

Annual data report 2020/21

Energy retailers

20 January 2022

Economic Regulation Authority

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

D242401

Economic Regulation Authority

Level 4, Albert Facey House

469 Wellington Street, Perth WA 6000

Telephone 08 6557 7900

Email info@erawa.com.au

Website www.erawa.com.au

This document can also be made available in alternative formats on request.

National Relay Service TTY: 13 36 77

© 2022 Economic Regulation Authority. All rights reserved. This material may be reproduced in whole or in part provided the source is acknowledged

Contents

Chair's foreword	iii
1. Market overview	1
1.1 Electricity	1
1.1.1 Electricity retailers	1
1.1.2 Electricity customers.....	2
1.1.3 Contestable and non-contestable customers in the SWIS.....	3
1.1.4 Residential electricity customers	3
1.1.5 Business electricity customers	3
1.1.6 Pre-payment meter electricity customers	4
1.2 Gas	5
1.2.1 Gas retailers	5
1.2.2 Residential gas customers	6
1.2.3 Business gas customers	7
2. Payment difficulties	9
2.1 Electricity	10
2.1.1 Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill.....	10
2.1.2 Electricity customers on instalment plans	10
2.1.3 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans.....	11
2.2 Gas	12
2.2.1 Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill.....	12
2.2.2 Gas customers on instalment plans	13
2.2.3 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans	14
3. Energy bill debt of customers other than customers on a hardship program	16
3.1 Electricity	16
3.1.1 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt	16
3.1.2 Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt.....	17
3.2 Gas	18
3.2.1 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt	18
3.2.2 Business gas customers repaying an energy bill debt	19
4. Hardship programs	21
4.1 Electricity	22
4.1.1 Electricity customers on a hardship program	22
4.1.2 Electricity hardship customer debt	23
4.2 Gas	24
4.2.1 Gas customers on a hardship program	24
4.2.2 Hardship debt for gas customers	26
4.2.3 Hardship customer average bill debt by jurisdiction.....	26
5. Disconnections	28
5.1 Total electricity disconnections.....	28

5.2	Electricity residential disconnections.....	29
5.3	Electricity business disconnections.....	30
5.4	Total gas disconnections.....	30
5.5	Gas residential disconnections.....	31
5.6	Gas business disconnections.....	32
5.7	Inter-jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections.....	32
6.	Reconnections.....	34
6.1	Residential electricity reconnections.....	34
6.2	Business electricity reconnections.....	35
6.3	Gas residential reconnections.....	35
6.4	Gas business reconnections.....	36
7.	Customer service.....	37
7.1	Customer complaints.....	38
7.1.1	Residential electricity customer complaints.....	38
7.1.2	Business electricity customer complaints.....	38
7.1.3	Residential and business electricity customer complaints by category.....	39
7.1.4	Residential gas customer complaints.....	39
7.1.5	Business gas customer complaints.....	40
7.1.6	Residential and business gas customer complaints by category.....	40
7.2	Retailer call centre responsiveness.....	42
7.2.1	Electricity retailer call centre responsiveness.....	42
7.3	Gas retailer call centre responsiveness.....	43
	List of appendices	
	Appendix 1 List of Tables.....	44
	Appendix 2 List of Figures.....	46

Chair's foreword

The Economic Regulation Authority is Western Australia's independent economic regulator, and its responsibilities include administering the licensing schemes covering energy retailers.

Each year, the ERA reports to the Minister for Energy on trends in energy markets and indicators of energy retailers' performance, with a focus on financial hardship and customer service.

Throughout 2020/21, the ERA collected monthly data for key performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the COVID-19 pandemic customer support measures first introduced in early 2020.

The customer support measures continued, with some adjustments, throughout 2020/21. The measures included a freeze on electricity prices, providing more time to pay a bill, increased access to instalment plans and financial hardship programs, and pausing disconnections for non-payment of a bill.

The effects of the support measures on retailers' performance data make it difficult to compare performance in 2020/21 with previous years. The ability to compare the performance of Western Australian retailers with their peers in other jurisdictions is limited by differences in customer support measures implemented in each jurisdiction.

A key support for residential customers was the State Government's one-off \$600 household electricity bill credit in late 2020. Small businesses and charities also received government assistance throughout 2020/21 via grants and targeted financial support to help with the cost of COVID-19 lockdowns.

The household bill credit helped many customers fully or partially repay electricity bill debt. Monthly data showed that after the credit was paid to customers, there were large reductions in the number of customers with a bill debt or on a hardship program. However, after the credits were applied, the number of customers repaying a bill debt and the average amount of debt owed continued to trend upwards.

By the end of 2020/21, the average residential bill debt for Synergy's non-hardship customers reached its highest level in five years, while Synergy and Horizon Power customers on a hardship program had the highest average bill debts since reporting began in 2016/17.

Gas retailers reported the average bill debt owed by non-hardship residential customers and customers on a hardship program both increased by 46 per cent in 2020/21. There was also a substantial increase in the number of non-hardship customers with a bill debt.

Most of the customers with an energy bill debt will be on an instalment plan. The payments under the plan should be sufficient to repay bill debt and pay for ongoing consumption. The data provided by electricity and gas retailers points to there being a cohort of customers whose payments under the plan are not enough to prevent the debt owed increasing with each bill. The amount of debt owed is likely to continue increasing unless these customers are able to access additional assistance.

The moratorium on disconnections applying to Horizon Power and Synergy continued into 2020/21. However, access to protection from disconnection under the moratorium was no longer unconditional. From 30 September 2020, the moratorium only applied to customers who had an arrangement to manage their bills and stayed in regular contact with their retailer. Synergy resumed disconnections in March 2021 and Horizon Power resumed disconnections in June 2021.

Gas retailers continued the voluntarily pause on disconnections for residential and small business customers, with eligibility conditions similar to the electricity retailers. Most gas retailers didn't perform any disconnections during the year, but there were a small number of disconnections in 2021.

It is possible that the limitations on disconnections in place for most of 2020/21 reduced the incentive for some customers to constructively engage with their retailer to manage bill debt. The ERA expects that this issue will be addressed by retailers restoring their normal collections and disconnection policies during 2021/22.

It is encouraging to see that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the level of competition in the residential and small business gas markets. The three smaller retailers have continued to acquire market share from the two largest retailers, Alinta and Kleenheat. During 2020/21, the smaller retailers increased their combined share of the residential and small business markets from 13.8 per cent to 14.3 per cent and from 11.9 per cent to 13.3 per cent, respectively.

Steve Edwell
Chair, Economic Regulation Authority

1. Market overview

Main points

- The number of residential electricity customers increased by 0.9 per cent and the number of business electricity customers increased by 4.5 per cent in 2020/21.
- The number of residential gas customers increased by 2.3 per cent, while the number of business gas customers decreased by 3.2 per cent.
- The residential and business market shares of the largest gas retailer, Alinta Energy, fell by 1 per cent and 1.5 per cent respectively.

This section provides an overview of the energy retail market in Western Australia, including:

- the number of electricity and gas retailers
- electricity and gas market data
- residential and business electricity customers by retailer¹
- residential and business gas customers by retailer²
- pre-payment meter customers.³

1.1 Electricity

1.1.1 Electricity retailers

There were 13 retailers authorised to supply small use customers as at 30 June 2020:⁴

- AER Retail Pty Ltd
- Alinta Energy Pty Ltd
- Amanda Energy Pty Ltd
- A-Star Electricity Pty Ltd
- Change Energy Pty Ltd
- CleanTech Energy Pty Ltd
- Clear Energy Pty Ltd
- Electricity Generation and Retail Corporation (trading as Synergy)
- Peel Renewable Energy Pty Ltd
- Perth Energy Pty Ltd
- Regional Power Corporation (trading as Horizon Power)

¹ Throughout this report the term 'electricity customer' means a customer who consumes less than 160 megawatt-hours of electricity per year, referred to as a 'small use electricity customer'.

² Throughout this report the term 'gas customer' means a customer who consumes less than 1 terajoule of gas per year, referred to as a 'small use gas customer'.

³ Pre-payment meter customers are electricity customers who are supplied through a pre-payment meter.

⁴ Throughout the rest of this report a 'small use customer will be referred to as a 'customer'.

- Rottnest Island Authority
- Wesfarmers Kleenheat Gas Pty Ltd.

Table 1 shows the number of licensed electricity retailers over time.

Table 1: Number of licensed electricity retailers at 30 June 2016 to 2021

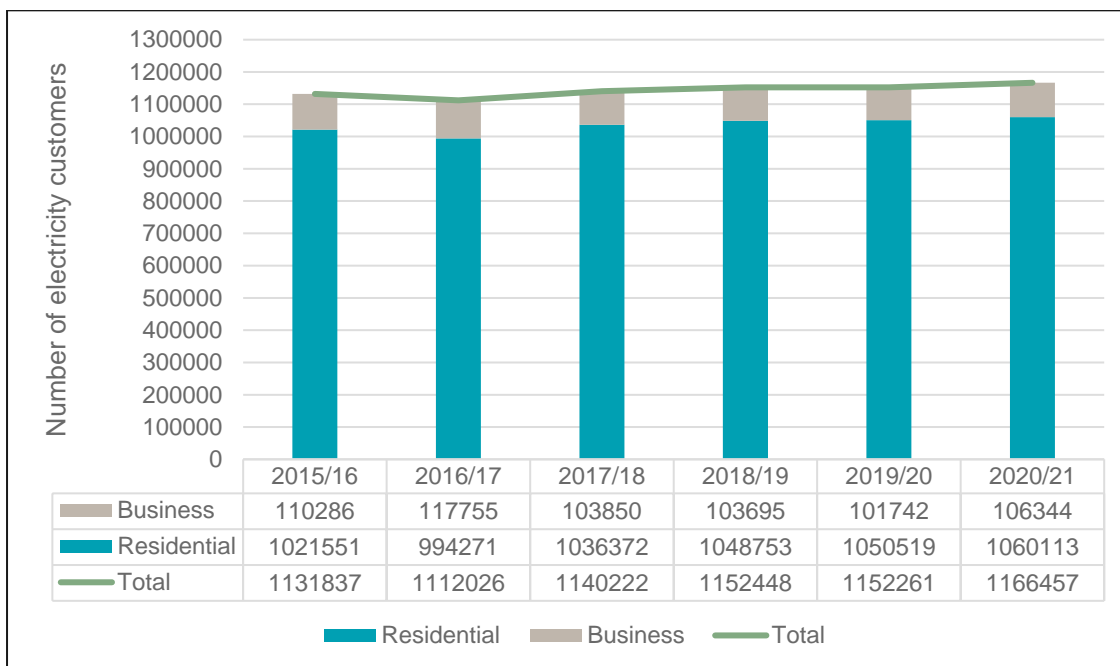
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Electricity retailers	10	11	12	12	13	13

Seven retailers supply customers through the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) in the lower half of Western Australia.⁵ Horizon Power and the Rottnest Island Authority supply customers through their own distribution networks outside the SWIS.⁶

1.1.2 Electricity customers

Figure 1 shows the number of residential and business electricity customers and total electricity customers.

Figure 1: Number of residential and business electricity customers at 30 June 2016 to 2021^{7 8}



In 2020/21, the number of business customers increased by 4.5 per cent, reversing the downward trend since 2016/17.

⁵ The SWIS covers a geographic area from Kalbarri to Albany, and from Perth to Kalgoorlie.

⁶ The Rottnest Island Authority is the exclusive retailer on Rottnest Island. Horizon Power is the only retailer currently supplying regional mainland areas of the State outside the SWIS.

⁷ Horizon Power advised that they had incorrectly included large-use business customers in the figure for 2016/17.

⁸ The number of electricity business customers decreased by 11.8 per cent in 2017/18. The decrease was the result of Horizon Power excluding large-use business customers from their data and Synergy reporting a decrease in business customers.

1.1.3 Contestable and non-contestable customers in the SWIS

Residential and business electricity customers in the SWIS are separated into two groups - contestable customers and non-contestable customers. Customers consuming between 50 megawatt-hours (MWh) and 160 MWh of electricity each year are contestable customers and can choose their retailer. Customers consuming less than 50 MWh are non-contestable customers and can be supplied only by Synergy. This means that Synergy's total residential and business customers includes both contestable and non-contestable customers. Customers supplied by other retailers in the SWIS are all contestable.

Almost all households and small businesses in the SWIS are non-contestable customers, and so supplied by Synergy.

1.1.4 Residential electricity customers

Table 2 shows the number of residential electricity customers by retailer.

Table 2: Number of residential electricity customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Clear Energy	0	0	0	0	0	1
Horizon Power	38,936	39,373	39,398	37,925	36,956	36,256
Perth Energy	0	0	2	2	2	2
Synergy	982,615	954,898	996,972	1,010,826	1,013,561	1,023,854
Total	1,021,551	994,271	1,036,372	1,048,753	1,050,519	1,060,113

In 2020/21, there were 593 contestable residential electricity customers, equivalent to 0.06 per cent of total residential customers. Synergy supplied 591 of these customers and two customers were supplied by Perth Energy.⁹

Horizon Power is the only retailer that has supplied residential customers outside the SWIS since the regional electricity market was deregulated in 2004.

In 2020/21, Clear Energy became the first retailer other than Synergy to provide electricity to a non-contestable customer in the SWIS through a solar power purchase agreement.¹⁰

1.1.5 Business electricity customers

Table 3 shows the number of business electricity customers by retailer.

In 2020/21, there were 11 retailers active in the business electricity market, nine of which supplied customers through the SWIS. Horizon Power and Rottneest Island Authority were the only retailers supplying customers outside the SWIS.¹¹

⁹ Refer to indicator CCR1 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA [website](#).

¹⁰ In the SWIS non-contestable customers are 'prescribed customers' under the *Electricity Corporation (Prescribed Customers) Order 2007* who are generally supplied by Synergy. However solar power purchase arrangements are behind the meter so are not covered by the Order.

¹¹ Rottneest Island Authority supplied businesses on Rottneest Island and Horizon Power supplied businesses in mainland areas of the State outside the SWIS.

In 2020/21, there were 87,136 non-contestable and 11,727 contestable business electricity customers in the SWIS.¹² The non-contestable customers were exclusively supplied by Synergy.

Synergy supplied 55.8 per cent of the contestable customers, Alinta supplied 29.9 per cent, Perth Energy supplied 9.0 per cent and six small retailers supplied the remaining 5.3 per cent.

Table 3: Number of business electricity customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AER Retail	21	23	12	26	20	14
Alinta Energy	2,428	2,775	2,858	2,826	3,519	3,509
Amanda Energy	73	95	138	121	111	166
Change Energy	n/a	6	25	57	115	136
CleanTech	n/a	n/a	n/a	74	63	130
Clear Energy	0	0	0	0	2	6
Horizon Power	7,873	8,549	7,720	7,884	7,577	7,456
Kleenheat	28	74	107	126	170	176
Perth Energy	599	301	867	413	436	1,051
Rottneest Island Authority	25	24	24	24	25	25
Synergy	99,239	105,908	92,099	92,144	89,704	93,675
Total	110,286	117,755	103,850	103,695	101,742	106,344

1.1.6 Pre-payment meter electricity customers

Pre-payment meter customers are required to pay for their electricity prior to consumption.

The deployment of pre-payment meters is currently restricted to customers in Horizon Power's licence area and Synergy's SWIS customers in the Ninga Mia Aboriginal community in the Goldfields.¹³

Table 4 shows the number of pre-payment customers supplied by Horizon Power and Synergy. The total number of Horizon Power pre-payment meter customers increased by 4.0 per cent in 2020/21.

Table 4: Number of electricity pre-payment meter customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	1,202	1,190	1,221	1,332	1,296	1,348

¹² Refer to indicator CCR4 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA [website](#).

¹³ *Electricity Industry (Code of Conduct) (Pre-payment Meter Areas) Notice 2010 and 2016.*

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Synergy	16	14	16	12	11	11
Total	1,218	1,204	1,237	1,344	1,307	1,359

1.2 Gas

1.2.1 Gas retailers

Nine retailers are authorised to supply gas to customers:

- AGL Sales Pty Ltd
- Alinta Energy
- Amanda Energy
- Esperance Gas Distribution Company Pty Ltd (EGDC)
- Kleenheat
- Origin Energy Retail Limited
- Perth Energy
- IPower 2 Pty Ltd and IPower Pty Ltd (trading as Simply Energy)
- Synergy.

Table 5 shows the number of licensed gas retailers.

Table 5: Number of licensed gas retailers at 30 June 2015 to 2020

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Gas retailers	5	7	9	9	9	9

AGL, Alinta Energy, Kleenheat, Origin, Perth Energy, Amanda Energy, Simply Energy and Synergy supply customers through the gas distribution networks operated by ATCO Gas Australia.¹⁴ Kleenheat also supplies a small number of customers on two distribution networks it owns in Albany (Oyster Harbour) and Margaret River. EGDC supplies customers in Esperance through the distribution network operated by Esperance Power Station.^{15,16}

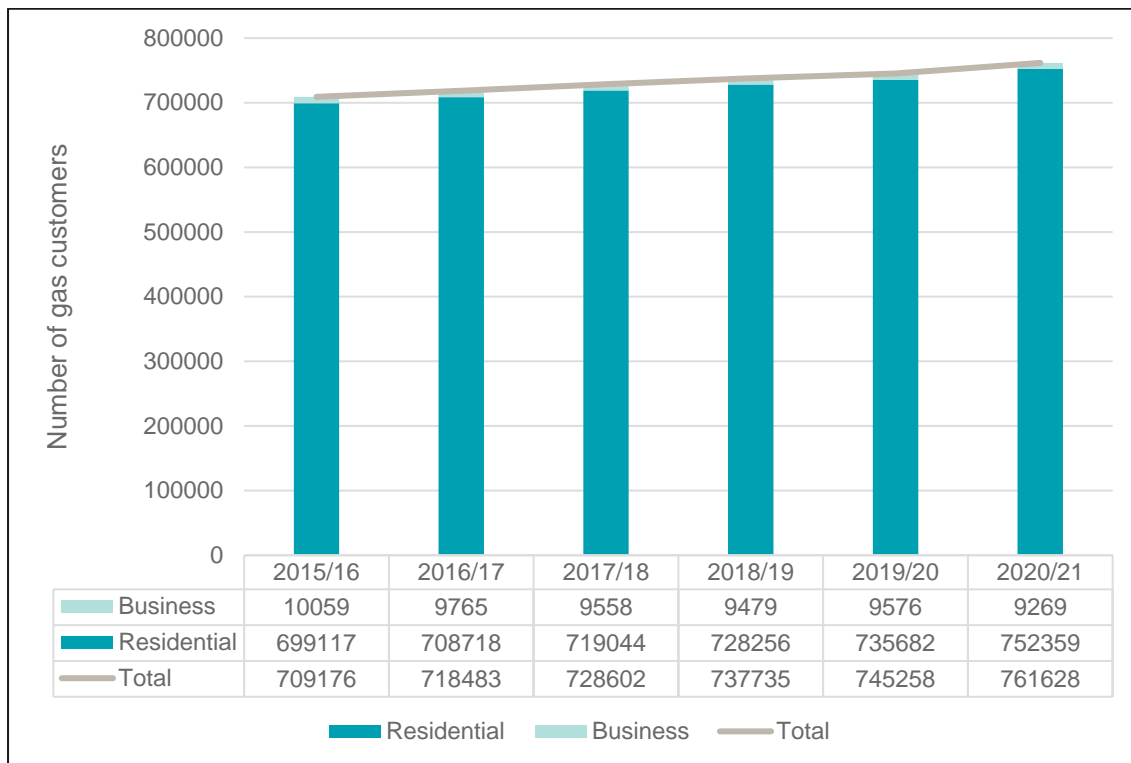
Figure 2 shows the number of residential and business gas customers.

In 2020/21, the number of residential customers increased by 1.0 per cent. Residential customer numbers have trended upwards for the last six years reported. In contrast, business customers have trended downwards to reach a six-year low in 2020/21.

¹⁴ ATCO has gas distribution networks located in the Coastal, Goldfields-Esperance and Great Southern supply [areas](#).

¹⁵ EGDC and Esperance Power Station are related businesses that are owned by Infrastructure Capital Group.

¹⁶ EGDC has notified customers that it will cease supplying them on 31 March 2022.

Figure 2: Number of residential and business gas customers at 30 June 2016 to 2021

1.2.2 Residential gas customers

Table 6 shows the number of residential gas customers by retailer.

Table 6: Number of residential gas customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021

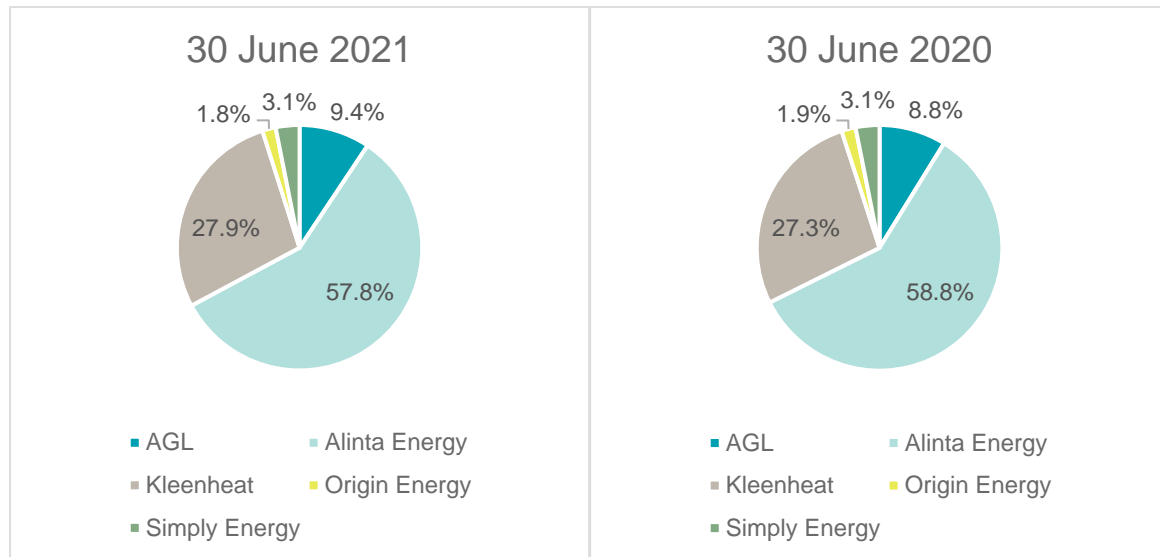
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	n/a	20,851	41,197	64,730	70,380
Alinta Energy	611,142	554,903	494,696	460,018	432,750	434,753
Kleenheat	87,648	153,478	196,274	197,325	201,102	210,088
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	6,880	14,626	13,700	13,235
EGDC	327	337	339	317	326	326
Perth Energy	0	0	4	6	3	2
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	14,767	23,071	23,575
Total	699,117	708,718	719,044	728,256	735,682	752,359

The entry of four new retailers to the residential gas market in the coastal supply area in the past four years has substantially reduced Alinta Energy's residential customer base.¹⁷ In 2020/21, Alinta Energy increased its number of customers for the first time in the reporting period by 0.5 per cent, however its market share still decreased by 1.0 per cent.

¹⁷ The coastal supply area covers ATCO's mid-west and south-west gas distribution systems, which extends from Geraldton to Busselton and as far inland as Harvey. EGDC doesn't supply customers in the coastal supply area.

Figure 3 compares the share of the residential coastal supply area gas market held by retailers in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Figure 3: Residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer at 30 June 2020 and 2021 (%)



During 2020/21, AGL, Origin Energy, Perth Energy and Simply Energy increased their combined share of residential customers from 13.8 per cent to 14.2 per cent. Kleenheat's market share increased by 0.6 percentage points following a 4.5 per cent increase in customers (see Table 6).

1.2.3 Business gas customers

Table 7 shows the number of business gas customers by retailer.

Kleenheat's business customer base decreased for the first time in the six years reported. In 2020/21, the number of customers supplied decreased by 3 per cent.

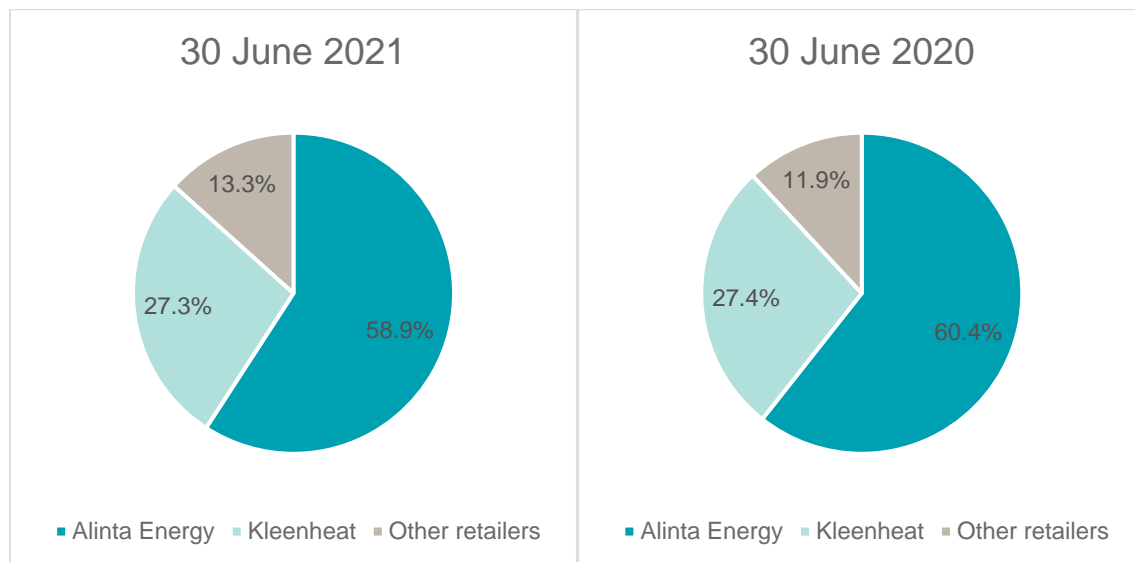
Alinta Energy's business customer base continued the downward trend of the past five years in 2020/21. The decline is due to increased competition in the business gas market, particularly in the past four years. Since 2015/16, the number of business customers supplied by Alinta Energy has decreased by 34.4 per cent.

Table 7: Number of business gas customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	n/a	580	537	517	497
Alinta Energy	8,319	7,612	6,497	5,993	5,788	5,457
Amanda Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	1	12
Synergy	137	175	173	144	167	192
Kleenheat	1,554	1,924	2,070	2,406	2,620	2,535
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	77	236	206	205
EGDC	49	46	45	41	37	34
Perth Energy	0	8	116	120	229	311
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	11	26
Total	10,059	9,765	9,558	9,479	9,576	9,269

Figure 4 compares the share of the business gas market held by retailers in the coastal supply area in 2019/20 and 2020/21.¹⁸

The 5.7 per cent reduction in Alinta Energy's business customer base has translated to a 1.5 percentage point reduction in its share of the business gas market in 2020/21.

Figure 4: Business gas market share in the coastal supply area by retailer at 30 June 2020 and 2021 (%)

¹⁸ The coastal supply area covers ATCO's mid-west and south-west gas distribution systems, which extend from Geraldton to Busselton and as far inland as Harvey. EGDC has been excluded because it doesn't supply customers in the coastal supply area.

2. Payment difficulties

Main points

- The State Government introduced a number of support measures for energy customers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect of these measures can be seen in the 2020/21 data.
- The percentage of residential and business electricity and gas customers granted more time to pay a bill in 2020/21 was the lowest for the six years reported.
- Gas retailers reported fewer residential customers on an instalment plan in 2020/21.
- The number of residential electricity and gas customers successfully completing their instalment plans decreased in 2020/21.

The *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers* and the *Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations* require retailers to offer assistance to residential customers experiencing payment difficulties.¹⁹

Payment difficulties exist when a customer is unable to pay an outstanding amount because of a change in personal circumstances (for instance, loss of income or unexpected costs) over a relatively short period. Retailers must also consider requests for assistance from a business customer who is experiencing payment difficulties. In practice, retailers offer their business customers most of the same assistance options that are available to residential customers.

The Electricity Code and Gas Compendium require retailers to offer residential customers in payment difficulties:

- Additional time to pay a bill.
- On request of the customer, an interest-free and fee-free instalment plan to pay a bill or arrears (including any disconnection or reconnection charges).

Retailers must ensure that the instalment plan is fair and reasonable, taking into consideration the customer's capacity to pay and their consumption history.

For customers in financial hardship, retailers are also required to:

- Give reasonable consideration to a request to reduce the customer's fees, charges or debt.
- Advise customers about concessions and how to access them.
- Advise customers about independent financial counselling services and other assistance services that are available.
- Advise customers of other financial assistance and grants schemes and how to access them.

The number of customers on a hardship program is discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁹ The Gas Compendium is contained in Schedule 2 of all gas trading licences. A copy of these licences is available on the ERA [website](#). The Electricity Code is available on the ERA [website](#).

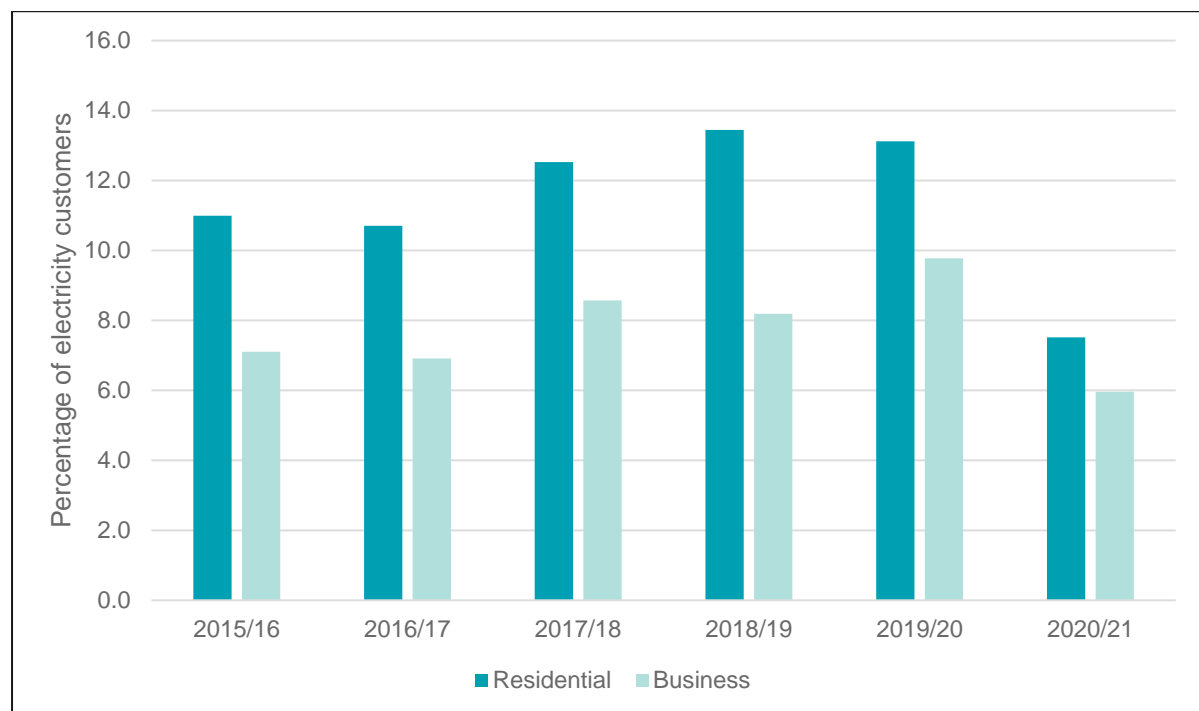
2.1 Electricity

2.1.1 Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill

Figure 5 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill.

The percentage of residential and business customers granted more time to pay a bill both decreased to the lowest proportion for the six years reported at 7.5 per cent and 6.0 per cent, respectively.

Figure 5: Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)



2.1.2 Electricity customers on instalment plans

Figure 6 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customers who were on an instalment plan.

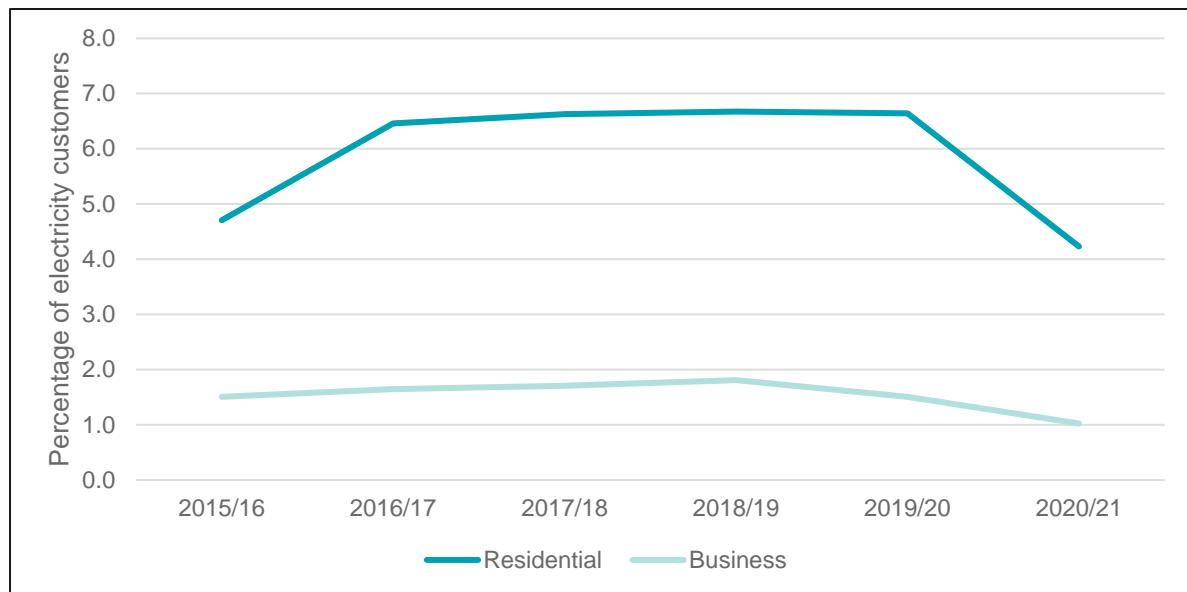
In 2020/21, the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan was 4.2 per cent, the lowest percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan in the six years reported.²⁰ Horizon Power and Synergy advised the decrease was due to the State Government's COVID-19 response, which included a freeze on electricity price increases for 2020/21, moratorium on disconnections and a \$600 electricity bill credit paid to every Western Australian household.²¹

²⁰ The relatively constant percentage of customers on instalment plans between 2016/17 and 2019/20 coincides with the exclusion of hardship customers from 2016/17.

²¹ The State Government [announced](#) a range of further measures to assist residential customers with their electricity bill in October 2020, alongside the [disconnection moratorium](#).

The percentage of business customers on an instalment plan decreased to 1.0 per cent. The reduction in business customers on an instalment plan in 2020/21 is likely due to the State Government's COVID-19 assistance to businesses.²²

Figure 6: Electricity customers on instalment plans at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)



2.1.3 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans

Table 8 shows the number of residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan.²³

The number of non-hardship residential customers on an instalment plan increased by 3.3 per cent in 2020/21.

Monthly data collected from Horizon Power and Synergy indicates that the number of non-hardship residential customers on an instalment plan was at its lowest point during November 2020 and December 2020, after the State Government provided every Western Australian household with a \$600 electricity bill credit.²⁴ During 2021, the number of residential customers on an instalment plan has increased each month and has continued to trend upwards for the first quarter of 2021/22.

Table 8: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans by retailer at 30 June 2018 to 2021

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	929	786	243	393
Synergy	4,853	5,978	5,629	5,672

²² For example, the State Government [provided](#) lockdown grants to small businesses due to the Anzac Day long weekend lockdown, including a \$500 electricity credit to small businesses and charities that did not have electricity supplied by Synergy or Horizon Power.

²³ The ERA commenced collecting data for this indicator in 2017/18.

²⁴ In October 2020, the State Government [announced](#) a \$600 electricity bill credit to every WA household to be received from 1 November 2020.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total	5,782	6,764	5,872	6,065

Table 9 compares the number of non-hardship residential electricity customers who had their instalment plans cancelled for non-payment with those who successfully completed their plans between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

In 2020/21, both Horizon Power and Synergy reported that fewer customers successfully completed their instalment plans than in the previous three years. Horizon Power and Synergy also reported a decrease in the number of customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment.

Table 9: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship program customers) who successfully completed their plan and those who had their instalment plan cancelled between 2017/18 and 2020/21

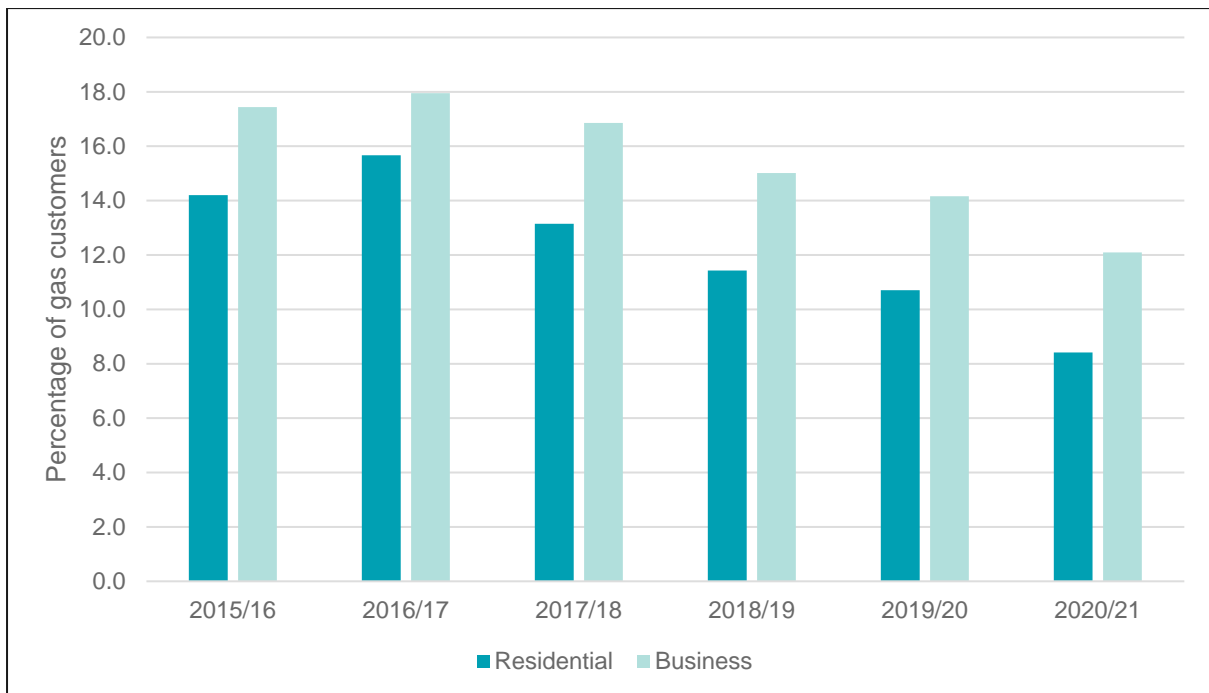
	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Horizon Power	Synergy	Horizon Power	Synergy	Horizon Power	Synergy	Horizon Power	Synergy
Successfully completed instalment plan	736	28,249	421	25,020	449	30,891	131	18,894
Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	1,912	28,912	2,073	31,331	2,384	28,306	1,040	12,513

2.2 Gas

2.2.1 Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill

Figure 7 shows the percentage of residential and business gas customers granted more time to pay a bill.

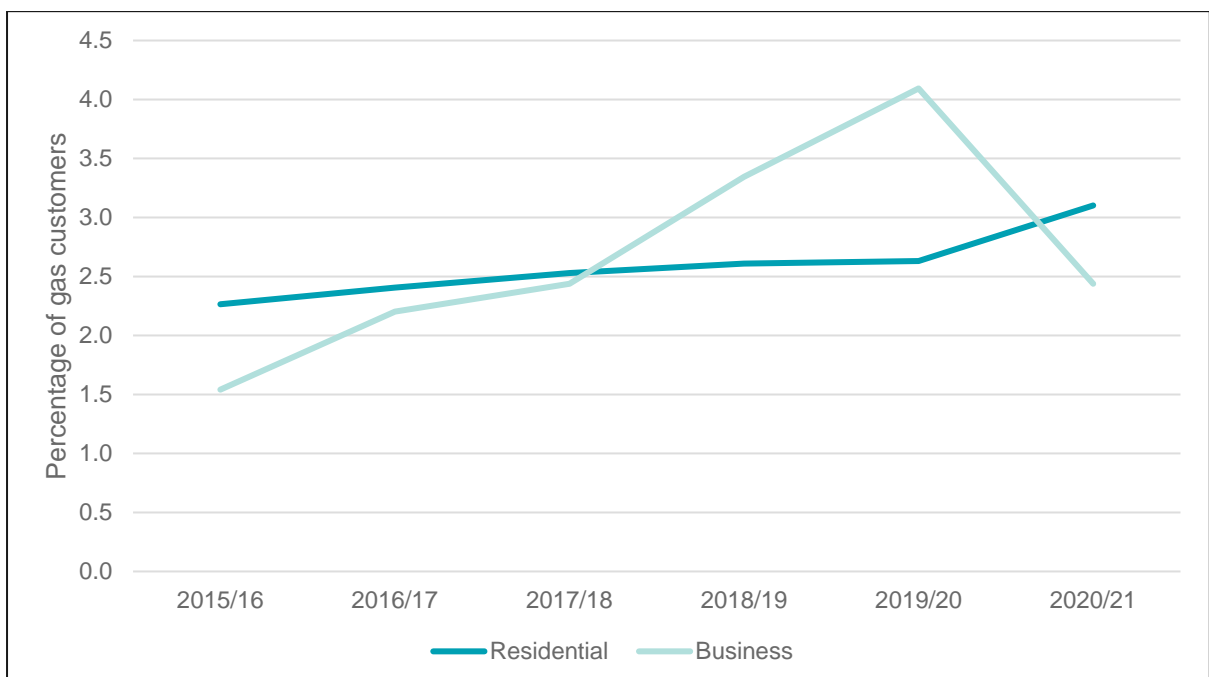
Fewer residential and business gas customers were granted more time to pay a bill in 2020/21. Retailers advised that the reason fewer customers were granted more time to pay a bill was due to retailers voluntarily increasing their support to customers, including pausing disconnections for at least part of 2020/21, which reduced the need for customers to request more time to pay.

Figure 7: Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)

2.2.2 Gas customers on instalment plans

Figure 8 shows the percentage of residential and business gas customers on an instalment plan.

The percentage of both residential gas customers on an instalment plan has trended upwards for the past five years. In 2020/21, the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan (3.1 per cent) was the highest for the six years reported. The percentage of business customers on an instalment plan decreased to 2.4 per cent.

Figure 8: Gas customers on an instalment plan at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)

2.2.3 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans

Table 10 shows the number and percentage of residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan.^{25,26}

Table 10: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan by retailer at 30 June 2018 to 2021

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	Number	37	133	118	245
	%	0.18	0.32	0.18	0.35
Alinta Energy	Number	7,971	8,608	7,791	6,644
	%	1.63	1.89	1.80	1.53
Kleenheat	Number	3,072	1,724	1,263	949
	%	1.57	0.88	0.63	0.45
Origin Energy	Number	1	37	28	47
	%	0.01	0.25	0.20	0.36
EGDC	Number	18	0	2	3
	%	5.37	0.00	0.61	0.92
Simply Energy ²⁷	Number	n/a	21	155	417
	%	n/a	0.14	0.67	1.77
Total	Number	11,099	10,544	9,380	8,305
	%	1.55	1.46	1.28	1.10

Table 11 compares the number of non-hardship residential gas customers who had their instalment plans cancelled for non-payment with those who have successfully completed their plans.²⁸

AGL, Alinta Energy, Kleenheat and Origin Energy reported decreases in the number of non-hardship customers who successfully completed their instalment plans and non-hardship customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment in 2020/21.

²⁵ The ERA commenced collecting data for this indicator in 2017/18.

²⁶ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 10 because it did not have any customers on an instalment plan during the reporting period.

²⁷ 2018/19 is the first year that Simply Energy has provided data to the ERA.

²⁸ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 11 because it did not have any customers on an instalment plan during the reporting period.

Table 11: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship program customers) who have successfully completed their plan and those who have had their instalment plan cancelled between 30 June 2018 and 2021

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	Successfully completed instalment plan	25	268	409	386
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	79	634	766	643
Alinta Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	4,816	4,950	6,964	5,773
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	1,956	1,978	3,936	2,820
Kleenheat	Successfully completed instalment plan	1,680	2,722	2,280	1,661
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	2,983	3,231	2,420	1,554
Origin Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	0	28	133	78
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	0	197	242	157
EGDC	Successfully completed instalment plan	2	0	3	3
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	0	0	1	0
Simply Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	n/a	1	29	156
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	n/a	16	359	617

3. Energy bill debt of customers other than customers on a hardship program

Main points

- In 2020/21, average bill debt for Synergy's residential electricity customers was the highest for the five years reported.
- The average energy bill debt was much higher for residential electricity customers supplied by Horizon Power than customers supplied by Synergy.
- The average energy bill debt of residential electricity customers continues to be much higher than the energy bill debt of residential gas customers.

Energy bill debt is separately reported for customers taking part in a retailer's hardship program and those not on a hardship program. This is the third year that the ERA has reported on energy bill debt of customers not on a hardship program.

Energy bill debt is defined as an amount owed to the retailer that has been outstanding for 90 calendar days or more.²⁹

Energy bill debt data for customers on a hardship program is discussed in section 4 of this report.

3.1 Electricity

3.1.1 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt

Table 12 shows the number of residential electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt for those customers.

The average debt of Horizon Power's customers has been much higher than that of Synergy's customers for the past five years.³⁰ In 2020/21, the average bill debt of Synergy's customers was the highest for the five years reported.

Monthly data collected from Horizon Power and Synergy showed that there was a substantial reduction in the number of residential customers repaying an energy bill debt in October 2020 when the State Government's \$600 electricity bill credit began to be applied to customer accounts.³¹ Since then, the number of customers repaying an energy bill debt has steadily increased. By 30 June 2021, the number of customers repaying a bill debt had almost returned to the level immediately before the bill credit was paid.

The removal of the customers whose bill debt was cleared by the \$600 electricity bill credit resulted in a substantial increase in the average bill debt. As at October 2020, Horizon Power's

²⁹ ERA, Electricity Retail Licence Performance Reporting Handbook, April 2019, p.23 ([online](#)).

³⁰ The higher average debt of Horizon Power's customers is likely due to higher costs in the north of the State, such as increased use of air conditioning.

³¹ In October 2020, the State Government [announced](#) a \$600 electricity bill credit to every WA household to be received from 1 November 2020. The monthly data shows the credits began to be applied in October.

average bill debt had increased to \$2,236 and Synergy's average bill debt had increased to \$944.

By December 2020, Horizon Power's average debt had fallen to \$1,021 and Synergy's average debt was relatively unchanged at \$929. For the remainder of 2020/21, Horizon Power's average debt has remained close to \$1,000 whereas Synergy's average debt has trended downwards to reach \$562 by 30 June 2021. The Synergy data indicates the average debt of most customers added after December 2020 was much less than \$900.

Table 12: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	985	1,498	670	836	919
	Average bill debt (\$)	850	715	903	1,496	1,066
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	21,867	10,669	9,978	10,451	9,389
	Average bill debt (\$)	363	396	379	541	562

3.1.2 Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt

Table 13 shows the number of business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt for those customers.³²

The bill debt picture for each retailers' business customers is mixed, both in terms of the number of customers with a debt and the average amount of debt. It is notable that the average amount of bill debt reported by six of the seven retailers in 2020/21 is less than the amount reported in 2019/20.

Table 13: Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AER Retail	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	1	2	1	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	3,000	6,000	3,338	2,127
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	10	303	48	353	292
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,450	1,390	2,083	6,194	3,059
Amanda Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	17	13	4	2	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,061	3,432	2,527	433	0

³² A-Star, Clear Energy, CleanTech and the Rottneast Island Authority have been excluded from Table 13 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past five years.

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Change Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	0	0	1	3
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	0	0	1,260	1,899
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	148	211	118	142	175
	Average bill debt (\$)	3,379	3,931	5,590	5,135	4,903
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1	0	1	11	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,930	0	1,005	2,498	149
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	5	3	3	56	45
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,285	0	15,100	3,983	3,800
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,984	1,739	1,326	538	761
	Average bill debt (\$)	893	1,094	1,172	2,599	2,516

3.2 Gas

3.2.1 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt

Table 14 shows the number of residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying a bill debt and the average bill debt for those customers.³³

In 2020/21, all six retailers reported an increase in the number of customers repaying a bill debt and, except for EGDC, reported an increase in the average energy bill debt for residential gas customers. Alinta reported that the number customers repaying a bill debt in 2020/21 had doubled from 2019/20. The average amount of bill debt owed by these customers was also almost double that in 2019/20.

Comparing Table 14 with Table 12 shows that the average energy bill debt for residential gas customers is generally less than for residential electricity customers.

Some retailers attributed the increased average bill debt to the retailers' voluntary pause on disconnections and increased assistance offered to customers during the pandemic. Removing the risk of disconnection has led to some customers accruing more bill debt than would have been the case before disconnections were suspended.

Monthly data collected from gas retailers indicates that, for most retailers, average residential customer bill debt has remained above pre-pandemic levels for the first quarter of 2021/22.

³³ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 14 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past five years.

Table 14: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	261	1,135	1,971	2,055
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	136	363	497	760
Alinta Energy ³⁴	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	15,579	1,318	1,419	13,026	26,821
	Average bill debt (\$)	47	88	80	163	310
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	570	1,497	1,979	1,708	2,778
	Average bill debt (\$)	76	89	116	134	298
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	42	267	428	464
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	103	190	223	368
EGDC	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1	2	0	2	3
	Average bill debt (\$)	220	234	0	365	254
Simply Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	n/a	242	1,690	1,740
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	n/a	95	190	201

3.2.2 Business gas customers repaying an energy bill debt

Table 15 shows the number of business customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average amount of bill debt.³⁵ The data presents a mixed picture, for both the number of customers repaying a bill debt and the average amount of the debt.

Alinta is the only retailer to report a substantial increase in the number of business customers repaying a bill debt in 2020/21. Compared to 2019/20, the number of Alinta customers repaying a bill debt increased by 90.2 per cent and the average bill debt increased by 44.8 per cent.

Origin Energy reported no change in the number of business customers repaying a bill debt from 2019/20, but the average amount of bill debt increased by 68.5 per cent.

Table 15: Business gas customers repaying an energy debt and average bill debt at 30 June 2017 to 2020

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	27	37	33	18

³⁴ Alinta Energy provided updated figures for 2019/20.

³⁵ Amanda Energy, EGDC and Simply Energy have been excluded from Table 15 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past five years.

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	367	608	1,137	967
Alinta Energy ³⁶	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	226	12	8	163	310
	Average bill debt (\$)	510	541	305	1,016	1,471
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	58	10	7	17	11
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,804	902	1,047	1,307	1,148
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	2	19	28	75	39
	Average bill debt (\$)	272	391	439	998	715
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	0	7	7	7
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	0	298	1,950	3,286
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	0	2	18	22
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	0	658	769	820

³⁶ Alinta Energy provided updated figures for 2019/20.

4. Hardship programs

Main points

- The total number of electricity customers on a hardship program decreased by 19.5 per cent in 2020/21.
- The total number of gas customers on a hardship program increased by 2 per cent in 2020/21.
- Almost all (94 per cent) of electricity customers successfully completed their hardship plan, compared to 68 percent of gas customers.
- The average bill debt of both electricity and gas customers were the highest since reporting began in 2016/17.
- The average bill debt of electricity customers on a hardship program was 53 per cent higher than the average bill debt of gas customers.
- The average bill debt for Western Australian electricity customers was substantially less than in other states.
- The average bill debt for Western Australian gas customers increased in 2020/21 and is now similar average bill debt in other states.

Access to a hardship program is available only to residential electricity and gas customers. Throughout this section of the report, all references to customers are to residential customers.

The ERA introduced new hardship program performance indicators in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

The purpose of the hardship program performance indicators is to provide the ERA, as well as other stakeholders such as policy makers, retailers and consumer groups, with reliable data on the effectiveness of hardship programs.

Financial hardship may be caused by sustained exposure to factors that affect a customer's ability to manage their utility debt. The most common factors include loss of income, budget management problems caused by low or insecure income, separation or divorce, physical and mental health issues, loss of a loved one and domestic violence. In these circumstances, a customer is unable to pay an outstanding amount without affecting their capacity to meet their basic living needs (such as rent or mortgage, groceries or other utilities).

The Electricity Code and the Gas Compendium require retailers to offer assistance to residential customers experiencing financial hardship. This assistance includes:³⁷

- Additional time to pay a bill.
- An interest-free and fee-free instalment plan to pay a bill or arrears (including any disconnection or reconnection charges).
- Reasonable consideration to a request to reduce the customer's fees, charges or debt.
- Information about concessions and how to access them.
- Information about independent financial counselling services and other assistance services that are available.

³⁷ The [Gas Compendium](#) and the [Electricity Code](#) are available on the ERA website.

- Information about other financial assistance and grants schemes and how to access them.

Retailers must ensure that any instalment plan is fair and reasonable, taking into account the customer's capacity to pay and their consumption history.³⁸

The Australian Energy Regulator and the Essential Services Commission of Victoria have required electricity and gas retailers to report hardship program data for several years. Where possible, the ERA's new indicators have been aligned with the Australian Energy Regulator's indicators to allow comparison of Western Australian data with other jurisdictions. Readers should exercise some caution when comparing data between jurisdictions, because of differences in the cost of energy and regulatory obligations.

Data for all the hardship program and energy bill debt indicators can be found in the data tables published on the ERA website. This chapter focuses on the number of customers on a hardship program and the amount of energy debt owed by these customers.³⁹

4.1 Electricity

4.1.1 Electricity customers on a hardship program

Table 16 shows the number and percentage of electricity customers on a hardship program.

Table 16: Number and percentage of electricity customers on a hardship program at 30 June 2017 to 2021

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	Number	1,150	912	1,511	1,518	1,126
	%	2.92	2.31	3.98	4.11	3.11
Synergy	Number	20,798	30,640	33,707	28,899	23,348
	%	2.18	3.07	3.33	2.85	2.28
Total	Number	21,948	31,552	35,218	30,417	24,474
	%	2.21	3.04	3.36	2.9	2.31

The total number of electricity customers on a hardship program decreased by 19.5 per cent in 2020/21.⁴⁰

Monthly data collected from Horizon Power and Synergy shows the lowest number of customers on a hardship program was in December 2020 (Horizon Power) and January 2021 (Synergy). Since then, the number of customers on a hardship program have gradually increased each month and continued to increase in the first quarter of 2021/22. The trend

³⁸ Retailers are also required to offer an instalment plan to customers experiencing payment difficulties only upon request.

³⁹ This report only presents data for six of the 17 indicators. Data for the remaining 11 indicators is in the [data tables](#) published on the ERA website. A complete list of the hardship program indicators is in section 4.9 of the [Electricity Retail Licence Performance Reporting Handbook](#).

⁴⁰ Synergy attributed the decrease to its COVID-19 response including the disconnection moratorium from March 2020 to 30 June 2021 (additional [guidance](#) on the eligibility criteria for customers commenced on 1 October 2020), the [freeze](#) on electricity charges for 2020/21 and the [\\$600](#) electricity bill credit to all residential customers. This has resulted in fewer customers requesting financial hardship assistance.

suggests the number of customers on a hardship program is likely to return to pre-pandemic levels during 2021/22.

Table 17 shows the reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program.

Most customers exiting a hardship program in all four years reported did so because they had either successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement. The percentage of customers who successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement in 2021/22 was the highest for the four years reported (94 per cent).

Table 17: Reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program between 2017/18 and 2020/21

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Successfully completed	17,242	88.2	22,508	87.9	26,879	90.2	21,131	94.0
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	132	0.7	150	0.6	302	1.0	56	0.3
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ⁴¹	2,168	11.1	2,940	11.5	2,617	8.8	1,292	5.7

4.1.2 Electricity hardship customer debt

Figure 9 shows the average energy bill debt for electricity hardship customers by retailer. While the total number of customers on a hardship program decreased in 2020/21, the total average energy bill debt of customers on hardship programs increased by 54.9 per cent to \$1,195.

Monthly data collected from Horizon Power and Synergy indicates that average bill debt is now much higher than pre-pandemic amounts and is continuing to increase in quarter one 2021/22. The monthly data also shows that, while the number of customers on a hardship program reduced after the \$600 electricity bill credit was applied to accounts from November 2020, the average bill debt did not.

⁴¹ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to make contact with the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

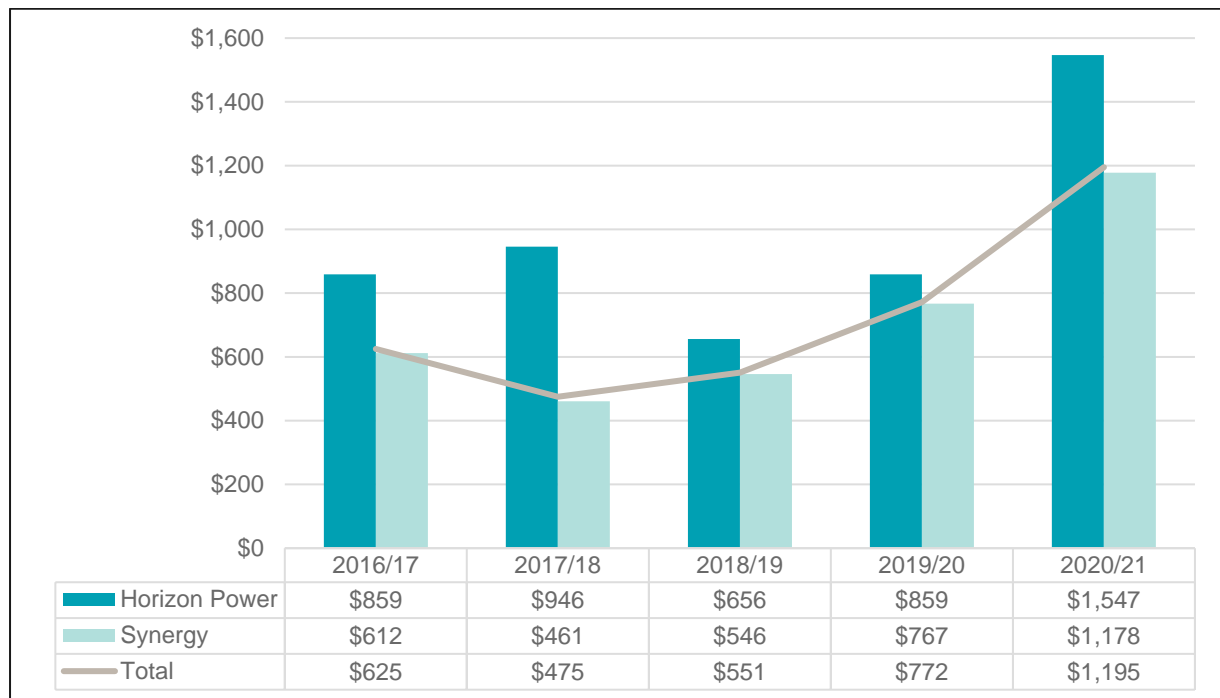
Figure 9: Electricity hardship customer average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021

Table 18 shows the electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program.

Table 18: Electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program by retailer between 2017/18 and 2020/21 (\$)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	862	1,442	758 ⁴²	1,255
Synergy	513	503	560	752
Total	531	579	580	798

4.2 Gas

4.2.1 Gas customers on a hardship program

Table 19 shows the number and percentage of gas customers on a hardship program.

Table 19: Number and percentage of gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	Number	n/a	4	42	52	102
	%	n/a	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.14

⁴² Horizon Power reported in 2019/20 that they had focused on improving hardship identification and so increased the number of hardship customers who entered the hardship program with a lower energy bill debt (between \$0 and \$500).

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy ⁴³	Number	5,272	4,434	5,012	3,977	3,733
	%	0.95	0.90	1.09	0.92	0.86
Kleenheat	Number	391	790	496	548	735
	%	0.25	0.40	0.25	0.27	0.35
Origin Energy	Number	n/a	0	21	23	23
	%	n/a	0.00	0.14	0.17	0.17
EGDC	Number	6	4	5	2	2
	%	1.78	1.18	1.58	0.61	0.61
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	3	72	171
	%	n/a	n/a	0.02	0.31	0.73
Total	Number	5,669	5,232	5,579	4,674	4,766
	%	0.80	0.73	0.77	0.64	0.63

The total number of gas customers on a hardship program increased by 2 per cent in 2020/21. Comparing Table 19 with Table 16 shows that the overall percentage of gas customers on a hardship program is much lower than electricity customers.⁴⁴

Table 20 shows the reasons gas customers exited a hardship program. The percentage of customers who successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement was the highest for the four years reported (68.4 per cent). Comparing Table 20 with Table 17 shows that the percentage of gas customers successfully completing a program is much lower than for electricity customers.

Table 20: Reasons gas customers exited a hardship program between at 30 June 2018 and 2021

	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Successfully completed	11,068	54.9	3,410	24.4	3,612	34.8	2,805	68.4
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	4,322	21.4	4,114	29.4	1,864	18	748	18.2
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ⁴⁵	4,775	23.7	6,466	46.2	4,891	47.2	550	13.4

⁴³ Alinta Energy provided updated figures for 2019/20.

⁴⁴ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 19 because none of its customers have been on a hardship program for the past five years.

⁴⁵ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to contact the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

4.2.2 Hardship debt for gas customers

Table 21 shows the average energy bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June.⁴⁶ The total average energy bill debt of customers on a hardship program increased by 46 per cent to \$779 in 2020/21. Monthly data collected from gas retailers indicates the average bill debt for customers on a hardship program continued to increase in the first quarter of 2021/22.

Table 21: Average energy bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021 (\$)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	101	500	683	1,025
Alinta Energy	246	312	206	444	854
Kleenheat	126	140	220	227	461
Origin Energy	n/a	0	138	102	317
EGDC	381	0	402	239	197
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	323	444	426
Total	238	286	209	423	779

Table 22 shows the average energy bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program.

Table 22: Average energy bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program 2017/18 to 2020/21 (\$)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	86	392	605	916
Alinta Energy	229	192	568	637
Kleenheat	267	344	262	286
Origin Energy	n/a	237	179	304
EGDC	619	757	367	583
Simply Energy	n/a	373	410	378
Total	230	199	522	575

4.2.3 Hardship customer average bill debt by jurisdiction

Table 23 compares the average bill debt of electricity and gas customers on a hardship program in Western Australia with customers in New South Wales and South Australia.

⁴⁶ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 21 and 22 because none of its customers have been on a hardship program for the past five years.

Table 23: Jurisdictional comparison of average energy bill debt of electricity and gas hardship customers between 2016/17 to 2020/21 (\$) ⁴⁷

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Electricity					
Western Australia	625	475	551	772	1,195
South Australia	1,496	1,694	1,863	1,970	2,438
New South Wales	1,006	916	1,212	1,274	1,629
Gas					
Western Australia	245	286	209	423	779
South Australia	521	585	621	599	790
New South Wales	682	668	684	658	786

The average bill debt for Western Australian electricity customers was the lowest of the three jurisdictions in all five years.

The average bill debt for Western Australian gas customers increased in 2020/21 and is now similar to the average bill debt of customers in New South Wales and South Australia.

⁴⁷ South Australia and New South Wales data from: Australian Energy Regulator, 2021, *Annual Retail Market Report 2020-21 – Charts and Data*, ([online](#)) [accessed 1 Dec 2021].

5. Disconnections

Main points

- During 2020/21, a disconnection moratorium was in place to assist electricity residential customers experiencing hardship because of COVID-19.
- Gas retailers voluntarily paused disconnections for residential and business customers for at least part of 2020/21 to assist customers experiencing hardship due to COVID-19.
- The pause in disconnections resulted in the number of electricity and gas residential and business customer disconnections in 2020/21 being substantially lower than previous years.
- In 2020/21, the Western Australian electricity and gas residential disconnection rates were lower than rates in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria

Energy is an essential service. Disconnection for non-payment of bills should be viewed as a last resort after payment plans and hardship programs have failed. The Electricity Code and Gas Compendium require retailers to provide customers experiencing financial hardship or payment difficulties with adequate opportunity to enter into an arrangement to avoid disconnection.

The rate of disconnections is an important indicator of how retailers meet their obligations to customers in debt while ensuring that customers continue to receive energy supply.

This section will look at disconnections that resulted from a customer's failure to pay a bill.^{48,49}

5.1 Total electricity disconnections

Figure 10 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customer disconnections.

In 2020/21 the percentage of residential electricity disconnections decreased for the second consecutive year. The percentage of business electricity disconnections decreased for the third consecutive year.

The decrease in 2020/21 can be attributed predominantly to the disconnection moratorium announced by the State Government in March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The moratorium applied to all Horizon Power and Synergy residential customers until 30 September 2020.

Between 1 October 2020 and 30 June 2021, the disconnection moratorium continued with additional guidance on the eligibility criteria for customers. Under the guidance, to remain connected a customer must engage with their retailer and agree to a plan to pay a bill debt.⁵⁰

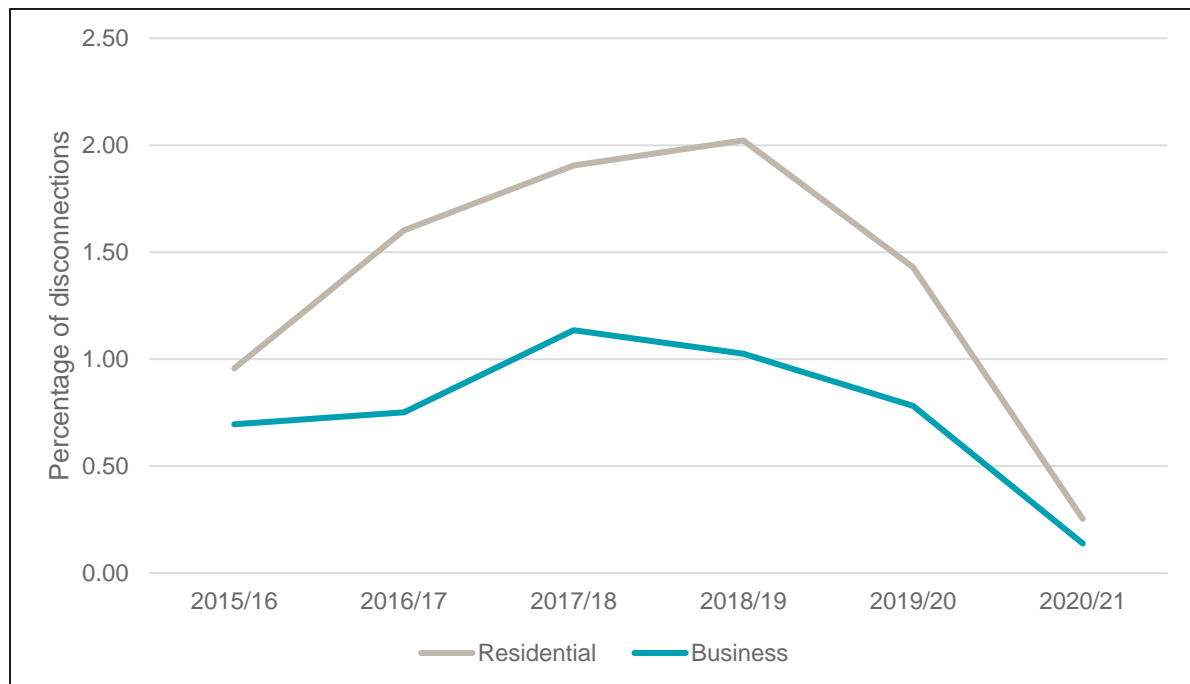
⁴⁸ Customers can also be disconnected for taking supply without having an account with the retailer (called 'non-application') or denying access to the meter.

⁴⁹ Refer to section 4.3 of the Handbook for definitions.

⁵⁰ The additional guidance is available in the State Government's [information sheet](#) on the COVID-19 disconnection moratorium.

Synergy resumed disconnections on 8 March 2021 and Horizon Power on 8 June 2021.⁵¹ Disconnection rates are expected to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2021/22.

Figure 10: Residential and business electricity customer disconnections from 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)



5.2 Electricity residential disconnections

Table 24 shows the number and percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections by retailer.

Table 24: Number and percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections by retailer between 2015/2016 and 2020/21

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Horizon Power	Number	1,705	1,826	1,943	3,156 ⁵²	2,741	251
	%	4.38	4.64	4.93	8.32	7.42	0.69
Synergy	Number	8,069	14,109	17,800	18,056	12,273	2,432
	%	0.82	1.48	1.79	1.79	1.21	0.24
Total	Number	9,774	15,935	19,743	21,212	15,014	2,683
	%	0.96	1.60	1.91	2.02	1.43	0.25

⁵¹ Customers flagged as hardship, on an active payment plan or payment extension were exempt from disconnection during 2020/21.

⁵² The increase in disconnections reported by Horizon Power in 2018/19 was mostly due to it previously reporting the number of customers who were disconnected, instead of the total number of times customers had been disconnected. A proportion of customers are disconnected more than once per year.

Total residential electricity disconnections decreased in 2020/21 to the lowest level for the six years reported. The decrease can be attributed predominantly to the disconnection moratorium.

5.3 Electricity business disconnections

Table 25 shows the number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer.⁵³

In 2020/21, every retailer reported a decrease in business customer disconnections, with Alinta and Amanda Energy reporting no business customer disconnections.⁵⁴

Table 25: Number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	Number	21	16	11	13	6	0
	%	0.86	0.58	0.38	0.46	0.17	0.0
Amanda Energy	Number	0	0	1	1	0	0
	%	0.0	0.0	0.72	0.83	0.0	0.0
Horizon Power	Number	128	144	124	82	128	4
	%	1.63	1.68	1.61	1.04	1.69	0.05
Kleenheat	Number	0	2	2	3	1	1
	%	0.0	2.70	1.87	2.38	0.59	0.57
Perth Energy	Number	2	4	15	18	29	3
	%	0.33	1.33	1.73	4.36	6.65	0.29
Synergy	Number	616	719	1,026	946	631	139
	%	0.62	0.68	1.11	1.03	0.70	0.15
Total	Number	767	885	1,179	1,063	795	147
	%	0.70	0.75	1.14	1.03	0.78	0.14

5.4 Total gas disconnections

Figure 11 shows the percentage of residential and business gas customer disconnections.

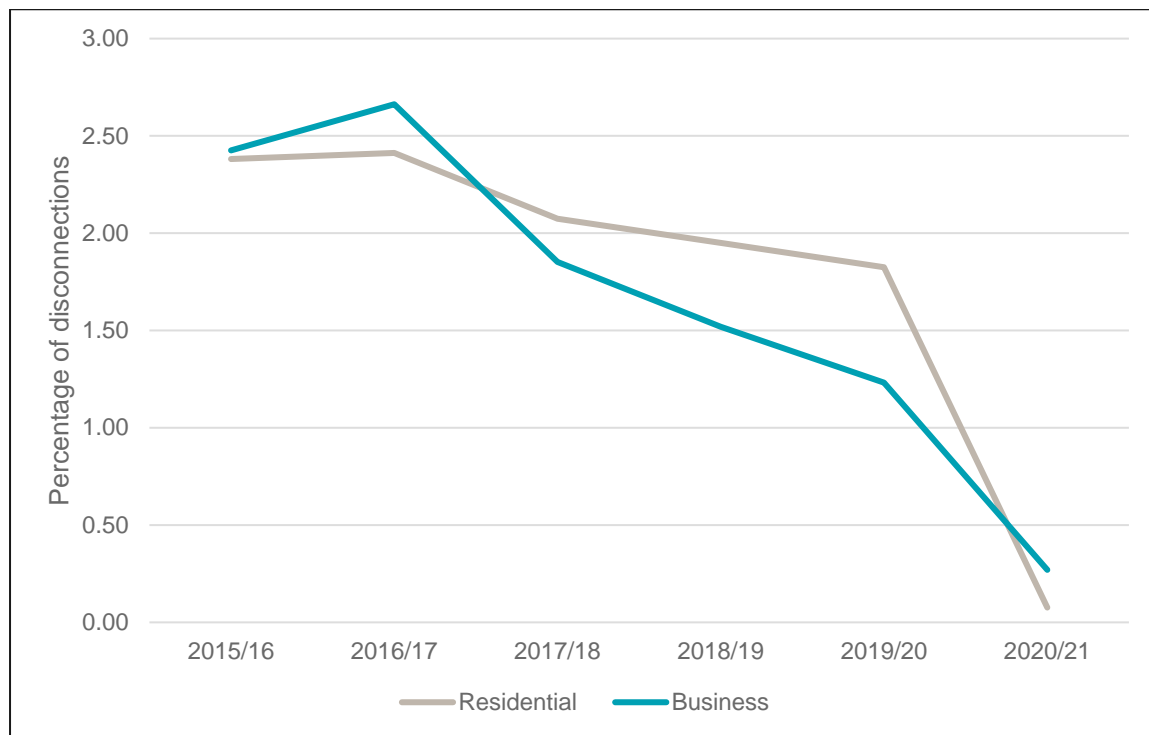
The percentage of business and residential gas customer disconnections decreased in 2020/21 and were the lowest for the six years reported. As part of their response to COVID-

⁵³ Six retailers did not disconnect any customers within the six-year reporting period and have been excluded from Table 25: AER Retail, A-Star, Change Energy, CleanTech, Clear Energy and Rottneest Island Authority.

⁵⁴ Normal credit collection arrangements resumed for business customers from [1 October 2020](#) for Synergy and Horizon Power business customers. Despite the resumption the number of disconnections in 2020/21 was much lower than before the COVID-19 measures were introduced.

19, all gas retailers continued to pause disconnections for at least part of 2020/21, which accounts for most of the reduction in disconnections.

Figure 11: Residential and business gas customer disconnections 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)



5.5 Gas residential disconnections

Table 26 shows the number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁵⁵

Simply Energy was the only gas retailer to report an increase in residential disconnections in 2020/21. Monthly data provided by Simply Energy shows that it resumed disconnections in January 2021.

Table 26: Number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2015/16 to 2020/21

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	Number	15,044	14,970	13,161	12,125	11,234	0
	%	2.46	2.70	2.66	2.64	2.60	0.0
Kleenheat	Number	1,600	2,121	1,744	2,007	1,910	0
	%	1.83	1.38	0.89	1.02	0.95	0.0
Origin Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	0	48	95	3
	%	n/a	n/a	0.0	0.33	0.69	0.02
EGDC	Number	5	6	8	12	8	5
	%	1.53	1.78	2.36	3.79	2.45	1.53
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	180	564

⁵⁵ AGL and Perth Energy did not disconnect any residential customers and have been excluded from Table 26.

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
	%	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.05	0.78	2.39
Total	Number	16,649	17,097	14,913	14,200	13,427	572
	%	2.38	2.41	2.07	1.95	1.83	0.08

5.6 Gas business disconnections

Table 27 shows the number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁵⁶

Table 27: Number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2015/16 to 2020/21

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	Number	201	177	147	117	80	0
	%	2.42	2.33	2.26	1.95	1.38	0.0
Synergy	Number	1	1	0	0	0	1
	%	0.73	0.57	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.52
Kleenheat	Number	42	82	30	26	37	22
	%	2.70	4.26	1.45	1.08	1.41	0.87
EGDC	Number	0	0	0	1	1	1
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.44	2.70	2.94
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0	1
	%	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	0.0	3.85
Total	Number	244	260	177	144	118	25
	%	2.43	2.66	1.85	1.52	1.23	0.27

5.7 Inter-jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections

Table 28 compares the residential electricity and gas disconnection percentages in Western Australia with the percentages in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

All jurisdictions stopped disconnections at various points during the pandemic. The Australian Energy Regulator released a Statement of Expectations of energy businesses in March 2020 to protect customers in the national market. This statement included a hold on disconnections for residential customers. Three further updates were released during 2020/21, which provided additional protections and support for customers to prevent disconnection to 30 June

⁵⁶ AGL, Amada Energy, Origin Energy and Perth Energy did not disconnect any business customers and have been excluded from Table 27.

2021 as long as they either made contact with, or were accessing support from, their retailer.⁵⁷ In Victoria, disconnections for non-payment ceased from mid-April 2020. Aligning with the AER, the Essential Services Commission provided updated advice during 2020/21 that energy retailers must work with customers and not disconnect if a customer is in contact with or accessing retailer support until 30 June 2021.⁵⁸ The AER and Victoria have also both advised that additional support for customers will apply if any future lockdowns occur.

In 2020/21 Western Australian residential electricity and gas disconnection percentages were the lowest of the four jurisdictions.

Table 28: Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections 2016 to 2021 (%)⁵⁹

	New South Wales ⁶⁰	South Australia	Victoria ⁶¹	Western Australia
Electricity				
2015/16	0.99	1.39	1.34	0.96
2016/17	0.89	1.43	1.16	1.60
2017/18	1.03	1.37	1.34	1.91
2018/19	1.00	1.33	0.89	2.02
2019/20	0.56	0.89	0.69	1.43
2020/21	0.30	0.49	0.27	0.25
Gas				
2015/16	0.51	1.23	1.28	2.38
2016/17	0.43	0.87	0.91	2.41
2017/18	0.39	1.03	1.11	2.07
2018/19	0.28	0.83	0.69	1.95
2019/20	0.22	0.51	0.42	1.83
2020/21	0.22	0.26	0.12	0.08

⁵⁷ Australian Energy Regulator, 2021, *AER Statement of Expectations of energy businesses: Protecting customers and the energy market during COVID-19*, ([online](#)) [accessed 1 Dec 2021]

⁵⁸ Essential Services Commission, 2021, 'Information for electricity and gas consumers', ([online](#)) [accessed 1 Dec 2021].

⁵⁹ The figures from South Australia and New South Wales are from the 2020/21 AER report and some have been amended from previous reports.

⁶⁰ South Australia and New South Wales data from: Australian Energy Regulator, 2021, *Annual Retail Market Report 2020-21 – Charts and Data*, ([online](#)) [accessed 1 Dec 2021].

⁶¹ Victoria data from: Essential Services Commission, 2021, *Victorian Energy Market Report 2020-21 – Appendix: Retailer profiles*, ([online](#)) [accessed 1 Dec 2021].

6. Reconnections

Main points

- Because electricity and gas residential and business disconnections were much lower in 2020/21, there was a corresponding reduction in the number of reconnections.
- The percentage of residential electricity reconnections by Horizon Power in 2020/21 was the lowest for the six years reported.
- The percentage of business electricity reconnections by Horizon Power (25 per cent) and Synergy (28.8 per cent) in 2020/21 were the lowest reported for the past six years.

Reconnection indicators apply only to the reconnection of a customer in the same name and at the same address as the disconnection. The total number of reconnections each year helps to identify customers who were not reconnected at all.⁶²

6.1 Residential electricity reconnections

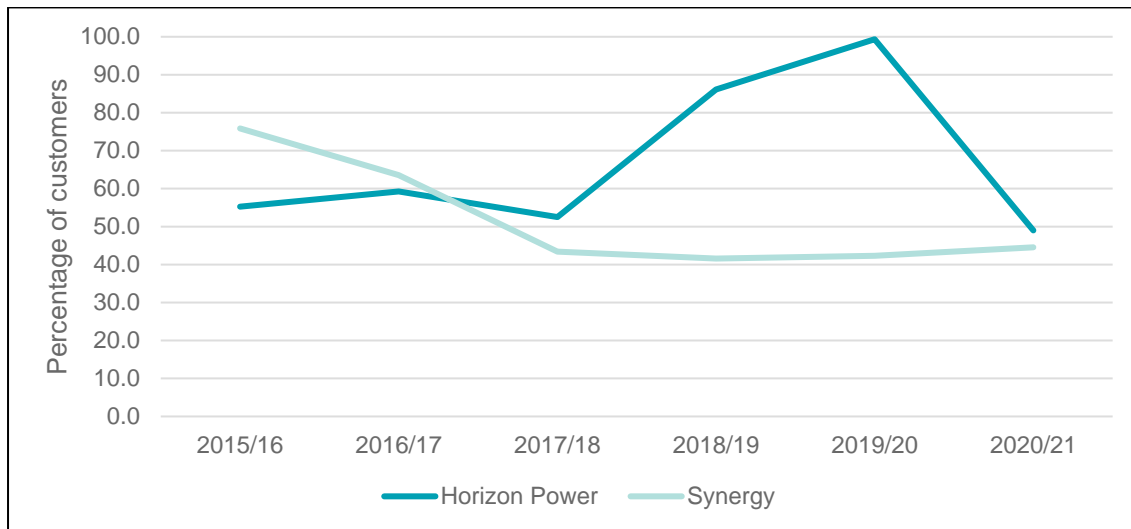
Figure 12 shows the percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailers.

Horizon Power's reconnection percentage (49.0 per cent) in 2020/21 was the lowest in the six years reported and similar to the levels reported in 2015/16 to 2017/18.⁶³

Synergy's reconnection percentage of 44.5 per cent in 2020/21 is similar to the levels reported for the past four years.

⁶² A proportion of disconnections involve customers who reconnect in a different name at the same address, often because another member of the household takes over the account from the person who was disconnected. These reconnections do not show up in the reconnections data, even though supply has been restored to the premise.

⁶³ The increase in the reconnections reported by Horizon Power in 2018/19 was mostly due to it previously reporting the number of customers who were reconnected, instead of the total number of times customers had been reconnected. A proportion of customers are disconnected and subsequently reconnected more than once per year.

Figure 12: Residential electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer between 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)

6.2 Business electricity reconnections

Table 29 shows the percentage of electricity business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer.

Synergy's business reconnection percentage has trended downwards over the past five years to reach a low of 28.8 per cent in 2020/21.

Table 29: Business electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)⁶⁴

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	66.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	n/a
Amanda Energy	n/a	n/a	0.0	100.0	n/a	n/a
Horizon Power	60.9	66.7	74.2	78.0	87.5	25.0
Kleenheat	n/a	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	100.0
Perth Energy	100.0	100.0	33.3	72.2	51.7	66.7
Synergy	64.4	51.7	35.1	33.5	29.6	28.8

6.3 Gas residential reconnections

Table 30 shows the percentage of residential gas customer disconnections that were reconnected by each retailer.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Alinta Energy and Amanda Energy did not disconnect any electricity business customers in 2020/21.

⁶⁵ AGL and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 31 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

Table 30: Gas residential customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2016 to 2021 (%)⁶⁶

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	70.1	66.0	66.7	66.7	73.1	n/a
Kleenheat	47.3	62.1	76.8	53.5	52.7	n/a
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	0.0	31.3	32.6	0.0
EGDC	80.0	16.7	75.0	50.0	75.0	60.0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	50.0	54.4	41.8

6.4 Gas business reconnections

Table 31 shows the percentage of business gas customer disconnections reconnected by each retailer.⁶⁷

Table 31: Gas business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2016 to 2021 (%)⁶⁸

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	60.7	59.3	53.7	55.6	36.3	n/a
Synergy	0.0	0.0	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0
Kleenheat	69.0	93.9	56.7	42.3	32.4	13.6
EGDC	n/a	n/a	n/a	100.0	100.0	100.0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0

⁶⁶ Alinta Energy and Kleenheat did not disconnect any residential gas customers in 2020/21.

⁶⁷ AGL, Amanda Energy, Origin Energy and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 32 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

⁶⁸ Alinta Energy did not disconnect any business gas customers in 2020/21.

7. Customer service

Main points

- Horizon Power reported a substantial reduction in the number of complaints from residential electricity customers in 2020/21.
- Most complaints from electricity and gas customers during 2020/21 were about billing, continuing the trend seen in previous years.
- The total number of calls to electricity and gas retailer call centres was the lowest for the six years reported, likely due to the COVID-19 support measures in place throughout 2020/21.

This chapter looks at how well retailers are servicing their customers, measured by customer complaints and call centre responsiveness.

Retailers are required to have an internal process for handling complaints that complies with Australian Standard AS/NZS 10002-2014 (Guidelines for complaint management in organisations). The standard defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.”⁶⁹

Retailers are also required to comply with the ERA’s customer complaints guidelines, which clarify the distinction between queries, complaints and other customer communications.⁷⁰

Customer complaints are separated into four categories: billing complaints, marketing complaints, transfer complaints and other complaints.⁷¹

A large proportion of customer interactions with their retailer is by telephone. Retailer responsiveness to telephone calls is an important measure of customer service.

Larger retailers operate call centres to handle customer enquiries and complaints. These call centres may have sophisticated systems to monitor and report on their performance.⁷² A key responsiveness indicator widely used for call centres in all sectors is the percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds.

Smaller retailers offer a simpler telephone service, which is often based on the customer calling a switchboard operator, who connects them to the appropriate contact person. This type of telephone service is generally not capable of recording responsiveness data.

⁶⁹ The ERA has slightly modified this definition by adding the words “or services” immediately after “products” because energy retailers provide a service rather than a product to their customers.

⁷⁰ A copy of the guidelines is available on the ERA [website](#).

⁷¹ Refer to section 4.5 of the Handbook for definitions.

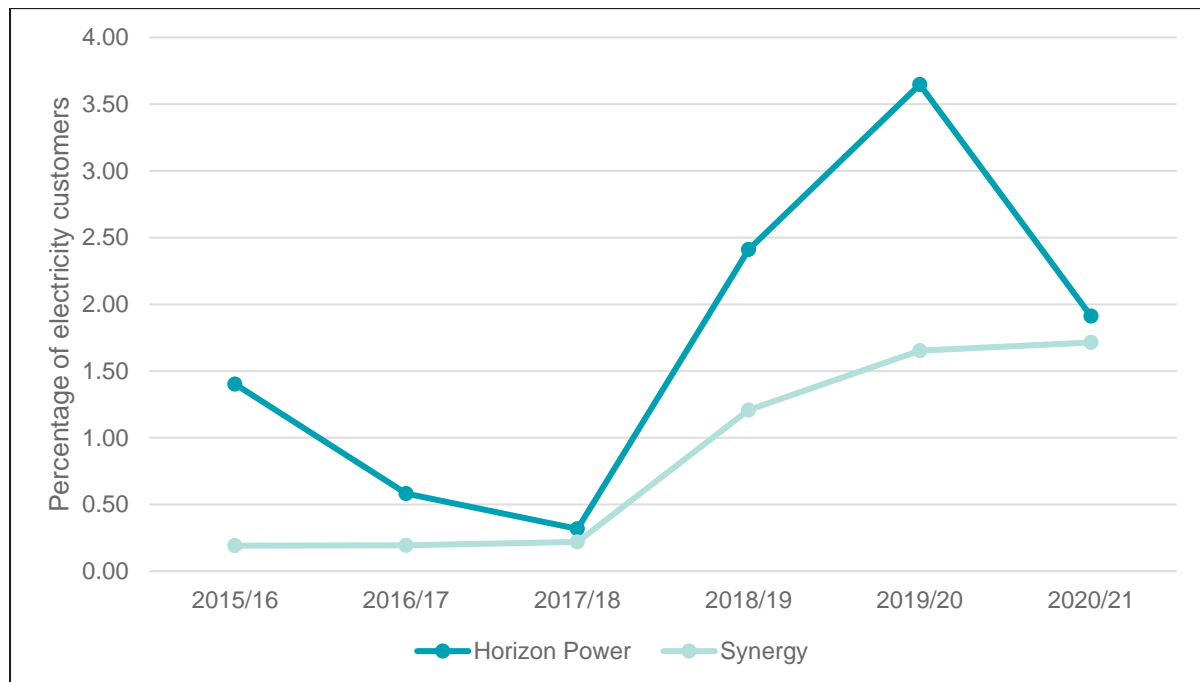
⁷² Some call centres handle calls about gas and electricity retail services, as well as other services provided by the retailer or a related business. Therefore, it is not always possible for retailers to separately report on their performance for gas and electricity retail calls. In these circumstances the reported performance will be for all the calls handled by the call centre.

7.1 Customer complaints

7.1.1 Residential electricity customer complaints

Figure 13 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total residential customers, made to electricity retailers. Horizon Power attributed the reduction in the number of complaints received in 2020/21 to the disconnection moratorium that was in place due to COVID-19 and the \$600 electricity bill credit.

Figure 13: Complaints from residential electricity customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)⁷³



7.1.2 Business electricity customer complaints

Table 32 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total business customers, made to electricity retailers.⁷⁴

Table 32: Complaints from business electricity customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 ⁷⁵	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1
Amanda Energy	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Change Energy	n/a	0.0	8.0	3.5	0.0	0.0

⁷³ In 2018/19 Synergy and Horizon Power both changed the way they recorded complaints. In previous years, complaints that were resolved at the first point of contact were not reported. In addition, in 2019/20 Horizon Power added additional ways for customers to make complaints.

⁷⁴ AER Retail, A-Star and Clear Energy have been excluded from Table 32 because they did not report any business customer complaints for the past six years.

⁷⁵ In 2018/19 Synergy and Horizon Power reported a much higher percentage of business customer complaints, because complaints resolved at the first point of contact were included for the first time.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 ⁷⁵	2019/20	2020/21
CleanTech	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	1.6	0.8
Horizon Power	1.5	0.4	0.2	1.6	2.3	1.3
Kleenheat	3.6	1.4	0.0	0.8	4.1	3.4
Perth Energy	0.2	2.3	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2
Rottneest Island Authority	0.0	4.2	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.6

7.1.3 Residential and business electricity customer complaints by category

Table 33 compares residential and business electricity customer complaints by category for each retailer for the past two years.⁷⁶

Most of the complaints from residential and business customers were about billing.

Table 33: Residential and business electricity customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (%)

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21
Residential								
Horizon Power	59.6	52.5	1.5	0.9	0.0	0.0	38.9	46.6
Synergy	81.0	82.4	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	18.9	17.1
Business								
Alinta Energy	66.7	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	33.3	0.0
CleanTech	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Horizon Power	67.3	61.5	0.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	32.2	37.5
Kleenheat	71.4	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	0.0
Perth Energy	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	80.6	79.8	0.5	0.0	0.6	0.5	18.3	19.7

7.1.4 Residential gas customer complaints

Table 34 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total residential customers, made to gas retailers.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The Rottneest Island Authority has been excluded from Table 33 because it did not receive any complaints from business customers for the past two years.

⁷⁷ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 35 because it did not receive any residential customer complaints for the past six years.

Table 34: Complaints from residential gas customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	n/a	1.7	2.0	1.4	0.3
Alinta Energy	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3
Kleenheat	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	1.3	1.3	0.8	0.8
EGDC	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.8	2.6	0.9

7.1.5 Business gas customer complaints

Table 35 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total business customers, made to gas retailers.⁷⁸

Table 35: Complaints from business gas customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	n/a	2.6	3.0	1.4	0.8
Alinta Energy	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.8
Synergy	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.7	1.2	1.6
Kleenheat	0.3	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.6
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	3.9	2.1	0.5	2.4
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	9.1	0.0

7.1.6 Residential and business gas customer complaints by category

Table 36 compares residential and business gas customer complaints by category per retailer for the past two years.

Most of the complaints from residential and business customers were about billing, followed by other complaints.

Table 36: Residential and business gas customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2018/19 and 2019/20 (%)⁷⁹

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21	2019/20	2020/21

⁷⁸ Amanda Energy, EGDC and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 36 because they did not receive any business customer complaints for the past six years.

⁷⁹ Esperance Gas Distribution Company did not receive any complaints from residential customers and Simply Energy did not receive any complaints from business customers in 2020/21.

		Billing	Marketing		Transfer		Other	
Residential								
AGL	33.4	51.0	7.0	4.4	28.9	13.1	30.7	31.6
Alinta Energy	76.4	83.3	11.4	6.4	3.0	1.8	9.3	8.6
Kleenheat	66.1	60.3	2.1	0.4	7.5	5.4	24.3	33.9
Origin Energy	29.6	49.1	7.0	4.7	9.6	2.8	53.9	43.4
EGDC	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Simply Energy	34.3	39.2	26.1	1.4	3.2	11.5	36.5	47.8
Business								
AGL	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	57.1	0.0	42.9	75.0
Alinta Energy	85.0	97.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.0	2.3
Synergy	0.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	50.0	33.3
Kleenheat	66.7	53.3	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	22.2	46.7
Origin Energy	100.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
Simply Energy	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

7.2 Retailer call centre responsiveness

7.2.1 Electricity retailer call centre responsiveness

Table 37 shows the number of calls to electricity retailer call centres.

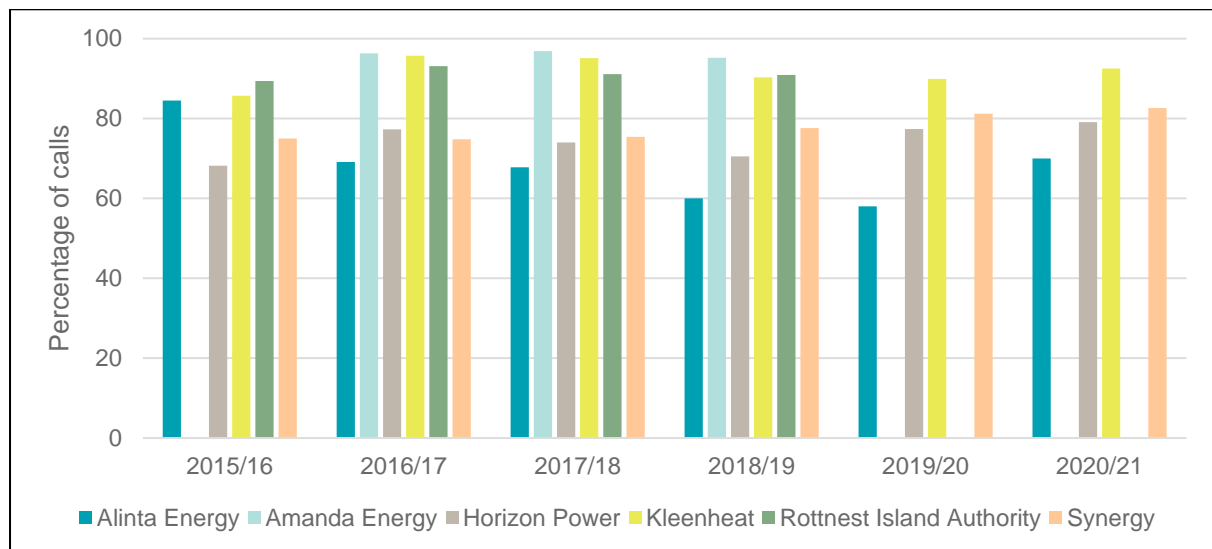
Table 37: Volume of calls to electricity retailer call centres 2015/16 to 2020/21⁸⁰

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Alinta Energy	2,997	1,412	1,355	1,410	4,570	3,312
Amanda Energy	n/a	1,959	1,653	1,945	n/a	n/a
Horizon Power ⁸¹	108,497	83,761	81,159	73,180	65,079	50,242
Kleenheat	14	46	61	31	69	67
Rottnest Island Authority	1,955	814	852	33	n/a	n/a
Synergy	1,058,008	1,156,318	1,060,903	1,008,193	958,159	711,117
Total	1,171,471	1,244,310	1,145,983	1,084,792	1,027,877	764,736

All retailers reported a reduction in the number of calls to their call centres in 2020/21.

Figure 14 shows the percentage of calls to electricity retailer call centres answered within 30 seconds.

Figure 14: Calls from electricity customers answered within 30 seconds 2016 to 2021 (%)



⁸⁰ In 2019/20 Amanda Energy and the Rottnest Island Authority made changes to their call centres that meant they were no longer able to record call centre statistics.

⁸¹ Horizon Power's call centre handles calls for both retail and distribution customers. Horizon Power has been unable to separate retail calls from distribution calls since 2014.

7.3 Gas retailer call centre responsiveness

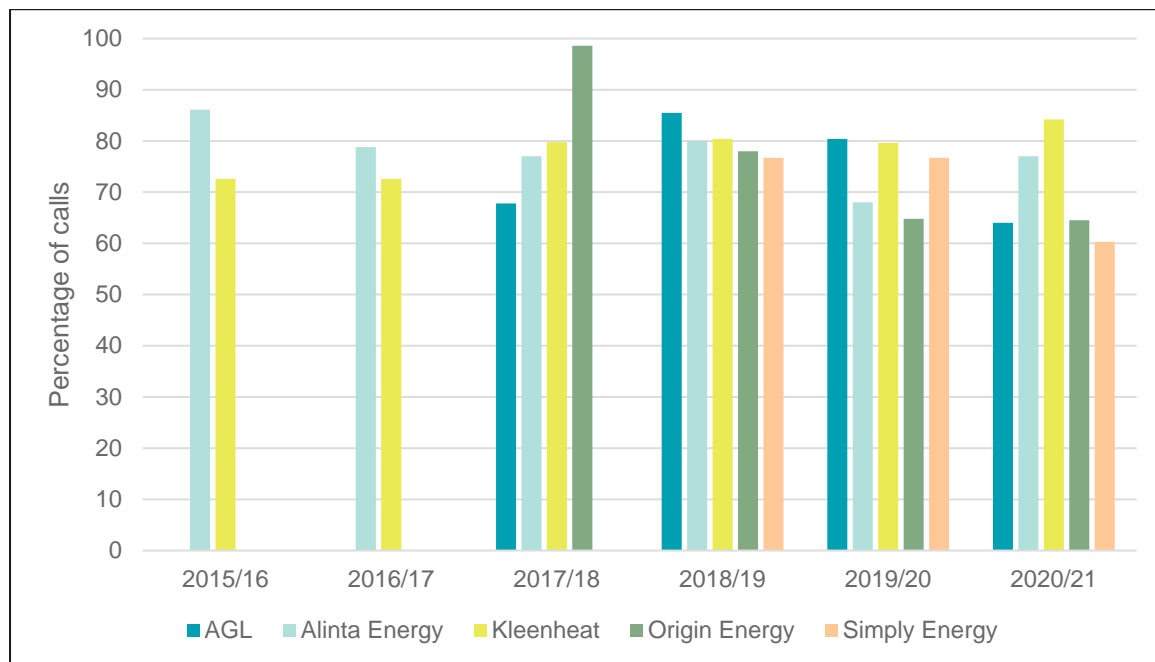
Table 38 shows the number of calls to gas retailer call centres.⁸²

Table 38: Volume of calls to gas retailer call centres 2016 to 2021

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
AGL	n/a	n/a	46,388	56,961	66,361	41,627
Alinta Energy	675,673	525,644	531,427	537,418	420,246	282,128
Kleenheat ⁸³	222,505	285,887	310,803	289,778	246,101	195,480
Origin Energy	n/a	n/a	18,518	34,319	27,466	21,861
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	12,512	24,624	16,436
Total	898,178	811,531	907,136	921,523	784,798	557,532

Figure 15 shows the percentage of telephone calls to gas retailer call centres answered within 30 seconds.⁸⁴

Figure 15: Calls from gas customers answered within 30 seconds 2016 to 2021 (%)



⁸² Amanda Energy, EGDC and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 38 as they do not operate a dedicated call centre. AGL and Origin Energy commenced supplying customers in 2017/18 and Simply Energy commenced supplying customers in 2018/19.

⁸³ The Kleenheat call centre handles calls for all areas of its business, including Liquefied Petroleum Gas customer calls.

⁸⁴ Amanda Energy, EGDC and Perth Energy have been excluded from Figure 16 as they do not operate a dedicated call centre.

Appendix 1 List of Tables

Table 1: Number of licensed electricity retailers at 30 June 2016 to 2021	2
Table 2: Number of residential electricity customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021	3
Table 3: Number of business electricity customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021	4
Table 4: Number of electricity pre-payment meter customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021	4
Table 5: Number of licensed gas retailers at 30 June 2015 to 2020	5
Table 6: Number of residential gas customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021	6
Table 7: Number of business gas customers by retailer at 30 June 2016 to 2021	8
Table 8: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans by retailer at 30 June 2018 to 2021	11
Table 9: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship program customers) who successfully completed their plan and those who had their instalment plan cancelled between 2017/18 and 2020/21	12
Table 10: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan by retailer at 30 June 2018 to 2021	14
Table 11: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship program customers) who have successfully completed their plan and those who have had their instalment plan cancelled between 30 June 2018 and 2021	15
Table 12: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021	17
Table 13: Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021	17
Table 14: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021	19
Table 15: Business gas customers repaying an energy debt and average bill debt at 30 June 2017 to 2020	19
Table 16: Number and percentage of electricity customers on a hardship program at 30 June 2017 to 2021	22
Table 17: Reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program between 2017/18 and 2020/21	23
Table 18: Electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program by retailer between 2017/18 and 2020/21 (\$)	24
Table 19: Number and percentage of gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021	24
Table 20: Reasons gas customers exited a hardship program between at 30 June 2018 and 2021	25
Table 21: Average energy bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021 (\$)	26
Table 22: Average energy bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program 2017/18 to 2020/21 (\$)	26
Table 23: Jurisdictional comparison of average energy bill debt of electricity and gas hardship customers between 2016/17 to 2020/21 (\$)	27
Table 24: Number and percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections by retailer between 2015/2016 and 2020/21	29
Table 25: Number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21	30
Table 26: Number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2015/16 to 2020/21	31
Table 27: Number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2015/16 to 2020/21	32
Table 28: Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections 2016 to 2021 (%)	33
Table 29: Business electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	35
Table 30: Gas residential customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2016 to 2021 (%)	36
Table 31: Gas business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2016 to 2021 (%)	36

Table 32: Complaints from business electricity customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	38
Table 33: Residential and business electricity customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (%)	39
Table 34: Complaints from residential gas customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	40
Table 35: Complaints from business gas customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	40
Table 36: Residential and business gas customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2018/19 and 2019/20 (%)	40
Table 37: Volume of calls to electricity retailer call centres 2015/16 to 2020/21	42
Table 38: Volume of calls to gas retailer call centres 2016 to 2021	43

Appendix 2 List of Figures

Figure 1: Number of residential and business electricity customers at 30 June 2016 to 2021	2
Figure 2: Number of residential and business gas customers at 30 June 2016 to 2021	6
Figure 3: Residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer at 30 June 2020 and 2021 (%)	7
Figure 4: Business gas market share in the coastal supply area by retailer at 30 June 2020 and 2021 (%)	8
Figure 5: Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)	10
Figure 6: Electricity customers on instalment plans at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)	11
Figure 7: Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)	13
Figure 8: Gas customers on an instalment plan at 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)	13
Figure 9: Electricity hardship customer average bill debt by retailer at 30 June 2017 to 2021	24
Figure 10: Residential and business electricity customer disconnections from 30 June 2016 to 2021 (%)	29
Figure 11: Residential and business gas customer disconnections 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	31
Figure 12: Residential electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer between 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	35
Figure 13: Complaints from residential electricity customers by retailer 2015/16 to 2020/21 (%)	38
Figure 14: Calls from electricity customers answered within 30 seconds 2016 to 2021 (%)	42
Figure 15: Calls from gas customers answered within 30 seconds 2016 to 2021 (%)	43