



Economic Regulation Authority

Annual data report 2021/22

Energy retailers

30 January 2023

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.

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Chair's foreword

The Economic Regulation Authority's annual data report to the Minister for Energy provides an overview of the trends in energy markets and indicators of energy retailers' performance, with a focus on financial hardship and customer service.

Observations for 2021/22

The report covers retailers' performance, serving both contestable and non-contestable customers, over financial year 2021/22. Only Synergy can supply non-contestable customers (customers consuming less than 50 MWh) in the South West Interconnected System, which represents almost all metropolitan residential and small business customers. Horizon Power supplies residential and small business customers throughout regional Western Australia.

In 2021/22, COVID-19 pandemic support measures continued to influence the experiences of residential customers. During the year, the electricity moratorium on disconnections ended and most gas retailers reinstated disconnections, which had been voluntarily paused during the pandemic. Residential customers also benefited from a \$600 electricity credit in November 2020 and an additional \$400 electricity credit in July 2022.

The disconnection moratorium (electricity) and voluntary pause (gas) led to lower disconnection rates compared to pre-pandemic levels. However, the cessation of these measures identifies an increase in the number of customers experiencing financial hardship because of debt accrued during the disconnection moratorium and voluntary pause period. The number of electricity customers in hardship returned to the levels observed prior to the disconnection moratorium and the number of gas customers in hardship is the highest ever reported. Although the number of customers experiencing hardship increased in 2021/22, the majority were successful in completing their hardship plan.

Average bill debt has increased for both electricity and gas retailers, despite the household electricity credits. Average residential electricity bill debt is highest for Horizon Power customers, but Synergy customers' debt increased significantly during the reporting period to its highest level since reporting commenced. Average residential gas bill debt also increased for most retailers.

More customers than ever are accessing instalment plans to repay their energy bill debts.

Despite these challenges, Western Australia performed relatively well compared to other states. Western Australians' average electricity bill debt is substantially lower than, and gas bill debt is similar to, the national average. Disconnection rates were higher than other states, but still lower than pre-pandemic levels.

The ERA's role

The data signifies increasing cost of living pressures on energy customers. Despite the pandemic related customer protection measures, subsequent high inflation levels and rising interest rates, are affecting the affordability of electricity and gas services .

Given these macro-economic circumstances, the ERA encourages retailers to maintain their focus on flexible payment arrangements and hardship support schemes over the next two to three years to ensure customers can continue to access energy as an essential service.

Energy retailers directly manage the relationship with their customers. The ERA's role is to approve retailers' hardship schemes and assess retailers' compliance with these schemes and wider retail licence obligations through regular audits. The ERA's annual retailers

performance report and individual retailer licence audit outcomes assist the ERA in assessing the effectiveness of retail protections such as hardship schemes.

In addition to reporting this data, the ERA has sought to support customers experiencing difficulties paying their electricity bill by introducing new protections in the *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers*. These changes will require retailers to extend assistance to manage payments to all customers who request it, set a bill debt of \$300 before a residential customer can be disconnected, and offer specific assistance and protections to customers experiencing family and domestic violence. The protections will commence on 20 February 2023.

Steve Edwell
Chair, Economic Regulation Authority

1. Market overview

Main Points

- The number of residential electricity customers increased by 1.5 per cent and the number of business electricity customers increased by 1.2 per cent in 2021/22.
- The number of residential and business gas customers increased by 1.6 per cent and 1.9 per cent respectively.
- The residential market share of the largest gas retailer, Alinta Energy, fell by 2.7 per cent, while its business market share increased by 0.8 per cent.

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 of 30 June 2022:⁴

- 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 (these are 'small use' electricity customers).

² Throughout this report the term 'gas customer' means a customer who consumes less than one terajoule of gas per year (these are 'small use' gas customers).

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 - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Electricity retailers	11	12	12	13	13	13

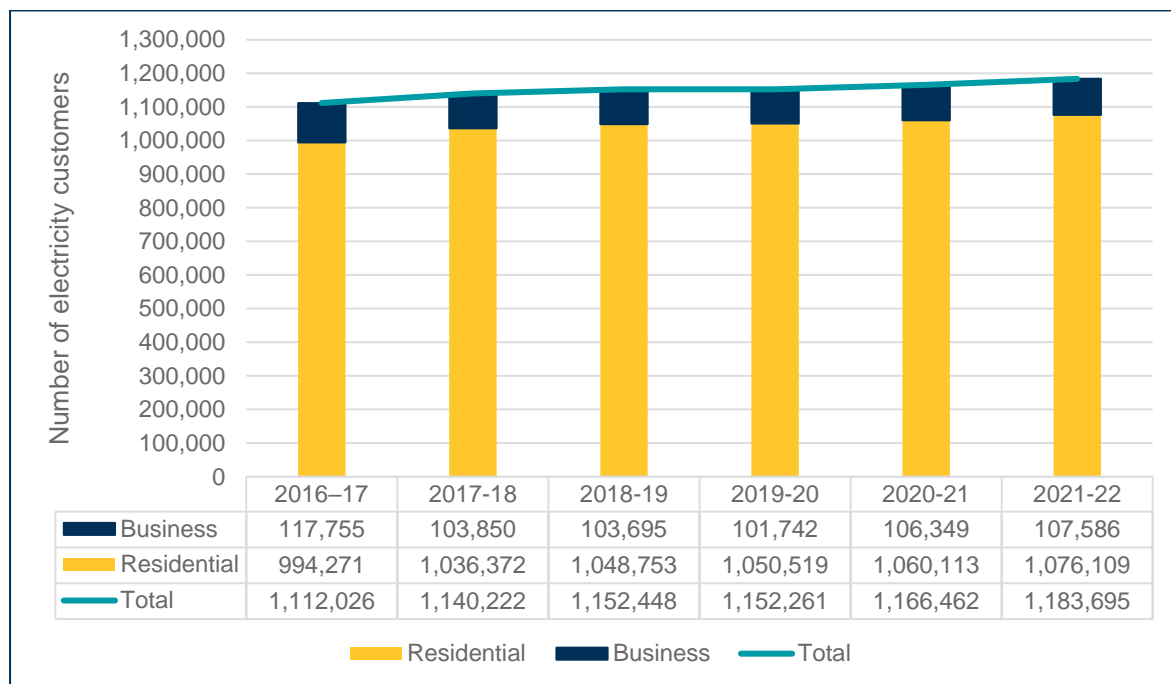
Seven retailers supply customers through the South West Interconnected System (SWIS) in the lower half of Western Australia, including the Perth metropolitan area.⁵ Horizon Power and the Rottnest Island Authority supply customers through their own distribution networks outside the SWIS.⁶

1.1.2 *Electricity customers*

Figure 1 shows the number of residential and business electricity customers and total electricity customers. In 2021/22, the number of business customers increased by 1.2 per cent, building on the increase in 2020/21.

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 customers in regional mainland areas of the State outside the SWIS.

Figure 1: Number of residential and business electricity customers - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022^{7, 8}

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, almost all households and small businesses in the SWIS, are non-contestable customers and can be supplied only by Synergy. This means that Synergy's total residential and business customers include both contestable and non-contestable customers. Customers supplied by other retailers in the SWIS are all contestable.

1.1.4 Residential electricity customers

Table 2 shows the total number of residential electricity customers by retailer. Synergy and Horizon Power supply most residential customers.

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.

Table 2: Number of residential electricity customers by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	39,373	39,398	37,925	36,956	36,256	36,919
Perth Energy	0	2	2	2	2	2
Synergy	954,898	996,972	1,010,826	1,013,561	1,023,854	1,039,188
Total	994,271	1,036,372	1,048,753	1,050,519	1,060,113	1,076,109

In 2021/22, most residential electricity customers were non-contestable customers, with only 743 contestable residential electricity customers in the SWIS, equivalent to 0.06 per cent of total residential customers. Synergy supplied 741 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.

1.1.5 Business electricity customers

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

In 2021/22, there were 12 retailers active in the business electricity market, 10 of which supplied customers through the SWIS. Horizon Power and Rottneest Island Authority were the only retailers supplying customers outside the SWIS.¹⁰

In 2021/22, there were 86,615 non-contestable and 11,845 contestable business electricity customers in the SWIS.¹¹ Non-contestable customers are supplied exclusively by Synergy.

Synergy supplied 56.5 per cent of the contestable customers, Alinta supplied 28.7 per cent, Perth Energy supplied 8.3 per cent and seven small retailers supplied the remaining 6.5 per cent.

Table 3: Number of business electricity customers by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AER Retail	23	12	26	20	14	5
Alinta Energy	2,775	2,858	2,826	3,519	3,509	3,396
Amanda Energy	95	138	121	111	166	251
Change Energy	6	25	57	115	136	146
CleanTech	n/a	n/a	74	63	130	210
Clear Energy	0	0	0	2	6	15
Horizon Power	8,549	7,720	7,884	7,577	7,456	9,101

⁹ Refer to indicator CCR1 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA website.

¹⁰ Rottneest Island Authority supplied businesses on Rottneest Island and Horizon Power supplied businesses in mainland areas of the State outside the SWIS.

¹¹ Refer to indicator CCR4 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA website.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Kleenheat	74	107	126	170	176	141
Peel Renewable	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	5	8
Perth Energy	301	867	413	436	1,051	984
Rottneest Island Authority	24	24	24	25	25	25
Synergy	105,908	92,099	92,144	89,704	93,675	93,304
Total	117,755	103,850	103,695	101,742	106,349	107,586

1.1.6 Pre-payment meter electricity customers

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

Pre-payment meters are currently restricted to customers in Horizon Power's licence area and Synergy's SWIS customers in the Ninga Mia Aboriginal community in the Goldfields.¹²

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 75 or 5.6 per cent in 2021/22.

Table 4: Number of electricity pre-payment meter customers by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	1,190	1,221	1,332	1,296	1,348	1,423
Synergy	14	16	12	11	11	11
Total	1,204	1,237	1,344	1,307	1,359	1,434

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

¹² Electricity Industry (Code of Conduct) (Pre-payment Meter Areas) Notice 2010 and 2016.

- IPower 2 Pty Ltd and IPower Pty Ltd (trading as Simply Energy)
- Synergy.

Table 5 shows the number of licensed gas retailers over time.

Table 5: Number of licensed gas retailers - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

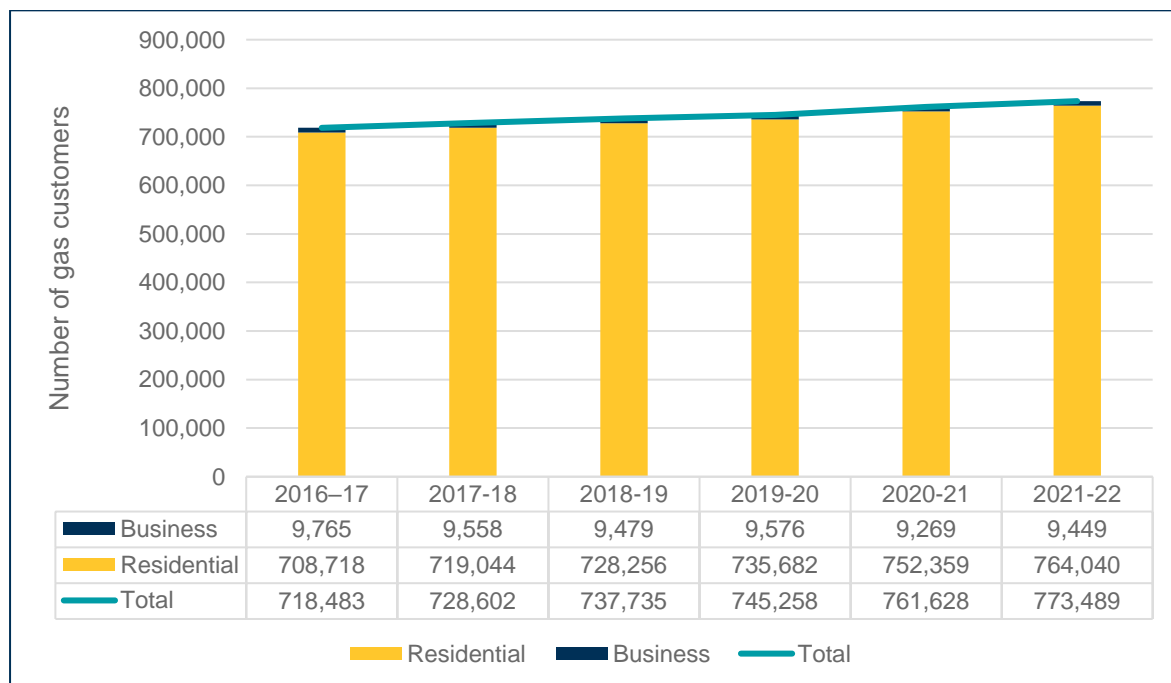
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Gas retailers	7	9	9	9	9	9

AGL, Alinta Energy, Kleenheat, Origin Energy, Perth Energy, Amanda Energy, Simply Energy and Synergy supply customers through the gas distribution networks operated by ATCO Gas Australia.¹³ 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.^{14,15}

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

In 2021/22, the number of residential customers increased by 1.6 per cent. Residential customer numbers have trended upwards for the last six years reported. The number of business customers increased by 1.9 per cent in 2021/22.

Figure 2: Number of residential and business gas customers - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022



¹³ ATCO has gas distribution networks located in the Coastal, Goldfields-Esperance and Great Southern supply [areas](#).

¹⁴ EGDC and Esperance Power Station are related businesses that are owned by Infrastructure Capital Group.

¹⁵ EGDC has notified customers that it will continue to supply gas for a further 12 months and is now due to cease supplying them on 31 March 2023.

1.2.2 Residential gas customers

Table 6 shows the number of residential gas customers by retailer. Alinta Energy and Kleenheat supply most residential gas customers.

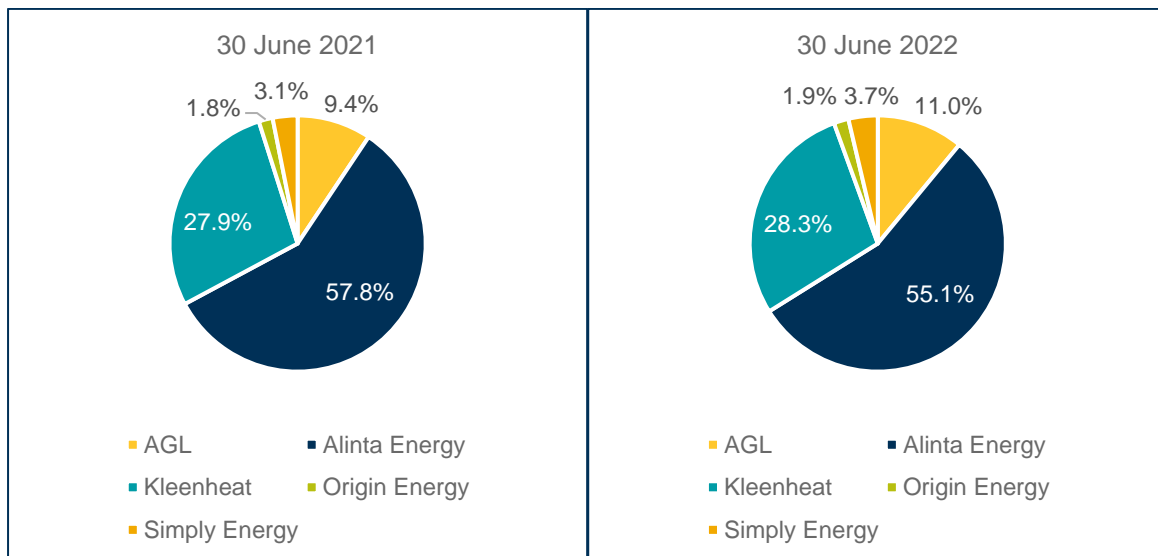
Table 6: Number of residential gas customers by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	20,851	41,197	64,730	70,380	83,909
Alinta Energy	554,903	494,696	460,018	432,750	434,753	421,008
Kleenheat	153,478	196,274	197,325	201,102	210,088	216,380
Origin Energy	n/a	6,880	14,626	13,700	13,235	14,228
EGDC	337	339	317	326	326	322
Perth Energy	0	4	6	3	2	2
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	14,767	23,071	23,575	28,191
Total	708,718	719,044	728,256	735,682	752,359	764,040

The entry of four new retailers to the residential gas market in the coastal supply area in the past five years has reduced Alinta Energy's share of residential customers.¹⁶ In 2021/22, Alinta Energy's market share decreased by 2.7 per cent to 55.1 per cent.

Figure 3 compares the share of the residential coastal supply area gas market held by retailers in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Figure 3: Residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer on 30 June in 2021 and 2022 (%)¹⁷



¹⁶ 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 does not supply customers in the coastal supply area.

¹⁷ Perth Energy has been excluded from Figure 3 because it only had two customers during the reporting period.

During 2021/22, AGL, Origin Energy, Perth Energy and Simply Energy increased their combined share of residential customers from 14.2 per cent to 16.5 per cent. Kleenheat's market share increased by 0.4 percentage points following a 3.0 per cent increase in Kleenheat's customer base (see Table 6).

1.2.3 Business gas customers

Table 7 shows the number of business gas customers by retailer. Alinta Energy and Kleenheat supply most business gas customers.

Table 7: Number of business gas customers by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	580	537	517	497	487
Alinta Energy	7,612	6,497	5,993	5,788	5,457	5,644
Amanda Energy	n/a	n/a	0	1	12	26
Synergy	175	173	144	167	192	159
Kleenheat	1,924	2,070	2,406	2,620	2,535	2,277
Origin Energy	n/a	77	236	206	205	213
EGDC	46	45	41	37	34	33
Perth Energy	8	116	120	229	311	583
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	2	11	26	27
Total	9,765	9,558	9,479	9,576	9,269	9,449

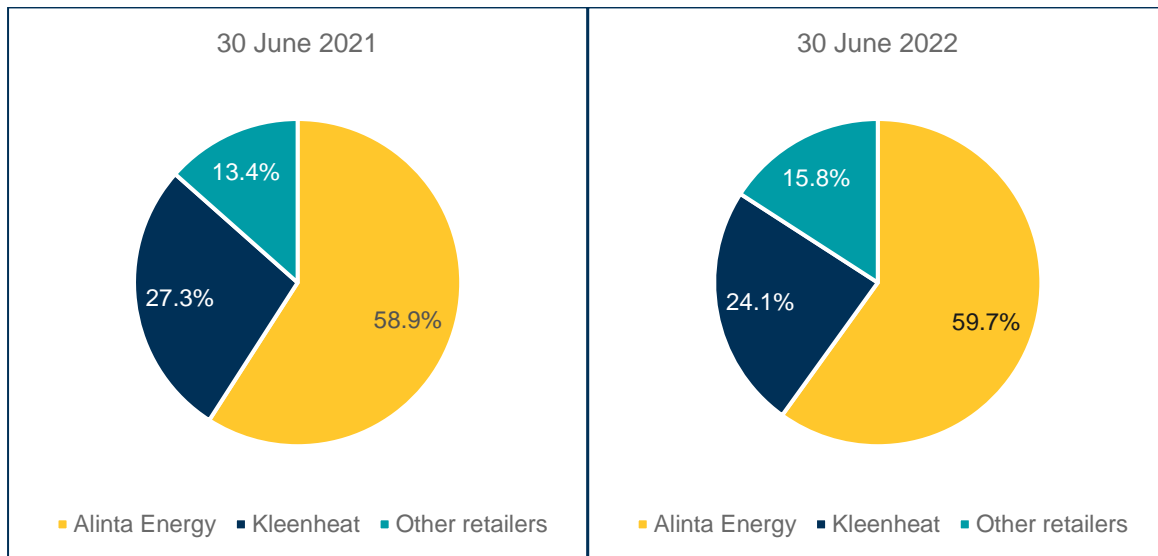
Kleenheat's business customer base decreased for the second year in a row. Following a 3.2 per cent decrease in 2020/21, the number of customers supplied decreased by a further 10.2 per cent in 2021/22.

Alinta Energy's business customer base increased by 3.4 per cent in 2021/22. This was the first increase reported by Alinta since the entry of additional retailers increased competition in the business gas market. Between 2016/17 and 2020/21, the number of business customers supplied by Alinta Energy decreased by 25.9 per cent.

Figure 4 compares the share of the business gas market held by retailers in the coastal supply area in 2020/21 and 2021/22.¹⁸

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 does not supply customers in the coastal supply area.

Figure 4: Business gas market share in the coastal supply area by retailer on 30 June in 2021 and 2022 (%)



The 3.4 per cent increase in Alinta Energy's business customer base has translated to a 0.8 percentage point increase in its share of the business gas market in 2021/22.

2. Payment difficulties

Main Points

- In 2021/22, many of the support measures for energy customers introduced by the State Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic ended.
- The percentage of residential and business electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill increased in 2021/22.
- The percentage of residential and business gas customers granted more time to pay a bill in 2021/22 was the lowest for the six years reported.
- The number of residential electricity and gas customers on an instalment plan increased in 2021/22.
- The number of residential electricity customers successfully completing their instalment plans increased in 2021/22.

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). 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 who are experiencing payment difficulties.²⁰

- 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.

¹⁹ The Gas Compendium is included as licence conditions in all gas trading licences. A copy of these licences is available on the ERA [website](#). The Electricity Code is available on the ERA [website](#).

²⁰ On 20 February 2023, amendments to the Electricity Code made by the ERA will commence, including extending payment assistance measures to all customers. More information on the code review and the code amendments is available on the ERA [website](#).

- 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.

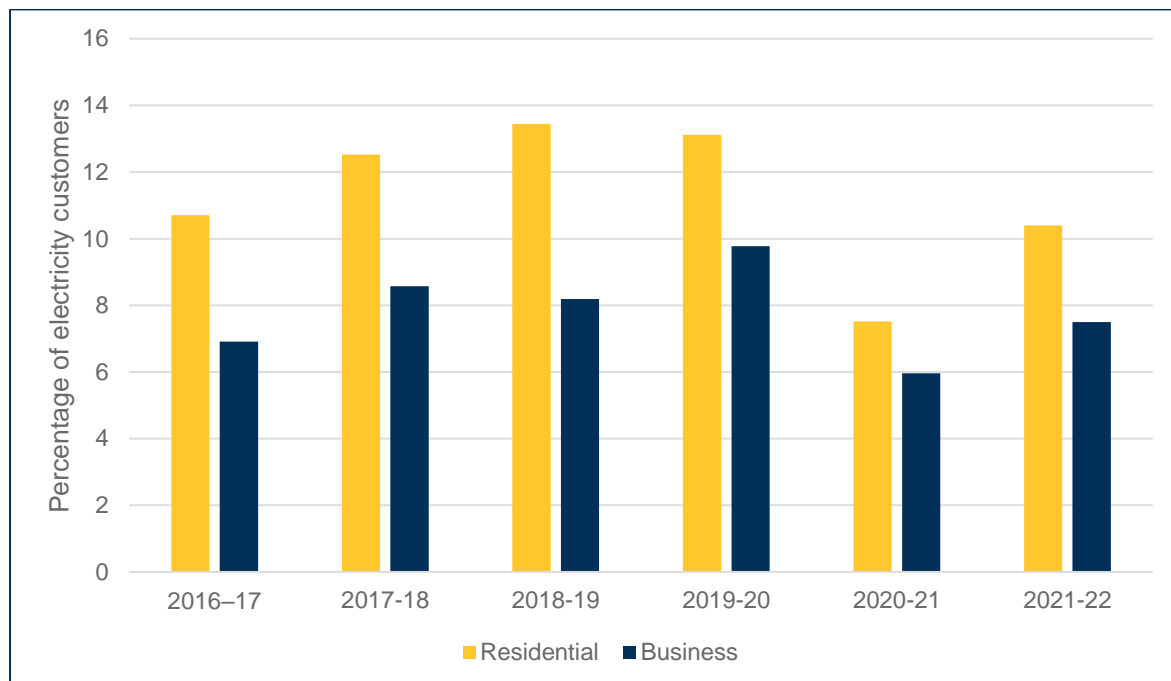
2.1 Electricity

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 increased in 2021/22 to 10.4 per cent and 7.5 per cent, respectively.

Figure 5: Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (%)



2.1.2 Electricity customers on instalment plans

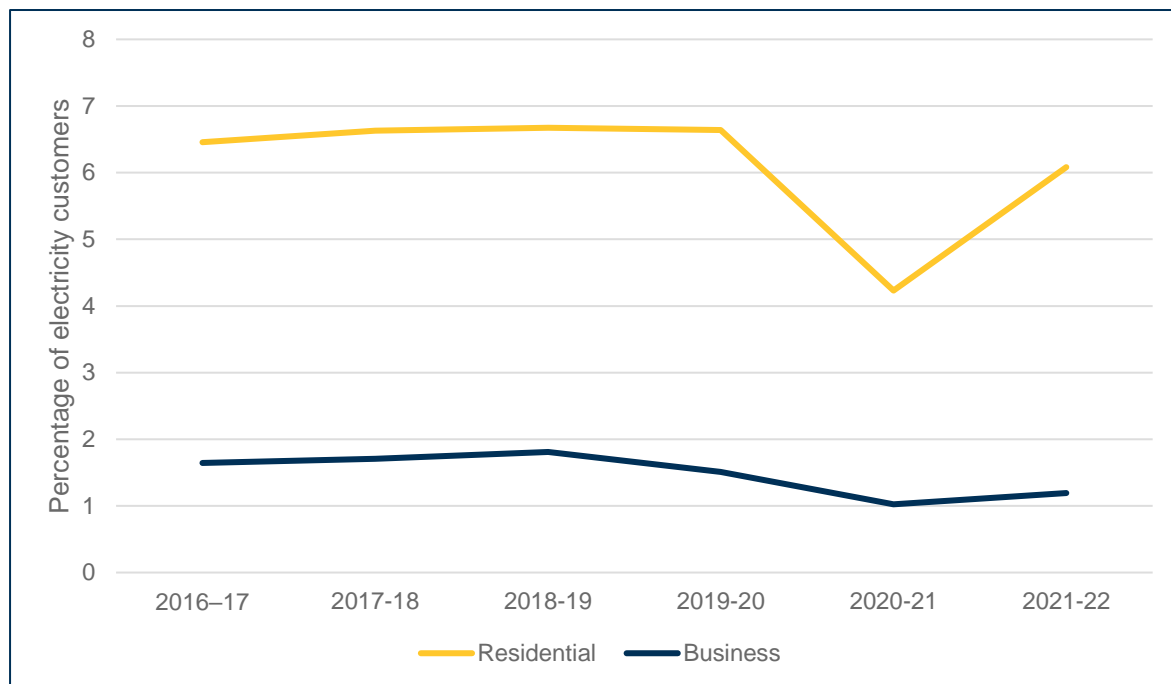
Figure 6 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customers who were on an instalment plan.

In 2021/22, the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan increased to 6.1 per cent, close to the relatively constant percentage of customers on instalment plans from 2016/17 to 2019/20 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the State Government's COVID-19 response.²¹

²¹ The decrease in residential customers on an instalment plan in 2020/21 was due to the State Government's COVID-19 [response](#), which included a freeze on electricity price increases for 2020/21, a moratorium on disconnections and a \$600 electricity bill credit paid to every Western Australian household.

The percentage of business customers on an instalment plan increased to 1.2 per cent. The percentage of business customers on an instalment plan in 2021/22 remained lower than levels prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.²²

Figure 6: Electricity customers on instalment plans - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (%)



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 10.4 per cent in 2021/22.

Table 8: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2022

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	929	786	243	393	598
Synergy	4,853	5,978	5,629	5,672	6,098
Total	5,782	6,764	5,872	6,065	6,696

²² This is likely due to the State Government's COVID-19 assistance to businesses during 2020/21, including providing lockdown grants to small businesses due to the 2021 Anzac Day long weekend lockdown, and 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.

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 2021/22.

The proportion of total customers on instalment plans, excluding hardship program customers, for Horizon Power is 3.2 per cent in 2020/21 and 3 per cent in 2021/22 and for Synergy is 3 per cent in 2020/21 and 4.1 per cent in 2021/22.

Overall, 0.4 per cent of Horizon Power's customers successfully completed instalment plans in 2020/21 and in 2021/22. For Synergy, 2.4 per cent of customers successfully completed instalment plans in 2021/22, compared to 1.8 per cent in the previous year.

Horizon Power also reported a decrease in the number of customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment, 2.6 per cent in 2021/22 compared to 2.8 per cent the previous year. Synergy reported an increase in the number of customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment (from 1.2 per cent in 2020/21 to 1.7 per cent in 2021/22), although this was still substantially lower than pre-pandemic levels.

During the five years reported, the majority of Horizon Power's instalment plans were cancelled for non-payment each year. Over the same period approximately half of Synergy's instalment plans were successfully completed each year.

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 2021/22

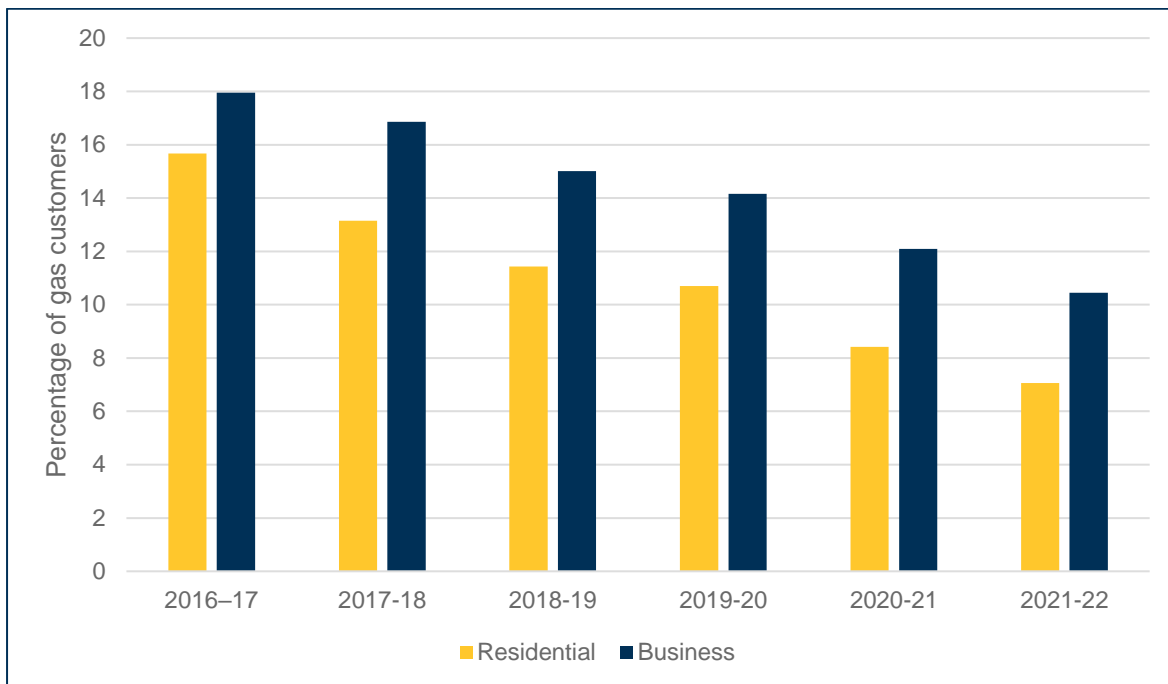
		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	Successfully completed instalment plan	736	421	449	131	167
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	1,912	2,073	2,384	1,040	973
Synergy	Successfully completed instalment plan	28,249	25,020	30,891	18,894	25,464
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	28,912	31,331	28,306	12,513	17,511

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.

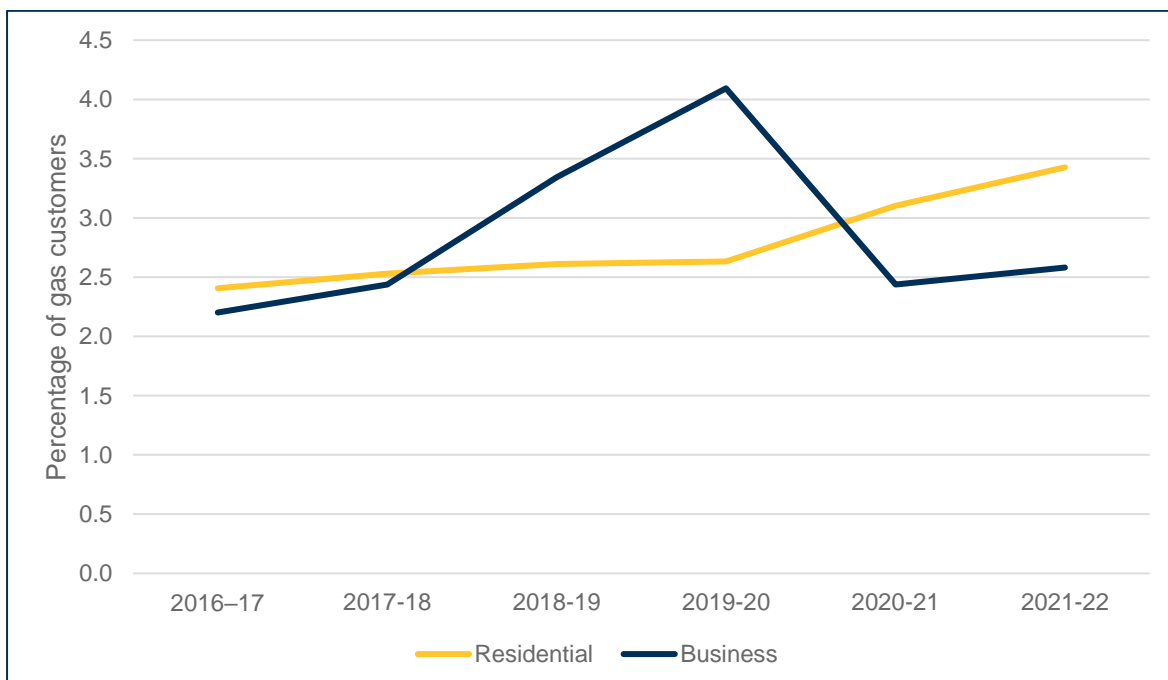
Fewer residential and business gas customers were granted more time to pay a bill in 2021/22. During the COVID-19 pandemic, retailers voluntarily increased their support to customers which reduced the need for customers to request more time to pay and this continued in 2021/22.

Figure 7: Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (%)

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 residential gas customers on an instalment plan has trended upwards for the past five years. In 2021/22, the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan (3.4 percent) was the highest for the six years reported. The percentage of business customers on an instalment plan increased to 2.6 per cent.

Figure 8: Gas customers on an instalment plan - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (%)

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.^{24,25}

Table 10: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2022

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	Number	37	133	118	245	289
	%	0.18	0.32	0.18	0.35	0.34
Alinta Energy	Number	7,971	8,608	7,791	6,644	8,757
	%	1.63	1.89	1.80	1.53	2.08
Kleenheat	Number	3,072	1,724	1,263	949	633
	%	1.57	0.88	0.63	0.45	0.29
Origin Energy	Number	1	37	28	47	57
	%	0.01	0.25	0.20	0.36	0.40
EGDC	Number	18	0	2	3	1
	%	5.37	0.00	0.61	0.92	0.31
Simply Energy ²⁶	Number	n/a	21	155	417	235
	%	n/a	0.14	0.67	1.77	0.83
Total	Number	11,099	10,544	9,380	8,305	9,972
	%	1.55	1.46	1.28	1.10	1.31

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.²⁷

The data presents a mixed picture, for both 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 2021/22.

Alinta Energy and Kleenheat reported similar numbers of non-hardship customers who successfully completed their instalment plans in 2021/22 as 2020/21, while AGL, Origin Energy and Simply Energy all reported an increase in successful completions 2021/22.

²⁴ The ERA commenced collecting data for this indicator in 2017/18.

²⁵ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 10 because it did not have any customers on an instalment plan during the reporting period.

²⁶ 2018/19 is the first year that Simply Energy provided data to the ERA.

²⁷ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 11 because it did not have any customers on an instalment plan during the reporting period.

Alinta Energy and Kleenheat reported a decrease in the number of non-hardship customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment, while AGL and Origin Energy reported increases in plan cancellations in 2021/22.

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 30 June 2022

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	Successfully completed instalment plan	25	268	409	386	570
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	79	634	766	643	903
Alinta Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	4,816	4,950	6,964	5,773	5,465
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	1,956	1,978	3,936	2,820	724
Kleenheat	Successfully completed instalment plan	1,680	2,722	2,280	1,661	1,644
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	2,983	3,231	2,420	1,554	1,113
Origin Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	0	28	133	78	99
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	0	197	242	157	254
EGDC	Successfully completed instalment plan	2	0	3	3	0
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	0	0	1	0	0

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Simply Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	n/a	1	29	156	263
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	n/a	16	359	617	608

3. Energy bill debt of customers (excluding customers on a hardship program)

Main points

- In 2021/22, average bill debt for Synergy's residential electricity customers was the highest for the six years reported.
- The average energy bill debt was 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.

Energy bill debt is defined as an amount owed to the retailer that has been outstanding for 90 calendar days or more.²⁸

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.

Table 12: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	985	1,498	670	836	919	915
	Average bill debt (\$)	850	715	903	1,496	1,066	974
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	21,867	10,669	9,978	10,451	9,389	11,947
	Average bill debt (\$)	363	396	379	541	562	766

The average debt of Horizon Power's customers has been much higher than that of Synergy's customers for the past six years.²⁹ In 2021/22, the average bill debt of Synergy's customers was the highest for the six years reported.

²⁸ ERA, Electricity Retail Licence Performance Reporting Handbook, April 2019, p.23 ([online](#)).

²⁹ 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.

The number of Synergy customers repaying an energy bill debt increased by 27.2 per cent in 2021/22.

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.³⁰

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.

Table 13: Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AER Retail	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	1	2	1	1	2
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	3,000	6,000	3,338	2,127	3,500
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	10	303	48	353	292	272
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,450	1,390	2,083	6,194	3,059	3,250
Amanda Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	17	13	4	2	0	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,061	3,432	2,527	433	0	0
Change Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	0	0	1	3	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	0	0	1,260	1,899	0
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	148	211	118	142	175	257
	Average bill debt (\$)	3,379	3,931	5,590	5,135	4,903	5,477
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1	0	1	11	1	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,930	0	1,005	2,498	149	4,973
Peel Renewable	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	3	8
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	3,309	315
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	5	3	3	56	45	3
	Average bill debt (\$)	2,285	0	15,100	3,983	3,800	37,333

³⁰ A-Star, Clear Energy, CleanTech and the Rottnest Island Authority have been excluded from Table 13 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past six years.

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,984	1,739	1,326	538	761	828
	Average bill debt (\$)	893	1,094	1,172	2,599	2,516	2,200

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.³¹

In 2021/22, four retailers (AGL, Kleenheat, EGDC and Simply Energy) reported an increase in the number of customers repaying a bill debt and all retailers, except for EGDC and Origin Energy, reported an increase in the average energy bill debt for residential gas customers.

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 during the pandemic as this led to some customers accruing more bill debt than would have been the case before disconnections were suspended.

Table 14: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	261	1,135	1,971	2,055	2,368
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	136	363	497	760	825
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	15,579	1,318	1,419	13,026	26,821	15,854
	Average bill debt (\$)	47	88	80	163	259	401
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	570	1,497	1,979	1,708	2,778	3,045
	Average bill debt (\$)	76	89	116	134	298	384
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	42	267	428	464	424
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	103	190	223	368	286
EGDC	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1	2	0	2	3	4
	Average bill debt (\$)	220	234	0	365	254	157

³¹ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 14 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past six years.

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Simply Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	n/a	242	1,690	1,740	2,470
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	n/a	95	190	201	288

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.³² The data presents a mixed picture, for both the number of customers repaying a bill debt and the average amount of the debt.

In 2021/22 AGL, Alinta and Kleenheat reported similar numbers of customers repaying a bill debt compared to 2020/21, but the average debt customers were repaying decreased.

Table 15: Business gas customers repaying an energy debt and average bill debt - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	27	37	33	18	18
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	367	608	1,137	967	556
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	226	12	8	163	310	311
	Average bill debt (\$)	510	541	305	1,016	1,471	1,014
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	58	10	7	17	11	6
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,804	902	1,047	1,307	1,148	1,301
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	2	19	28	75	39	34
	Average bill debt (\$)	272	391	439	998	715	589
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	0	7	7	7	10
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	0	298	1,950	3,286	3,816
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	0	2	18	22	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	0	658	769	820	2,500
Simply Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	3
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	254

³² Amanda Energy and EGDC have been excluded from Table 15 because they have not had any customers repaying an energy bill debt for the past six years.

4. Hardship programs

Main points

- The total number of electricity customers on a hardship program increased by 45.8 per cent in 2021/22, returning to pre-pandemic levels.
- The total number of gas customers on a hardship program increased by 27.1 per cent in 2021/22, the highest number recorded since reporting began in 2016/17.
- The majority (89.7 per cent) of electricity customers successfully completed their hardship plan, compared to 71.5 percent of gas customers.
- The average bill debt of both electricity and gas customers decreased slightly but remained higher than the average bill debt reported pre-pandemic.
- The average bill debt of electricity customers on a hardship program was 48 per cent higher than the average bill debt of gas customers.
- The average bill debt for Western Australian electricity and gas customers was substantially less than 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 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 Gas Compendium require retailers to offer assistance to residential customers experiencing financial hardship. This assistance includes:³³

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

³³ The [Gas Compendium](#) and [Electricity Code](#) are available on the ERA website.

Retailers must ensure that any instalment plan is fair and reasonable, taking into account the customer's capacity to pay and their consumption history.³⁴

The Australian Energy Regulator and Essential Services Commission of Victoria have required electricity and gas retailers to report hardship program data for several years. Where possible, the ERA's indicators have been aligned with the Australian Energy Regulator's indicators to allow comparison of Western Australian data with other jurisdictions. State-based data is indicative only and 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.³⁵

4.1 Electricity

4.1.1 Electricity customers on a hardship program

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

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

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	Number	1,150	912	1,511	1,518	1,126	1,007
	%	2.92	2.31	3.98	4.11	3.11	2.73
Synergy	Number	20,798	30,640	33,707	28,899	23,348	34,678
	%	2.18	3.07	3.33	2.85	2.28	3.34
Total	Number	21,948	31,552	35,218	30,417	24,474	35,685
	%	2.21	3.04	3.36	2.9	2.31	3.32

The total number of electricity customers in a hardship program increased by 45.8 per cent in 2021/22, returning to pre-pandemic levels.

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

Most customers exiting a hardship program in all five years reported did so because they had either successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement to exit the program. The percentage of customers who successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement in 2022/21 was 89.7 per cent.

³⁴ Retailers are also required to offer an instalment plan to customers experiencing payment difficulties, but only on request.

³⁵ 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](#).

Table 17: Reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program between 2017/18 and 2021/22

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Successfully completed	Number	17,242	22,508	26,879	21,131	14,285
	%	88.2	87.9	90.2	94.0	89.7
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	Number	132	150	302	56	112
	%	0.7	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.7
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ³⁶	Number	2,168	2,940	2,617	1,292	1,522
	%	11.1	11.5	8.8	5.7	9.6

4.1.2 Electricity hardship customer debt

Figure 9 shows the average bill debt for electricity hardship customers by retailer and the combined average bill debt across both retailers. The total number of customers on a hardship program increased in 2021/22 and the average energy bill debt of Horizon Power and Synergy hardship customers remained higher than pre-pandemic amounts.

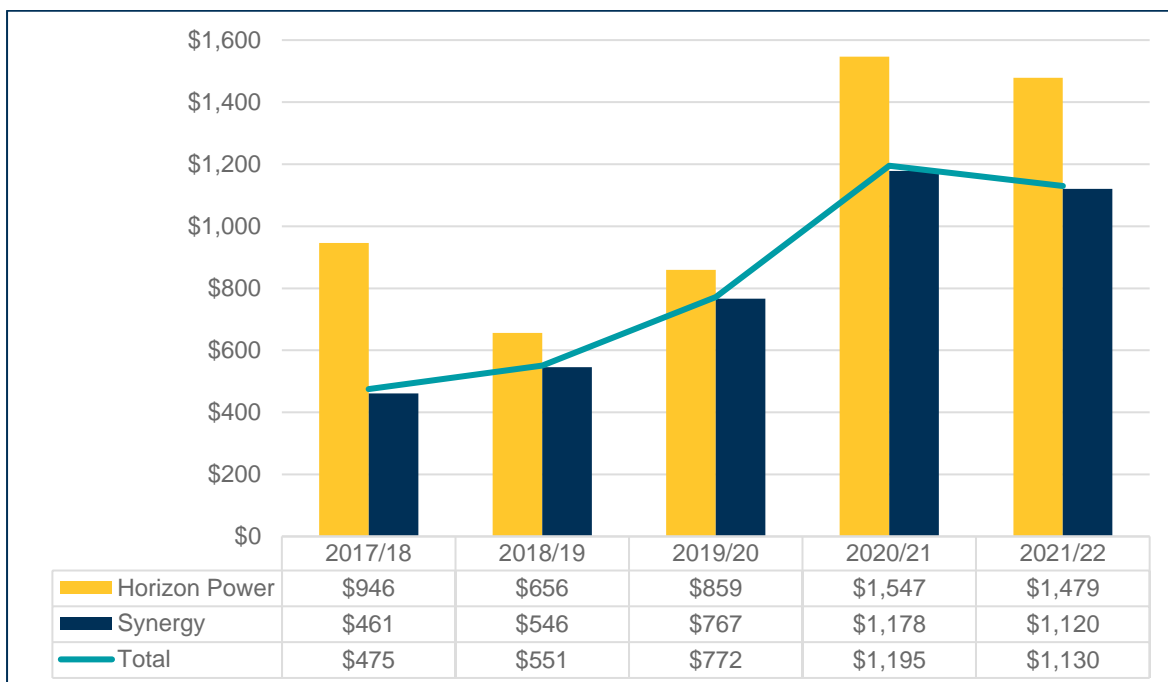
Figure 9: Electricity hardship customer average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

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

³⁶ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to make contact with the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

Table 18: Electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program by retailer between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (\$)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	862	1,442	758 ³⁷	1,255	851
Synergy	513	503	560	752	792
Total	531	579	580	798	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.³⁸

Table 19: Number and percentage of gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	Number	n/a	4	42	52	102	33
	%	n/a	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.14	0.04
Alinta Energy	Number	5,272	4,434	5,012	3,977	3,733	5,003
	%	0.95	0.90	1.09	0.92	0.86	1.19
Kleenheat	Number	391	790	496	548	735	758
	%	0.25	0.40	0.25	0.27	0.35	0.35
Origin Energy	Number	n/a	0	21	23	23	74
	%	n/a	0.00	0.14	0.17	0.17	0.52
EGDC	Number	6	4	5	2	2	0
	%	1.78	1.18	1.58	0.61	0.61	0.00
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	3	72	171	188
	%	n/a	n/a	0.02	0.31	0.73	0.67
Total	Number	5,669	5,232	5,579	4,674	4,766	6,056
	%	0.80	0.73	0.77	0.64	0.63	0.79

The total number of gas customers on a hardship program increased by 27.1 per cent in 2021/22, the highest number in the six years reported. However, the number of gas customers on a hardship program represents less than one per cent of all residential gas customers.

³⁷ Horizon Power reported in 2019/20 that it 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).

³⁸ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 19 because none of its customers have been on a hardship program for the past six years.

Comparing Table 19 with Table 16 shows that the overall percentage of gas customers on a hardship program is much lower than electricity customers.

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 five years reported (71.5 per cent). Comparing Table 20 with Table 17 shows that the percentage of gas customers successfully completing a program (71.5 per cent) is much lower than for electricity customers (89.7 per cent).

Table 20: Reasons gas customers exited a hardship program between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Successfully completed	Number	11,068	3,410	3,612	2,805	3,614
	%	54.9	24.4	34.8	68.4	71.5
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	Number	4,322	4,114	1,864	748	738
	%	21.4	29.4	18	18.2	14.6
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ³⁹	Number	4,775	6,466	4,891	550	705
	%	23.7	46.2	47.2	13.4	13.9

4.2.2 Hardship debt for gas customers

Table 21 shows the average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer at 30 June.⁴⁰ The total average bill debt of gas customers on a hardship program decreased by 2.4 per cent to \$761 in 2020/21, but remained higher than pre-pandemic amounts.

Table 21: Average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (\$)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	101	500	683	1,025	1,116
Alinta Energy	246	312	206	578	854	778
Kleenheat	126	140	220	227	461	550
Origin Energy	n/a	0	138	102	317	660
EGDC	381	0	402	239	197	0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	323	444	426	1,121
Total	238	286	209	527	779	761

Table 22 shows the average bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program. Each retailer that reported having customers on a hardship program in

³⁹ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to contact the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

⁴⁰ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 21 and 22 because none of its customers have been on a hardship program for the past six years.

2021/22 reported the highest average debt of customers at the time they entered a hardship program over the five years reported.

Table 22: Average bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program 2017/18 to 2021/22 (\$)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	86	392	605	916	1,168
Alinta Energy	229	192	568	637	774
Kleenheat	267	344	262	286	482
Origin Energy	n/a	237	179	304	604
EGDC	619	757	367	583	0
Simply Energy	n/a	373	410	378	886
Total	230	199	524	575	712

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. The average bill debt for Western Australian electricity and gas customers was the lowest in the three jurisdictions in all six years.

Table 23: Jurisdictional comparison of average bill debt of electricity and gas hardship customers between 2017/18 to 2021/22 (\$)⁴¹

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Electricity						
Western Australia	625	475	551	772	1,195	1,130
South Australia	1,496	1,694	1,863	1,970	2,438	2,424
New South Wales	1,006	916	1,212	1,274	1,630	1,707
Gas						
Western Australia	245	286	209	527	779	761
South Australia	521	585	621	599	790	907
New South Wales	682	668	684	658	786	851

⁴¹ South Australia and New South Wales data from: Australian Energy Regulator, 2022, *Annual Retail Market Report 2021-22 – Charts and Data*, ([online](#)) [accessed 30 Nov 2022].

5. Disconnections

Main points

- The resumption of disconnections in 2021/22 resulted in an increase in the number of electricity and gas residential and business customer disconnections compared to 2020/21.
- Electricity residential disconnections and gas residential and business disconnections remained much lower than pre-pandemic levels.
- In 2021/22, the Western Australian electricity and gas residential disconnection rates were higher than New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, but still lower than pre-pandemic rates.

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 outlines disconnections that resulted from a customer's failure to pay a bill.^{42,43}

5.1 Total electricity disconnections

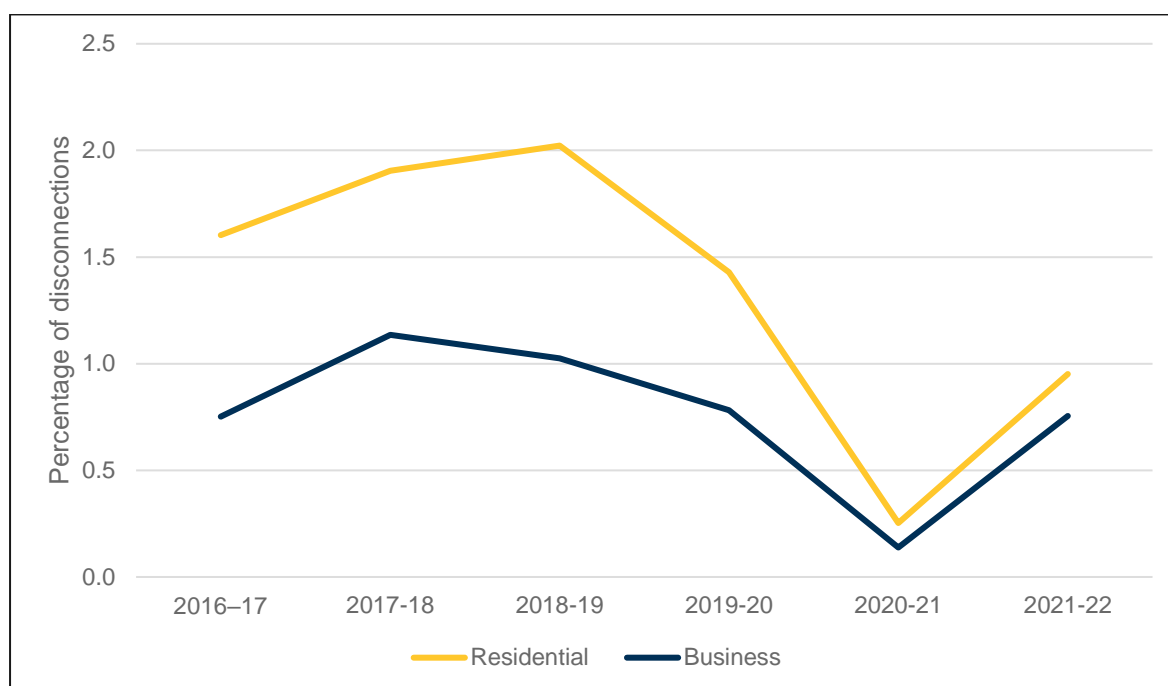
Figure 10 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customer disconnections.

In 2021/22, the percentage of residential and business electricity disconnections increased due to the resumption of disconnections after the State Government's moratorium on disconnections ended.⁴⁴ However, the percentage of residential electricity disconnections continued to be lower than pre-pandemic levels.

⁴² Customers can also be disconnected for taking supply without having an account with the retailer (called 'non-application') or denying access to the meter.

⁴³ Refer to section 4.3 of the Handbook for definitions.

⁴⁴ Customers flagged as hardship, on an active payment plan or payment extension were exempt from disconnection during 2020/21. Synergy resumed disconnections on 8 March 2021 and Horizon Power on 8 June 2021.

Figure 10: Residential and business electricity customer disconnections from 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2022 (%)

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 2016/2017 and 2021/22

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Horizon Power	Number	1,826	1,943	3,156 ⁴⁵	2,741	251	2,590
	%	4.64	4.93	8.32	7.42	0.69	7.02
Synergy	Number	14,109	17,800	18,056	12,273	2,432	7,651
	%	1.48	1.79	1.79	1.21	0.24	0.74
Total	Number	15,935	19,743	21,212	15,014	2,683	10,241
	%	1.60	1.91	2.02	1.43	0.25	0.95

Total residential electricity disconnections increased in 2021/22. For Horizon Power customers the number of disconnections increased back to pre-pandemic levels, while for Synergy customers the number of disconnections remained lower than pre-pandemic levels.

⁴⁵ 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.

5.3 Electricity business disconnections

Table 25 shows the number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer.⁴⁶

In 2021/22, Alinta and Kleenheat reported no business customer disconnections. Amanda Energy, Horizon Power, Perth Energy and Synergy all reported an increase in business customer disconnections.

Table 25: Number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer 2016/17 to 2021/22

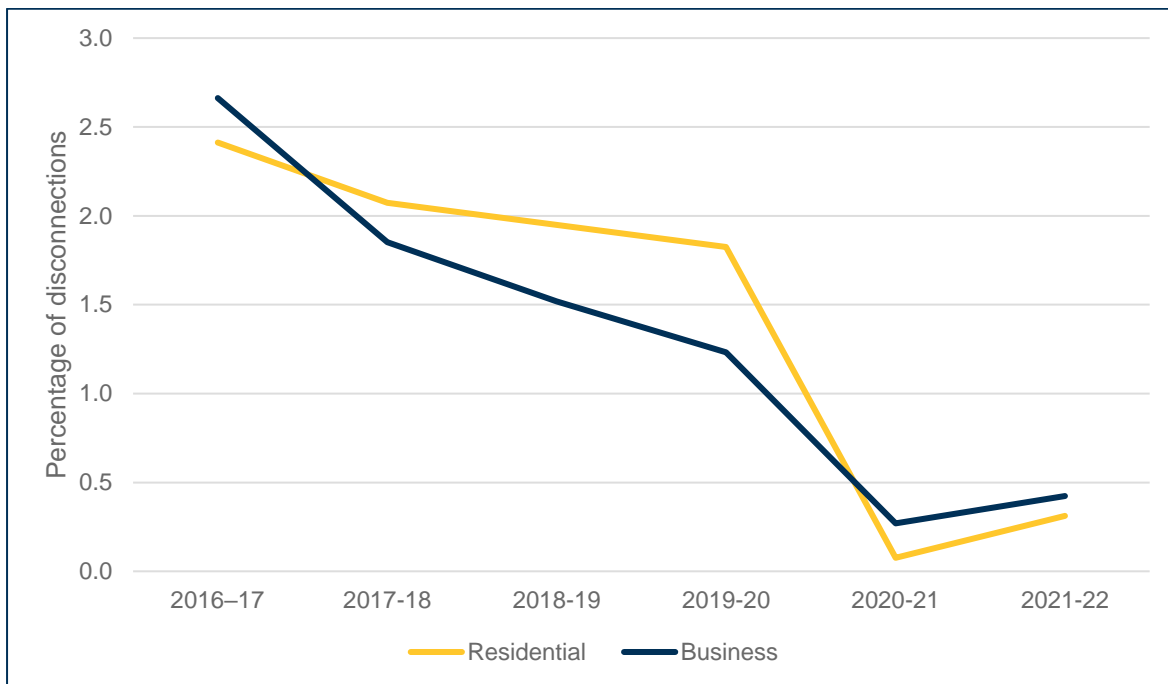
		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	Number	16	11	13	6	0	0
	%	0.58	0.38	0.46	0.17	0.0	0.0
Amanda Energy	Number	0	1	1	0	0	1
	%	0.0	0.72	0.83	0.0	0.0	0.40
Horizon Power	Number	144	124	82	128	4	96
	%	1.68	1.61	1.04	1.69	0.05	1.05
Kleenheat	Number	2	2	3	1	1	0
	%	2.70	1.87	2.38	0.59	0.57	0.00
Perth Energy	Number	4	15	18	29	3	41
	%	1.33	1.73	4.36	6.65	0.29	4.17
Synergy	Number	719	1,026	946	631	139	674
	%	0.68	1.11	1.03	0.70	0.15	0.72
Total	Number	885	1,179	1,063	795	147	812
	%	0.75	1.14	1.03	0.78	0.14	0.75

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 increased in 2021/22, but were still lower than pre-pandemic levels. As part of their continued response to COVID-19, many gas retailers continued to pause disconnections for at least part of 2021/22, which accounts for most of the continued reduction in disconnections.

⁴⁶ Seven 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, Peel Renewable and Rottnest Island Authority.

Figure 11: Residential and business gas customer disconnections 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)

5.5 Gas residential disconnections

Table 26 shows the number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁴⁷

With most retailers recommencing disconnections during 2021/22 Alinta, Origin Energy and EGDC not surprisingly reported an increase in residential disconnections in that year. Kleenheat did not disconnect any residential gas customers during 2021/22.

⁴⁷ AGL and Perth Energy did not disconnect any residential customers and have been excluded from Table 26.

Table 26: Number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2016/17 to 2021/22

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	Number	14,970	13,161	12,125	11,234	0	1,925
	%	2.70	2.66	2.64	2.60	0.0	0.46
Kleenheat	Number	2,121	1,744	2,007	1,910	0	0
	%	1.38	0.89	1.02	0.95	0.0	0.0
Origin Energy	Number	n/a	0	48	95	3	113
	%	n/a	0.0	0.33	0.69	0.02	0.79
EGDC	Number	6	8	12	8	5	11
	%	1.78	2.36	3.79	2.45	1.53	3.42
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	8	180	564	335
	%	n/a	n/a	0.05	0.78	2.39	1.19
Total	Number	17,097	14,913	14,200	13,427	572	2,384
	%	2.41	2.07	1.95	1.83	0.08	0.31

5.6 Gas business disconnections

Table 27 shows the number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁴⁸ After the voluntary pause on disconnections due to COVID-19 was lifted, there was a slight increase in the number of business gas customer disconnections in 2021/22, but the number remained lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Table 27: Number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2016/17 to 2021/22

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	Number	177	147	117	80	0	32
	%	2.33	2.26	1.95	1.38	0.0	0.57
Synergy	Number	1	0	0	0	1	0
	%	0.57	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.52	0.0
Kleenheat	Number	82	30	26	37	22	7
	%	4.26	1.45	1.08	1.41	0.87	0.31
EGDC	Number	0	0	1	1	1	0
	%	0.0	0.0	2.44	2.70	2.94	0.0

⁴⁸ AGL, Amanda Energy, Origin Energy and Perth Energy did not disconnect any business customers and have been excluded from Table 27.

		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	n/a	0	0	1	1
	%	n/a	n/a	0.0	0.0	3.85	3.70
Total	Number	260	177	144	118	25	40
	%	2.66	1.85	1.52	1.23	0.27	0.42

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.

Provisions the Australian Energy Regulator and the Essential Services Commission in Victoria put in the place to protect customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, including limiting disconnections, were all phased out in 2022.

In 2021/22 Western Australian residential electricity disconnection percentages were the highest of the four jurisdictions and gas disconnections was the second highest of the four jurisdictions.⁴⁹ However, they were still lower than pre-pandemic disconnection rates.

Table 28: Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections 2017 to 2022 (%)

	New South Wales ⁵⁰	South Australia	Victoria ⁵¹	Western Australia
Electricity				
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
2021/22	0.28	0.56	0.52	0.91
Gas				
2016/17	0.43	0.87	0.91	2.41
2017/18	0.39	1.03	1.11	2.07

⁴⁹ This could be due to differences in the timing of the lifting of customer support mechanisms introduced during the pandemic.

⁵⁰ South Australia and New South Wales data from: Australian Energy Regulator, 2022, *Annual Retail Market Report 2021-22 – Charts and Data*, ([online](#)) [accessed 30 Nov 2022].

⁵¹ Victoria data from: Essential Services Commission, 2022, *Victorian Energy Market Report – Victorian Energy Market Dashboard*, ([online](#)) [accessed 30 Nov 2022].

	New South Wales ⁵⁰	South Australia	Victoria ⁵¹	Western Australia
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
2021/22	0.27	0.40	0.19	0.31

6. Reconnections

Main points

- Electricity residential disconnections and gas residential and business disconnections all remained lower in 2021/22 than pre-pandemic levels, so there was a corresponding reduction in the number of reconnections.
- The percentage of residential electricity reconnections was 54.7 per cent for Synergy customers and 87.1 per cent for Horizon Power customers in 2021/22.

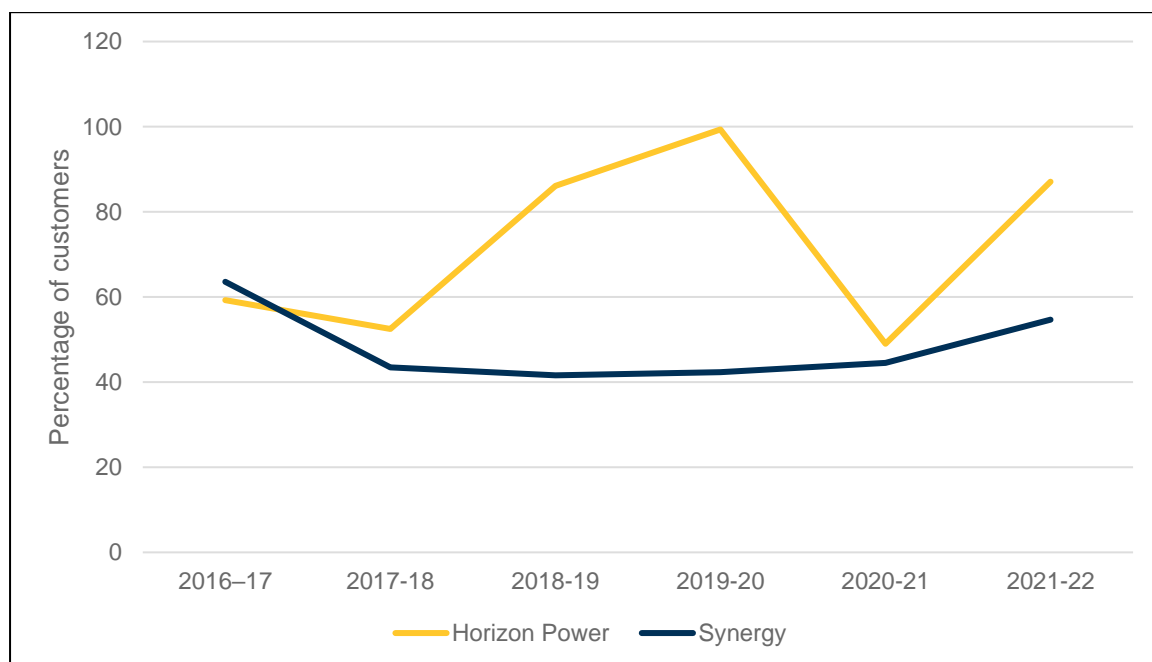
Reconnection indicators apply only to the reconnection of a customer in the same name and at the same address as the disconnection. The total number of reconnections each year helps to identify customers who were not reconnected at all.⁵²

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 (87.1 per cent) in 2021/22 was higher than 2020/21 and similar to the levels reported in 2018/19.⁵³ Synergy's reconnection percentage of 54.7 per cent in 2021/22 is higher than the levels reported between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

Figure 12: Residential electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer between 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)



⁵² 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.

⁵³ 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.

6.2 Business electricity reconnections

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

The percentage of business electricity reconnections for Synergy and Horizon Power increased to 48.7 per cent and 44.8 per cent respectively in 2021/22.

Table 29: Business electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)⁵⁴

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	n/a	n/a
Amanda Energy	n/a	0.0	100.0	n/a	n/a	0.0
Horizon Power	66.7	74.2	78.0	87.5	25.0	44.8
Kleenheat	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	100.0	n/a
Perth Energy	100.0	33.3	72.2	51.7	66.7	31.7
Synergy	51.7	35.1	33.5	29.6	28.8	48.7

6.3 Gas residential reconnections

Table 30 shows the percentage of residential gas customer disconnections that were reconnected by each retailer.⁵⁵ Kleenheat did not disconnect any residential gas customers in 2021/22.

Table 30: Gas residential customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2017 to 2022 (%)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	66.0	66.7	66.7	73.1	n/a	45.0
Kleenheat	62.1	76.8	53.5	52.7	n/a	n/a
Origin Energy	n/a	0.0	31.3	32.6	0.0	41.6
EGDC	16.7	75.0	50.0	75.0	60.0	100.0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	50.0	54.4	41.8	31.9

⁵⁴ Alinta Energy and Kleenheat did not disconnect any electricity business customers in 2021/22.

⁵⁵ AGL and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 30 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

6.4 Gas business reconnections

Table 31 shows the percentage of business gas customer disconnections reconnected by each retailer.⁵⁶ Synergy and EGDC did not disconnect any business gas customers in 2021/22.

Table 31: Gas business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2017 to 2022 (%)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	59.3	53.7	55.6	36.3	n/a	43.8
Synergy	0.0	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
Kleenheat	93.9	56.7	42.3	32.4	13.6	57.1
EGDC	n/a	n/a	100.0	100.0	100.0	n/a
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	100.0

⁵⁶ AGL, Amanda Energy, Origin Energy and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 31 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

7. Customer service

Main points

- Synergy reported an increase in the number of complaints from residential electricity customers in 2021/22 to the highest level in the six years reported.
- Most complaints from electricity and gas customers during 2021/22 were about billing, continuing the trend seen in previous years.
- The total number of calls to electricity and gas retailer call centres increased in 2021/22 but remained lower than pre-pandemic levels.

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.”⁵⁷

Retailers are also required to comply with the ERA’s customer complaints guidelines, which clarify the distinction between queries, complaints and other customer communications.⁵⁸

Customer complaints are separated into four categories: billing complaints, marketing complaints, transfer complaints and other complaints.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ 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.

⁵⁷ 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.

⁵⁸ A copy of the guidelines is available on the ERA [website](#).

⁵⁹ Refer to section 4.5 of the Handbook for definitions.

⁶⁰ 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

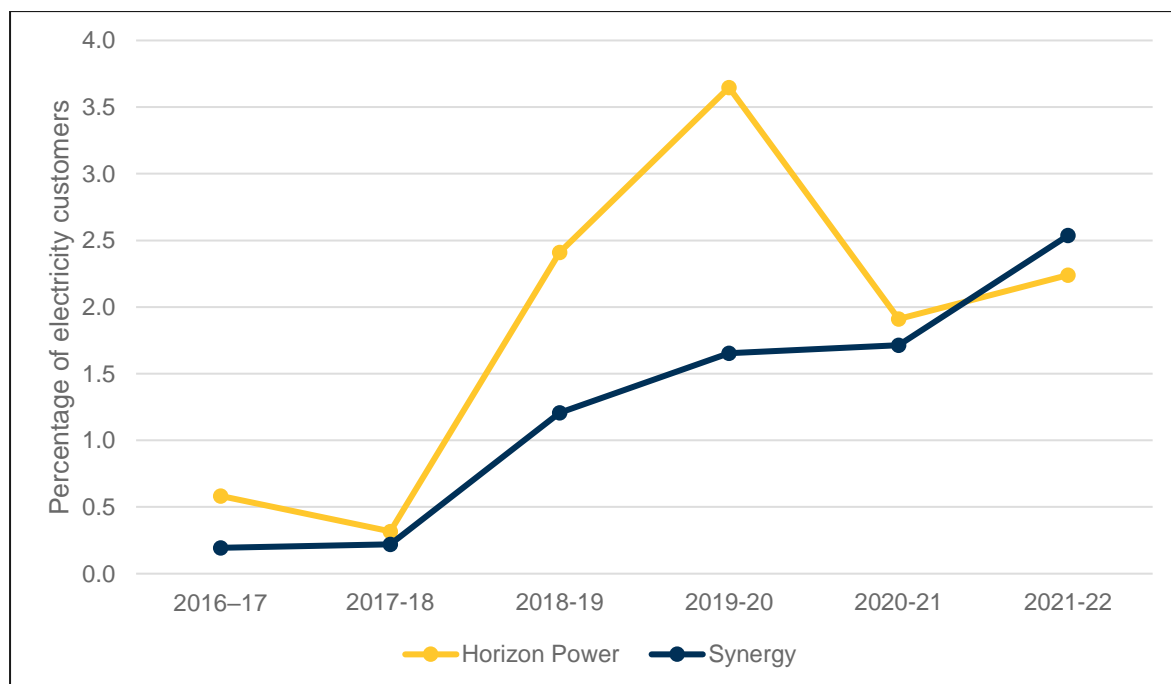
7.1.1 Residential electricity customer complaints

Figure 13 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total residential customers, made to electricity retailers.

Synergy had the highest percentage of complaints for the six years reported, likely related to several factors, including the lifting of the disconnection moratorium and other COVID-19 relief measures. Synergy also issued a higher number of estimated bills than usual in 2021/22 because Western Power was not able to provide it with actual meter readings due to a shortage of meter readers. While this has since been resolved, Synergy received complaints from customers who received estimated bills over multiple billing cycles and eventually received a bill based on an actual meter reading that was higher than the estimated bills, leaving the customer with a 'catch-up' amount to pay.

Over 99 per cent of complaints from both Horizon Power and Synergy were resolved within 15 business days.

Figure 13: Complaints from residential electricity customers by retailer 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)⁶¹



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.⁶² The percentage of business electricity complaints resolved

⁶¹ 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.

⁶² AER Retail, A-Star, Clear Energy and Peel Renewable have been excluded from Table 32 because they did not report any business customer complaints for the past six years.

within 15 business days varied by retailer. All Alinta Energy and Amanda Energy's complaints were concluded within this timeframe.

Table 32: Complaints from business electricity customers by retailer 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 ⁶³	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Amanda Energy	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Change Energy	0.0	8.0	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
CleanTech	n/a	n/a	0.0	1.6	0.8	0.5
Horizon Power	0.4	0.2	1.6	2.3	1.3	0.7
Kleenheat	1.4	0.0	0.8	4.1	3.4	2.1
Perth Energy	2.3	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0
Rottnest Island Authority	4.2	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7

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.⁶⁴

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 2020/21 and 2021/22 (%)

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22
Residential								
Horizon Power ⁶⁵	52.5	64.2	0.9	0.7	0.0	0.2	46.6	44.4
Synergy	82.4	76.7	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	17.1	14.3
Business								
Alinta Energy	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
Amanda Energy	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ AER Retail, A-Star, Change Energy, Clear Energy, Peel Renewable and the Rottnest Island Authority have been excluded from Table 33 because they did not receive any complaints from business customers for the past two years.

⁶⁵ Horizon Power advised for 2021/22 it was not able to separate residential and business 'other' complaints and have included all 'other' complaints under residential customers.

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
CleanTech	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Horizon Power	61.5	63.1	1.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	37.5	n/a
Kleenheat	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Perth Energy	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	79.8	72.0	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.1	19.7	17.2

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.⁶⁶ The percentage of residential customer complaints varied by retailer and, with the exception of EGDC, remained at lower levels than existed pre-pandemic.

For AGL, Kleenheat, Origin Energy and EGDC residential gas customers, over 90 per cent of complaints were concluded within 15 business days.

Table 34: Complaints from residential gas customers by retailer 2016/17 to 2021/22 (%)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	1.7	2.0	1.4	0.3	0.1
Alinta Energy	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3
Kleenheat	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.2
Origin Energy	n/a	1.3	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.4
EGDC	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.6
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	1.8	2.6	0.9	0.5

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.⁶⁷ The percentage of business customer complaints varied by retailer, with AGL, Origin Energy and Simply Energy reporting the lowest percentage for the six years reported.

Each retailer concluded at least 85 per cent of business customer complaints within 15 business days, with all complaints concluded within this timeframe for AGL and Synergy customers.

⁶⁶ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 34 because it did not receive any residential customer complaints for the past six years.

⁶⁷ Amanda Energy, EGDC and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 35 because they did not receive any business customer complaints for the past six years.

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

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	2.6	3.0	1.4	0.8	0.6
Alinta Energy	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.4
Synergy	0.6	0.0	0.7	1.2	1.6	1.3
Kleenheat	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.9
Origin Energy	n/a	3.9	2.1	0.5	2.4	0.0
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	0.0	9.1	0.0	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.

For Alinta Energy and Kleenheat, 60 percent or more of the complaints from residential and business customers were about billing in 2021/22. All of Synergy's complaints from business customers in 2021/22 were about other complaints.

Table 36: Residential and business gas customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2020/21 and 2021/22 (%)⁶⁸

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22	2020/21	2021/22
Residential								
AGL	51.0	45.8	4.4	5.0	13.1	5.8	31.6	43.3
Alinta Energy	83.3	78.8	6.4	10.2	1.8	1.9	8.6	9.1
Kleenheat	60.3	67.6	0.4	1.9	5.4	3.5	33.9	27.1
Origin Energy	49.1	41.5	4.7	5.7	2.8	5.7	43.4	47.2
EGDC	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0
Simply Energy	39.2	45.1	1.4	9.2	11.5	4.6	47.8	41.2
Business								
AGL	25.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	75.0	33.3
Alinta Energy	97.7	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0
Synergy	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	100.0
Kleenheat	53.3	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.7	40.0

⁶⁸ Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 36 because they did not receive any customer complaints for the past two years. Simply Energy did not receive any complaints from business customers in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
Origin Energy	80.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	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 2016/17 to 2021/22⁶⁹

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Alinta Energy	1,412	1,355	1,410	4,570	3,312	2,048
Amanda Energy	1,959	1,653	1,945	n/a	n/a	n/a
Horizon Power ⁷⁰	83,761	81,159	73,180	65,079	50,242	58,882
Kleenheat	46	61	31	69	67	45
Peel Renewable	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	3	17
Rottnest Island Authority	814	852	33	n/a	n/a	n/a
Synergy	1,156,318	1,060,903	1,008,193	958,159	711,117	793,551
Total	1,244,310	1,145,983	1,084,792	1,027,877	764,736	854,526

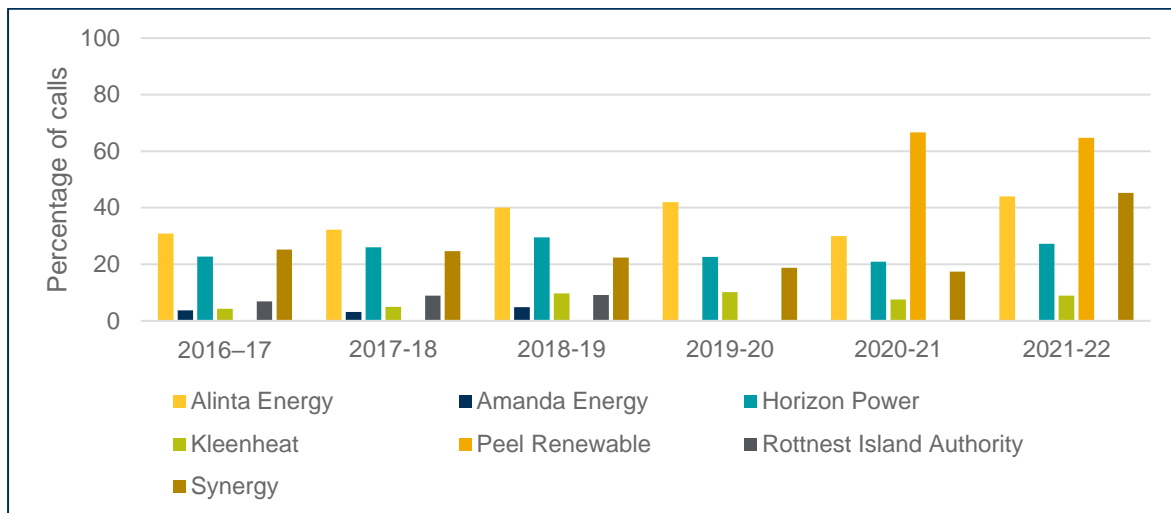
Horizon Power and Synergy both reported an increase in the number of calls to their call centres in 2021/22, but the level of calls remained lower than pre-pandemic levels. The reasons for this are unclear, but may be due to increased uptake of other communications channels or COVID-19 support measures, leading to customers needing less support.⁷¹

Figure 14 shows the percentage of calls to electricity retailer call centres not answered within 30 seconds.

⁶⁹ 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.

⁷⁰ 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.

⁷¹ Currently, the ERA does not require retailers to report on the number of communications made through other channels such as through websites. This is something the ERA will consider in future reporting requirements.

Figure 14: Calls from electricity customers not answered within 30 seconds 2017 to 2022 (%)

7.3 Gas retailer call centre responsiveness

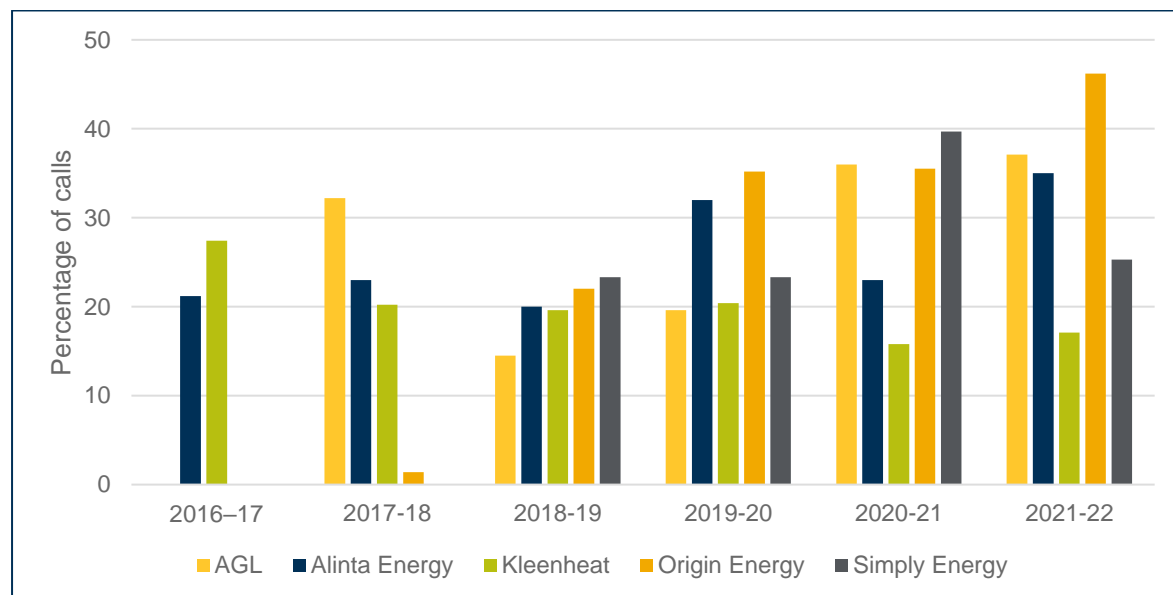
Table 38 shows the number of calls to gas retailer call centres.⁷²

Table 38: Volume of calls to gas retailer call centres 2016/17 to 2021/22

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
AGL	n/a	46,388	56,961	66,361	41,627	46,674
Alinta Energy	525,644	531,427	537,418	420,246	282,128	296,875
Kleenheat ⁷³	285,887	310,803	289,778	246,101	195,480	204,465
Origin Energy	n/a	18,518	34,319	27,466	21,861	22,842
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	12,512	24,624	16,436	15,701
Total	811,531	907,136	921,523	784,798	557,532	586,557

Figure 15 shows the percentage of telephone calls to gas retailer call centres not answered within 30 seconds.⁷⁴

Figure 15: Calls from gas customers not answered within 30 seconds 2017 to 2022 (%)



⁷² 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.

⁷³ The Kleenheat call centre handles calls for all areas of its business, including Liquefied Petroleum Gas customer calls.

⁷⁴ Amanda Energy, EGDC and Perth Energy have been excluded from Figure 15 as they do not operate a dedicated call centre.

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