



## Our Reconciliation Action Plan



One of our greatest achievements in 2018-19 was launching our first Reconciliation Action Plan—our Reflect RAP—which outlines our commitments towards reconciliation between October 2018 and September 2019.

2014

Indigenous officer appointed

2018

Reflect RAP launched

2019

Innovate RAP to be launched

### Our vision for reconciliation

Our Reflect RAP aims to help create equal opportunity and promote a culture of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples at EWOQ and in the communities we assist across the state.

We strive for our reconciliation journey to have a positive influence across our sector, and for industry to join us in contributing to a better Australia.

Our RAP formalises our continued commitment to engage, strengthen and maintain our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our continued aim is to assist Indigenous people to become confident and informed consumers, and to ensure they are aware of their right to assistance with issues relating to their energy services, and in South East Queensland their water services. We want all Queenslanders to know that it is okay to use our services.

### Our reconciliation journey

Our journey towards reconciliation started in January 2014 with the appointment of a dedicated Indigenous officer. Over the past five years, our journey has continued through our community outreach program, which has touched communities from Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in the southeast to the Torres Strait Islands in the far north.

With the endorsement of our Reflect RAP by Reconciliation Australia, we joined more than 1000 organisations from across Australia who have formally committed to reconciliation through the RAP program since its inception in 2006.

We are proud to be turning our good intentions into positive actions, helping to build higher trust, lower prejudice, and increase pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The RAP program provides us with a framework to advance reconciliation within our spheres of influence. It is a roadmap for our reconciliation journey and lays the foundations for future reconciliation initiatives.

In late 2019, we will launch our Innovate RAP, which is a two-year plan that we will use to advance reconciliation, to help to create equal opportunity and continue to promote a culture of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples both within our organisation and the communities we help across Queensland.

### Our connections

Through our reconciliation journey, we are fostering professional and community partnerships to strengthen our connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders across Queensland.

Our professional alliances include:

**Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA)** – actively involved in the Indigenous engagement interest group.

**Financial Counselling Australia** – our Ombudsman Jane Pires joined the Yarning Circle at the national conference in Melbourne in May 2019, and our General Manager of Assessment, Intake and Resolution, John Jones, was a guest speaker on the energy affordability panel at the 2019 Queensland conference.

**Thriving Communities Partnership** – we are a member of the Queensland chapter of this cross-sector collaboration that supports an initiative supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment programs.

**North Queensland Indigenous Consumer Taskforce** – since 2013, we have been part of this coordinated approach to tackling Indigenous consumer disadvantage in the region.

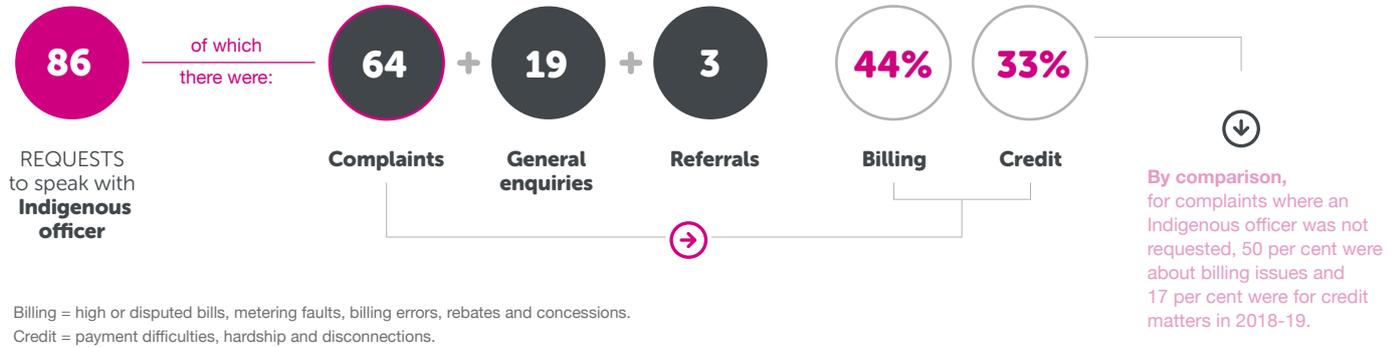




## HOW MANY INDIGENOUS CONSUMERS COMPLAIN?



While we haven't historically collected information about the cultural background of our customers, we do record the number of callers who ask to speak to an Indigenous officer. During 2018-19, there were 86 occasions where a customer asked to speak with an Indigenous officer.



### Our Indigenous Outreach Officer

Francine O'Rourke is our Indigenous Investigation Conciliation and Outreach Officer. Based in our Cairns office, she is a dedicated liaison officer for Indigenous consumers throughout Queensland and can assist with complaints and provide help.

Francine is part of the Yidinji Aboriginal group, whose land and sea country covers the southern corridor from Cairns to Babinda, encompassing Innisfail, Trinity Inlet, Yarrabah, Russell River, and parts of the Atherton Tablelands. Fran's maternal grandmother has South Sea Island and Italian heritage. Fran also has Torres Strait Islander kinship and networks through this side of the family.

From 1 July 2019, we will ask our customers whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, to provide a more accurate insight into the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers who use our service. This will allow us to monitor, determine and report if there are industry trends affecting Indigenous consumers and engage with industry about the challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers.



"Reconciliation is no one single issue or agenda. Based on international research and benchmarking, Reconciliation Australia defines and measures reconciliation through five critical dimensions: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance. All sections of the community; governments, civil society, the private sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—have a role to play to progress the dimensions."

– **Karen Mundine**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Reconciliation Australia

Visit [www.ewoq.com.au/rap](http://www.ewoq.com.au/rap) to learn more.



## Our connections

**One of our functions is to promote the Energy and Water Ombudsman scheme to those who may need our assistance. Our priorities this year have included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers, 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.**

In 2018-19, we assisted customers across Queensland and used a range of community outreach activities and information channels to build awareness of our services.

### Community outreach

Over the year, we attended community finance workshops and spoke to members of the public about their financial affairs. We promoted our services through presentations at community events and attended 'bring your bills' sessions throughout the state including locations across Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton and Toowoomba.

### Supporting regional Queensland

We have three Regional Managers who are based in Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane and oversee our connections in North Queensland, Central Queensland and South Queensland. During 2018-19, they travelled to areas including Toowoomba, Woorabinda, Gladstone and Capricorn Coast, connecting with community leaders and providing information to help customers understand their rights and responsibilities when making a complaint about an issue within our jurisdiction.

### Indigenous outreach

Our Indigenous Investigation Conciliation and Outreach Officer delivers our outreach program to communities across Queensland. Our aim is to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to become confident and informed consumers, and ensure they are aware of their right to assistance with issues relating to their energy services, and water services for customers in South East Queensland.

During 2018-19, we yarned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support networks and consumers in Caboolture, Inala, Logan Central, Kuranda, White Rock, Woorabinda, Woree and Yarrabah. Our Ombudsman took part in the Yarning Circle and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Forum at the 2019 Financial Counselling Australia (FCA) Conference in Melbourne in May.

We supported the annual National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week festivities in Cairns, Rockhampton and Brisbane in July. These events provided a great opportunity to showcase our services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers. We also supported National Reconciliation Week events.

### Connecting online

We continue to promote our services online through our website, the Energy and Water Complaints Wizard (a self-assessment tool enabling customers with a dispute to quickly and easily contact the appropriate authority to lodge their complaint) and social media.

We use social media to interact with stakeholders and the community, informing Queenslanders about how we can help with their energy and water problems.



 #EWOQId

 [www.ewoq.com.au](http://www.ewoq.com.au)

 [www.energywatercomplaints.com.au](http://www.energywatercomplaints.com.au)

Visit  
[www.ewoq.com.au/  
 community](http://www.ewoq.com.au/community)  
 to learn more.





## Our connections

We maintain strong links with the Ombudsman community with the Energy and Water Ombudsman a member of the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) and the Australia and New Zealand Energy and Water Ombudsman Network (ANZEWON).

### ANZOA

Committed to high standards of independence, impartiality and effectiveness, ANZOA members observe the six benchmarks for industry-based customer dispute resolution:

- accessibility
- independence
- fairness
- accountability
- efficiency
- effectiveness.

In addition to regular informal contact with other Ombudsman offices, the Ombudsman attended the ANZOA AGM in November 2018.

Our team members are actively involved in ANZOA's eight interest groups, including:

- complaints management
- customer financial hardship
- indigenous engagement
- information technology for business
- people and development
- policy and research
- public relations and communications
- systemic issues and investigations.

### ANZEWON

ANZEWON is a network of energy and water Ombudsman and utilities complaints Commissioners from across Australia and New Zealand, who work together to explore and address industry and policy developments that affect Australian and New Zealand consumers.

The network supports collaboration and learning to avoid duplication of effort which ensures members can progress projects with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

During 2018-19, we continued to collaborate with ANZEWON members in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia as part of our planning for the proposed expansion of our jurisdiction to include exempt entities (embedded networks).

In November 2018, the Ombudsman attended the ANZEWON meeting in Hobart, including a visit to Bruny Island to inspect a solar and battery storage trial. In March 2019, the Ombudsman attended the ANZEWON meeting in Sydney followed by the Senate Hearing on the Treasury Law change in relation to Consumer Data Rights and the concerns that Energy and Water Ombudsman schemes have with the proposals.

Next financial year, we will support an ANZEWON research activity into the impact of emerging technologies on ombudsman schemes in the sector.



## Our contribution to public policy

### WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORS

We regularly contribute to policy and legislative reviews undertaken by government, regulators, not-for-profit organisations and other bodies. We draw on our experiences and insights with customers and suppliers to inform energy and water policy decisions.

In 2018-19, we contributed to public policy in the following ways:

#### Government

We met regularly with the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy to update them on industry trends and issues identified through our complaint handling. We discussed upcoming legislative reviews, potential jurisdictional changes and our role in reporting systemic issues.

We contributed a submission for the Department's discussion paper about a review of National Energy Retail Law in Queensland.

We also provided a submission in response to an issues paper about a review of financial counselling for the Australian Government's Department of Social Services.

#### Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)

We made a submission to the ACCC's guide to the Electricity Retail Code and contributed to their consultation of the New Energy Tech Consumer Code.

#### Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC)

We made submissions to the AEMC about:

- estimated meter reads
- meter installation for advanced meter communications
- a review of the regulatory frameworks for stand-alone power systems
- updating the regulatory frameworks for embedded networks
- a rule change for National Energy Retail Amendment (Bill Contents - Customers with Interval Meters) Rule 2019.

#### Australian Energy Regulator (AER)

We made submissions to the AER supporting standardised statements in customer hardship policies, an issues paper about hardship guidelines, and the draft customer hardship policy guideline version 1.

We attended the AER Stakeholder Forum, took part in the AER Ombudsman Teleconference and a videoconference on the Competition and Consumer (Industry Code—Electricity Retail) Regulations 2019.