

# Media release

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## Energy and water bills problematic for Queenslanders

Problems with electricity, gas and water bills accounted for more than half of complaints closed by the Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland (EWOQ) last financial year, according to the industry ombudsman's 2018-19 Annual Report released on Friday.

Queensland's Energy and Water Ombudsman Jane Pires said more than 8500 Queensland residents and small businesses had sought help from her office during the 2018-19 financial year to resolve issues with their electricity, gas and water retailers and distributors.

"Billing problems were the number one reason energy and water consumers contacted us during 2018-19, with 51 per cent of the complaints we closed last year associated with billing, including high bills, billing errors, problems with estimated bills, and issues with rebates and concessions," Ms Pires said.

"We also closed 1130 credit-related complaints as consumers dealt with the effects of not paying their bills on time, including threats of debt collection, debt-listing impacting personal credit ratings and having their energy disconnected or water restricted because of non-payment."

Ms Pires said 84 per cent of EWOQ's cases had been about electricity in 2018-19, followed by eight per cent about gas and five per cent about water, with an 18 per cent decrease in the total number of complaints closed during 2018-19 following a 30 per cent surge of cases in 2017-18 when digital metering was introduced.

"As the cost of energy continues to affect household budgets, we've helped keep the power on for thousands of Queenslanders over the past 12 months by negotiating reasonable payment plans for large bills, resolving errors with estimated bills and assisting consumers who felt pressured to switch energy retailers," she said.

"We also closed 699 gas cases last financial year, including a case where a customer experienced erratic gas supply after a new gas meter was installed.

"In South East Queensland, we helped 467 customers with their water during 2018-19, including resolving a dispute about a family's household water pressure and an ongoing billing error for an investment property."

Ms Pires said while energy and water companies worked hard to fix problems for their customers, some issues were so complex and confusing that a good outcome may seem impossible at times for some consumers.

"My team appreciate how stressful it can be to try and resolve issues with energy and water companies, and we worked hard last year to close 86 per cent of cases within 28 days while also negotiating \$993,086 worth of outcomes for customers, including billing adjustments, goodwill gestures and debt waivers," she said.

"While this is a great outcome, it's important for those who are having problems with their energy or water company to contact them as soon as possible so they know about the problem and can try to fix it – and if you're having difficulty paying a bill on time, ask about payment plans and extensions."

EWOQ is a free, fair and independent dispute resolution service for residents and small businesses who have unresolved issues with their electricity, gas and water providers. For electricity and gas, we can help those across Queensland, as well as water customers in South East Queensland.

Please contact your electricity, gas or water supplier in the first instance to try and resolve your problem. If you can't resolve it directly with them or you're not satisfied with outcome, call us on 1800 662 837 or go to [www.ewoq.com.au](http://www.ewoq.com.au) to lodge a complaint online.

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