



Media Statement

19 February 2016

WA's energy distributors improve customer service

Complaints to Western Australia's electricity distributors are trending down, according to the 2015 Annual Performance Report for Energy Distributors, released today by the Economic Regulation Authority (ERA).

ERA governing body member, Dr Stephen King, said all three electricity distributors (Western Power, Horizon Power and Rottnest Island Authority) also reported improved call centre performance in terms of faster response times and fewer unanswered calls.

"Western Power attributed its lower volume of calls to the introduction of a new mobile phone friendly power outage webpage, which has seen a three-fold increase in the number of customers visiting the website instead of contacting the call centre," Dr King said.

"Western Power's call centre performance was the best it had been over the past six years, and the average wait time for a call to be answered was just 11 seconds," he said.

"Electricity distributors were particularly focused on communication in 2015. Horizon Power reported that it was increasingly using social media to communicate with its customers. For example, around 13,000 customers were reached via social media during Tropical Cyclone Olwyn."

Dr King said in terms of gas distributors, the volume of calls to the ATCO call centre increased by 8.7 per cent to reach a six-year peak of around 84,000 calls.

"While ATCO received a 10-fold increase in complaints in 2015, the significant increase was due to a change in administrative processes; in previous years ATCO did not count complaints that were resolved during initial contact with the customer, whereas now it does," he said.

"In terms of interruptions, Western Power reported a reduction in the number and length of interruptions in the Perth CBD and other major urban areas. It attributed the improvement to power line upgrades and a reduction in planned maintenance works.

"The number of ATCO customers who experienced a supply interruption of greater than 12 hours was much lower in 2015, down from 1,534 customers in 2014, to 743 customers in 2015."

Dr King said the impact of natural disasters was highlighted by 13 per cent of Horizon Power's customers experiencing a supply interruption of greater than 12 hours as a direct result of tropical

cyclones. These incidents resulted in a record 1,618 service standard payments to affected customers.

“Excluding the effect of the cyclones, the average length of power cuts experienced by Horizon Power’s customers in Karratha, Port Hedland and South Hedland was 27.7 per cent lower than in 2014. This was a direct result of Horizon undertaking works to increase reliability by placing power cables underground,” he said.

“In country areas outside of regional centres, works by Horizon Power to increase reliability led to an average 15.7% reduction in the length of power cuts; while the average length of power cuts in Western Power’s country networks has almost doubled over the past six years from 679 minutes to 1,030 minutes. This is in part, due to maintenance and repair works undertaken by Western Power.”

The 2015 Annual Performance Report for Energy Distributors examines the performance of electricity distributors and gas distributors that supply small use customers in the State. Its purpose is to independently report on the performance of energy distribution businesses.

ENDS

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