



Media Statement

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WA's energy retailers under the spotlight

Western Australia has the lowest residential electricity disconnection rate in Australia, but the highest residential gas disconnection rate, according to a report by the Economic Regulation Authority (ERA).

This was just one of the findings of the annual report on energy retailers, which examines the performance of energy retail businesses that supply small use customers.

ERA chair, Nicky Cusworth, said the report also served to benchmark, where possible, energy retailers' performance against similar businesses in other energy markets.

Ms Cusworth said the report indicates the recent deterioration in economic conditions has resulted in more customers struggling to pay their energy bills.

She said energy retailers have responded by increasing the assistance they provide to customers, and by agreeing to payment extensions and instalment plans. The proportion of residential electricity customers granted more time to pay their bills rose from 8.7 per cent to 11 per cent in 2015-16. For residential gas customers, the proportion rose from 10.1 per cent to 14.2 per cent.

The report includes a summary of the sector, which showed the number of electricity retailers supplying small use business customers increased to 10 last financial year, with AER Retail, Amanda Energy and Kleenheat entering the market.

The number of gas retailers was five, which has been unchanged for some time. Four of the five retailers supply natural gas in the south-west of the State, while the Esperance Gas Distribution Company supplies natural gas in Esperance.

"Deteriorating economic conditions during 2015-16 resulted in an increase in electricity and gas customers negotiating assistance from their retailer, and more direct debit cancellations due to default," Ms Cusworth said.

"Despite difficult economic conditions, the overall proportion of residential electricity customers disconnected for non-payment was almost the same as last year," she said.

"However, residential gas disconnections reached a six-year peak of 2.38 per 100 customers in 2015-16.

“The overall complaint rate for gas customers increased to 0.27 per 100 customers in 2015-16 from 0.18 the previous year. However, most of the increase was because Alinta Energy introduced new customer service programs that recorded all customer comments expressing dissatisfaction as complaints.

“The level of complaints from residential electricity customers was slightly lower, down to 0.24 per 100 customers compared to 0.26 the previous year.

“Calls to electricity and gas retailer call centres were both slightly lower than in 2015-16, continuing the long-term downward trend,” Ms Cusworth said.

- The 2016 annual performance report for energy retailers is available on the [ERA website](#).
- An [infographic](#), highlighting the key findings of the report, is available.

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