



Message from the Energy and Water Ombudsman

As Energy and Water Ombudsman, I am delighted to present the 2018-19 annual report, a year where we have continued to see a great deal of public interest in the energy sector as pricing pressures and new technologies continued to capture the attention of consumers and government.



service delivery standards and closed 86 per cent of cases in less than 28 days.

Billing disputes and credit-related matters, like credit collection, payment difficulties, hardship and disconnection, continue to make up the majority of complaints we receive. Complaints about provision, which are problems with new or existing connections, are the third most common issue customers contact us about.

Our contribution

As a dispute resolution service for energy and water consumers, we are at the frontline in terms of how Queenslanders are coping with rising power bills, complex energy contracts and discounting arrangements, and how well energy and water companies are progressing with the implementation of legislative changes.

With dialogue at the heart of our business, the conversations we have with consumers, industry, government departments and regulators provide us with a unique perspective of industry trends. We have contributed our insights to a number of policy submissions over the past 12 months, including standardised statements in customer hardship policies, draft hardship guidelines, a consumer code for new energy technology, and proposed regulatory and policy amendments for estimated meter reads, meter installation for advanced meter communications, and stand-alone power systems.

We have also been involved with the Queensland Government's review of the *Energy and Water Ombudsman Act 2006*.

One of our greatest achievements in 2018-19 was launching our inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan – our Reflect RAP – which formalised our commitment towards reconciliation. As the Ombudsman, I am excited about being able to contribute to a better Australia and helping to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and others in our nation. The opportunities the Reflect RAP has created to date have fostered greater cultural awareness within our organisation, even over this short period. This 12-month initiative will be surpassed by our

The service we provide has continued to play a pivotal role for Queensland's consumers of electricity, gas and water as pressures mount on our customers to understand the complex nature of the energy sector and what they are entitled to receive as well as their options in the market. This, coupled with the pressure of low wages growth and a spotlight on affordability across the sector, has meant that our team has been busy assisting consumers with a greater number of complex issues than we've previously encountered.

Our cases

During 2018-19, electricity continued to make up the bulk of our caseload and accounted for 84 per cent of the 8584 cases received. The significant increase in electricity cases we experienced during the previous financial year stabilised as the industry worked to reduce problems consumers faced with the introduction of the Power of Choice and digital metering.

Despite a fall in the overall number of cases closed this year compared with last year, we closed nine per cent more cases in 2018-19 than in 2016-17. There has been an increase in the complexity of the cases received, which has resulted in a greater number of cases escalating to investigation. While these matters take longer to resolve, our Assessment, Investigation and Resolution team continued to exceed their

Launched our new brand identity



Energy & Water Ombudsman Queensland

Launched our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan



Innovate RAP, which is a two-year plan set to be launched in late 2019.

During 2018-19, we also launched our new brand which we believe reflects our core business of dialogue. Last year's 2017-18 annual report was the first official document to feature our new logo, a dialogue symbol inside the letter Q in the vibrant colours of Queensland. The rebrand is part of our commitment to ensuring Queensland consumers know we are here to help with their energy or water issues when they need it. We have since published a new range of brochures to introduce our services to consumers and financial counsellors.

Our people

Our people are the strength of our organisation and have been a strong focus over the past 12 months. During 2018-19, we introduced a number of tools to assist our team members with their learning and development. We have temporarily appointed a dedicated human resource manager to focus on our people, capability and culture and we have further progressed our flexible working arrangements, including options to work from home and increased mobility across our teams.

We continue to look at ways to develop the skills of our team and to encourage career growth and development. Team members have had opportunities over the past 12 months to develop in different roles and this has strengthened our succession planning.

Our connections

Community outreach and stakeholder engagement are an important part of our service and we continue to foster relationships and strengthen our networks across the state. A focus of our outreach program during 2018-19 has been working closely with Indigenous communities, including visiting Woorabinda in Central Queensland, and Yarrabah and Kuranda in North Queensland.

Our priorities this year have also included energy consumers in regional areas, older Queenslanders and customers in financial difficulty, who we reach through our relationships with financial counsellors and community services that help those in financial hardship.

Over the next 12 months, we plan to increase our connections with multicultural communities, and visit the regional centres of Gympie, Mackay, Mt Isa and Townsville. As always, our team are available to attend community events like Bring Your Bills days to talk to consumers about their issues with energy and water.

Engaging with our key stakeholders is integral to our service. We strive to improve our performance reporting and strengthen connections with our scheme participants, peers and government departments and industry regulators. These

conversations enable customer stories and ideas to be shared and developed, which we believe helps improve customer experience and internal dispute resolution processes for the good of the sector.

As our website is redeveloped over the next 12 months, we are working towards using technology more effectively to broaden our engagement and impact across the state, for greater awareness of our scheme and improved communication with our customers.

Our future

Over the past two years, we have focused on the future of our organisation, both in terms of how we can meet proposed legislative changes and an expanded jurisdiction, and the evolving needs and expectations of customers. We have been working on a number of strategic projects to ensure both our service delivery and our team are ready for these challenges, including changes in jurisdiction and technological advances in the sector.

This year, we finalised planning for a number of projects that will be implemented and delivered in the months ahead. The next 12 months will see significant change to our service delivery and our customers' experience as we move towards a more digital environment. We hope that this will better meet the expectations of Queenslanders and how they interact with us, while also ensuring the current environment remains stable as we work to make our service the best it can be.

My thanks

The challenges and changes we've experienced over the past 12 months serve to remind us of the dynamic nature of the sector. I am grateful for the support and counsel of the Advisory Council, in particular, its Chair Anna Moynihan; my peers in the Ombudsman community; and my team for their business and industry knowledge and strong performance over the past 12 months.

While we have further challenges to overcome in the next 12 months, the future of EWOQ is strong and I am confident we will continue to achieve great results for Queensland's energy and water consumers.



Jane Pires
Energy and Water Ombudsman

2018-19 HIGHLIGHTS

8,559

cases closed



84%

electricity

8%

gas

5%

water

\$993,086
worth of
monetary outcomes
negotiated
for Queenslanders.