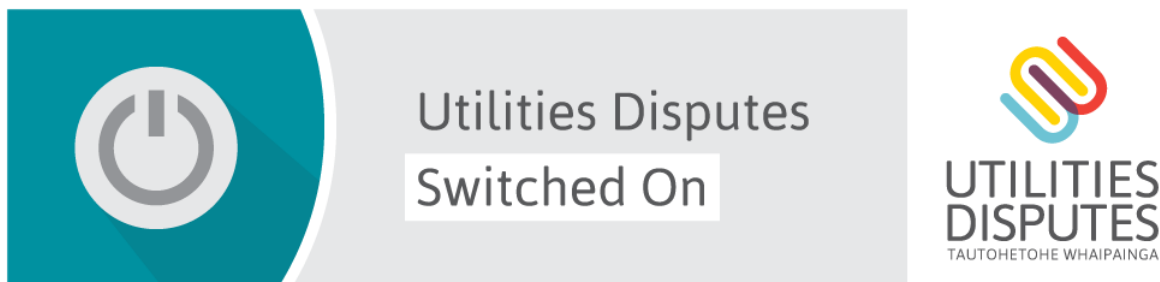


Independent / fair / free



June 2018

0800 22 33 40 | info@utilitiesdisputes.co.nz | www.utilitiesdisputes.co.nz

|MC:TOC|

Welcome from the Commissioner, Nanette Moreau



Greetings,

As winter sets in, energy bill complaints are on the rise at Utilities Disputes. The overall number of complaints tends to rise in winter, together with the portion of bill-related complaints. While we can't make decisions about the price of energy, our team can investigate whether your bill is accurate, and whether the customer service, communication and information you have received has been adequate, including whether you are being billed on the appropriate plan.

While a recent Consumer NZ report reveals a substantial number of dissatisfied energy customers, our own consumer survey has confirmed awareness about Utilities Disputes is low. We want more people to know they can contact our free and independent service. You have the right to ask questions or complain and we can help by identifying and investigating the issues.

Both industry and consumers can learn from complaints, and the media can be one way to share messages and tips. Knowledge can empower consumers to better understand their options and make more informed choices.

Recent examples of informative media articles include:

- During the mass power outages caused by the **Auckland storm**, a complainant contacted the NZ Herald and said she wanted more people to know they could contact Utilities Disputes for guidance. She said it made a real difference. [See the story.](#)
- Our tips about **switching energy providers** were published by Fairfax – our main message: your energy provider, and whether you switch, is your choice. However, if you do switch, switch carefully. Read contracts (current and potential), ask questions, and find out about 'termination' or 'break' fees. [See the story.](#)
- The NZ Herald reported on a Canstar Blue statement that **a third of consumers don't understand their power bill**. We encouraged consumers to talk to their

provider, ask about unexplained bills or charges, and if issues remain unresolved, contact us. [See the story.](#)

- A Fairfax article covered some Utilities Disputes complaints, including a \$7000 '**back bill**', and a sudden **high bill** after three months. [See the story.](#)

Together with the steady amount of energy complaints, we are now receiving complaints and queries about water in Auckland, and about fibre installation on shared property. We have received approximately 250 fibre installation complaints and queries from consumers who share property. We expect to receive more calls as more fibre is installed.

Contact us any time for more information, and we encourage you share this newsletter among your networks. Feedback and complaints can create positive change for businesses and for consumers.

Stay warm and safe over winter.



Nanette Moreau
Commissioner

Interview: Boosting financial capability with Tim Barnett



Tim Barnett heads the National Building Financial Capability Charitable Trust (NBFCCT) – soon to be re-branded to a more snappy title! - supporting the 198 free budgeting services in Aotearoa. The Trust provides training, data, advocacy, networking and negotiating services. Tim previously ran the Christchurch Community Law Centre, and was MP for Christchurch Central for 12 years. He has been General Secretary of the NZ Labour Party, and Group Manager – Iwi for Tūhoe.

How did NBFCCT come to be?

We exist because the nation's well-established network of budgeting services, for many years under the umbrella of the Federation of Family Budgeting Services, became fractured in the past 10 years. I became CEO in June 2017 when the Federation officially closed, and NBFCCT was formed. Most of our funding is from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) – we have a 10 year contract with them.

And you are soon re-branding?

Yes. We need people to understand what we're here to do and language is crucial for that understanding. NBFCCT is a mouthful and we weren't being understood – I was even asked to speak at a couple of building conferences!

[Read more](#)

Annual General meeting

Utilities Disputes' Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday 28 June 2018. The 2017-18 Annual Report will be released following this meeting, and available on our website.

Who do you pay your energy bill to?

Who do you pay your energy bill to? If it is a property manager or building owner they may be required to join Utilities Disputes' Energy Complaints Scheme. This could also include apartments, offices, retirement villages, marinas and more...

The Energy Innovation (Electric Vehicles and Other Matters) Amendment Act came into force on 1 July 2017. This means "secondary networks" (small electricity networks like those in apartment buildings, malls and retirement villages) must belong to the approved dispute resolution scheme, operated by Utilities Disputes. This is to ensure consumers on these networks have access to free, independent dispute resolution if they have issues or complaints about their energy providers.

There is estimated to be over 100,000 consumers who don't currently have access to the Energy Complaints Scheme. If your provider doesn't belong to the scheme, we can't investigate your complaint.

We are working to identify the providers that need to join. So, if you pay your energy bill to a landlord or property manager, let us know! **0800 22 33 40**

Winter Energy Payment

Utilities Disputes attended the Winter Energy Payment stakeholder meeting on 17 May, hosted by Electricity Retailers' Association of New Zealand (ERANZ) and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD).

The new Winter Energy Payment aims to help with the cost of heating homes over winter. People who receive NZ Superannuation, a Veterans Pension or a benefit are eligible for this payment. Emails and letters explaining the payment will be sent to clients from 21 May. The first payment for 2018 will be made on 1 July.

For tips on how to keep your home warm and dry over winter, check out [Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority \(EECA\) website](#).

Case notes - energy (examples of what we do):



Case number: 70689

Issues: Supply - surge - damage, customer service - provision of information - poor quality information

Outcome: Recommendation - not upheld

Complaint: Mr H complained about a surge at his property. He said the surge damaged some of his appliances. He also complained his retailer did not accept his complaint and referred him to his insurance company instead.

In January 2017, road contractors damaged an underground supply cable causing a feeder trip. This caused an outage for over 500 customers in the area, including Mr H. Mr H was without power for around three hours. Mr H said after the outage his meter stopped communicating, and two appliances at his property were damaged.

(Complaint summary continued on the website...)

[Read more](#)

Case number: 71464

Issues: Billing - high, billing - price, provision - existing connection - supply upgrade/downgrade

Outcome: Settled

Complaint: Ms Z represented a group, who had an account with the retailer. Ms Z raised a complaint about the retailer's capacity charges. She said the charges were high and possibly incorrect. Ms Z also complained the retailer provided poor customer service by not communicating adequately after she lodged a complaint. The group was later represented by Ms P.

The retailer said it first dealt with the complaint in April 2016 and understood the complaint was resolved. The retailer confirmed there were two dwellings at the property and the complaint was about the supply to one building. It said it was discussing a solution to the complaint with the distributor.

[Read more](#)

Electricity Pricing review

In May we met with the Electricity Price Review Secretariat about how Utilities Disputes can help them in their task of ***ensuring the New Zealand electricity market delivers efficient, fair, and equitable prices as technology evolves and we transition to a lower emissions future, taking into consideration the requirements of environmental sustainability and the need to maintain security and reliability of supply.***

On the Board's behalf we have indicated an interest in being involved from our unique position as provider of the approved scheme for electricity and gas complaints. This may include sharing data about the issues affecting consumers, and where targeted approaches to other community organisations may help.

Chair visits ENA

Hon Heather Roy, Independent Chair of Utilities Disputes, presented to the board of the Electricity Networks Association (ENA) on 1 June. The ENA Board was interested to hear Heather discuss Utilities Disputes' upcoming transition to a fully independent Board. Heather was grateful for the opportunity to share our news, and answer questions from the ENA Board.

Consultation

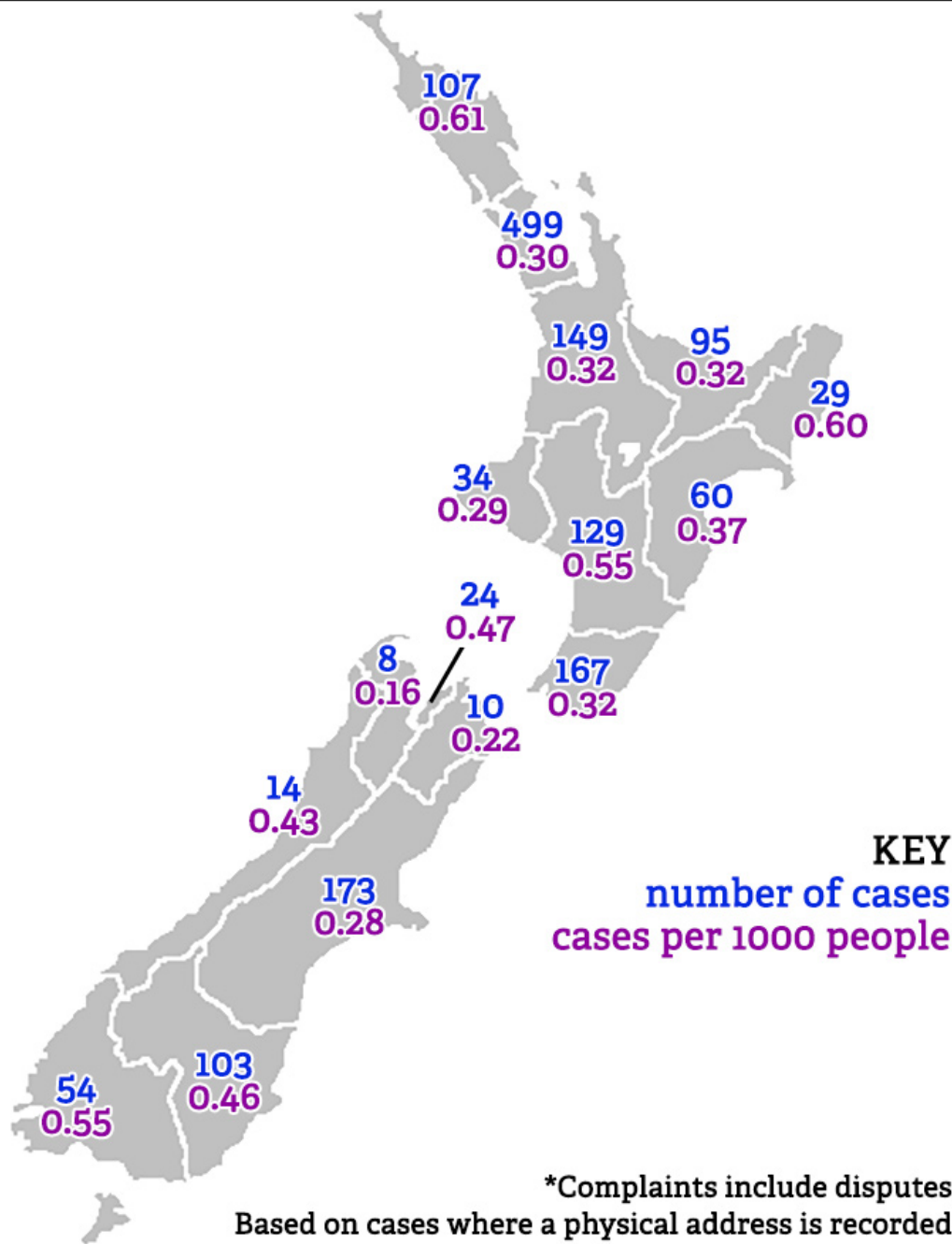
The Utilities Disputes Board has been consulting on proposed Scheme changes from the five-year independent review. Consultation round two closed on 15 June.

We received 13 submissions in round two of consultation. Any changes to the Energy Scheme rules require ministerial approval. The Board will use the information received when deciding the most appropriate way forward.

For more information on consultation, see the [‘What’s happening’ page on our website.](#)

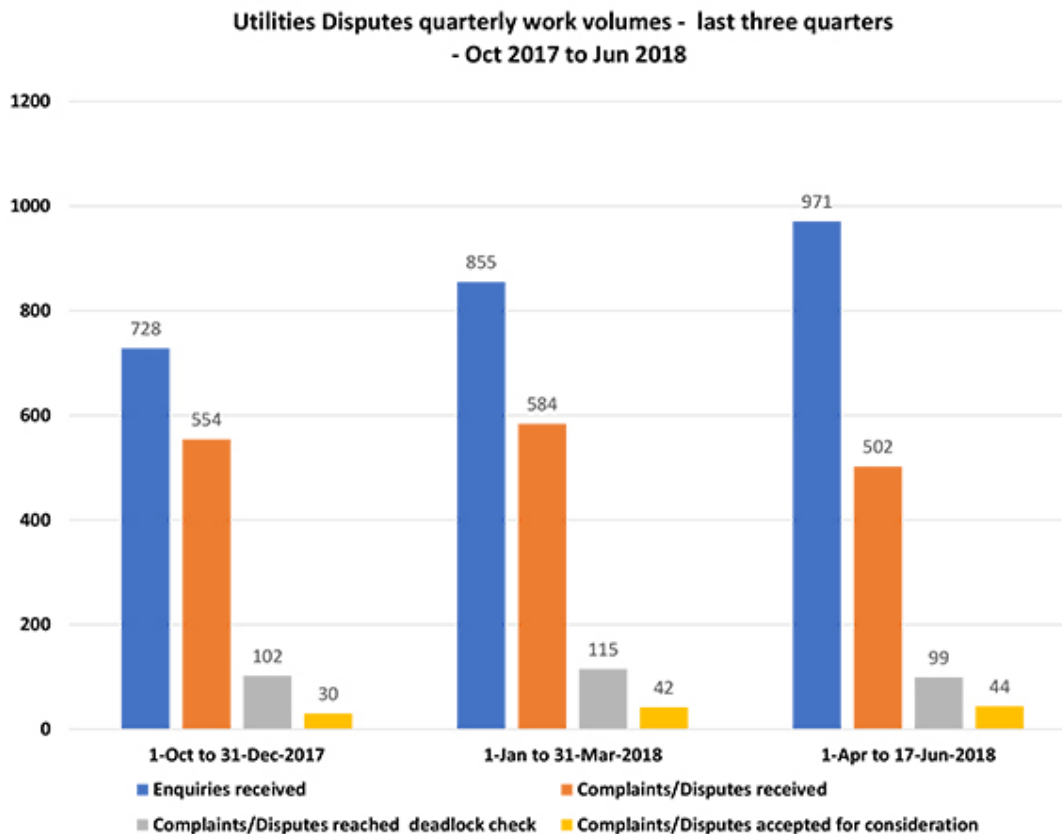
What the numbers tell us...

Complaints(*) received by region against population
1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018



***Complaints include disputes**
Based on cases where a physical address is recorded
1 in 4 complaints for the period did not have a physical address recorded

*For the Energy and Water Schemes we use "complaints".
For the BSPAD Scheme we use "disputes".*



Did you know...

Most property owners are responsible for the maintenance and repair of electricity lines and poles on their property? This includes keeping trees away from lines and poles.

Only professionals should complete this work. Contact an electrician or arborist if you think you might need some work done.

See our fact sheet: [Trees and power lines](#), or call us for more information:
0800 22 33 40.

Did you know we are on Neighbourly?

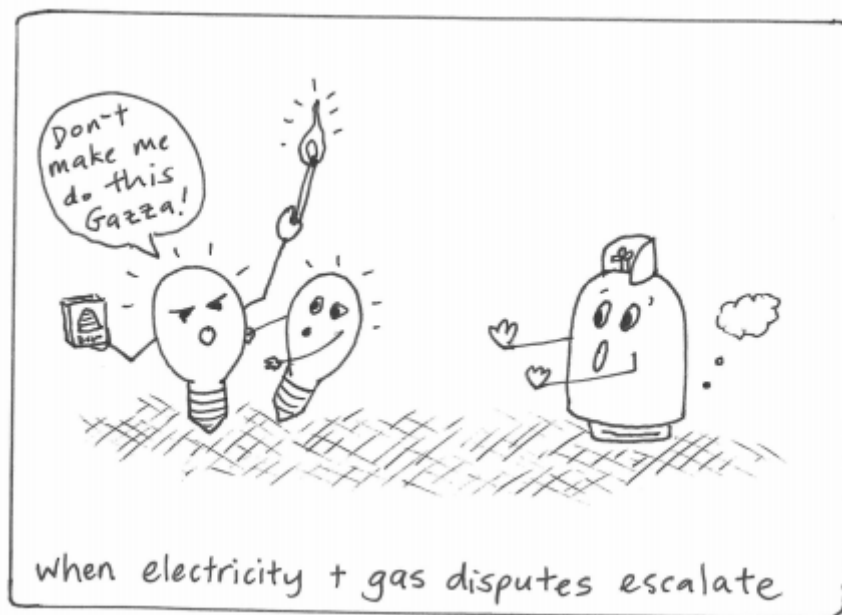


What is Neighbourly?

Neighbourly allows you to stay connected with your neighbours and community using a private neighbourhood website. It's a free service that is designed to make your neighbourhood a safer and better place to live.

We will use Neighbourly to inform you when we are visiting your community, for updates about us, and passing on useful information.

Please visit our page: <https://www.neighbourly.co.nz/organisation/utilities-disputes>



Please feel free to pass along this newsletter to your colleagues. We welcome your feedback, suggestions and questions. You can contact us at the email below.



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Call us on:

0800 22 33 40

Please call or email us to be added to (or removed from) our mailing list.