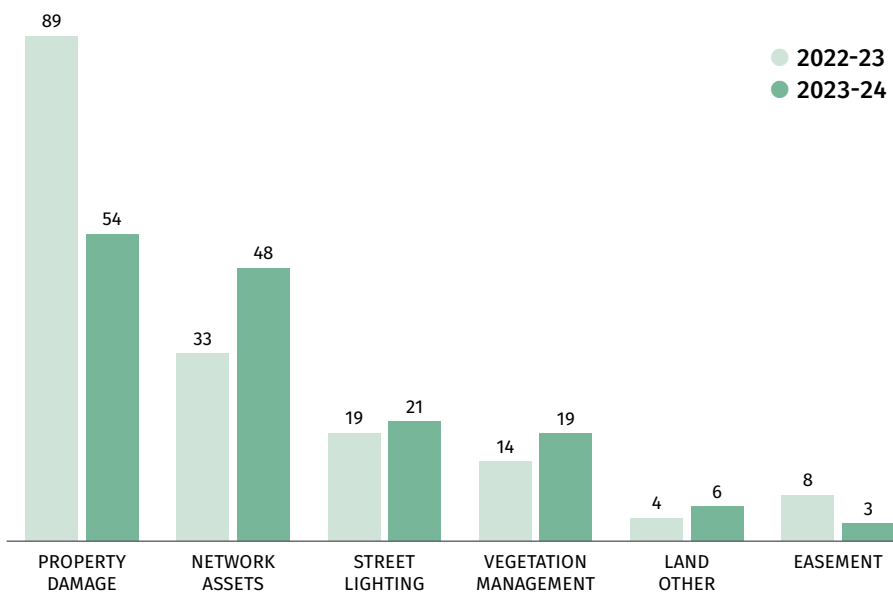
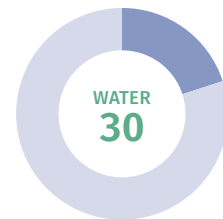
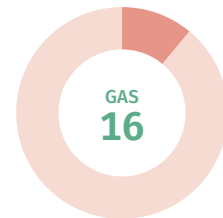
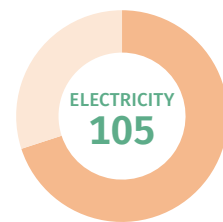
The following sub-issues decreased:

- Property Damage (39%)
- Easement.

The following sub-issues increased:

- Network Assets (45%)
- Street Lighting
- Vegetation Management
- Land Other.

LAND COMPLAINTS



LAND COMPLAINTS BY TYPE

MEMBER PERFORMANCE

Complaints received by Member - 5 years (FY)

AGL



Origin Energy



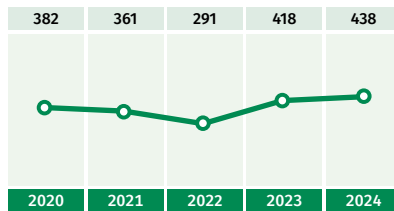
ENGIE



EnergyAustralia



SA Power Networks



Alinta Energy



Lumo Energy



SA Water



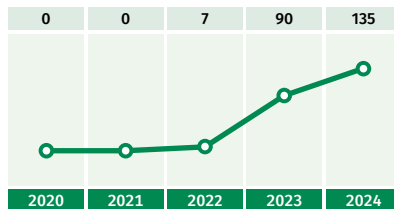
Energy Locals



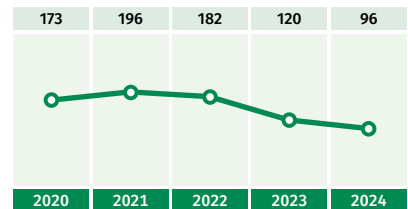
OVO Energy



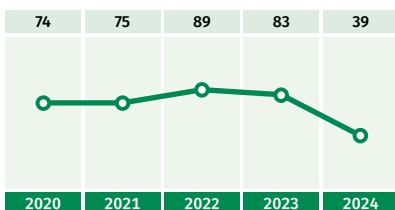
Sumo Power



Australian Gas Networks



Dodo Power and Gas



Momentum Energy

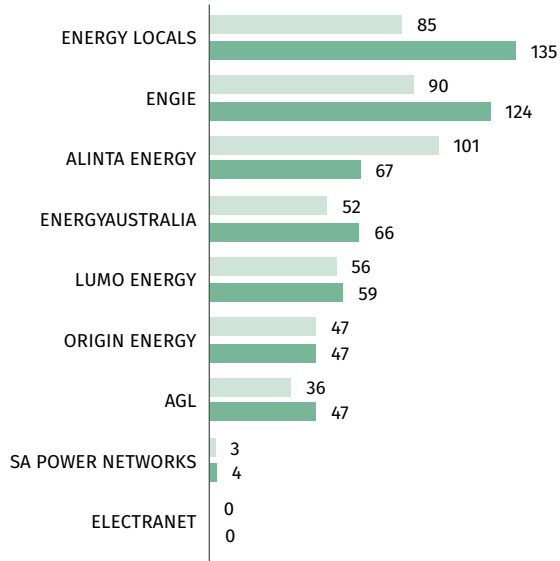


Others

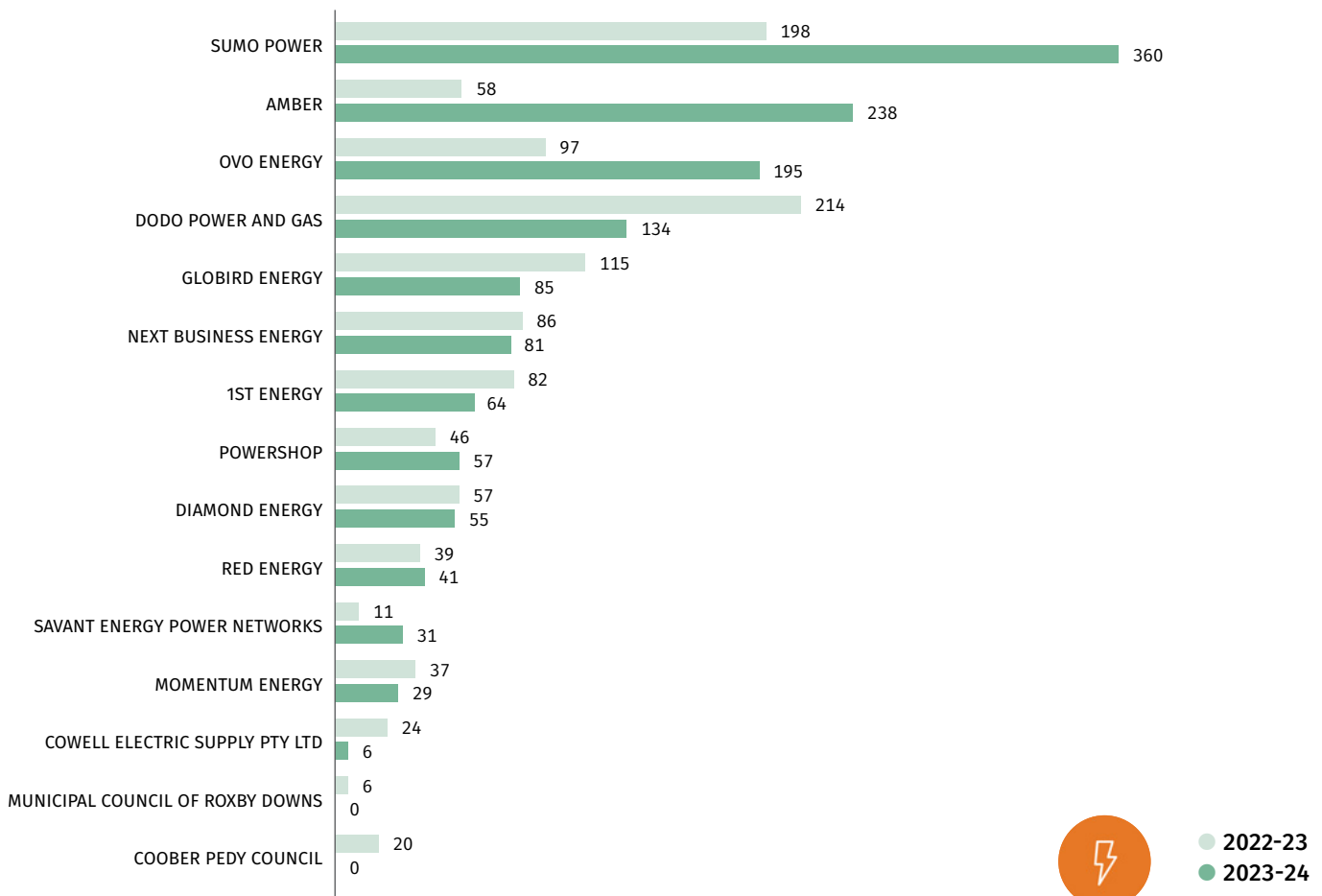


Complaints received by Members per 10,000 Customers

LARGER ELECTRICITY MEMBERS > 10K CUSTOMERS



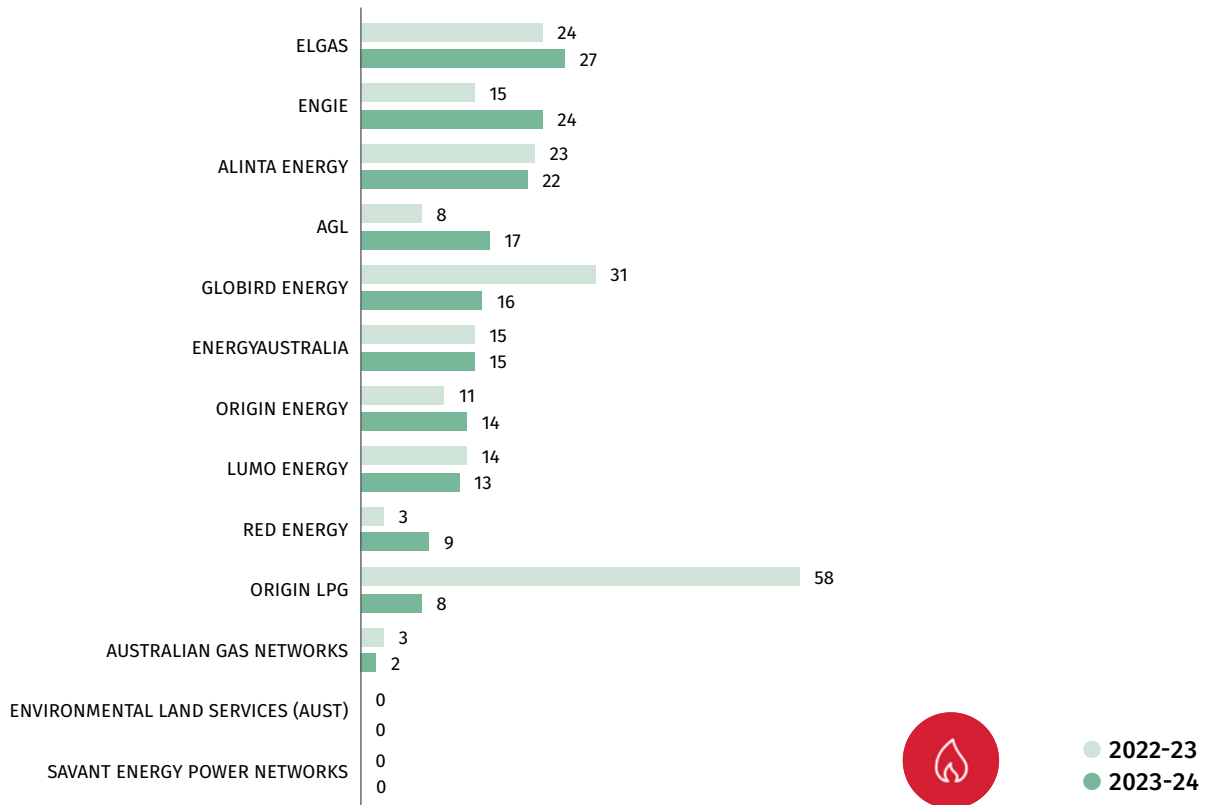
SMALLER ELECTRICITY MEMBERS 1K TO 10K CUSTOMERS



● 2022-23
● 2023-24

Complaints received by Members per 10,000 Customers

GAS MEMBERS WITH > 1K CUSTOMERS



● 2022-23
● 2023-24

WATER MEMBERS WITH > 10K CUSTOMERS



● 2022-23
● 2023-24

RESOLUTIONS

SUBJECT:	DOUBLE BILLING AND MISSING PAYMENT
ISSUES:	BILLING – ERROR – INCORRECT BILL CALCULATION
UTILITY:	GAS
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Mr Y received two bills from his provider for the same billing period. He was concerned that he had been overcharged. He was further concerned that not all of his payments were applied to the account and the outstanding balance may be incorrect.

OUR REVIEW

We found the provider issued a \$79 quarterly bill that was incorrect because it did not charge for the gas use recorded.

The provider applied a \$79 credit to Mr Y's account to cancel the erroneous quarterly bill. The provider issued an amended gas bill, for \$224, for the same period, which corrected the undercharging, included gas use and the \$79 reversal credit.

The provider received a \$224 payment, which reduced Mr Y's account balance to nil. This was displayed on the next quarterly bill issued three months later.

The provider has no record of receiving a \$79 payment for Mr Y's account.

RESOLUTION

The provider gave Mr Y a goodwill gesture payment of \$100 for the billing error. The provider also agreed to trace Mr Y's \$79 payment with his receipt details.

SUBJECT:	INCORRECT SIGN UP AND SOLAR METER UPGRADE DELAY
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ISSUES:	BILLING – BILLING PROCESS – CROSS METERING WRONG METER PROVISION – EXISTING CONNECTION – SOLAR METER UPGRADE DELAY
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UTILITY:	ELECTRICITY
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CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
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CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION
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THE ISSUE

Mr P moved into a new residence and his provider established the electricity account for the incorrect address.

Mr P was unaware of this and arranged the installation of a solar system. However, there were delays with the meter upgrade due to the address mismatch issue.

Mr P wanted his provider to rectify the account issues and establish the electricity account for the correct address, arrange a solar meter upgrade and consider a credit for the delay and inconvenience.

OUR REVIEW

We found the provider incorrectly setup the electricity account for a neighbouring property.

The solar meter upgrade could not be completed due to the address and meter mismatch.

RESOLUTION

The provider cancelled the account for the incorrect property and established a new account for the correct supply address. Once completed, the provider arranged the solar meter upgrade and arranged a \$250 credit as goodwill.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

We have a responsibility to identify and record systemic issues and potential compliance issues and, as appropriate, notify the relevant provider and regulatory body or responsible authority.

How we define a systemic issue

A systemic issue is one that has the potential to affect a number of customers. It may arise from an energy or water provider's policies or practices, or their application, and may be caused by a range of matters in isolation or together. These include, but are not limited to, a system change, a policy or procedure change, lack of regulatory compliance or the conduct of an energy or water provider's employee, agent or contractor.

Our role

We have a responsibility to identify and record systemic issues and potential compliance issues and, as appropriate, notify the relevant provider and regulatory body or responsible authority.

Once we have identified potential systemic issues, we may, where appropriate, investigate the issues. Where we find that an issue is systemic, it is referred to the relevant Member's senior management for remedial action. We will continue to monitor the issue until a resolution is achieved that is considered to be a reasonable outcome for the customers affected. We may also refer to a Member's senior management any opportunities identified to improve the Member's policies or practices in order to reduce complaints.

Should a provider be found to have breached legislation, regulations or their license or authorisation conditions, it is up to the regulatory body or responsible authority to take relevant action. The Energy and Water Ombudsman does not have any punitive powers.

Systemic issue themes

Most systemic issues – including potential systemic issues identified by our Dispute Resolution Officers – fall into several themes, including:

- Inadequate or inaccurate information provision, such as misleading discount information
- Meter reading problems, including obtaining data from meter providers
- Billing problems, particularly delayed bills (which can be related to meter reading problems) and the backdating of bills when customers have been transferred
- Incorrect application of time-of-use tariffs, including the inappropriate allocation of controlled load
- Incorrect application of concessions or rebates, including missing payments.

RESOLUTIONS

SUBJECT:	HIGH BILLS
ISSUES:	BILLING – HIGH – DISPUTED HIGHER THAN EXPECTED
UTILITY:	GAS
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Mr J had received higher than expected gas bills. He had reported a gas leak and was concerned it may have contributed to a higher gas bill. He was further concerned that the meter installed at his property appeared to be a commercial meter, and he was unsure if the meter was fit for purpose.

OUR REVIEW

We reviewed the meter reading records from the gas distributor and bills issued by the provider, for three years, reconciling the use recorded on the meter with the quantity billed and confirmed the bills were accurate.

We reviewed the distributor's records of the reported gas leak and their attendance. It showed the leak was located on the regulator prior to meter outlet.

Therefore, the leaking gas had not passed through the meter and was not recorded on the meter, which did not impact Mr J's bills.

We confirmed the distributor installed a commercial meter, that can deliver more gas to the property than a residential meter. The size of the meter that was installed was determined by the number of gas appliances at the property and the gas required to operate them. The meter installed was appropriate to meet the gas demand at the property. The quantity of gas delivered through the meter is controlled by the gas appliances when they operate. The meter will deliver and record only the amount of gas required by the appliances when they operate.

RESOLUTION

The accuracy of Mr J's bills was independently verified. Despite no billing errors the provider apologised for the poor service and experience Mr J received. Due to this, the provider gave Mr J a goodwill gesture payment of \$200. Mr J was satisfied with the outcome.

SUBJECT:	HOT WATER ISSUES
ISSUES:	PROVISION – EXISTING CONNECTION – OTHER METERING INSTALLATION COMPLAINTS
UTILITY:	ELECTRICITY
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Mr B had been without hot water for several months since his provider replaced the basic electricity meter with a smart meter as part of a retailer led smart meter rollout.

Mr B had been contacting his provider on multiple occasions but was told to get an electrician to check the hot water service.

The property is owned by Housing SA, and they were contacted by Mr B to have the hot water system checked.

Housing SA's electrician confirmed the hot water system was functioning as expected and recommended that the provider have the meter checked.

The smart meter was brand new, and usage was being recorded on it, so the provider maintained that the fault must be with the hot water system.

Mr B did not know what to do so he contacted us to escalate the matter.

OUR REVIEW

We arranged for an independent consultant to attend the property and investigate why there had been no hot water since the meter replacement.

The assessor tested the hot water system and found it was operating as expected. The assessor identified that the smart meter's controlled load register was not switching on as it should.

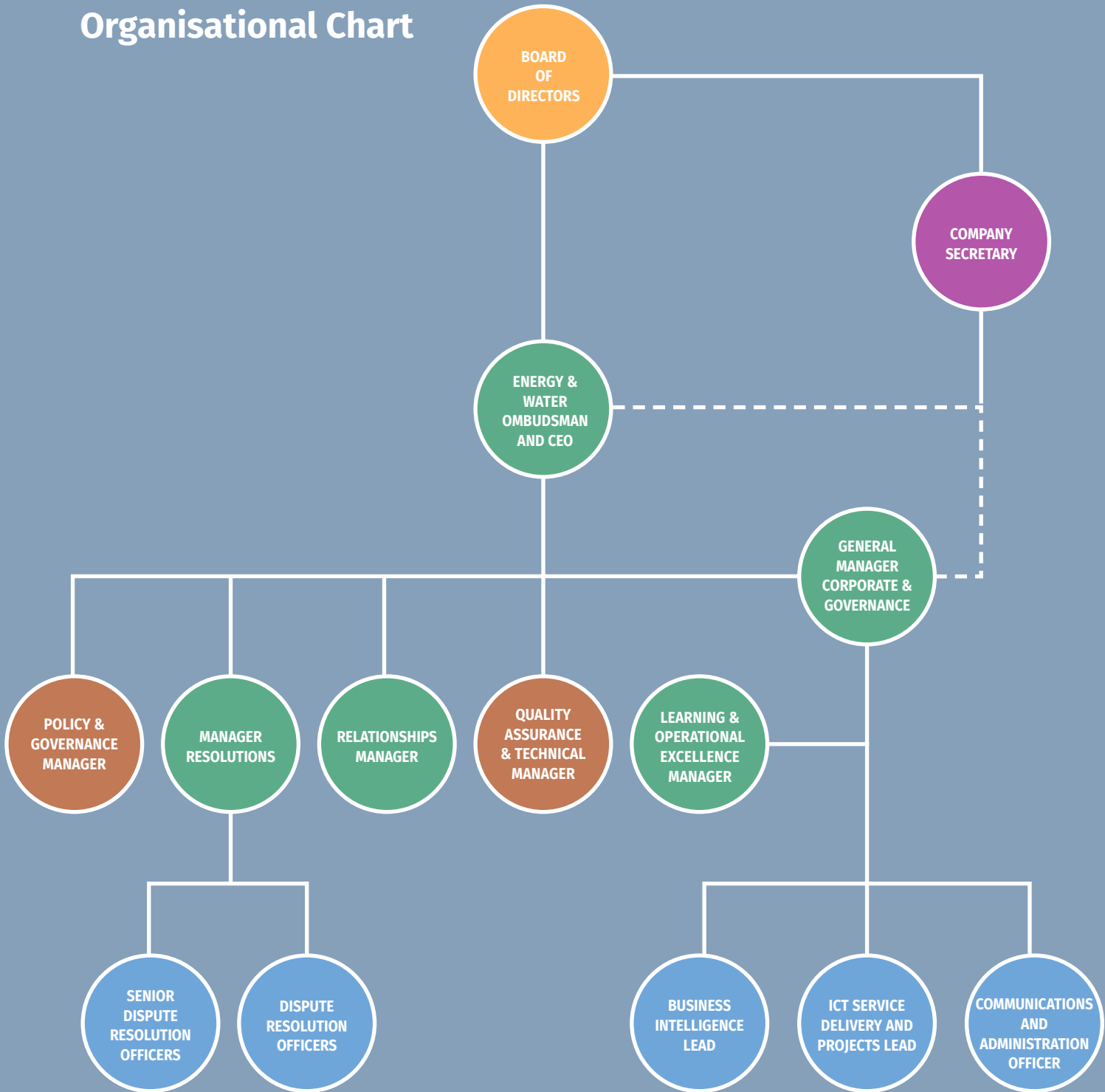
We reported the independent consultant's findings to the provider, and they arranged for a meter replacement. Once the meter was replaced, the hot water issues were resolved.

RESOLUTION

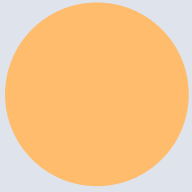
The provider apologised for the poor service and experience Mr B received. Due to this the provider gave Mr B a goodwill gesture payment of \$1,000. Mr B was satisfied with the outcome.

OUR ORGANISATION

Organisational Chart



 MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBER



Board of Directors

The Board is composed of four Industry Directors elected by Scheme Members, four Consumer Directors nominated by the Essential Services Commission (of South Australia) and an Independent Chair.

Chair

- Greg May – appointed 22 March, 2024

Directors

The Directors of the Company as of 30 June, 2024 were:

- Greg May, Independent Chair
- Geoff Barton, Gas Industry Director (Australian Gas Networks)
- Sue Chase, AM, Consumer Director
- Mark Henley, Consumer Director
- Kylie Johnson, Water Industry Director (SA Water) – ceased 28 June, 2024
- Patrick Makinson, Electricity Industry Director (SA Power Networks)
- Kay Matthias, Consumer Director
- Nadia Moffatt OAM, Consumer Director
- Anthony Sinclair, Electricity Industry Director (AGL)

Company Secretary

- Jamie Dreckow, Company Secretary



Management Team

- Sandy Canale, Ombudsman & CEO
- Re Ouano, General Manager Corporate and Governance
- Ben Perry, Manager Resolutions
- Ben McAvenna, Relationships Manager
- Elvira Bobekova, Learning & Operational Excellence Manager

OUR ORGANISATION

Key Developments in 2023-24

Strategic Plan 2022-25

The Board updated its Strategic Plan, which outlines our focus areas, objectives, and key strategies over the next three years.

The focus areas are:

1. Best Practice Dispute Resolution

To be an independent, innovative, and fair Scheme that is recognised by Members, consumers and other stakeholders as a leading industry-based dispute resolution body.

2. Consumer Engagement

To engage with consumers so they can better understand their energy and water services, resolve complaints with their providers, and access the Scheme.

3. Member Relationships

To establish and maintain positive, impartial relationships with Members to understand complaint drivers, improve complaint-handling procedures and achieve early-stage resolution of complaints.

4. Policy Influence

To influence policy by actively sharing information with key State and Federal stakeholders about the impact of existing and proposed policies and practices on the Scheme, Members, and consumers.

5. Scheme Adaptability

To be an agile and responsive organisation in a time of significant change in the economy and in energy and water services.

6. Our People and Organisational Capability

Continuously improve to guarantee a professional, agile, and robust organisation that is sustainable and delivers best-practice dispute resolution to energy and water consumers.

The Scheme

The Scheme's independent status and reputation, data and analysis capability, and comprehensive engagement program make it well placed to influence policy in what is a dynamic and disruptive period in the energy and water service sectors.

Learning and development

We are committed to developing our staff to deliver best practice dispute resolution. We completed several initiatives during the year to develop our staff and enhance the benefits available to them, including:

- appointing a second Senior Dispute Resolution Officer to provide on-the-job training and ongoing support to our Dispute Resolution Officers
- further developing skills for all case management staff to enhance overall competency and expertise
- *'Protecting your wellbeing whilst managing tricky conversations'* training
- conducting various technical training sessions on key topics such as industry issues, privacy and dispute resolution
- providing soft skills training to staff, including managing tricky conversations.

Through our performance management process, we identified individual development needs and met them through formal and informal learning approaches.

We also appointed a Learning & Operational Excellence Manager in April 2024. They are undertaking an end-to-end review of our Learning and Development Framework.

Technology

Technology plays a crucial part in ensuring our services are delivered efficiently, effectively and with minimal disruption.

This year, we fully transitioned our IT environment to the cloud. This upgrade significantly improves our IT system's security and resilience. Our new 'cloud-first' environment provides a better platform to support flexible working arrangements and greater flexibility for future system enhancements.

We also successfully completed and deployed enhancements to our Case Management System (CMS), which included improvements to our case escalation process, workflows and user interface.

As discussed in the next section, we have also completed several technology-based improvements to our business intelligence platforms.

Business Intelligence

We have improved our Business Intelligence capability with several projects that enhance how we capture, process and report on data, using contemporary data analytics solutions.

Key achievements during the year include:

- expanding the use of Power BI within the organisation, resulting in the broader distribution of automated on-demand reports
- embedding Power BI into our CMS
- rolling out a new automated notification and task assignment system that helps identify and resolve exceptions and quality issues as they occur
- developing a new set of metrics that provide better insights about case handling duration at a case level, including potential bottleneck areas and opportunities for improvement
- exploring the use of generative Artificial Intelligence and the potential role of applications within the business, including identification of risks
- hosting an internship placement that supported detailed analysis of customer feedback data.

Dispute Resolution

This year, we improved our case management processes through several initiatives, including:

- successfully completing and deploying enhancements to our CMS, such as our case escalation process, workflows, and user interface
- streamlined the allocation and classification of upgraded cases to speed up case handling
- improved data use and analytics for improved visibility and feedback on case management delays and bottlenecks
- improved processes for handling high risk cases
- refreshed our issues, case categorisation and association for enhanced reporting, issue identification and visibility
- improved collection of referral outcome data
- updated our quality assurance measures to ensure we deliver best practice dispute resolution.

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

This year has seen us continue to work with stakeholders to improve communication, feedback, and the quality of information we provide.

We implemented enhancements to our quarterly and half-yearly publications and updated the statistical reports included in our publications for relevance and understandability.

Throughout the year, the Ombudsman also actively promoted the Scheme through the media, including appearances at radio interviews and face-to-face community forums.

The addition of our phone number on energy bills has also helped to broaden our outreach to customers requiring our services. From 1 January 2025, our number will also appear on SA Water bills.

Work Health and Safety

We are firmly committed to the health and safety of our staff. We strive to maintain a workplace free from injuries.

Our Work Health and Safety Policy outlines the principles and processes that promote and maintain work health and safety at the workplace.

Work health and safety is a standing agenda item at each team meeting. Additionally, ergonomic assessments are conducted regularly. We also encourage staff participation in various health and wellbeing activities, such as free voluntary health checks and flu vaccinations.

Workplace safety inspections are conducted quarterly.

The first aid kit, which includes a defibrillator, is restocked quarterly or as necessary, and all electrical equipment is tested and tagged annually.

An Employee Assistance Program provides staff and their immediate family members with support and free counselling for work and personal matters.

We further promote health and wellbeing in the workplace through:

- providing drug and alcohol use guidance through a Drug and Alcohol Use Directive
- assistance to quit smoking with subsidised quit programs supported by a No Smoking Directive.

In addition, we also provide the following workplace protections:

- protecting against bullying, harassment and discrimination through an Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy
- ensuring anti-discrimination and equal opportunity through a formalised policy
- providing grievance processes as specified in a Grievance Policy. We also have personal and physical security policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of our staff.

Our Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We have a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in all areas. This commitment drives us to look after our employees, customers and Members without regard to ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, age, or life experience.

This commitment enriches our working relationships and propels our success, as diverse perspectives and experiences foster innovation and growth. Together, we create a vibrant and dynamic workplace where everyone feels valued and empowered.

Internal Audit

Our internal auditors executed the audit under the oversight of the Board and the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee. This year's audit focused on the Scheme's business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements. The audit did not find any significant deficiencies.

Quality Assurance

Quality is paramount in everything we do.

Our Quality Assurance program continues to be developed and adapted to the changing complaint landscape. The program ensures that all customers and Members receive a high level of service and consistency in case management.

Our Quality Assurance program includes:

- on-the-job supervision and coaching
- peer review
- Ombudsman review
- independent Quality Assurance Review.

The Quality Assurance review is undertaken by our Quality Assurance and Technical Manager with the outcome fed back into individual Learning and Development plans and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for staff members.

A robust internal reporting mechanism supports our Quality Assurance program. It assists management to identify and monitor quality and productivity.

We will complete an Internal Review after an Investigation where one or more grounds for a review are met and the customer can explain how each ground would change the outcome or decision. Please see the [Case Management](#) section for more information.

Employee Reward and Recognition

Our staff are at the core of what we do. We pride ourselves in offering contemporary employment benefits to our staff such as:

- flexible working arrangements, including working from home on two prescribed days a week with three days in the office
- paid parental leave
- providing Group Salary Continuance cover for all staff
- providing Group Personal Accident Insurance for all staff and members of the Board
- offering salary sacrifice options
- providing access to contemporary information, communication, and technology systems
- access to learning and development opportunities
- assistance to quit smoking with subsidised quit programs.

We also recently completed a market review and adjustment of our staff salaries to ensure we remain competitive in the marketplace.

Environmental Policy

Our Environmental Sustainability Committee aims to raise awareness of our environmental impacts and implement effective strategies to minimise and lessen our ecological footprint.

During the year, the Committee delivered key initiatives to minimise our ecological footprint as part of its Sustainability Plan. This included improvements to managing heating and cooling within the office, reducing the number of office printers, and promoting awareness and improvements to waste management, with an emphasis on recycling.

Policy Influence

While our primary function is to facilitate the resolution of complaints between customers of electricity, gas and water and their providers, we also maintain strong relationships with energy and water market regulators and other agencies, including government departments. In line with our Strategic Plan, we do this to exchange data and other information, improve reporting processes and influence and improve outcomes for energy and water consumers.

These activities primarily involve writing submissions on inquiries and reviews, both separately and jointly with other Energy and Water Ombudsman interstate, as well as attending both ad hoc bilateral and regular quarterly meetings. We also participate in forums with these important stakeholders.

We hold regular meetings with the AER and ACCC, ESCOSA through their Consumer Advisory Committee and also with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, mainly around privacy and consumer data right issues. We also hold regular meetings with other Energy and Water Ombudsman, as well as with Ombudsman in other industries through the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association, as a way to enhance information sharing and influence.

During 2023-24, we provided 25 written submissions, 15 of which were joint submissions. Some of the key issues, reviews and regulatory determinations the Scheme provided submissions on included:

- AEMC's Accelerating Smart Meter Deployment rule change process
- AEMC's Unlocking CER Benefits Through Flexible Trading rule change process
- AER's Retail Performance Reporting Procedures and Guidelines
- AER's Review of the Exemptions Framework for Embedded Networks
- AER's Review of Payment Difficulty Protections
- ESCOSA's Review of Australian Gas Networks Regulatory Framework 2026-31
- ESCOSA's SA Water Regulatory Determination 2024-28
- Reviews of Community Engagement in Energy Infrastructure, conducted by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner and the AEMC
- SA Department for Energy and Mining's Energy Transition Green Paper and the Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Act 2023 and Regulations
- SA Power Networks Regulatory Determination 2025-30 (SAPN, ESCOSA and AER)
- Senate Committee on Residential Electrification.

MEMBERS

As of 30 June, 2024 the Scheme had a total of 201 Members.



Electricity Members

1st Energy	Diamond Energy	Next Business Energy
Across Australia Parks & Resorts Pty Ltd	Discover Energy	Origin Energy
AGL Sales (Queensland Electricity) Pty Ltd	Discovery Parks, G'day Group	OVO Energy
AGL Sales Pty Ltd	Dodo Power & Gas	Pacific Blue
AGL South Australia Pty Ltd	Edithburgh Caravan Park	Pine Country Caravan Park
Aldinga Beach Holiday Park	ElectraNet	Port Clinton Caravan Park
Alinta Energy	Electricity in a Box	Port Lincoln Tourist Park
Amber Electric; Amber	Energy Locals; iO Energy Retailing Services	Port Wakefield Caravan Park and Balaklava Caravan Park
Ampol Energy (Retail) Pty Ltd	EnergyAustralia	PowerHub
Andamooka Power House	Enerven	Powershop
Ardrossan Caravan Park	ENGIE	Powow Power
Ashbrook Apartments	Flo Energy Australia	ReAmped Energy
Barossa Village Inc.	Flow Power	Red Energy
Beachside Caravan Park	Future X Power	SA Power Networks
Belair National Park Caravan Park	Gawler Caravan Park	Savant Energy
benergy	Gawler Gateway Tourist Park	Shell Energy
BHP Olympic Dam Corporation Pty Ltd	Glenbrook Apartments	Somerton Park Retirement Village
BIG4 Barossa Tourist Park	GloBird Energy	Southern Cross Care (SA, NT & VIC) Incorporated
BIG4 Normanville Jetty Holiday Park	Glow power	Stansbury Caravan Park
BIG4 Port Willunga Tourist Park	Gulfhaven Caravan Park, Port Victoria	Stockport Caravan & Tourist Park
Blue NRG	Highway 1 Holiday and Lifestyle Park	Sturt River Park
Boandik Lodge	Hindmarsh Island Caravan Park	Sumo Power
Burton Village	Kadina Caravan Park	Sustainable Savings
Circular Energy	Kalyra Bellevue Heights Village	Telstra Energy Pty Ltd
Clayton Church Homes	Kingston-on-Murray Caravan Park	The Mansions
CleanPeak Energy	Leabrook Place	The Palms Residential Park, Hillier Park Residential Village
Cobdogla Station Caravan Park	Liberty Primary Steel, Liberty Onesteel	The Trustee for the Tavern Trust
Community Corporation 22654 inc.	Localvolts	U City Energy
Community Corporation 26052 Inc	Loxton Riverfront Holiday Park	Uniting SA
Community Corporation 41346 Inc	Lumo Energy	Unity Retirement Village
Community Corporation No. 40515, Incorporated	McLaren Vale Lakeside Caravan Park	V Three Energy
Community Corporation No. 41210, Incorporated	Minda Incorporated	Victor Harbour Beachfront Holiday Park
Coober Pedy Council	Minlaton Caravan Park	Waikerie Lifestyle Village, Virginia Residential Park, Naracoorte Holiday Park
CovaU Energy	Moana Beach Tourist Park; Christies Beach Tourist Park	WINconnect
Cowell Electric Supply	Momentum Energy	Windsor Gardens Caravan Park
CPE Tonsley Pty Ltd	Mount Barker District Council, Mount Barker Caravan Park	Woodcroft Park
Dalfoam Pty Ltd	Mt View Homes	ZEN Energy
Delorean Energy Retail	Municipal Council of Roxby Downs	
	Murray Bridge Tourist Park	
	Murraylink Transmission Partnership	
	Nectr	



AGL South Australia Pty Ltd
Alabrilife Village
Alinta Energy
Australian Gas Networks
CovaU Energy
CPE Tonsley Pty Ltd
Delorean Energy Retail
Discover Energy
Elgas
EnergyAustralia
ENGIE
Environmental Land Services (Aust) Pty Ltd
GloBird Energy
Lumo Energy
Origin Energy
Origin LPG
OVO Energy
Red Energy
Savant Energy
Telstra Energy Pty Ltd
WINconnect



Adelaide Hills Council
Alano Water
Alexandrina Council
Barunga West Council
Berri Barmera Council
City of Charles Sturt
City of Marion
City of Onkaparinga
City of Playford
City of Port Adelaide Enfield
City of Port Lincoln
City of Salisbury
City of Tea Tree Gully
Clare & Gilbert Valleys Council
Compass Springs
Cooper Pedy Council
Coorong District Council
Copper Coast Council
CPE Tonsley Pty Ltd
District Council of Ceduna
District Council of Cleve
District Council of Elliston
District Council of Franklin Harbour
District Council of Grant
District Council of Karoonda East Murray
District Council of Kimba
District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula
District Council of Loxton Waikerie
District Council of Mallala
District Council of Mount Barker
District Council of Mount Remarkable

District Council of Orroroo Carrieton
District Council of Peterborough
District Council of Robe
District Council of Streaky Bay
District Council of Tumby Bay
ERA Water
FB Pipeline
Kangaroo Island Council
Kingston District Council
Light Regional Council
Lightsview ReWater
Michell Infrastructure Pty Ltd
Mid Murray Council
Monarto Water Network Limited
Municipal Council of Roxby Downs
Naracoorte Lucindale Council
Northern Areas Council
NWIC Pty Ltd
Port Augusta City Council
Port Pirie Regional Council
Regional Council of Goyder
Renmark Paringa Council
Rural City of Murray Bridge
SA Water
Southern Mallee District Council
Tatiara District Council
The Barossa Council
The Corporation of the City of Whyalla
The Flinders Ranges Council
Wakefield Regional Council
Wattle Range Council
Wudinna District Council
Yorke Peninsula Council

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN (SA) LIMITED

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
Revenue from ordinary activities	4,434,362	3,742,732
Expenses from ordinary activities:		
Accounting and audit fee	41,660	39,474
Depreciation	326,443	298,226
Employee benefit	2,519,644	2,277,304
Total other expenses	1,235,463	1,118,056
Income tax expense	-	-
Surplus for the year	311,152	9,672
Total comprehensive income for the year	311,152	9,672

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN (SA) LIMITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

	2024 \$	2023 \$
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,056,140	1,067,212
Trade and other receivables	97,096	150,015
Other current assets	218,078	190,563
Other financial assets	2,083,804	1,818,656
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	3,455,117	3,226,446
NON CURRENT ASSETS		
Property, plant and equipment	855,340	860,234
TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS	855,340	860,234
TOTAL ASSETS	4,310,457	4,086,680
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Trade and other payables	104,723	116,885
Financial liability payable	170,962	155,645
Employee benefits	407,990	322,849
Other current liabilities	37,207	26,139
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	720,883	621,518
NON CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Financial liability payable	221,632	370,682
Employee benefits	17,097	54,787
TOTAL NON CURRENT LIABILITIES	238,729	425,469
TOTAL LIABILITIES	959,612	1,046,987
NET ASSETS	3,350,845	3,039,693
EQUITY		
Accumulated surplus	3,350,845	3,039,693
TOTAL EQUITY	3,350,845	3,039,693

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN (SA) LIMITED

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	2024 \$	2023 \$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Receipts from members (inclusive of goods and services tax)	4,739,174	3,992,431
Payments to suppliers and employees (inclusive of goods and services tax)	(4,137,426)	(3,746,692)
Net cash inflow from operating activities	601,748	245,739
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES		
Proceeds from sale of property, plant and equipment	1,471	550
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	(303,126)	(177,825)
Proceeds from other financial assets	3,668,656	1,805,305
Payments for other financial assets	(3,933,803)	(1,818,656)
Interest received	133,127	15,862
Net cash (outflow) from investing activities	(433,675)	(174,764)
CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES		
Financing lease principal and interest payments	(179,145)	(168,207)
Net cash outflow from financing activities	(179,145)	(168,207)
Net decrease in cash and cash equivalents	(11,072)	(97,232)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of year	1,067,212	1,164,444
CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS AT END OF YEAR	1,056,140	1,067,212

RESOLUTIONS

SUBJECT:	DELAY IN CLAIM DETERMINATION – CLAIM DENIED
ISSUES:	PROPERTY DAMAGE – DELAY IN RESTORING SUPPLY CAUSED BY NATURAL EVENTS
UTILITY:	ELECTRICITY
CUSTOMER TYPE:	RESIDENTIAL
CASE TYPE:	INVESTIGATION

THE ISSUE

Ms. X reported a three-day unplanned electricity outage, attributing it to natural events. She felt SA Power Networks didn't use best endeavours to restore supply promptly.

Consequently, she submitted a compensation claim, which was declined after a prolonged period of over six months.

OUR REVIEW

The Electricity Distribution Code 5.4.1 requires SA Power Networks to use its best endeavours to restore supply.

However, there is no regulatory requirement that sets a time frame for the restoration to be completed.

Our review encompassed:

- SA Power Networks' job reports detailing the impact of severe weather
- Weather reports during the outage period (July 8th to 9th, 2023)
- The outage timeline
- The duration taken by SA Power Networks to dispatch crews for resolution
- A report on the damage to SA Power Networks' infrastructure caused by the severe weather.

We found SA Power Networks promptly dispatched crews to restore supply at Ms. X's property, but the presence of a failed transformer and multiple feeders needing repair prolonged the process and delayed the restoration. We were satisfied that SA Power Networks had used its best endeavours to restore the supply at Ms X's property as soon as possible, meaning that SA Power Networks wasn't obligated to pay the compensation claim. However, they failed to promptly address the compensation claim within a reasonable time frame.

RESOLUTION

Acknowledging the delay in addressing the compensation claim, SA Power Networks agreed to compensate Ms. X with a goodwill gesture payment of \$500.



ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 24



ENERGY & WATER
OMBUDSMAN SA

Energy and Water Ombudsman (SA) Limited

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