

Case Studies

Energy

Waiving of debt due to history of domestic violence

A customer had previously been subject to domestic violence which had led to them experiencing high bills because they needed to leave the lights on all the time. The customer had been receiving estimated bills from the Retailer and, with the support of a community organisation, provided an actual meter reading to the Retailer. After the Retailer sent four further estimated bills to the customer in the same month for varying amounts, the community organisation contacted the Retailer to clarify the outstanding balance. When the Retailer did not respond, the community organisation complained to the Energy and Water Ombudsman on the customer's behalf.

Following contact from the Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Retailer reviewed the matter and, given the customer's circumstances, offered them a full debt waiver for the customer's account. The Energy and Water Ombudsman also provided the customer with information to assist them to provide accurate self-reads of their meter.

Debt waived and concessions applied for a customer with disability

Due to a medical condition, a customer had recently ceased work and was receiving a disability pension. The customer complained to the Energy and Water Ombudsman that they had contacted the Retailer to discuss a high account and request financial assistance and were not successful in obtaining any relief that was suitable to their needs. The customer also complained that the Retailer's customer service representative did not accommodate the communication challenges the customer faced due to their disability.

Following contact from the Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Retailer reconsidered their decision and agreed to resolve the complaint by waiving the debt and applying a concession to the account. The Retailer also undertook to provide feedback to relevant staff on communicating with a person with disability.

An apology and concessions applied for an elderly customer

A person acting on behalf of their elderly parent contacted the Retailer to inform it of their other parent's passing, close their deceased parent's account and open a new account in their surviving parent's name. The person complained to the Energy and Water Ombudsman that, subsequently, the bills continued to be issued in the deceased parent's name. They also said that when they called the Retailer to rectify the situation, they experienced difficulty convincing the Retailer that they had an Enduring Power of Attorney for their surviving parent, and later received a letter from the Retailer closing their own home account rather than that of their deceased parent. The person complained about the closure of the wrong account and that the concession previously applied to their deceased parent's account should have been applied to their surviving parent's account.

Following contact from the Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Retailer apologised for the extra work created from closure of the wrong account and offered to apply a credit to the account of the person's surviving parent to match the expected concession payment.

Energy and Water Ombudsman investigation leads to removal of credit listing

A customer complained that their Retailer had listed a credit default during a period when they were living in various locations due to their treatment for medical issues. The customer informed the Energy and Water Ombudsman that they had provided the Retailer with an updated address and information about their circumstances, but the Retailer had not notified them prior to listing the credit default.

The investigation by the Energy and Water Ombudsman confirmed that the customer had updated their address. During the investigation, the Retailer identified that it had multiple addresses for the customer and it was not clear which postal address had been used when sending out the notices. As the Retailer was unable to confirm that the required default notices and warnings were sent to the correct address, it removed the credit default listing.

Energy and Water Ombudsman involvement reduces bill

A customer, who was experiencing severe financial hardship, complained that they had received a number of bills from the Retailer based on estimated meter readings.

The investigation by the Energy and Water Ombudsman found that the last actual, as opposed to estimated, meter reading was nearly 18 months earlier. Following the Energy and Water Ombudsman's involvement, the Distributor arranged a meter reading. The Retailer then recalculated the bill based on the customer's actual consumption. The Retailer also recovered the undercharged consumption for the last 12 months only, in accordance with the relevant Code. A credit for the amount waived was applied to the customer's bill.

Energy and Water Ombudsman facilitates a correct payment

A family member complained about delays in receiving a correct refund cheque for their parent's deceased estate, after a cheque was sent to them by the provider which they said was incorrectly made out to the parent, rather than the estate. Following a facilitated resolution by the Energy and Water Ombudsman, a new cheque was issued which resolved the complaint.

Investigation of damage to appliance

A customer complained that following a routine meter exchange by the Distributor, an electrical appliance was found to be damaged but the Distributor would not compensate them for the damage.

As part of the Energy and Water Ombudsman's investigation, independent technical advice was sought from EnergySafety, who is responsible for the technical and safety regulation of the electrical industry in Western Australia. EnergySafety confirmed that the correct procedure, substantiated by documented tests undertaken by the Distributor, had been followed during the meter exchange, which included switching off the supply during the meter changeover, and that this would prevent any possible harmful high or low voltages being applied to appliances.

The Energy and Water Ombudsman informed the customer that the decision by the Distributor to decline their claim for damage to the appliance was reasonable.

Energy and Water Ombudsman involvement leads to removal of credit listing

A customer complained that, after they had informed their Retailer that they were moving and that the account was to be transferred to housemates, the Retailer continued to send bills in the customer's name to the old address. These bills were unpaid which resulted in the Retailer listing a default on the customer's credit rating. When the customer became aware of the credit listing, they paid the debt in full but the listing remained and affected their ability to obtain credit.

The investigation by the Energy and Water Ombudsman revealed that the Retailer was aware that the customer had moved, but continued to send bills for consumption to the customer at the old address. As a result, the Retailer reimbursed the customer for consumption that occurred after the customer informed the Retailer that they were moving and removed the credit listing.

The Energy and Water Ombudsman assists in keeping customer connected

A customer received a large bill from their Retailer, which included high consumption due to a faulty appliance. The customer had a number of dependents and had recently lost their job. As a result, despite paying some instalments, the customer was experiencing financial hardship and was at risk of disconnection for failing to pay fully for past consumption. To avoid disconnection, the customer was being asked to pay a lump sum, which was not within their current financial means.

Following the Energy and Water Ombudsman's involvement the Retailer agreed to a payment plan taking into account the customer's living expenses and capacity to pay. The retailer also agreed that, if the customer maintained the payments for a reasonable period of time, the Retailer would further assist in keeping the customer connected by partially crediting the customer's account.

Energy and Water Ombudsman involvement leads to corrected bill and removal of credit listing

A customer complained that their credit listing, which had been referred by a Retailer to a credit reporting agency, was incorrect. The customer claimed not to have received notification from the Retailer about the debt and was concerned that this listing may affect their ability to obtain credit in the future. The customer had subsequently paid the debt, but the listing remained.

The investigation confirmed that the customer had been listed for failing to pay their final bill which had been based on an estimated meter read, as the meter had not been able to be read due to a locked gate at the property. The investigation also revealed that the final bill had been generated using an incorrect estimation method. When the correct estimation method was applied, the final bill was calculated to be less than the minimum threshold used by the Retailer for referral to a credit reporting agency. As a result, the listing was removed.

Ombudsman's investigation avoids disconnection

A customer received a bill from their Retailer, which included consumption charges transferred from their previous residential property. The customer claimed to have closed the previous account and that the consumption was by a subsequent occupant of the property. The Retailer disputed this, and had informed the customer they would be disconnected if the transferred amount was not paid.

The customer contacted the Energy and Water Ombudsman. An investigation, which included reviewing independent records, supported the customer's claim that the account had been closed correctly. Following the Ombudsman's involvement the Retailer waived the transferred charges and the disconnection was avoided.

Ombudsman involvement reduces bill

A customer complained about a high bill and the matter was investigated by the Energy and Water Ombudsman.

The investigation confirmed that the customer had been issued with a large bill as a result of the Distributor providing the Retailer with an actual meter reading after supplying a number of estimated reads, which were lower than the actual consumption. The large 'catch-up' bill was for actual consumption that had not previously been charged due to the low 'estimated' bills. Actual meter readings are required to be undertaken by the Distributor once a year but for this customer the time between actual meter readings by the Distributor was over 18 months.

Following the Ombudsman's involvement, the Retailer recalculated the bill to recover the undercharged consumption for only the previous 12 months and waived the undercharged consumption prior to that. In addition, the Retailer allowed the customer to pay the 'catch-up' bill over 12 months with all future bills to be paid by the due date.

Distributor provides more accurate estimates of consumption

A customer noted that there had been a significant increase in their bills due to higher than usual estimates of consumption and queried this with the retailer. They were told that the estimates were based on the average consumption in the area but, as the distributor would be doing an actual meter read shortly, this would enable an adjustment based on the customer's actual consumption. When the distributor came to conduct the actual read, the meter was found to be faulty and a correct actual read was not possible. The customer therefore continued to be billed on estimated consumption, based on the average consumption patterns in the area. The customer complained to the Energy Ombudsman because they thought this was unfair, as they only used the home during holiday periods and would have lower than average consumption.

An investigation revealed that, although there had been a series of estimated reads over the previous year, there was a history of actual reads from prior periods that showed the customer's consumption patterns were considerably lower than average. The matter was resolved by the distributor providing the retailer with revised estimates based on the customer's prior history and the retailer re-issuing reduced bills to the customer.

Ombudsman involvement leads to an urgent reconnection

A customer complained to the Energy Ombudsman that they had been disconnected for consuming electricity without entering into a contract with a retailer. The customer had been under the mistaken impression that their employer, who owned the home, had already established an account.

As the retailer had not been afforded an opportunity to resolve the complaint, the Energy Ombudsman advised the customer to approach the retailer and, if the matter was not resolved, to contact the Energy Ombudsman again.

Shortly afterwards, the customer informed the Energy Ombudsman that, given the genuine confusion over who was to establish the account, the retailer had undertaken to reconnect the property, but this would take a number of days. The customer was concerned about the welfare of their young child over this period, in particular due to a lack of power to cool the house in very hot weather conditions. The Energy Ombudsman approached the retailer, who was previously unaware that a young child was at the property, and undertook to reconnect the property in a few hours.

Energy and Water Ombudsman involvement leads to backdated rebate

A customer complained to the Energy and Water Ombudsman that they had previously informed their water provider that they held a Pensioner Concession Card and assumed they would be receiving the concession. They had now become aware that the concession had not been applied and were seeking to have it backdated.

The Energy and Water Ombudsman's investigation revealed that the customer had contacted the water provider about concessions but had not specifically mentioned the Pensioner Concession Card. Following the Energy and Water Ombudsman's involvement, the water provider informed the customer that it recognised the customer had made an earlier enquiry and the water provider changed the customer's application date to the date of their contact with the water provider to discuss concessions resulting in the maximum concession rebate being applied to the customer's account from that time.

Bill for damaged water meter waived

A customer noticed that their water meter was leaking, and contacted their Water Provider. The Water Provider formed the view that the meter had been hit by a vehicle, replaced the meter and billed the customer for the work. The customer complained that they had not caused the damage to the meter and should not be billed for the meter's replacement.

Following the investigation by the Energy and Water Ombudsman, which included an on-site visit, the Water Provider, in the particular circumstances of the case, waived the bill for the replacement meter.

Infrastructure moved without cost to the owner

A property owner complained about the location of a water mains and valve, which they claimed was in a hazardous position and affected their development plans to install a driveway. The owner had been informed by the Provider that they would have to bear the cost of relocating the water service.

Following the involvement of the Energy and Water Ombudsman, which included an on-site visit attended by staff from the Energy and Water Ombudsman and engineers from the Provider to assess the situation, the Provider agreed that the water main would be lowered at their expense.

Ombudsman investigation assists property purchasers

A property owner complained that they were not made aware, prior to purchasing a piece of land, that the property was a 'beneficiary lot', and that they would be liable for additional expenses to connect to a water supply. A beneficiary lot is a piece of land which does not yet have a water or wastewater supply connection, even though there is a mains supply adjacent to the property. The owner is required to pay to have a connection installed.

The investigation confirmed that the water provider had, in fact, provided information regarding the requirement to pay the additional costs to the property owner and their Settlement Agent. As a result of the investigation, however, the water provider reviewed and amended its correspondence to make the information more prominent.
