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Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner Scheme 10 years old

The Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner Scheme (the Scheme) is ten years old this month, and has just had one of the busiest months in its history.

“The Scheme was set up to meet the need for accessible and independent complaint resolution in the industry,” said Commissioner Judi Jones.

“New Zealand already had ombudsmen for the banking and insurance industries but, unlike Australia, had no such scheme for the energy sector,” Ms Jones said.

“The first year showed the scheme was meeting a need. We received high numbers of enquiries and complaints in 2002, the first full year of operation. The next peak was 2004, but this year has broken all records,” Ms Jones said. “In August 2011 we received 792 enquiries and complaints, more than three times the 233 received in August 2002.”

“There are a couple of things that may have had an impact on the workload,” Ms Jones said. “One is that all companies now have to include contact details for the Scheme on invoices, so more people know about us. The other is that more people are thinking about the way they use electricity because of the Electricity Authority’s ‘What’s my number?’ campaign.”

The Scheme was set up in October 2001 as a self-regulatory industry scheme for the electricity industry. In 2005 the Scheme expanded to include complaints about gas companies. Since 2006, the Scheme has been able to consider complaints from landowners and land occupiers.

Billing is the most common issue in complaints. In the first ten years it has been the main issue in nearly half the complaints received. Customer service, disconnection and meters each account for about 10% for complaints, with various issues making up the balance.

Milestones

- 2001 Electricity Complaints Commissioner Scheme set up
- 2005 Scheme expanded to include gas, and becomes the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner Scheme
- 2005 Commissioner authorised to deal with complaints where the amount in dispute is up to \$20,000 or \$50,000 with the company’s agreement
- 2006 Scheme expanded to include complaints from landowners and land occupiers
- 2010 Scheme becomes the approved Scheme under the Electricity Act 1992 and the Gas Act 1992

For more information, contact:
Dinah Vincent
Communications Advisor
04 914 4525 or 0800 22 33 40
d.vincent@egcomplaints.co.nz
www.egcomplaints.co.nz