

Media release, 16 October 2014

Energy retailers should commit to reducing complaints by 25% in the next year

The Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria's (EWOV) annual report raises serious concerns about the direction of the energy retail market in Victoria and the relationship between energy retailers and their customers.

Of the nearly 85,000 cases received by EWOV the majority were energy retail related.

Ms Jo Benvenuti, Executive Officer of the Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) said she was pleased by initiatives recently undertaken by the Victorian Government, the Essential Services Commission and – at their behest – the Energy Retailers Association of Australia, to start addressing the issues behind these complaint rates.

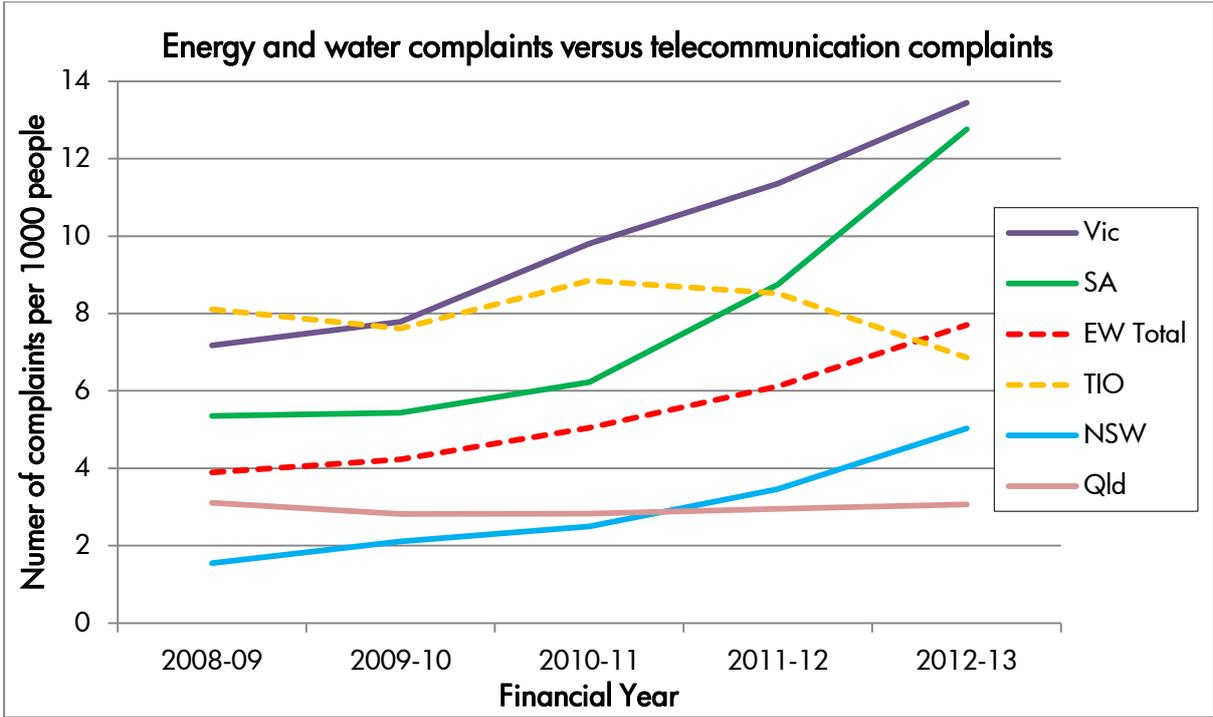
"This report shows the industry is at a crossroad," Ms Benvenuti said. "We have reached 500,000 complaints, and the Ombudsman has raised the spectre of 1 million. We don't want that. We want to see more people being able to resolve their problems directly with their retailers, and certainly we want to see more consumers with payment difficulties being assisted, not disconnected.

"It's time industry made a commitment to turn complaint rates around. CUAC is calling on the industry to commit to reducing cases received by EWOV by 25% in the next twelve months. We want them to take the issue seriously and really work towards achieving this.

"We are happy to work with all key stakeholders to improve compliance with the regulations, improve customer service, and particularly to improve processes for assisting consumers in payment difficulty.

"We have to tackle these problems together: it is time for concerted action and commitment."

Since 2009, the rate of energy complaints per head of population has consistently tracked higher than complaints to other industry ombudsman schemes such as telecommunications, reaching almost twice the rates of telecommunication complaints in 2012-13. In 2013-14, rates of energy complaints climbed to 14.6 per 1,000 Victorians.



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