

# NEWS RELEASE

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## INCREASE IN ENERGY OMBUDSMAN'S WORKLOAD REFLECTS INDUSTRY CHANGES

Energy Industry Ombudsman Sandy Canale says the large increase in the number of cases reaching his office in 2008-09 generally reflects a number of system and process changes implemented by energy companies during the year.

Figures outlined in the *Energy Ombudsman of South Australia Annual Report* for 2008-09 released today indicate the office dealt with 8,608 cases during the year, compared to 5,293 in 2007-08 – an increase of 62.6 per cent.

Mr Canale says many of the cases were related to changes introduced by the energy companies, including retailers embarking on new systems and processes for service delivery.

"Many of the cases were related to just one energy retailer introducing a new billing system," Mr Canale said. "However, the large increase does indicate there were issues related to a number of energy companies.

"The number of cases that dealt specifically with billing almost doubled, from 2,122 in 2007-08 to 4,141 in 2008-09, indicating this was a major factor in the overall rise in case numbers."

The annual figures show that of the 8,608 cases dealt with by the EIOSA, 2,951 stopped at the "enquiry" stage. This suggests that either customers had not made prior contact with the energy company (in which case they were encouraged to do so) or the information provided at that point of contact was enough to satisfy the callers.

Of the remainder, 4,937 were classed as "higher level referrals" – meaning that EIOSA referred them back to higher-level staff within the relevant energy retailers in attempts to resolve the issues.

Only 257 (or 3 per cent) required further detailed investigation and intervention by EIOSA. Mr. Canale says the low number of those requiring EIOSA investigation after the initial complaints indicated that most of the cases could be handled relatively quickly and efficiently.

The photovoltaic Feed in Scheme introduced on 1 July 2008, has encountered some teething problems as the retailers have introduced their services and made changes to their offers and customer billing systems," Mr Canale said.

“However, most of the cases presented to us were – like the majority of other contacts – able to be resolved without the need for further intervention.”

In the report, Mr Canale suggests that many of these matters “should have been resolved by the provider without our intervention”.

“I would urge any energy company embarking on change programs to clearly identify areas of potential impact to consumers and ensure that it is able to respond to issues in a timely fashion to minimise any inconvenience to consumers,” he writes.

Mr Canale also noted that the increase in cases relating to disconnection, whether for unexplained reasons or non-payment of accounts – had risen from 297 in 2007-08 to 464 in 2008-09.

“While these cases constitute a small percentage of the overall total, each of these is particularly important,” Mr Canale said.

“Everyone recognises how problematic it is to be without electricity – for whatever reason - and we are satisfied that most of these cases have been resolved through negotiation, retailers’ hardship programs and other solutions,” Mr Canale said.

Mr Canale said the impact on EIOSA staff of the huge increase in workload had been recognised and work practices altered to suit demand. Changes included a new facilitation method that helped staff negotiate outcomes more efficiently without impacting on customer satisfaction.

“Customers should always check their bills carefully and contact their retailers first with any queries or problems,” Mr Canale said. “However, should they not be happy with the response, we are available for free, independent advice.”

A copy of the Report is available at [www.eiosa.com.au](http://www.eiosa.com.au)

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