



Media release

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Consumer group calls on energy companies to bring down complaint numbers

In its 2010-2011 Annual Report, released today, the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) reveals that it saw a record 54,289 cases in 2010-11. 51,101 or 94% of these cases concerned the energy industry, suggesting that Victoria's energy businesses are not delivering the standard of service that consumers expect. Cases against electricity companies have increased 218 per cent over the last five years, with an even greater increase of 241 per cent in gas complaints. These figures are a wake-up call for the energy industry.

"The time has come for the energy industry to stand back and assess its poor performance as evidenced by this enormous increase in complaints over the last five years," said CUAC Executive Officer, Jo Benvenuti. "In light of these results, CUAC is calling on all energy companies to commit to a target of reducing EWOV cases by ten per cent each year for the next five years. It is time for industry to take responsibility and seek improved outcomes for consumers."

"CUAC is looking to work with industry to encourage them to deliver these improved outcomes for Victorian consumers."

Of particular concern is the increase in cases related to credit and disconnection received by EWOV in 2010-2011. 16 percent of EWOV cases related to credit as the main issue. 4,079 of these cases identified disconnection or restriction of energy or water supplies as the main issue, a 58 per cent increase on last year. The electricity industry was a major contributor, seeing a 74 per cent increase in EWOV cases related to disconnection for account arrears.

"These figures indicate that rising utility prices are starting to really impact on vulnerable and low-income Victorian households."

"We call upon energy businesses to act both within the letter and the spirit of Victorian regulation intended to ensure protection for the most vulnerable consumers. Businesses should be delivering best practice hardship programs and payment plans to consumers in need. Disconnection should be the absolute last resort."

"EWOV's annual report delivers a strong message to energy businesses that it is time improve their behaviour and stop the erosion of consumer confidence."

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