



Economic Regulation Authority

Annual data report 2022/23

Energy retailers

20 December 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.

National Relay Service TTY: 13 36 77

© 2023 Economic Regulation Authority. All rights reserved. This material may be reproduced in whole or in part provided the source is acknowledged.

Contents

2022/23 observations	iv
1. Market overview	1
1.1 New family violence provisions	1
1.2 Electricity	3
1.2.1 Electricity Retailers	3
1.2.2 Contestable and non-contestable customers in the SWIS	4
1.2.3 Residential electricity customers	4
1.2.4 Business electricity customers	5
1.2.5 Pre-payment meter electricity customers	6
1.3 Gas	6
1.3.1 Gas retailers	6
1.3.2 Residential gas customers	8
1.3.3 Business gas customers	9
2. Payment difficulties	11
2.1 Electricity	12
2.1.1 Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill	12
2.1.2 Electricity customers on instalment plans	13
2.1.3 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans	13
2.2 Gas	14
2.2.1 Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill	14
2.2.2 Gas customers on instalment plans	15
2.2.3 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans	16
3. Energy bill debt of customers (excluding customers on a hardship program)	18
3.1 Electricity	18
3.1.1 Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt	18
3.1.2 Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt	19
3.2 Gas	20
3.2.1 Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt	20
3.2.2 Business gas customers repaying an energy bill debt	21
4. Hardship programs	23
4.1 Electricity	24
4.1.1 Electricity customers on a hardship program	24
4.1.2 Electricity hardship customer debt	25
4.2 Gas	26
4.2.1 Gas customers on a hardship program	26
4.2.2 Hardship debt for gas customers	28
4.2.3 Hardship customer average bill debt by jurisdiction	29
5. Disconnections	31
5.1 Total electricity disconnections	31

5.2	Electricity residential disconnections	32
5.3	Electricity pre-payment meter disconnection periods	33
5.4	Electricity business disconnections	34
5.5	Total gas disconnections	35
5.6	Gas residential disconnections	35
5.7	Gas business disconnections	36
5.8	Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections	37
6.	Reconnections.....	38
6.1	Residential electricity reconnections	38
6.2	Business electricity reconnections	39
6.3	Gas residential reconnections	40
6.4	Gas business reconnections	40
7.	Customer service	41
7.1	Customer complaints	42
7.1.1	Residential electricity customer complaints	42
7.1.2	Business electricity customer complaints	42
7.1.3	Residential and business electricity customer complaints by category	43
7.1.4	Residential gas customer complaints	44
7.1.5	Business gas customer complaints	44
7.1.6	Residential and business gas customer complaints by category	45
7.2	Compensation Payments	46
7.3	Retailer call centre responsiveness.....	46
7.3.1	Electricity retailer call centre responsiveness.....	46
7.4	Gas retailer call centre responsiveness	48

List of appendices

Appendix 1 List of Tables	49
Appendix 2 List of Figures.....	51

2022/23 observations

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. The report covers retailers' performance in serving both contestable and non-contestable customers, over 2022/23.¹

This year's report includes new information on pre-payment meter disconnections, service standard payments to customers and family violence obligations.

In February 2023, the *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers 2022* (Electricity Code) became effective and brought about major changes to retailer obligations, providing support to residential customers facing payment challenges and introducing vital protections for customers experiencing family and domestic violence.²

Over 2022/23, retailers improved customer assistance and hardship programs to facilitate access to energy as an essential service for all Western Australians. Changes to the Electricity Code now mean that everyone can access payment plans and extensions of time to pay. To allow both gas and electricity customers to receive equivalent protections the ERA is undertaking a review of the *Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations*. The new Gas Compendium is expected to commence on 1 July 2024.³

Electricity

- Customers made fewer requests for short term payment extensions.
- The average bill debt for residential non-hardship customers decreased to \$774.
- Average bill debt for customers entering a hardship program increased by 50 per cent from the previous year to \$1,197.
- 11,488 residential electricity customers were disconnected for non-payment, an increase of 12.2 per cent from 2021/22.
- In July 2022, the State Government provided a \$400 electricity bill credit to all households.

Gas

- Residential customers sought more assistance to manage their energy bills: More customers were on instalment plans and were receiving additional time to pay.
- The average energy bill debt of residential customers was the highest in six years (\$451).
- 5,556 residential customers were disconnected, up 134.1 per cent from 2021/22

The report provides data for a series of indicators over the past six years, covering the COVID-19 pandemic period. Care should be taken when drawing comparisons between the years. The short-term effect of factors such as weather events, disconnection moratoriums or additional concession payments from Government may skew longer term trends. To provide a more comprehensive view of retail energy market trends, the ERA is considering how to enhance future data reporting.

¹ For electricity, only Synergy can supply non-contestable customers (customers that consume less than 50MWh of electricity per year) in the South West Interconnected System, which encompasses nearly all metropolitan residential and small business customers. Horizon Power supplies electricity to residential and small business customers throughout regional Western Australia.

² ERA 2023 Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers ([online](#)).

³ ERA 2023 review of the Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations ([online](#)).

1. Market overview

Main Points

- New family violence obligations for retailers were introduced in February 2023 and will be reported on in 2024/25.
- The number of residential electricity customers increased by 2.1 per cent.
- The number of residential and business gas customers increased by 2.6 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively.
- The residential market share of the largest gas retailer, Alinta Energy, decreased by 1.1 per cent, while its business market share decreased by 1.5 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 retailer
- residential and business gas customers by retailer
- pre-payment meter customers.

WA Household electricity credit offset 2022 (HEC)

As part of the State Government's 2022/23 budget, a \$400 electricity credit was provided to households to counter increased cost of living pressures. The credits were provided automatically in July 2022 for Synergy and Horizon Power customers.

Retailers advised that the credit helped relieve payment difficulties for customers with lower levels of debt, resulting in fewer requests for short term payment extensions.

1.1 New family violence provisions

In February 2023, the *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity 2022* (Electricity Code) introduced new protections for customers experiencing family and domestic violence (FDV).⁴

- The requirement for retailers to develop and publish a family violence policy addressing matters such as staff training and establishing safe methods of communication.
- A nine-month prohibition on disconnections for customers affected by family violence.
- Prohibiting retailers from requesting written evidence of family violence (except where the retailer is considering debt or disconnection action) and establishing processes that avoid a customer having to repeatedly disclose or refer to their FDV experience when.

The ERA is working with electricity retailers on developing new performance reporting indicators for the 2023/24 energy retailer report. For this years report, Horizon Power and Synergy provided a qualitative update on implementation of the new FDV provisions.

⁴ The Electricity Code can be found on the ERA's [website](#)

Horizon Power

As a function of its existing Hardship Management and Assistance Program, Horizon Power provides customers experiencing or recovering from Family and Domestic Violence with support and assistance tailored to their specific circumstances. The transition to compliance with the new Code requirements in February 2023 was relatively seamless, with only moderate system adjustment and process development required. Lifeline delivered tailored training to all Horizon Power frontline staff, which strengthened the delivery of the new protections by experienced regional Hardship Assistance teams.

To date, Horizon Power has seen positive impacts and received good feedback from customers receiving assistance and support under the new provisions of the code, however, the numbers of customers flagged as protected are still relatively low. Outside of customers voluntarily identifying as experiencing or recovering from FDV circumstances, cultural and social factors, exacerbated in the service environment, make it challenging for Horizon Power to independently identify customers impacted and provide them with support and assistance. Going forward, Horizon Power is confident that the number of customers provided with protection under the new provisions of the code will grow organically as knowledge and experience of the support mechanisms become more widely known.

Synergy

Synergy introduced new family violence customer protections in October 2022. The new obligations required Synergy to identify and assist vulnerable customers, aligning with Synergy's existing 'Fresh Start' program. Initiatives included a specialised team, staff training, communication updates, a Domestic Violence Policy, enhanced privacy measures and secure communication channels.

The commencement of the Electricity Code in February 2023 enhanced Synergy's understanding of customers affected by family violence, especially those with outstanding debts. The change allowed Synergy to offer more targeted support by providing account management information, proactive financial hardship monitoring and directing customers to appropriate staff, regardless of their debt status.

In a recent case, a customer facing financial hardship and domestic violence sought assistance from Synergy's Case Management team. A job loss led to financial strain, abuse and relationship breakdown. The customer, relying on Centrelink for income, faced eviction and homelessness. Synergy's Case Manager enrolled the customer in the Fresh Start program, waived a significant debt and provided crucial referrals to financial counselling, crisis accommodation and domestic violence support services. This support contributed positively to the customer's financial well-being and ongoing engagement with Synergy.

1.2 Electricity

1.2.1 Electricity Retailers

There were 13 authorised retailers, supplying small use customers, typically residential and small business customers, during 2022/23.⁵

- AER Retail Pty Ltd⁶
- Alinta Sales Pty Ltd t/a Alinta Energy
- Amanda Energy Pty Ltd
- Change Energy Pty Ltd
- CleanTech Energy Pty Ltd⁷
- Clear Energy Pty Ltd
- Electricity Generation and Retail Corporation (trading as Synergy)
- Peel Renewable Energy Pty Ltd
- Perth Energy Pty Ltd
- Perdaman Energy Retail Pty Ltd⁸
- Regional Power Corporation (trading as Horizon Power)
- 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 supplying customers– 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Electricity Retailers	12	12	13	13	13	13

There are nine retailers that provide services to customers in the South West Interconnected System (SWIS).^{9,10} Horizon Power and Rottnest Island Authority supply customers through their own distribution networks outside of the SWIS.

Figure 1 shows the number of residential and business electricity customers and total electricity customers. In 2022/23, the number of residential customers grew by 2.1 per cent while the number of business customers increased by 1 per cent, compared to 2021/22.¹¹

⁵ Throughout the rest of this report a 'small use customer' will be referred to as a 'customer'.

⁶ As of 30 June 2023, AER Retail Pty Ltd no longer supplied small use customers.

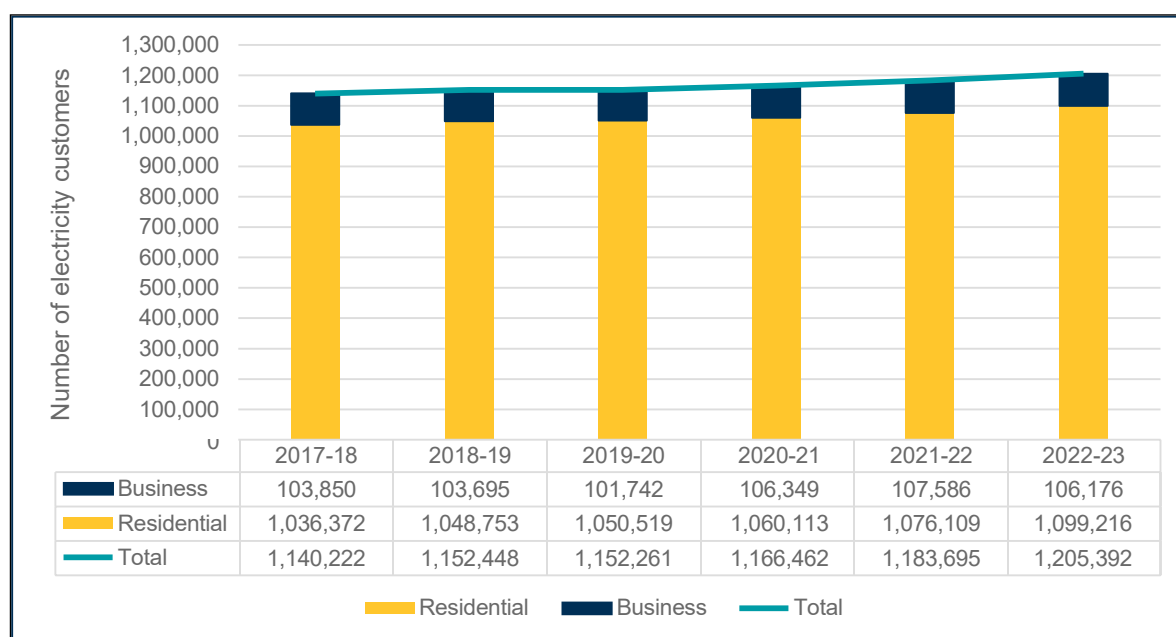
⁷ As of 30 June 2023, CleanTech Energy Pty Ltd no longer supplied customers.

⁸ Perdaman Energy Retail Pty Ltd started supplying customers in 2022/23.

⁹ The SWIS covers a geographic area from Kalbarri to Albany, and from Perth to Kalgoorlie.

¹⁰ Excludes AER Retail and CleanTech as they were no longer supplying customers on 30 June 2023.

¹¹ Alinta Energy has been excluded from the calculation of the increase in the number of business customers as the previous year's data incorrectly included meter (MIN) numbers, which were higher than actual customer numbers. Alinta's actual customer numbers for 2022/23 are reflected in Table 3.

Figure 1: Number of residential and business electricity customers – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

1.2.2 Contestable and non-contestable customers in the SWIS

In the SWIS, residential and business electricity customers are categorised into two groups, either contestable customers or non-contestable customers. Customers consuming between 50 and 160 megawatt-hours (MWh) of electricity annually, are contestable customers and may choose their electricity retailer. The majority of households and small businesses in the SWIS consume less than 50MWh and are non-contestable customers, exclusively supplied by Synergy.

Synergy's customer base includes both contestable and non-contestable customers. Customers supplied by other retailers in the SWIS are all contestable.

1.2.3 Residential electricity customers

Table 2 shows the total number of residential electricity customers by retailer.¹²

During 2022/23, the number of residential electricity customers rose by 23,107. This represents a 2.1 per cent increase, which is the highest annual growth rate over the six reported years. Since 2017/18, there has been a 6.1 per cent rise in total residential customer numbers.

Table 2: Number of residential electricity customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 20 June 2023

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	39,398	37,925	36,956	36,256	36,919	36,694
Perth Energy	2	2	2	2	2	1
Synergy	996,972	1,010,826	1,013,561	1,023,854	1,039,188	1,062,521

¹² Synergy and Horizon Power supply most residential customers.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total	1,036,372	1,048,753	1,050,519	1,060,113	1,076,109	1,099,216

In 2022/23 and consistent with previous years, most residential electricity customers were non-contestable. However, there was a small number, 696 or 0.07 per cent, of contestable residential customers in the SWIS. Perth Energy supplied electricity to one of these contestable customers, while Synergy supplied the rest.¹³

Horizon Power is the only retailer supplying residential customers outside the SWIS since the deregulation of the regional electricity market in 2004.

1.2.4 Business electricity customers

Table 3 shows the number of business electricity customers by retailer (contestable and non-contestable).

During 2022/23, there were 13 retailers active in the business electricity market, with 11 of them providing services within the SWIS.^{14,15} Horizon Power and Rottnest Island Authority were the only retailers supplying customers outside the SWIS.¹⁶

Within the SWIS in 2022/23, there were 87,630 non-contestable and 9,182 contestable business electricity customers. Non-contestable business customers are exclusively supplied by Synergy.

Synergy supplied 72 per cent of contestable business customers in the SWIS, Alinta and Perth Energy both supplied 10 per cent and the remaining 8 per cent were supplied by eight smaller retailers.

Table 3: Number of business electricity customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023¹⁷

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AER Retail	12	26	20	14	5	0
Alinta Energy ¹⁸	2,858	2,826	3,519	3,509	3,396	953
Amanda Energy	138	121	111	166	251	368
Change Energy	25	57	115	136	146	168
Clear Energy	0	0	2	6	15	7
CleanTech Energy	n/a	74	63	130	210	0
Horizon Power	7,720	7,884	7,577	7,456	9,101	9,339

¹³ Refer to indicator CCR1 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA website.

¹⁴ Refer to indicator CCR4 in the customer numbers tab of the retailer data published on the ERA website.

¹⁵ AER Retail and CleanTech Energy supplied customers during 2022/23 but ceased supplying small use customers by 30 June 2023.

¹⁶ Rottnest Island Authority supplied businesses on Rottnest Island and Horizon Power supplied businesses in mainland areas of the State outside the SWIS.

¹⁷ A-Star has been excluded from Table 3 as it has not supplied customers for the past six years.

¹⁸ Alinta Energy included incorrect numbers from 2017/18 to 2021/22. The 2023 year correctly represents actual electricity customer numbers.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Kleenheat	107	126	170	176	141	105
Peel Renewable	n/a	n/a	0	5	8	8
Perdaman Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	1
Perth Energy	867	413	436	1,051	984	970
Rottnest Island Authority	24	24	25	25	25	25
Synergy	92,099	92,144	89,704	93,675	93,304	94,232
Total	103,850	103,695	101,742	106,349	107,586	106,176

1.2.5 Pre-payment meter electricity customers

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

Currently, pre-payment meters are limited to customers within Horizon Power's license area and Synergy's customers in the Ninga Mia Aboriginal community in the Goldfields.¹⁹

Table 4 shows the number of pre-payment meters supplied by Horizon Power and Synergy. Pre-payment meter customers increased by just 27 in 2022/23, compared to an increase of 75 customers in the previous year.

Table 4: Number of electricity pre-payment meter customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	1,221	1,332	1,296	1,348	1,423	1,450
Synergy	16	12	11	11	11	11
Total	1,237	1,344	1,307	1,359	1,434	1,461

1.3 Gas

1.3.1 Gas retailers

In 2022/23, eight retailers were authorised to supply gas to customers:

- AGL Sales Pty Ltd
- Alinta Energy
- Amanda Energy
- Kleenheat
- Origin Energy Retail Limited
- Perth Energy

¹⁹ 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 2018 to 30 June 2023

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Gas retailers	9	9	9	9	9	8

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.²⁰

Kleenheat also supplies a small number of customers on four gas distribution networks it owns in Albany (Oyster Harbour) and Margaret River (Riverslea and Rapids Landing) and Leinster.

Esperance Gas Distribution Company – Transition of gas customers

In 2021, the Esperance Gas Distribution Company Pty Ltd announced it would cease the supply of reticulated gas to customers in Esperance. Horizon Power negotiated a 12-month extension with EGDC to give customers time to transition to a new energy source.

From April 2022 to March 2023, Horizon Power supported residential, business and government gas customers to transition from gas to an alternative energy source.²¹ Most customers affected were transitioned to electricity.²² This program was the first large scale transition of its kind.

In March 2023, EGDC ceased the supply of reticulated gas to all residential and business customers and surrendered its gas trading licence.²³

The total number of residential and business gas customers continues to increase, with an additional 20,179 customers (2.5 per cent) supplied with gas during 2022/23. This represents the largest yearly growth for residential and business gas customers in the past six years.

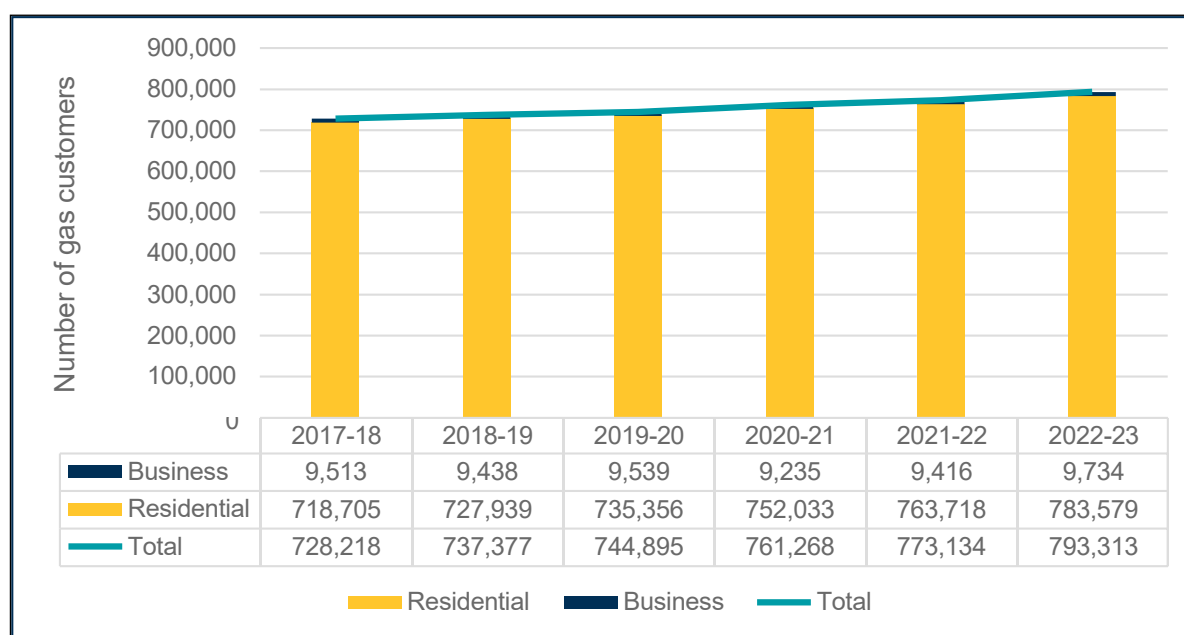
Figure 2 shows the number of residential and business gas customers.

²⁰ ATCO's gas distribution networks are located in the Coastal, Goldfields-Esperance and Great Southern supply areas.

²¹ Further information on the transition can be found on Horizon Powers [website and the WA State Governments media release, 31 March 2023 \(online\)](#).

²² Esperance Gas reported a total of 355 residential and business customers on 30 June 2022. ERA, Annual Data Energy report 2021/22 ([online](#))

²³ ERA Notice, 31 March 2023, Surrender of gas distribution licence and gas trading licence ([online](#)).

Figure 2: Number of residential and business gas customers – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

1.3.2 Residential gas customers

Table 6 shows the number of residential gas customers by retailer at 30 June 2023. Alinta Energy and Kleenheat supply over 80 per cent of residential gas customers.

Residential gas customers increased by 19,861 (2.6 per cent) in 2022/23, continuing an upward trend in residential customer numbers for the last six years.

Table 6: Number of residential gas customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023²⁴

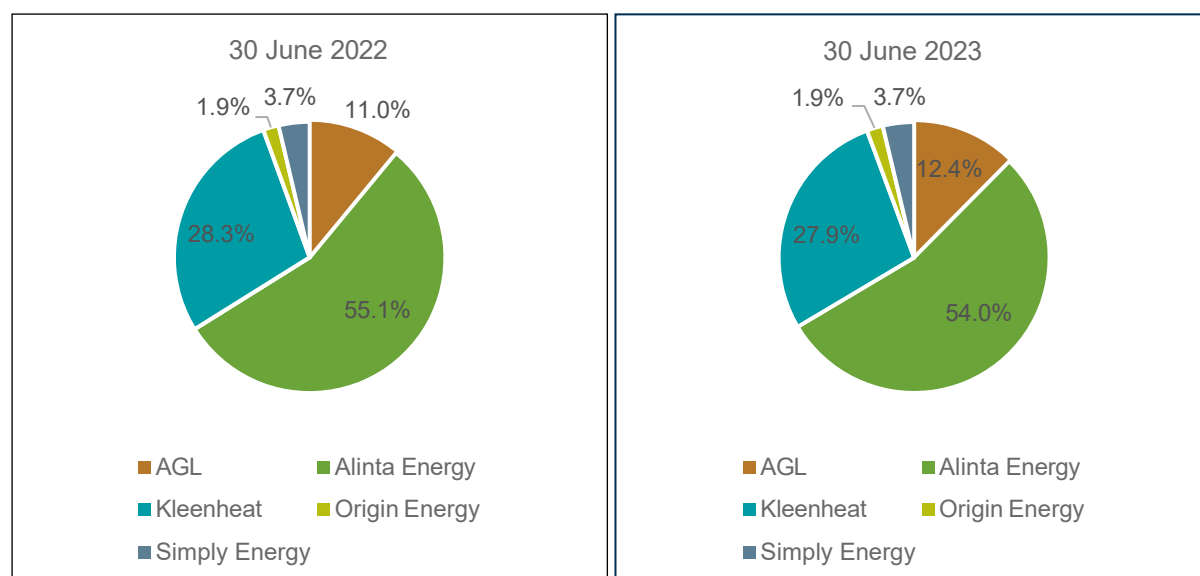
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	20,851	41,197	64,730	70,380	83,909	97,360
Alinta Energy	494,696	460,018	432,750	434,753	421,008	423,386
Kleenheat	196,274	197,325	201,102	210,088	216,380	218,464
Origin Energy	6,880	14,626	13,700	13,235	14,228	15,119
Perth Energy	4	6	3	2	2	0
Simply Energy	n/a	14,767	23,071	23,575	28,191	29,250
Total	718,705	727,939	735,356	752,033	763,718	783,579

During 2022/23, five of the six retailers in Table 6 showed an increase in residential customers. Perth Energy had two customers in 2021/22 but were no longer supplied any residential gas customers by 30 June 2023.

²⁴ Esperance Gas was removed from Table 6 as it surrendered its licence during 2022/23; however, for each of the previous years it reported over 300 customers.

Figure 3 compares the share of the residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer on 30 June in 2022 and in 2023.²⁵

Figure 3: Residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer on 30 June in 2022 and 2023



Alinta continues to remain the largest supplier of residential gas in 2022/23. Alinta increased its customer numbers by 2,378, but overall, its market share decreased by 1.1 per cent, down to 54.0 per cent.

AGL reported the largest increase in its residential customer base in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, with an additional 13,451 customers (16.0 per cent increase). On 30 June 2023, AGL had increased its market share of the residential (coastal supply area) gas market to 12.4 per cent.

Kleenheat gained an additional 2,084 customers during the year, however, its share of the market decreased by 0.4 per cent to 27.9 per cent.

1.3.3 Business gas customers

Table 7 shows the number of business gas customers by retailer. Alinta Energy and Kleenheat supply over 80 per cent of business gas customers.

Table 7: Number of business gas customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023²⁶

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	580	537	517	497	487	477
Alinta Energy	6,497	5,993	5,788	5,457	5,644	5,686

²⁵ 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.

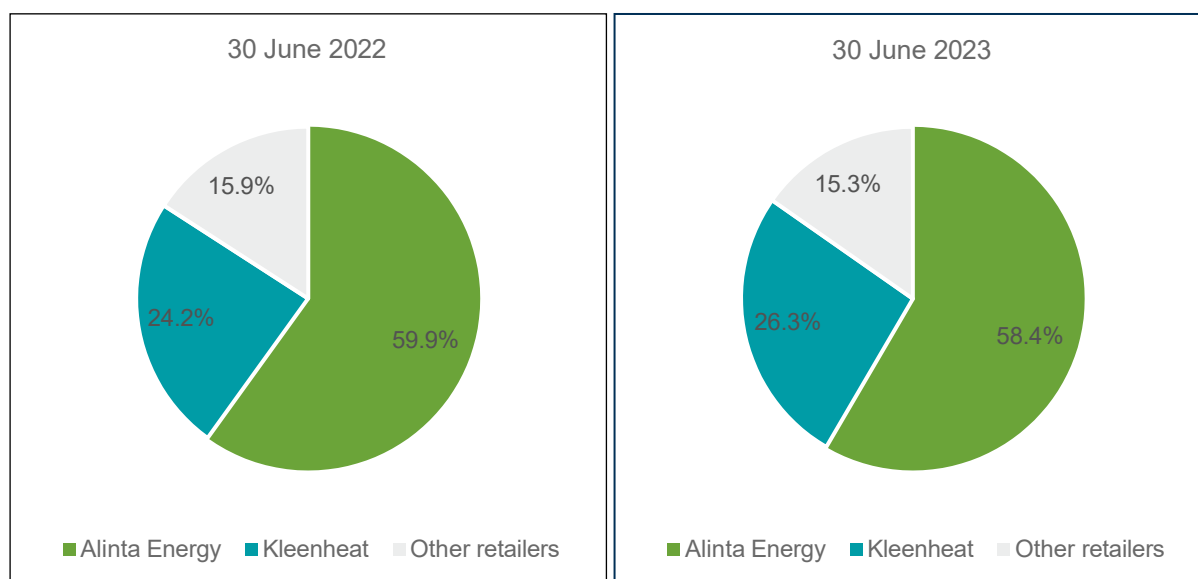
²⁶ Esperance Gas was removed from Table 7 as it surrendered its licence during 2022/23; however, for each of the previous years it reported over 30 customers.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Amanda Energy	n/a	0	1	12	26	23
Synergy	173	144	167	192	159	147
Kleenheat	2,070	2,406	2,620	2,535	2,277	2,560
Origin Energy	77	236	206	205	213	220
Perth Energy	116	120	229	311	583	594
Simply Energy	n/a	2	11	26	27	27
Total	9,513	9,438	9,539	9,235	9,416	9,734

In 2022/23, business gas customers increased by 3.38 per cent, to a total of 9,734 customers across eight retailers.

Figure 4 compares the share of the business gas market held by retailers in the coastal supply area in 2021/22 and 2022/23.²⁷

Figure 4: Business gas market share in the coastal supply area by retailer on 30 June in 2022 and 2023 (%)²⁸



From 2021/22 to 2022/23, Alinta's market share decreased by 1.3 per cent to 58.4 per cent. Kleenheat's market share increased by 2.1 per cent, to 26.3 per cent.

²⁷ The coastal supply area covers ATCO's mid-west and south-west gas distribution systems, which expand from Geraldton to Busselton and as far inland as Harvey.

²⁸ The 2022 year in Figure 4 excludes Esperance Gas distribution company.

2. Payment difficulties

Main Points

- The number of residential electricity customers requesting and being granted additional time to pay a bill decreased in 2022/23. Residential customers received the \$400 household electricity credit from Government in July 2022.
- There was an increase in the percentage of business electricity customers granted additional time to pay a bill.
- The proportion of residential gas customers on instalment plans continued to trend upwards in 2022/23, reaching 3.5 per cent, the highest over the last six years. In contrast, the percentage of business customers on instalment plans decreased to the lowest in the last six years at 2.3 per cent.
- Overall, there was a reduction in both electricity and gas customers having their instalment plans cancelled for non-payment compared to the previous year.

On 20 February 2023, the *Code of Conduct for the Supply of Small Use Customers 2022* (Electricity Code) came into effect, extending the obligations of retailers to further support customers experiencing payment difficulties. Retailers are now required to make payment extensions and instalment plans available to all residential customers, without the need for customers to be assessed as experiencing payment difficulties or in financial hardship.^{29,30,31}

Retailers must not vary an instalment plan for residential customers without their consent and all residential customers, not just those facing hardship, have the right to request a review of their instalment plan. Extending the right to all residential customers ensures that their ability to pay is not only considered at the time the instalment plan is entered into but can be reassessed throughout the duration of the plan, at the request of the customer.

Under the Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations (Gas Compendium), a retailer is only required to offer payment assistance, including extensions and interest-free instalment plans, to residential customers assessed as experiencing payment difficulties or in financial hardship.^{32,33} 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 gas customers in financial hardship, retailers are also required to:³⁴

- Give reasonable consideration to a request to reduce the customer's fees, charges or debt.

²⁹ The Electricity Code can be found [online](#).

³⁰ The ERA's final decision on the Electricity Code can be found [online](#).

³¹ The Electricity Code, effective February 2023, replaced the term 'instalment plan' with 'payment plan'. This report retains the term 'instalment plan' for consistency and comparability with the Gas Compendium. All references to 'instalment plan' with regard to electricity customers in this report, means a reference to 'payment plan'.

³² 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 Gas Compendium is available [online](#).

³³ Payment difficulties exist when a customer is unable to pay an outstanding amount because of a change in personal circumstances (i.e. – loss of income). Retailers must consider requests for assistance from a business customer experiencing payment difficulties.

³⁴ The number of customers on a hardship program is discussed in chapter 4.

- 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 ERA is currently reviewing the Gas Compendium to align the protections for gas customers with customer protections in the Electricity Code.³⁵

Chapter 4 contains additional information on energy bill debt for customers assessed as being in hardship.

2.1 Electricity

2.1.1 Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill

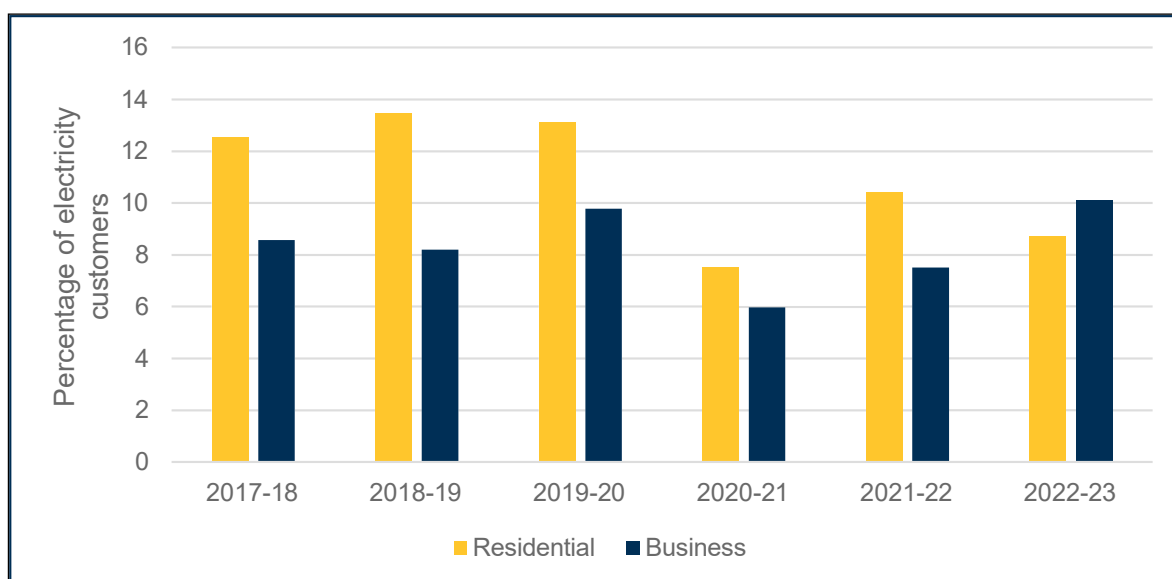
Figure 5 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customers (including hardship customers) granted more time to pay a bill.

The total number of residential customers (including hardship customers) who were granted additional time to pay a bill decreased to 95,805 in 2022/23 (or 8.7 per cent of total residential customers). This represents a reduction of 14.4 per cent in residential electricity customers requesting and being granted additional time to pay a bill since the previous period.

Retailers have advised that the household electricity credit applied to customer accounts in July 2022, may have contributed to fewer requests for short term payment extensions by customers with lower bill debt.

The number of business customers that were granted more time to pay a bill increased by 2,649 in 2022/23, representing 10.1 per cent of business customers.

Figure 5: Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%)



³⁵ Information on the Gas Compendium review can be found on the ERA's [website](#)

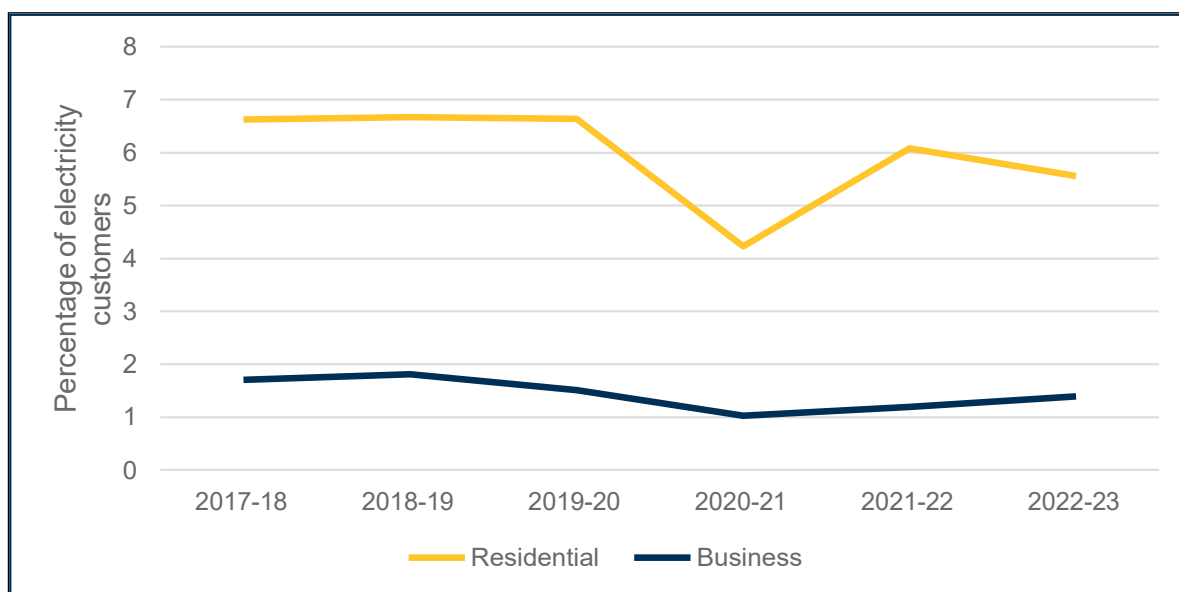
2.1.2 Electricity customers on instalment plans

Figure 6 shows the percentage of residential and business electricity customers (including hardship customers) who were on an instalment plan.³⁶

In 2022/23, the percentage of Horizon Power's residential customers on an instalment plan increased to 11.1 per cent and the total percentage of Synergy's customers decreased to 5.4 per cent. Figure 6 shows that across both retailers there was an overall reduction of 5.5 per cent in the number of customers on instalment plans.

Most retailers reported an increase in the percentage of business customers on an instalment plan, with an overall increase to 1.4 per cent (from 1.2 per cent in 2021/22).

Figure 6: Electricity customers on instalment plans – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%)



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.

The number of non-hardship residential customers on an instalment plan decreased by 6.6 per cent in 2022/2023.

Table 8: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans by retailer - 30 June 2019 to 30 June 2023.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	786	243	393	598	668
Synergy	5,978	5,629	5,672	6,098	5,588

³⁶ The decrease in residential customers on an instalment plan in 2020/21 could be attributed 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.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total	6,764	5,872	6,065	6,696	6,256

Table 9 below 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 2018/19 and 2022/23. The ERA includes this data in the report to provide an indication of how effective instalment plans and additional time to pay may be on assisting customers to manage their ongoing bills.

The percentage of customers that successfully completed an instalment plan during 2022/23 was 32.3 per cent. This was lower than the percentage of completion in 2021/22 (39.2 per cent).

In 2022/23, both Horizon Power and Synergy reported a reduction in the number of customers who had their instalment plan cancelled for non-payment. Since 2018/19, Horizon Power and Synergy's cancellations fell by 78.5 per cent and 47.2 per cent since 2018/19 respectively.

Table 9: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship program customers) who successfully completed their plan and those who had their instalment plan cancelled between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	Successfully completed instalment plan	421	449	131	167	405
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	2,073	2,384	1,040	973	446
Synergy	Successfully completed instalment plan	25,020	30,891	18,894	25,464	19,285
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	31,331	28,306	12,513	17,511	16,547

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 (including hardship customers) granted more time to pay a bill.

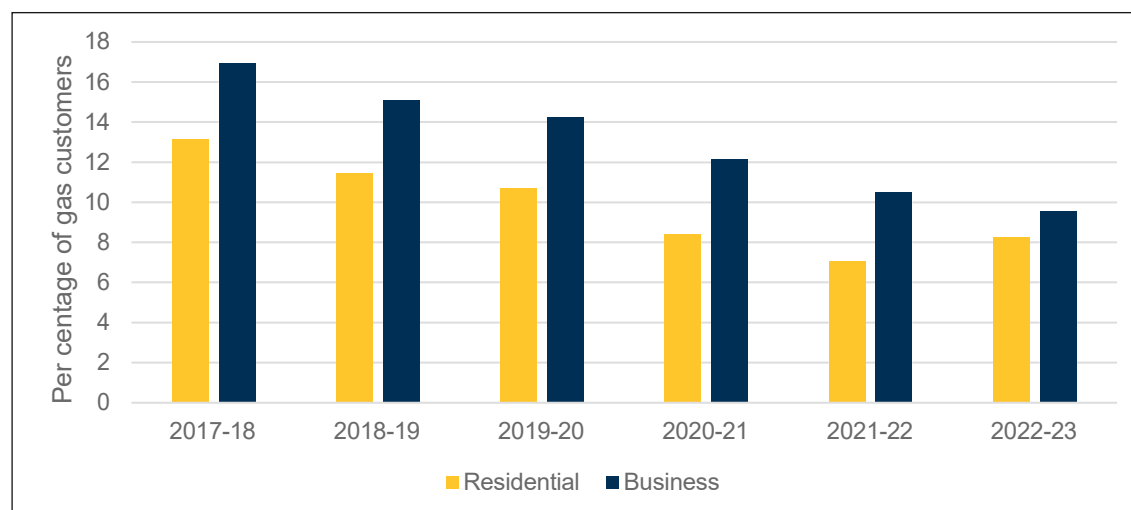
An additional 10,694 residential customers were granted additional time to pay a bill, an increase of 19.8 per cent since 2021/22. This represents 8.3 per cent of total residential customers receiving more time to pay their bill.³⁷ Retailers have suggested the increase in

³⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic, retailers voluntarily increased their support to customers which reduced the need for customers to request more time to pay. Retailers continued to support customers into 2021/22 before commencing the removal of assistance measures during 2022/23.

customers requesting payment extensions is due to pressures customers are facing with increased cost of living expenses and the ending of COVID-19 assistance measures.

In 2022/23, 5.6 per cent less business customers were granted additional time to pay their bills. This represents 9.6 per cent of total business customers granted more time to pay a bill, the lowest percentage in the past six years.

Figure 7: Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%)



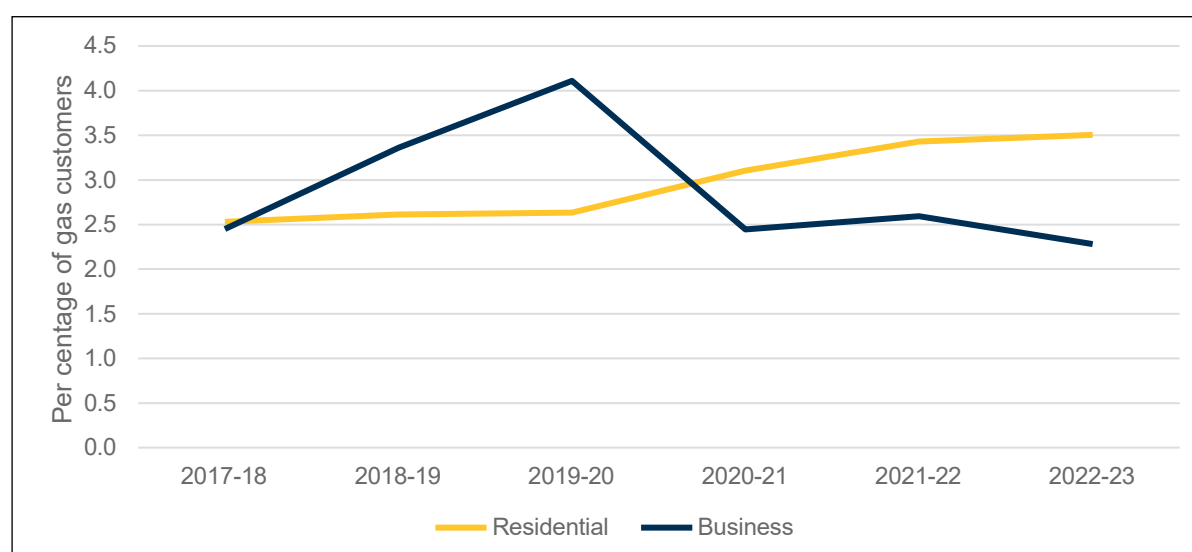
2.2.2 Gas customers on instalment plans

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

Over the last six years there has been an ongoing increase in the proportion of residential customers on instalment plans. In 2022/23 Alinta Energy, Kleenheat and Origin Energy all reported rises in the percentage of residential customers on an instalment plan. The total percentage reported increased to 3.5 per cent, the highest for the six years reported.

In contrast, the percentage of business customers on an instalment plan fell to 2.3 per cent, the lowest in the last six years.

Figure 8: Gas customers on an instalment plan – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%)



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. Most individual retailers have less than 1 per cent of their customer base on an instalment plan, the exception is Alinta who has over 2 per cent of its customers on an instalment plan.

Table 10: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan by retailer - 30 June 2019 to 30 June 2023.

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	Number	133	118	245	289	358
	%	0.32	0.18	0.35	0.34	0.37
Alinta Energy	Number	8,608	7,791	6,644	8,757	9,865
	%	1.89	1.80	1.53	2.08	2.33
Kleenheat	Number	1,724	1,263	949	633	730
	%	0.88	0.63	0.45	0.29	0.33
Origin Energy	Number	37	28	47	57	114
	%	0.25	0.20	0.36	0.40	0.75
Simply Energy	Number	21	155	417	235	197
	%	0.14	0.67	1.77	0.83	0.67
Total	Number	10,523	9,355	8,302	9,971	11,264
	%	1.46	1.28	1.11	1.32	1.44

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.

The information reported varies between retailers 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 2022/23.

AGL was the only retailer that reported an increase in the number of residential gas customers successfully completing an instalment plan from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

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 2019 and 30 June 2023

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	Successfully completed instalment plan	268	409	386	570	595
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	634	766	643	903	913
Alinta Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	4,950	6,964	5,773	5,465	5,149
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	1,978	3,936	2,820	724	1,427
Kleenheat	Successfully completed instalment plan	2,722	2,280	1,661	1,644	1,422
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	3,231	2,420	1,554	1,113	819
Origin Energy	Successfully completed instalment plan	28	133	78	99	63
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	197	242	157	254	216
Simply Energy ³⁸	Successfully completed instalment plan	1	29	156	263	241
	Instalment plan cancelled for non-payment	16	359	617	608	505

³⁸ Simply Energy commenced supplying customers in 2018/19.

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

Main points

- Horizon Power's residential electricity customers continue to hold a higher average energy bill debt, compared to customers supplied by Synergy.
- The average energy bill debt of Synergy's residential customers rose to its highest point in six years,
- The average energy bill debt of residential electricity customers continues to be much higher than the energy bill debt of residential gas customers.
- The average bill debt for residential gas customers increased to the highest reported in the past six years.

Energy bill debt is defined as an amount owed to the retailer that has been outstanding for 90 calendar days or more.³⁹

Energy bill debt data for customers assessed as experiencing financial hardship and on a defined 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 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,498	670	836	919	915	821
	Average bill debt (\$) ⁴⁰	715	903	1,496	1,066	974	798
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	10,669	9,978	10,451	9,389	11,947	10,823
	Average bill debt (\$)	396	379	541	562	766	772

³⁹ ERA, Electricity retail licence performance reporting handbook, April 2019, can be found [online](#).

⁴⁰ 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 average bill debt for Horizon Power's residential customers decreased by 18.1 per cent to \$798 in 2023. Horizon Power advised that it increased its credit management resources to focus on reducing outstanding debt.

During 2022/23, the average energy bill debt of Synergy's residential customers increased to its highest point in six years, reaching levels comparable to Horizon Power's residential customers.

The number of customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt for Horizon Power and Synergy, decreased by 10.3 and 9.4 per cent, respectively.

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.⁴¹

The bill debt picture for each retailers' business customers varies, both in terms of the number of customers with a debt and the average amount of debt.

The total number of business customers repaying an energy bill debt on 30 June 2023 decreased by 22.5 per cent to 1,680 customers compared to 2022. Overall, 1.6 per cent of all business electricity customers are repaying an energy bill debt.

The average amount of bill debt for business customers decreased by 16.4 per cent, to \$2,584 in 2022/23. This is mostly driven by the reduction in bill debt for Perth Energy customers in 2022/23 from an unusually high level in 2021/22.

Table 13: Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AER Retail	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1	2	1	1	2	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	3,000	6,000	3,338	2,127	3,500	0
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	303	48	353	292	272	247
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,390	2,083	6,194	3,059	3,250	2,784
Amanda Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	13	4	2	0	0	4
	Average bill debt (\$)	3,432	2,527	433	0	0	1,142
Change Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	0	1	3	0	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	0	1,260	1,899	0	0
Horizon Power	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	211	118	142	175	257	248

⁴¹ Clear Energy, CleanTech and the Rottnest Island Authority have been excluded from Table 13 because they have not had any customers repaying and energy bill debt for the past six years.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	Average bill debt (\$)	3,931	5,590	5,135	4,903	5,477	3,827
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	1	11	1	1	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	1,005	2,498	149	4,973	0
Peel Renewable	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	n/a	0	3	8	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	n/a	0	3,309	315	1,607
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	3	3	56	45	3	8
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	15,100	3,983	3,800	37,333	5,886
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,739	1,326	538	761	828	1,172
	Average bill debt (\$)	1,094	1,172	2,599	2,516	2,200	2,262

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.⁴²

On 30 June 2023, AGL was the only retailer to report an increase in the number of customers repaying a bill debt (an increase of 39.8 per cent), with a reduction reported by all other retailers. The total percentage of residential gas customers repaying an energy bill debt on 30 June 2023 decreased to 2.5 per cent.

There was a 5.8 per cent increase in the average bill debt on 30 June 2023 for residential gas customers, to \$451, significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Comparing Table 14 with Table 12 shows that the average energy bill debt for residential gas customers (\$451 in 2022/23) is less than the average energy bill debt for residential electricity customers (\$774).

⁴² 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.

Table 14: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	261	1,135	1,971	2,055	2,368	3,311
	Average bill debt (\$)	136	363	497	760	825	746
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,318	1,419	13,026	26,821	15,854	12,274
	Average bill debt (\$)	88	80	163	259	401	437
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	1,497	1,979	1,708	2,778	3,045	1,585
	Average bill debt (\$)	89	116	134	298	384	237
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	42	267	428	464	424	400
	Average bill debt (\$)	103	190	223	368	286	395
Simply Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	242	1,690	1,740	2,470	1,740
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	95	190	201	288	201
Totals	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	3,118	5,042	18,823	33,858	24,161	19,310
	Average bill debt (\$)	79	68	124	280	426	451

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.

On 30 June 2023, 2.6 per cent of all business customers are repaying an energy bill debt.

During 2022/23, the total the number of business gas customers repaying an energy debt decreased by 33.9 per cent to 253 customers but the average bill debt increased by 43.1 per cent to \$1,311.

In 2022/23, Amanda Energy, Origin Energy and Perth Energy's gas business customers, had the highest average bill debt for each retailer over the past six years.

Table 15: Business gas customers repaying an energy debt and average bill debt - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	27	37	33	18	18	16
	Average bill debt (\$)	367	608	1,137	967	556	864
Alinta Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	12	8	163	310	311	193
	Average bill debt (\$)	541	305	1,016	1,471	1,014	1,241
Amanda Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	0	0	0	0	1
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	0	0	0	0	1,010
Synergy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	10	7	17	11	6	4
	Average bill debt (\$)	902	1,047	1,307	1,148	1,301	589
Kleenheat	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	19	28	75	39	34	26
	Average bill debt (\$)	391	439	998	715	589	431
Origin Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	7	7	7	10	10
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	298	1,950	3,286	3,816	5,462
Perth Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	0	2	18	22	1	3
	Average bill debt (\$)	0	658	769	820	2,500	3,015
Simply Energy	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	n/a	0	0	0	3	0
	Average bill debt (\$)	n/a	0	0	0	254	0
Total	Number of customers repaying a bill debt	68	89	313	407	383	253
	Average bill debt (\$)	337	263	883	1,364	1,030	1,311

4. Hardship programs

Main points

- The total number of electricity customers on a hardship program decreased by 2.4 per cent in 2022/23; however, the average energy bill debt of Horizon Power and Synergy hardship customers increased.
- Of all electricity customers exiting a hardship program during the year, 94 per cent did so due to successful completion of the program.
- The total gas customers on a hardship program decreased by 9.9 per cent in 2022/23; however, the total average bill debt for customers on a hardship program increased by 29.2 per cent to the highest average bill debt reported in the last six years.
- Higher bill debt for hardship customers on electricity instalment plans and increasing numbers of customers on gas instalment plans indicate ongoing financial challenges faced by customers.
- The average bill debt for Western Australian electricity customers was substantially less than in other states. In contrast, the average gas bill debt for hardship customers was higher in Western Australia.

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

The hardship program performance indicators provide the ERA, and various stakeholders such as policy makers, retailers and consumer groups, with reliable data on the operation of hardship programs.

Financial hardship may be caused by prolonged exposure to circumstances that inhibit a customer's ability to manage their utility debt. The most common factors include financial management challenges stemming from insufficient or uncertain income, relationship breakdown, physical and mental health issues, bereavement and family violence. In such situations, customers may find it challenging to pay outstanding amounts without affecting their capacity to meet essential living expenses like rent or mortgage, groceries or other utilities.

The Electricity Code and the Gas Compendium require retailers to offer assistance to residential customers assessed as experiencing financial hardship, including: ^{43,44}

- Additional time to pay a bill.
- An instalment plan.
- 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 services.

⁴³ The Electricity Code 2022 extended this to all residential customers on request.

⁴⁴ The Electricity Code defines financial hardship in relation to a residential customer, as 'a state of long-term financial disadvantage as a result of which the customer is unable to pay an outstanding amount as required by a retailer without affecting the customer's ability to meet the basic living needs of the customer or a dependant of the customer'

Retailers must ensure that any instalment plan is fair and reasonable and must consider the customer's capacity to pay.

For several years, the Australian Energy Regulator and Essential Services Commission of Victoria have required electricity and gas retailers to report hardship program data. Where possible, the ERA's indicators have been aligned with the Australian Energy Regulator's indicators to facilitate comparison of Western Australian data with other jurisdictions (see section 4.2.3). However, it is important to note, that state-based data serves as an indication only and readers should approach comparisons between jurisdictions with caution due to variations in energy costs and regulatory requirements.

Comprehensive data concerning all hardship program and energy bill debt indicators are available in the data tables published on the ERA website. This chapter focuses on the number of customers enrolled in hardship programs and the customers' associated energy debt.

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 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	Number	912	1,511	1,518	1,126	1,007	882
	%	2.31	3.98	4.11	3.11	2.73	2.40
Synergy	Number	30,640	33,707	28,899	23,348	34,678	33,936
	%	3.07	3.33	2.85	2.28	3.34	3.19
Total	Number	31,552	35,218	30,417	24,474	35,685	34,818
	%	3.04	3.36	2.9	2.31	3.32	3.17

The total number of electricity customers in a hardship program decreased by 2.43 per cent in 2022/23 compared to the previous year, with both Synergy and Horizon reporting a reduction of customers on a hardship program.

Table 17 shows the reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program. Most customers exiting a hardship program across the five years, did so because they had either successfully completed the program or had the retailer's agreement to exit the program.

In 2022/23, only 4.8 per cent of customers on a hardship program were excluded or removed for non-compliance. 94.7 per cent of customer exists from hardship programs was due to successful completion. Synergy reported positive outcomes in its financial hardship programs, with a 71 per cent increase in the number of customers successfully completing its hardship programs compared to 2021/22.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Annual datasheet for individual retailer reported information.

Table 17: Reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program between 2018/19 and 2022/23

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Successfully completed	Number	22,508	26,879	21,131	14,285	24,201
	%	87.9	90.2	94.0	89.7	93.8
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	Number	150	302	56	112	148
	%	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.7	0.6
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ⁴⁶	Number	2,940	2,617	1,292	1,522	1,218
	%	11.5	8.8	5.7	9.6	4.8

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.

As shown in Table 16, the total number of customers on a hardship program decreased in 2022/23. However, the average energy bill debt of Horizon Power and Synergy hardship customers increased, remaining more than double that of pre-pandemic amounts.

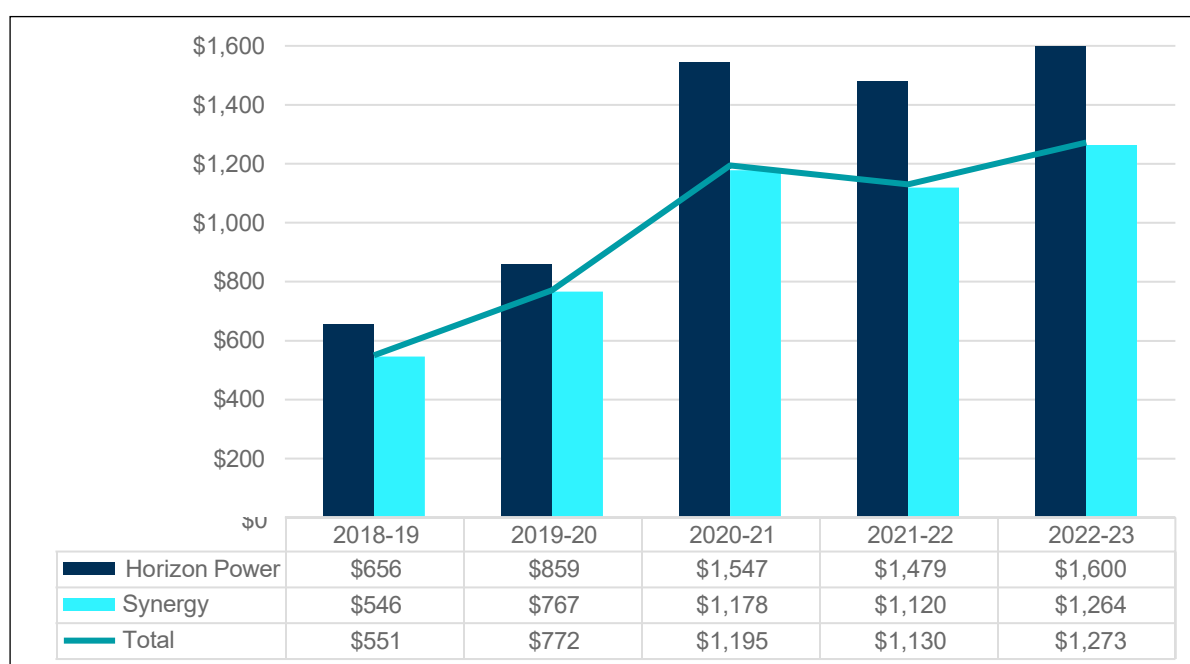
Figure 9: Electricity hardship customer average bill debt by retailer – 3- June 2018 to 30 June 2023

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

⁴⁶ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to contact the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

The average bill debt of customers at the time of entering a retailers hardship program increased by 50 per cent, rising from \$798 in 2021/22 to \$1,197 in 2022/23 (Table 18). Retailers suggested the higher debt could be attributable to higher cost of living challenges.

In previous years, the data showed that the average bill debt of a customer increased (at 30 June), indicating that the customer had difficulty managing both the outstanding debt and their ongoing consumption.⁴⁷

For 2022/23, the average energy bill debt at 30 June is \$1,273, a similar level to the average when entering a hardship program. Retailers have advised this may indicate that hardship programs are helping customers to not accrue additional debt as they manage the cost of their ongoing consumption.

Table 18: Electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program by retailer between 2018/19 and 2022/23 (\$)

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	1,442	758 ⁴⁸	1,255	851	1,706
Synergy	503	560	752	792	1,169
Total	579	580	798	798	1,197

4.2 Gas

4.2.1 Gas customers on a hardship program

Table 19 shows the number and percentage of residential gas customers on a hardship program.⁴⁹

The total number of gas customers on a hardship program decreased by 9.9 per cent in 2022/23, returning to pre-pandemic levels. Gas customers on a hardship program make up less than 1 per cent of all residential gas customers.

When comparing Table 19 against Table 16, it is evident that the overall percentage of gas customers on a hardship program (0.7 per cent) is much lower than electricity customers (3.17 per cent). Typically, average gas bills are lower than average electricity bills.

Table 19: Number and percentage of residential gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	Number	4	42	52	102	33	42

⁴⁷ For the past three years, the average energy bill debt of a hardship customer was much higher than the average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program.

⁴⁸ 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).

⁴⁹ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 19 because none of its customers have been on a hardship program for the past six years and it is no longer supplying residential customers.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
	%	0.02	0.10	0.08	0.14	0.04	0.04
Alinta Energy	Number	4,434	5,012	3,977	3,733	5,003	4,317
	%	0.90	1.09	0.92	0.86	1.19	1.02
Kleenheat	Number	790	496	548	735	758	816
	%	0.40	0.25	0.27	0.35	0.35	0.37
Origin Energy	Number	0	21	23	23	74	113
	%	0.00	0.14	0.17	0.17	0.52	0.75
Simply nergy	Number	n/a	3	72	171	188	171
	%	n/a	0.02	0.31	0.73	0.67	0.58
Total	Number	5,228	5,574	4,672	4,764	6,056	5,459
	%	0.73	0.77	0.64	0.63	0.79	0.70

Table 20 shows the reasons gas customers exited a hardship program. The percentage of customers exiting a program who successfully completed it or had the retailer's agreement to leave, fell to 37.5 per cent, compared to 71.5 per cent the previous year. The number of customers who left the program because they were excluded or removed due to non-compliance increased significantly, to 51.5 per cent (compared to 13.9 per cent the previous years).

Some retailers have advised that during the pandemic, no customers were removed from a hardship program for non-compliance. Retailers are now returning to normal operating procedures, where customers are removed from hardship programs for non-compliance.

Comparing Table 20 with Table 17 shows that the percentage of gas customers successfully completing a program (37.5 per cent) is much lower than for electricity customers (94.7 per cent).

Table 20: Reasons gas customers exited a hardship program between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2023⁵⁰

		2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Successfully completed	Number	3,407	3,608	2,802	3,614	2,513
	%	24.4	34.8	68.3	71.5	37.5
Switched, transferred or left the retailer	Number	4,113	1,864	748	738	738
	%	29.4	18.0	18.2	14.6	10.9
Excluded or removed for non-compliance ⁵¹	Number	6,466	4,891	550	705	3,471
	%	46.2	47.2	13.4	13.9	51.5

4.2.2 Hardship debt for gas customers.

Table 21 shows the average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer on 30 June.

The total average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program continued to increase, from an average of \$286 in 2017/18, to \$983 in 2022/23. This represents a 243.7 per cent increase in average bill debt over the past six years. The average bill debt for 2022/23 is the highest average ever reported.

AGL and Alinta had the highest average bill debt figures for 2022/23.

Table 21: Average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (\$) ⁵²

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	101	500	683	1,025	1,116	1,504
Alinta Energy	312	206	578	854	778	1,095
Kleenheat	140	220	227	461	550	510
Origin Energy	0	138	102	317	660	746
Simply Energy	n/a	323	444	426	1,121	426
Total	286	209	534	779	761	983

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

During 2022/23, Alinta Energy and Kleenheat reported the highest average debt of customers at the time they entered a hardship program during the reported five-year period. Conversely,

⁵⁰ Esperance Gas has been removed from the figures previously reported in Table 20 due to the surrender of its licence in 2022/23.

⁵¹ This may include instances where the hardship customer fails to contact the retailer or make agreed payments towards their energy account.

⁵² Esperance Gas has been removed from Table 21 due to the surrender of its licence in 2022/23.

AGL, Origin Energy and Simply Energy all reported a lower average bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program compared to the previous year.

The average energy bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program increased by 34.7 per cent from 2021/22 to 2022/23. This is the highest annual increase reported in six years.

Consistent with the observations in section 4.1.2, the average energy bill debt when entering a hardship program is similar to the average energy bill debt of hardship customers calculated on 30 June 2023.

Table 22: Average bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program 2018/19 to 2022/23 (\$)⁵³

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	392	605	916	1,168	1,070
Alinta Energy	192	568	637	774	1,305
Kleenheat	344	262	286	482	556
Origin Energy	237	179	304	604	391
Simply Energy	373	410	378	886	378
Total	199	522	575	712	959

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.⁵⁴

The average bill debt on 30 June 2023 for Western Australian electricity hardship customers is lower than that of South Australia and NSW; however Western Australian gas hardship customers had a higher average bill debt than customers in the other two jurisdictions.

⁵³ Esperance Gas has been removed from Table 22 due to the surrender of its licence in 2022/23.

⁵⁴ State-based data serves as an indication only and readers should approach comparisons between jurisdictions with caution due to variations in energy costs and regulatory requirements.

Table 23: Jurisdictional comparison of average bill debt of electricity and gas hardship customers between 2017/18 to 2022.23 (\$)⁵⁵

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Electricity						
Western Australia	475	551	772	1,195	1,130	1,273
South Australia	1,694	1,863	1,970	2,438	2,424	2,402
New South Wales	916	1,212	1,274	1,630	1,712	1,735
Gas						
Western Australia	286	209	534	779	761	983
South Australia	585	621	599	790	907	852
New South Wales	668	684	658	786	861	852

⁵⁵ Data for South Australia and NSW - Australian Energy Regulator – Annual retail markets report 2022-23, Charts and Graphs, ([online](#)), accessed 5 December 2023.

5. Disconnections

Main points

- In 2022/23, residential and business, gas and electricity disconnections continued to increase following the end of COVID-19 era disconnection moratoriums.
- 11,488 residential electricity customers were disconnected, up 12.2 per cent from 10,241 in 2021/22.
- Residential gas disconnections were up 134 per cent from 2021/22.

Energy is an essential service. Disconnection for non-payment of bills is a last resort after instalment 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 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 looks at disconnections that resulted from a customer's failure to pay a bill.^{56,57}

5.1 Total electricity disconnections

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

In 2022/23, the percentage of residential and business electricity disconnections continued to increase after the State Government's moratorium on disconnections ended in mid-2021.⁵⁸

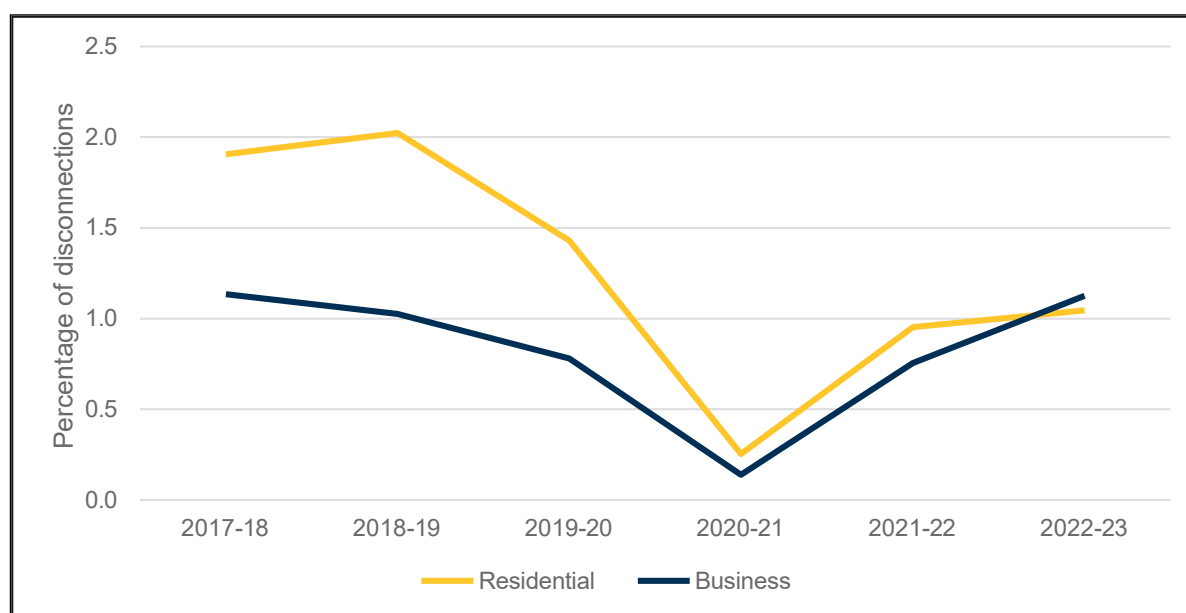
Despite an increase in overall disconnection numbers, the percentage of residential electricity disconnections remains below pre-pandemic levels. However, the percentage of business electricity disconnections returned to pre-pandemic levels.

In addition to the resumption of disconnection practises, retailers suggest, the overall increase in disconnections may be attributable to the rising costs of living and the current economic challenges faced by residential and business customers.

⁵⁶ Customers can also be disconnected for taking supply without having an account with the retailer (called 'non-application') or denying access to the meter.

⁵⁷ Refer to section 4.3 of the Handbook for definitions.

⁵⁸ 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 2018 to 20 June 2023

5.2 Electricity residential disconnections

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

Horizon Power and Synergy both reported an increase in electricity customer disconnections during 2022/23. Overall, the number of customers disconnected for non-payment remained around 1 per cent of total residential customers over the past two years.

Table 24: Number and percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections by retailer between 2017/18 and 2022/23

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	Number	1,943	3,156 ⁵⁹	2,741	251	2,590	2,800
	%	4.93	8.32	7.42	0.69	7.02	7.63
Synergy	Number	17,800	18,056	12,273	2,432	7,651	8,688
	%	1.79	1.79	1.21	0.24	0.74	0.82
Total	Number	19,743	21,212	15,014	2,683	10,241	11,488
	%	1.91	2.02	1.43	0.25	0.95	1.05

⁵⁹ 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 pre-payment meter disconnection periods

Periods of disconnection for pre-payment meter customers occur for many reasons. A short period often indicates that the customer ran out of credit and is then prompted to purchase more. A longer period may reflect limited access to recharge facilities, a voluntary decision to not consume electricity (the property is empty) or alternatively, the customer limited financial capacity to purchase electricity.

Horizon Power increased the emergency credit limit on meters to \$200 as a Covid-19 assistance measure, to help customers stay connected.^{60,61} When a customer goes into emergency credit, this amount is required to be repaid before credit can be purchased for reconnection. Although a high emergency credit was helpful to customers during the pandemic it also presents a high financial hurdle for customers to reconnect once the credit has been used. Therefore, Horizon Power lowered the emergency credit limit to \$100 and has been gradually reducing it down to \$30, which it considers more manageable for customers.

Horizon Power implemented disconnection moratoriums in 2022 to assist customers to remain connected while it resolved a technical issue with the pre-payment metering system. The system did not recognise payments by some customers to their accounts, and did not re-energise the meters.⁶²

Table 25 shows the number of pre-payment meter period of disconnections. Fewer pre-payment meter disconnection periods were reported in 2022/23, than in 2021/22.⁶³

Table 25: Total number of pre-payment meter disconnection periods⁶⁴

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	10,865	34,368	31,969	30,307	66,841	49,529
Synergy	391	318	290	249	560	270
Total	11,256	34,786	32,259	30,556	67,401	49,799

Table 26 shows the total number of disconnection periods for pre-payment meter customers that have been disconnected two or more times in any one-month period, for longer than 2 hours on each occasion.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ The Electricity Code clause (60)(1) requires a pre-payment meter customer to have access to an amount of \$20 emergency credit outside of normal business hours.

⁶¹ Emergency credit is generally used where there is an issue with a meter, to enable a customer to remain in power.

⁶² The ERA reviewed the metering issue in Horizon Powers recent performance audit and monitored its resolution. More information on Horizon Power's audit can be found on the ERA's [website](#).

⁶³ The higher number of disconnections for Horizon Power's pre-payment meter customers in 2021/2022 was due to the ending of COVID-19 disconnection moratoriums from July 2021 onwards.

⁶⁴ The ERA collected this information in previous years; however, this is the first year reported.

⁶⁵ Clause 66 of the Electricity Code provides for information and assistance obligations in relation to customers experiencing payment problems, including residential pre-payment meter customers disconnected two or more times in any one-month period for longer than 120 minutes on each occasion.

The number of disconnection periods for customers lasting longer than 2 hours (two or more times in any one-month period) decreased by 18 per cent since the previous period, however the figures are still greater than pre-pandemic levels.

Table 26: Total number of disconnection periods for pre-payment meter customers that have been disconnected two or more times in any one-month period for longer than two hours.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	989	1,083	1,295	2,454	3,349	2,721
Synergy	15	45	32	21	28	20
Total	1,004	1,128	1,327	2,475	3,377	2,741

5.4 Electricity business disconnections

Table 27 shows the number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer.⁶⁶

In 2022/23, Amanda Energy was the only retailer that reported no business customer disconnections. Horizon Power and Perth Energy's disconnections reduced by 57.2 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. Synergy's business electricity customer disconnections increased by 69.4 per cent.

The total percentage of business electricity customers disconnected for failure to pay a bill increased to 1.13 per cent in 2022/23 (from 0.75 per cent in 2021/22).

Table 27: Number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AER	Number	0	0	0	0	0	1
	%	0	0	0	0	0	n/a
Alinta Energy	Number	11	13	6	0	0	6
	%	0.38	0.46	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.63
Amanda Energy	Number	1	1	0	0	1	0
	%	0.72	0.83	0.00	0.00	0.40	0.00
Horizon Power	Number	124	82	128	4	96	41
	%	1.61	1.04	1.69	0.05	1.05	0.44
Kleenheat	Number	2	3	1	1	0	1
	%	1.87	2.38	0.59	0.57	0.00	0.95

⁶⁶ A-Star, Change Energy, Clear Energy, Peel Renewable, Perdaman Energy and Rottnest Island Authority did not disconnect any business customers and have been excluded from Table 27.

⁶⁷ As of 30 June 2023, AER Retail ceased supplying small use customers. The ERA only collected customer numbers on 30 June 2023 (see the ERA handbook), so a percentage calculation was not possible.

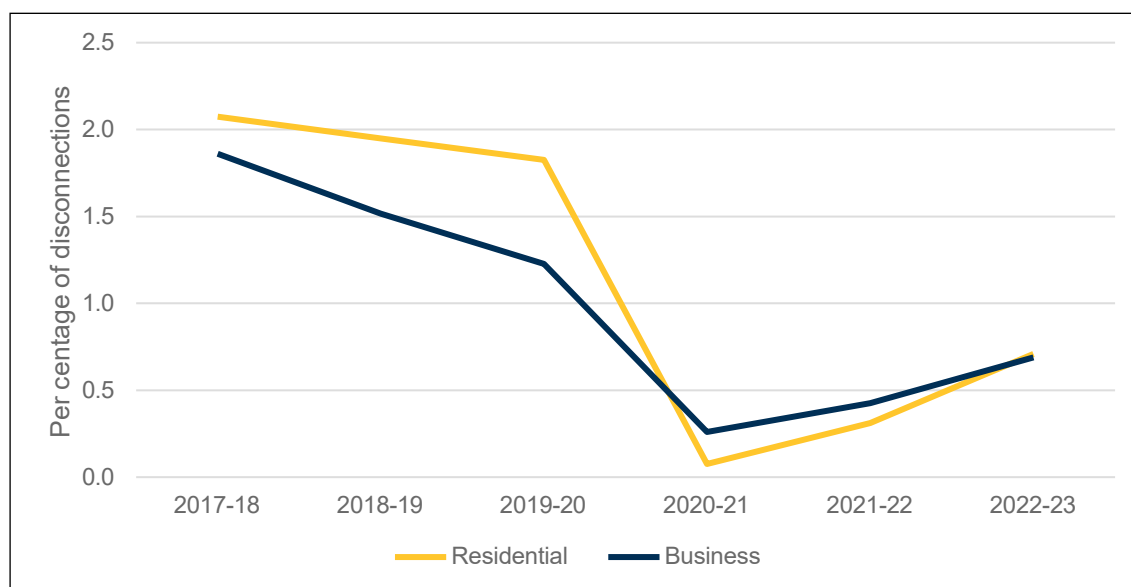
		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Perth Energy	Number	15	18	29	3	41	4
	%	1.73	4.36	6.65	0.29	4.17	0.41
Synergy	Number	1,026	946	631	139	674	1,142
	%	1.11	1.03	0.70	0.15	0.72	1.21
Total	Number	1,179	1,063	795	147	812	1,195
	%	1.14	1.03	0.78	0.14	0.75	1.13

5.5 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 2022/23 but remain below pre-pandemic levels. Some retailers advised that the increase in disconnections is partly due to the resumption of usual practices following their self-imposed pause in disconnections during the pandemic and into 2021/22.

Figure 11: Residential and business gas customer disconnections 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)



5.6 Gas residential disconnections

Table 28 shows the number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁶⁸ Overall, the number of disconnections more than doubled during 2022/23, increasing to 5,556.

⁶⁸ AGL and Perth Energy did not disconnect any residential customers and have been excluded from Table 28.

Alinta Energy and Kleenheat reported an increase in the number of residential gas disconnections in 2022/23 compared to the previous year. Origin Energy and Simply Energy reported a decrease in the number of disconnections.

Table 28: Number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2017/18 to 2022/23

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	Number	13,161	12,125	11,234	0	1,925	4,219
	%	2.66	2.64	2.60	0.0	0.46	1.00
Kleenheat	Number	1,744	2,007	1,910	0	0	1,131
	%	0.89	1.02	0.95	0.0	0.0	0.52
Origin Energy	Number	0	48	95	3	113	26
	%	0.0	0.33	0.69	0.02	0.79	0.17
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	8	180	564	335	180
	%	n/a	0.05	0.78	2.39	1.19	0.62
Total	Number	14,905	14,188	13,419	567	2,373	5,556
	%	2.07	1.95	1.82	0.08	0.31	0.71

5.7 Gas business disconnections

Table 29 shows the number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer.⁶⁹ Since lifting the COVID-19 voluntary pause on disconnections, there has been a steady increase in the number of business gas customer disconnections that continued in 2022/23.

Table 29: Number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2017/18 to 2022/23

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	Number	147	117	80	0	32	32
	%	2.26	1.95	1.38	0.0	0.57	0.56
Synergy	Number	0	0	0	1	0	0
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.52	0.0	0.00
Kleenheat	Number	30	26	37	22	7	34
	%	1.45	1.08	1.41	0.87	0.31	1.33
Origin Energy	Number	0	0	0	0	0	1
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.50

⁶⁹ AGL, Amanda Energy and Perth Energy did not disconnect any business customers in the past 6 reporting years and have been excluded from Table 29.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Simply Energy	Number	n/a	0	0	1	1	0
	%	n/a	0.0	0.0	3.85	3.70	0.00
Total	Number	177	143	117	24	40	67
	%	1.86	1.52	1.23	0.26	0.42	0.69

5.8 Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections

Table 30 compares the residential electricity and gas disconnection percentages in Western Australia with the percentages in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria.

Provisions that 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.

Table 30: Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections 2018 to 2023 (%)⁷⁰

	New South Wales	South Australia	Victoria	Queensland	Western Australia
	Electricity				
2018/19	1.00	1.33	0.89	1.34	2.02
2019/20	0.56	0.89	0.69	0.85	1.43
2020/21	0.30	0.49	0.27	0.17	0.25
2021/22	0.28	0.56	0.52	0.66	0.91
2022/23	0.39	0.46	0.43	0.39	1.05
	Gas				
2018/19	0.28	0.83	0.69	0.79	1.95
2019/20	0.22	0.51	0.42	0.64	1.83
2020/21	0.22	0.26	0.12	0.30	0.08
2021/22	0.27	0.40	0.19	0.49	0.31
2022/23	0.31	0.25	0.20	0.31	0.71

⁷⁰ Data: South Australia and New South Wales data from: Australian Energy Regulator, 2023, Annual Retail Market Report 2022-23 – Charts and Data ([online](#)) [accessed 1 December 2023]

6. Reconnections

Main Points

- There was a decline in number and percentage of residential electricity customers being reconnected in 2022/23 for both Horizon Power and Synergy.
- Horizon Power's reconnection rate dropped significantly from 87.1 per cent to 49.6 per cent. Synergy's rate decreased from 54.7 per cent to 50.9 per cent.
- In 2022/23, Horizon Power's business electricity reconnections increased to 53.7 per cent from the previous year's 44.8 per cent. Synergy saw a slight decrease from 48.7 per cent in 2021/22 to 46.7 per cent in 2022/23.
- Alinta Energy, Kleenheat and Origin Energy reported increased reconnection rates for residential gas customers compared to the previous year. Conversely, Simply Energy did not disconnect any business gas customers in 2022/23.

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 following a disconnection.⁷¹

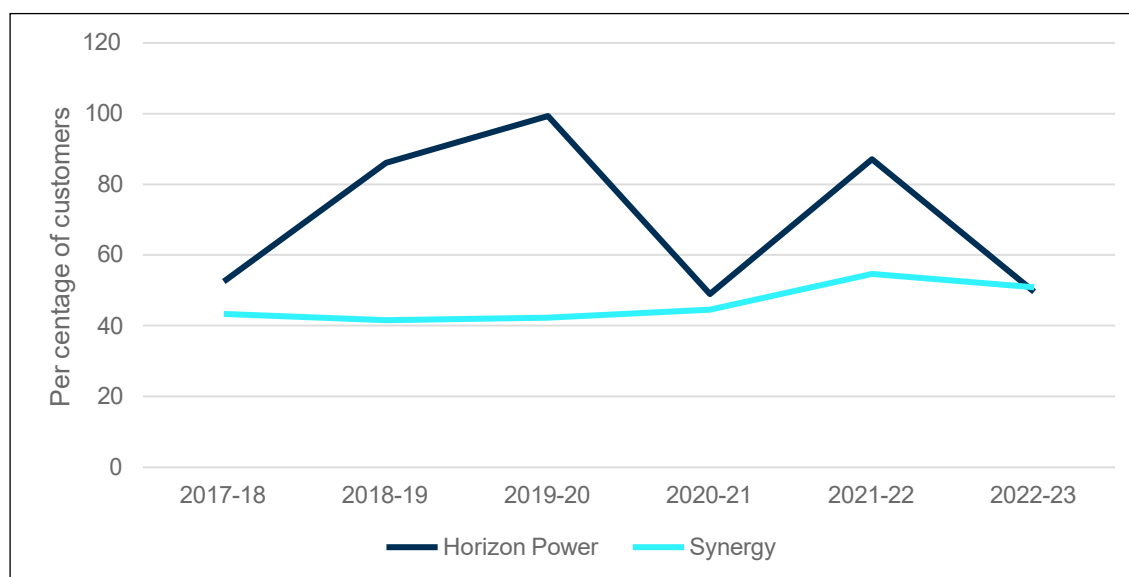
6.1 Residential electricity reconnections

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

There was a reduction in the number and percentage of reconnections for electricity customers. Horizon Power's residential reconnection percentage decreased to 49.6 per cent compared to 87.1 per cent in 2021/22.⁷² Synergy's reconnection percentage also decreased, from 54.7 per cent in 2021/22 to 50.9 per cent in 2022/23.

⁷¹ 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.

⁷² 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 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)

6.2 Business electricity reconnections

Table 31 shows the percentage of electricity business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailers.⁷³

In 2022/23, the percentage of business electricity reconnections for Horizon Power and Alinta increased to 53.7 and 33.4 per cent, respectively. Kleenheat reported 100 per cent reconnections based on one customer disconnection being reconnected during the year. Synergy's business electricity reconnections decreased slightly, to 46.7 per cent (from 48.7 per cent in 2021/22).

Amanda Energy and Perth Energy had no reconnections during 2022/23.

Table 31 Business electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	100.0	100.0	100.0	n/a	n/a	33.3
Amanda Energy ⁷⁴	0.0	100.0	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
Horizon Power	74.2	78.0	87.5	25.0	44.8	53.7
Kleenheat	0.0	33.3	0.0	100.0	n/a	100.0
Perth Energy	33.3	72.2	51.7	66.7	31.7	0.0
Synergy	35.1	33.5	29.6	28.8	48.7	46.7

⁷³ A-Star, Change Energy, Lear Energy, Peel Renewable, Perdam Energy and Rottnest Island Authority have all been removed from Table 31 because they did not disconnect any business customers over the past six years.

⁷⁴ Amanda Energy did not disconnect any electricity business customers in 2022/23.

6.3 Gas residential reconnections

Table 32 shows the percentage of residential gas customer disconnections that were reconnected by each retailer.⁷⁵

The percentage of residential gas customer disconnections that were reconnected by Alinta Energy, Kleenheat and Origin Energy increased, compared to the previous year. Simply Energy's reconnections decreased from 31.9 per cent in 2021/22 to 22.2 per cent in 2022/23.

Table 32: Gas residential customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2018 to 2023 (%)⁷⁶

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	66.7	66.7	73.1	n/a	45.0	52.2
Kleenheat	76.8	53.5	52.7	n/a	n/a	52.7
Origin Energy	0.0	31.3	32.6	0.0	41.6	50.0
Simply Energy	n/a	50.0	54.4	41.8	31.9	22.2

6.4 Gas business reconnections

Table 33 shows the percentage of business gas customer disconnections reconnected by each retailer.⁷⁷ Alinta Energy and Kleenheat were the only retailers to reconnect business customers in 2022/23, reporting increases in the number of reconnections since the previous year.

Table 33: Gas business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2018 to 2023 (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	53.7	55.6	36.3	n/a	43.8	46.9
Kleenheat	56.7	42.3	32.4	13.6	57.1	61.8
Simply Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	100.0	n/a

⁷⁵ AGL and Perth Energy have been excluded from Table 32 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

⁷⁶ Alinta did not disconnect any gas residential customers in 2020/21 and Kleenheat did not disconnect any gas residential customers in 2020/21 and 2021/22

⁷⁷ AGL, Amanda Energy, Origin Energy, Perth Energy and Synergy have been excluded from Table 33 because they did not perform any reconnections over the past six years.

7. Customer service

Main points

- Residential electricity and gas customer complaints decreased in 2022/23.
- Synergy resolved almost 99 per cent of residential electricity complaints within 15 business days. Horizon Power reported a slightly lower resolution rate of 91 per cent.
- For both residential and business customers, most complaints were about billing issues.
- Most compensation payments in 2022/23 were in relation to wrongful disconnections. Horizon Power made a significant portion of these payments.

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 managing complaints, which complies with Australian Standard AS/NZS 10002-2014 (Guidelines for complaint management in organisations). According to this standard, a complaint is defined 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.”⁷⁸

Retailers are also required to comply with the ERA’s customer complaints guidelines, which clarify the distinction between queries, complaints and other customer communications.⁷⁹

Customer complaints are separated into four categories: billing complaints, marketing complaints, transfer complaints and other complaints.⁸⁰

Given that a significant proportion of customer interactions occur via telephone, the responsiveness of retailers to these calls is an important measure of assessing customer service quality.

Larger retailers manage customer inquiries and complaints through call centres, equipped with sophisticated monitoring and reporting systems.⁸¹ A widely used indicator for call centre performance across various sectors is the percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds.

Smaller retailers offer a simpler telephone service, where customers reach a switchboard operator who then connects them to the appropriate contact person. Such systems generally lack the capability to record responsiveness data.

⁷⁸ The ERA 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.

⁷⁹ A copy of the guidelines is available on the ERA [website](#).

⁸⁰ Refer to section 4.5 of the Handbook for definitions.

⁸¹ 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 managed by the call centre

7.1 Customer complaints

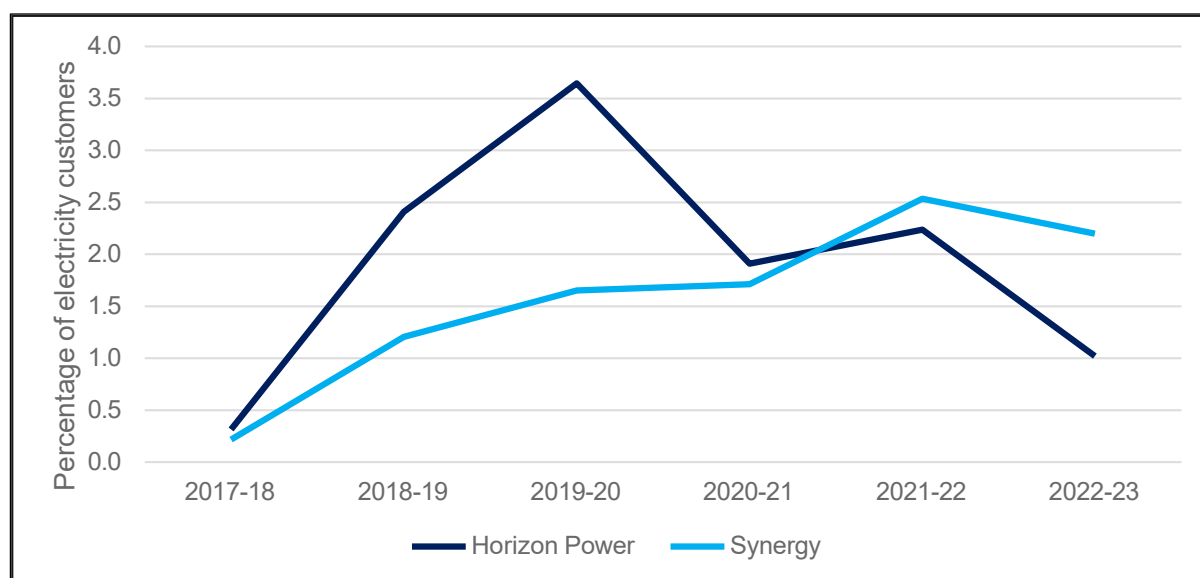
7.1.1 Residential electricity customer complaints

Figure 13 shows the total number of complaints made to electricity retailers, as a percentage of total residential customers.⁸²

The total number of complaints received from residential customers decreased by 12.6 per cent to 23,772. This could be attributed to Synergy receiving an unusually high number of complaints the previous year. Some retailers also reported that their increased internal focus on better managing complaints processes and the payment of household credits to customers may have contributed to lower levels of complaints. In May 2022, Horizon Power reviewed and improved its complaints management process, assisting more customers to resolve potential complaints prior to escalation.

Synergy resolved almost 99 per cent of complaints within 15 business days. Horizon Power reported a decrease for 2022/23, resolving 91 per cent of complaints within 15 business days.

Figure 13: Complaints from residential electricity customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)⁸³



7.1.2 Business electricity customer complaints

Table 34 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total business customers, made to electricity retailers.⁸⁴ For 2022/23, less than 1 per cent of business customers made a complaint to their retailer.

The percentage of business electricity complaints resolved within 15 business days varied by retailer. All of Amanda Energy's complaints were concluded within this timeframe. Synergy and Horizon Power resolved more than 92.9 per cent of complaints within 15 business days.

⁸² Excludes complaints received from pre-payment customers.

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ AER Retail, A-Star, Clear Energy and Peel Renewable have been excluded from Table 34 because they did not report any business customer complaints for the past six years.

Table 34: Complaints from business electricity customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4
Amanda Energy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.1
Change Energy	8.0	3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CleanTech	n/a	0.0	1.6	0.8	0.5	0.0
Horizon Power	0.2	1.6	2.3	1.3	0.7	0.4
Kleenheat	0.0	0.8	4.1	3.4	2.1	0.0
Perth Energy	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
Rottnest Island Authority	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.8

7.1.3 Residential and business electricity customer complaints by category

Table 35 compares residential and business electricity customer complaints by category for each retailer for the past two years.⁸⁵

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

Table 35: Residential and business electricity customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (%)

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23
Residential								
Horizon Power ⁸⁶	64.2	53.9	0.7	0.0	0.2	0.0	44.4	46.1
Synergy	76.7	68.4	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	14.3	20.4
Business								
Alinta Energy	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	25.0
Amanda Energy	100.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
CleanTech	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Horizon Power	63.1	50.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	n/a	50.0

⁸⁵ AER Retail, A-Star, Change Energy, Clear Energy, Peel Renewable, Perth Energy and the Rottnest Island Authority have been excluded from Table 35 because they did not receive any complaints from business customers for the past two years.

⁸⁶ Horizon Power advised for 2021/22 it was not able to separate residential and business 'other/ complaints and included all 'other' complaints under residential customer.

	Billing			Marketing	Transfer		Other	
Kleenheat	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Synergy	72.0	71.6	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.3	17.2	16.2

7.1.4 Residential gas customer complaints

Table 36 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total residential customers, made to gas retailers.⁸⁷ The percentage of residential customer complaints varied by retailer, and for 2022/23 remained at levels lower than existed pre-pandemic.

The total number of complaints received from residential gas customers decreased by 16 per cent, from 27,185 complaints in 2021/22 to 23,772 in 2022/23. Some retailers have increased their customer focus and complaint reduction strategies and some retailers have changed procedures in relation to unpaid debt, contributing to less customer complaints in 2022/23.

Table 36: Complaints from residential gas customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	1.7	2.0	1.4	0.3	0.1	0.1
Alinta Energy	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2
Kleenheat	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
Origin Energy	1.3	1.3	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.5
Simply Energy	n/a	1.8	2.6	0.9	0.5	0.5

7.1.5 Business gas customer complaints

Table 37 shows the total number of complaints, as a percentage of total business customers, made to gas retailers.⁸⁸ The percentage of business customer complaints varied by retailer. AGL, Synergy and Simply Energy reported no customer complaints for 2022/23 and Alinta, Amanda Energy and Origin Energy, reported increases in complaints since the previous year.

Amanda Energy and Origin Energy resolved all business customer complaints within 15 business days. Alinta Energy and Kleenheat concluded 63.3 per cent and 77.8 per cent of customer complaints within 15 days, respectively.

Table 37: Complaints from business gas customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	2.6	3.0	1.4	0.8	0.6	0.0
Alinta Energy	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.5
Amanda Energy	n/a	n/a	0	0	0	4.3
Synergy	0.0	0.7	1.2	1.6	1.3	0.0

⁸⁷ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 36 as it did not receive any complaints for the past six years.

⁸⁸ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 37 because they did not receive any business customer complaints for the past six years.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Kleenheat	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.6	0.9	0.7
Origin Energy	3.9	2.1	0.5	2.4	0.0	0.5
Simply Energy	n/a	0.0	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

7.1.6 Residential and business gas customer complaints by category

Table 38 compares residential and business gas customer complaints by category per retailer for the past two years.

For Alinta Energy, Kleenheat and Origin Energy, more than 70 per cent of all the complaints from residential and business customers were about billing. Most of the complaints for Simply Energy were “other” complaints.

Table 38: Residential and business gas customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (%)⁸⁹

	Billing		Marketing		Transfer		Other	
	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23
Residential								
AGL	45.8	52	5.0	1.0	5.8	7.1	43.3	39.8
Alinta Energy	78.8	65.8	10.2	17.8	1.9	1.7	9.1	11.2
Kleenheat	67.6	75.2	1.9	1.3	3.5	4.4	27.1	19.1
Origin Energy	41.5	51.4	5.7	1.4	5.7	4.2	47.2	43.1
Simply Energy	45.1	30	9.2	2.2	4.6	3.0	41.2	72.6
Business								
AGL	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	33.3	0.0
Alinta Energy	100.0	70.0	0.0	23.3	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0
Synergy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
Kleenheat	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	0.0
Origin Energy	0.0	94.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

⁸⁹ Perth Energy has been excluded from Table 38 because they did not receive any customer complaints for the past two years. Simply Energy did not receive any complaints from business customers in 2021/22 and 2022/23.

7.2 Compensation Payments

There are service standards that retailers must meet when supplying a customer with electricity. In some cases, the customer is entitled to a payment if a standard included in the Electricity Code is not met.

Table 39 shows the total number of number of payments made by electricity retailers to residential customers for the previous six years, where the retailer failed to comply with its obligations under the Electricity Code for:

- facilitating customer reconnections
- wrongful disconnections
- failing to respond to customer complaints within a timeframe (customer service).^{90,91}

Most payments (95 per cent) in 2022/23 related to wrongful disconnections.

In 2022/23, Horizon Power made 92.8 per cent of the total number of payments to residential electricity customers. However, the number of compensation payments made by Horizon Power in 2022/23 fell by 51.3 per cent compared to 2021/22.

Table 39: Total number of compensation payments from electricity retailers to customers.

		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Horizon Power	Customer reconnections	5	6	6	0	1	5
	Wrongful disconnections	42	9	31	34	228	111
	Customer service	0	0	0	0	0	0
Synergy	Customer reconnections	3	2	1	0	0	1
	Wrongful disconnections	21	15	18	1	5	8
	Customer service	0	2	1	1	1	0
Total		71	34	57	36	235	125

7.3 Retailer call centre responsiveness

7.3.1 Electricity retailer call centre responsiveness

Table 40 shows the number of calls to electricity retailer call centres.

⁹⁰ The ERA collected data from licensees on service standard payments over the past six years, however, this is first time compensation payments have been included in the report.

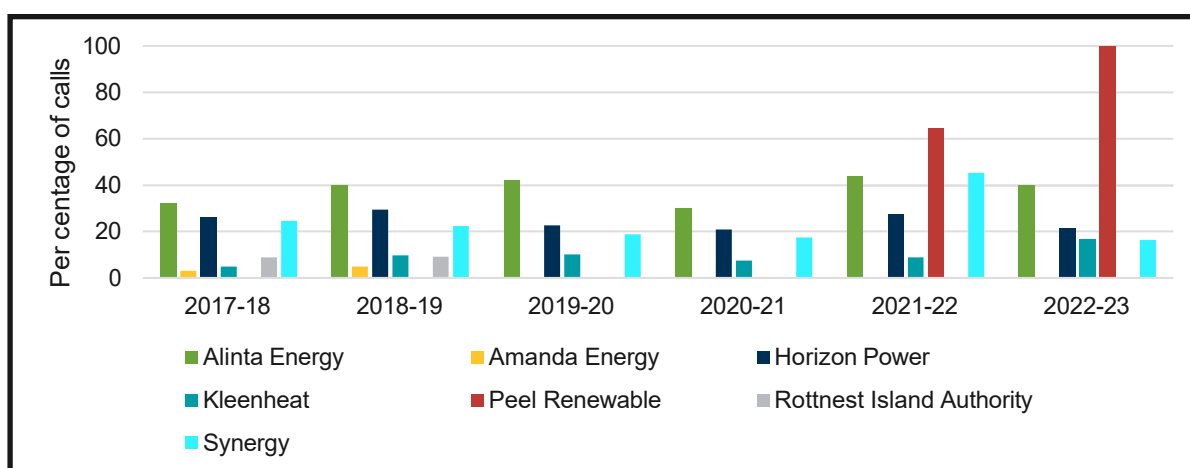
⁹¹ Compensation payments in Table 39 relate to the retailer failing to comply with Clauses 94, 95 and 96 of the Electricity Code.

Table 40: Volume of calls to electricity retailer call centres 2017/18 to 2022/23⁹²

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Alinta Energy	1,355	1,410	4,570	3,312	2,048	1,648
Amanda Energy	1,653	1,945	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Horizon Power ⁹³	81,159	73,180	65,079	50,242	58,882	53,053
Kleenheat	61	31	69	67	45	42
Peel Renewable	n/a	n/a	0	3	17	1
Rottnest Island Authority	852	33	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Synergy	1,060,903	1,008,193	958,159	711,117	793,551	703,671
Total	1,145,983	1,084,792	1,027,877	764,741	854,543	758,415

All retailers reported a reduction in the number of calls to their call centres in 2022/23, with calls continuing to remain below pre-pandemic levels. Some retailers suggest calls have reduced compared to a high level of call volumes in 2021/22 received when COVID-19 measures were lifted.

Figure 14 shows the percentage of calls to electricity retailer call centres not answered within 30 seconds. In 2022/23, Peel Renewable only had one call that was not answered within 30 seconds.

Figure 14: Calls from electricity customers not answered within 30 seconds 2018 to 2023 (%)

⁹² 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.

⁹³ Horizon Power's call centre handles calls for both retail and distribution customers. Horizon Power has not been able to separate retail calls from distribution calls since 2014.

7.4 Gas retailer call centre responsiveness

Table 41 shows the number of calls to gas retailer call centres. The total number of calls increased by 5.6 per cent since the 2021/22 year; however, is still below pre-pandemic levels. Alinta Energy received more than 51 per cent of the total calls, with Kleenheat and AGL receiving the next highest volume of calls, at 30.5 per cent and 12.1 per cent of total calls, respectively.

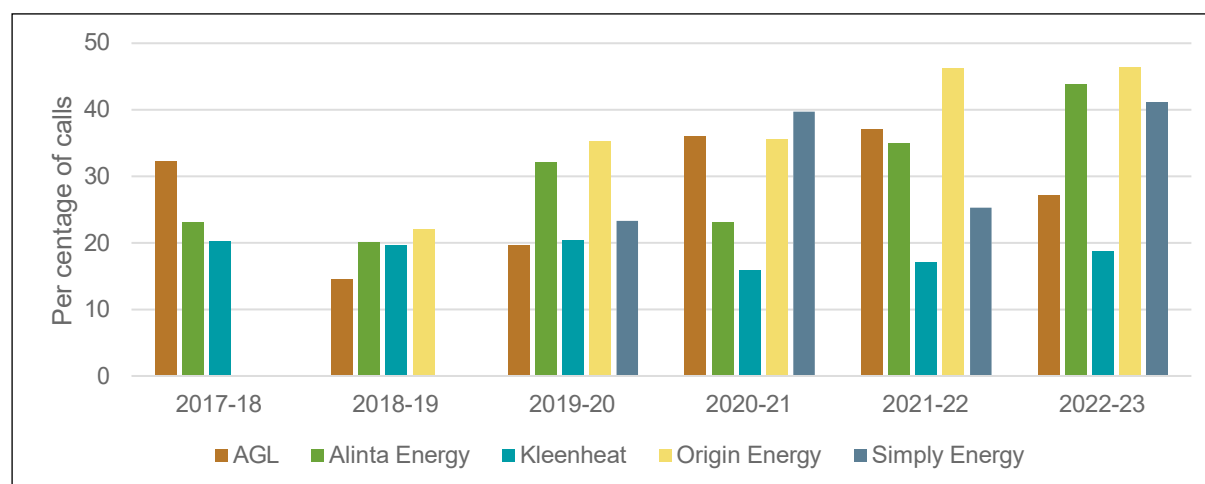
Table 41: Volume of calls to gas retailer call centres 2017/18 to 2022/23

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
AGL	46,388	56,961	66,361	41,627	46,674	74,642
Alinta Energy	531,427	537,418	420,246	282,128	296,875	319,648
Kleenheat	310,803	289,778	246,101	195,480	204,465	189,164
Origin Energy	18,518	34,319	27,466	21,861	22,842	27,235
Simply Energy	n/a	12,512	24,624	16,436	15,701	8,677
Total	907,136	930,988	784,798	557,532	586,557	619,366

Figure 15 shows the percentage of telephone calls to gas retailer call centres not answered within 30 seconds.⁹⁴

Origin had the highest percentage of calls not answered within 30 secs (46 per cent) and the second lowest volume of calls. In contrast, Kleenheat and AGL answered, 81.3 per cent and 72.9 per cent of their respective calls within 30 seconds.

Figure 15: Calls from gas customers not answered within 30 seconds 2018 to 2023 (%)



⁹⁴ Amanda Energy and Perth Energy have been excluded from Figure 15 as they do not operate a dedicated call centre.

Appendix 1 List of Tables

Table 1: Number of licensed electricity retailers supplying customers– 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	3
Table 2: Number of residential electricity customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 20 June 2023	4
Table 3: Number of business electricity customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	5
Table 4: Number of electricity pre-payment meter customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	6
Table 5: Number of licensed gas retailers - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023.....	7
Table 6: Number of residential gas customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	8
Table 7: Number of business gas customers by retailer – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	9
Table 8: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) on instalment plans by retailer - 30 June 2019 to 30 June 2023.	13
Table 9: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship program customers) who successfully completed their plan and those who had their instalment plan cancelled between 2018/19 and 2022/23.	14
Table 10: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) on an instalment plan by retailer - 30 June 2019 to 30 June 2023.	16
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 2019 and 30 June 2023	17
Table 12: Residential electricity customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	18
Table 13: Business electricity customers repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023.....	19
Table 14: Residential gas customers (excluding hardship customers) repaying an energy bill debt and the average bill debt by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	21
Table 15: Business gas customers repaying an energy debt and average bill debt - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	22
Table 16: Number and percentage of electricity customers on a hardship program - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	24
Table 17: Reasons electricity customers exited a hardship program between 2018/19 and 2022/23	25
Table 18: Electricity hardship customer average energy bill debt at the time of entering a hardship program by retailer between 2018/19 and 2022/23 (\$).....	26
Table 19: Number and percentage of residential gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023.....	26
Table 20: Reasons gas customers exited a hardship program between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2023	28
Table 21: Average bill debt for gas customers on a hardship program by retailer - 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (\$)	28
Table 22: Average bill debt of gas hardship customers at the time of entering a hardship program 2018/19 to 2022/23 (\$).....	29
Table 23: Jurisdictional comparison of average bill debt of electricity and gas hardship customers between 2017/18 to 2022.23 (\$).....	30
Table 24: Number and percentage of residential electricity customer disconnections by retailer between 2017/18 and 2022/23.....	32
Table 25: Total number of pre-payment meter disconnection periods.....	33
Table 26: Total number of disconnection periods for pre-payment meter customers that have been disconnected two or more times in any one-month period for longer than two hours	34
Table 27: Number and percentage of business electricity customer disconnections by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23	34
Table 28: Number and percentage of residential gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2017/18 to 2022/23	36
Table 29: Number and percentage of business gas customer disconnections by retailer from 2017/18 to 2022/23	36

Table 30: Jurisdictional comparison of residential electricity and gas disconnections 2018 to 2023 (%).....	37
Table 31 Business electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	39
Table 32: Gas residential customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2018 to 2023 (%).....	40
Table 33: Gas business customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer 2018 to 2023 (%).....	40
Table 34: Complaints from business electricity customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	43
Table 35: Residential and business electricity customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (%).....	43
Table 36: Complaints from residential gas customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	44
Table 37: Complaints from business gas customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	44
Table 38: Residential and business gas customer complaints by complaint category per retailer in 2021/22 and 2022/23 (%).....	45
Table 39: Total number of compensation payments from electricity retailers to customers.....	46
Table 40: Volume of calls to electricity retailer call centres 2017/18 to 2022/23	47
Table 41: Volume of calls to gas retailer call centres 2017/18 to 2022/23	48

Appendix 2 List of Figures

Figure 1:	Number of residential and business electricity customers – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	5
Figure 2:	Number of residential and business gas customers – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023	9
Figure 3:	Residential coastal supply area gas market share by retailer on 30 June in 2022 and 2023	10
Figure 4:	Business gas market share in the coastal supply area by retailer on 30 June in 2022 and 2023 (%).....	11
Figure 5:	Electricity customers granted more time to pay a bill – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%).....	13
Figure 6:	Electricity customers on instalment plans – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%)	14
Figure 7:	Gas customers granted more time to pay a bill – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%).....	16
Figure 8:	Gas customers on an instalment plan – 30 June 2018 to 30 June 2023 (%).....	17
Figure 9:	Electricity hardship customer average bill debt by retailer – 3- June 2018 to 30 June 2023	27
Figure 10:	Residential and business electricity customer disconnections from 30 June 2018 to 20 June 2023	34
Figure 11:	Residential and business gas customer disconnections 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	38
Figure 12:	Residential electricity customer disconnections that were reconnected by retailer between 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%)	42
Figure 13:	Complaints from residential electricity customers by retailer 2017/18 to 2022/23 (%).....	45
Figure 14:	Calls from electricity customers not answered within 30 seconds 2018 to 2023 (%).....	51
Figure 15:	Calls from gas customers not answered within 30 seconds 2018 to 2023 (%)	52