



# ENERGY RETAILERS COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE REPORT – CUSTOMER SERVICE

2014-15

May 2016



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present information about the performance of energy retailers in Victoria with regard to their customer service in 2014-15. The information is based on data provided by retailers according to the Commission's published performance indicators.<sup>1</sup>

The key findings based on retailer data supplied for the 2014-15 year are reported below.

## ENERGY MARKETS

The number of retail customers in the Victorian electricity market grew by about 1.6 per cent in 2014-15 in comparison to the prior reporting period; a total increase of 43 257 customers. Within different customer segments, the year-on-year change varied. There was a 1.3 per cent and 6.0 per cent increase in residential and small business customers respectively, but a 3.7 per cent decrease in total large business electricity customers.

A similar pattern occurred in the gas market, with increases of approximately 1.8 per cent and 9.0 per cent in residential and small business customers respectively, but a 23.8 per cent decrease in large business customers.

During 2014-15, there was an increase in the number of companies and retail brands operating in the residential, small business, and large business customer segments of the retail energy market. Market shares also shifted, with many retailers increasing their share of customers – mainly at the expense of long standing retailers (Origin Energy, EnergyAustralia, and AGL).

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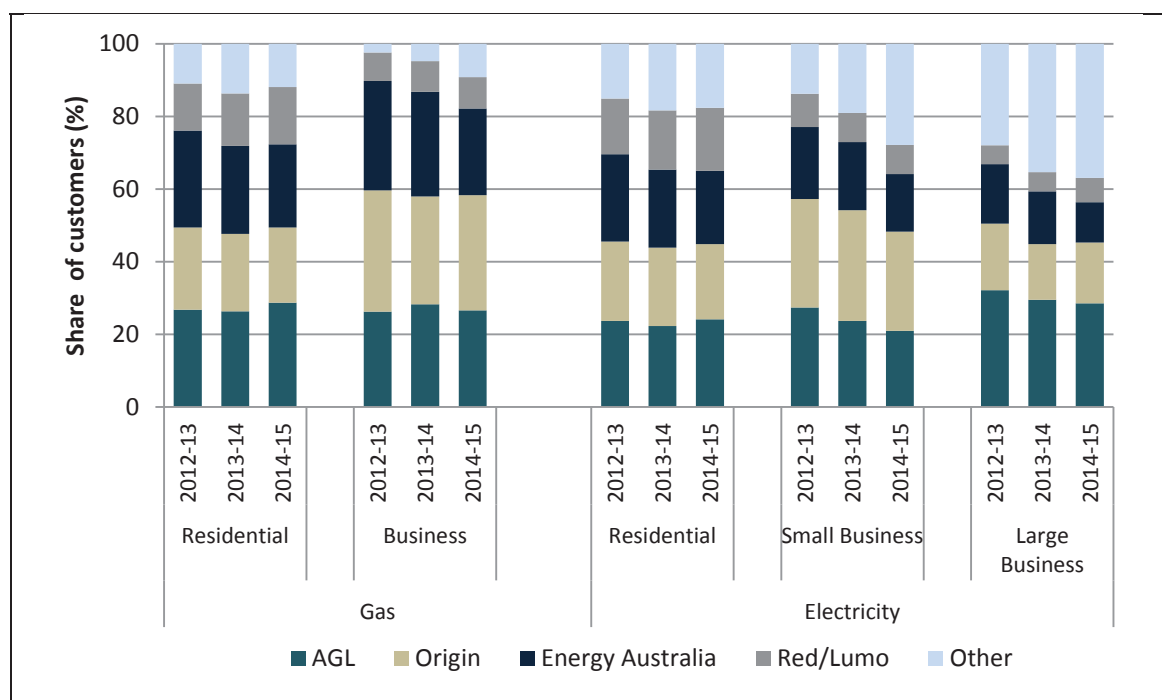
<sup>1</sup> See Essential Services Commission, *Energy Retail Performance Indicators – Effective 2013-14*, June 2013.

The number of active electricity retailers increased from 24 to 30, with 11 of these retailers also supplying gas.

During 2014-15, AGL completed its acquisition of Australian Power & Gas which ceased activity in the retail market. Snowy Hydro Limited (the parent company of Red Energy) purchased Lumo Energy, bringing its combined customer market share to more than 16 per cent in Victoria in respect of both electricity and gas retail.

Four companies – AGL, Energy Australia, Origin Energy, and Snowy Hydro (which owns both Red Energy and Lumo Energy) held over 80 per cent of the total retail electricity and gas market. Figure 1 illustrates the market share of customers for AGL, Energy Australia, Origin Energy, and Snowy Hydro relative to all other competing retailers in different segments of the energy retail market.

**FIGURE 1 RETAILER MARKET SHARE BY FUEL AND CUSTOMER TYPE**  
2012-13 to 2014-15



## CUSTOMERS ON STANDARD CONTRACTS

Since the introduction of full retail competition in the Victorian retail energy industry in 2002, customers have had the option to purchase energy under 'market retail contracts' or 'standard retail contracts'.

Where a customer has not made contact with a retailer to enter a market offer contract, the customer has continued to be supplied with energy under the terms of their existing retailer's 'standing offer'.

In 2014-15, approximately 10 per cent of residential customers received their energy under standing offer contracts. This amounts to about 228 000 electricity and 217 000 gas accounts.

A higher proportion of small business customers – about 19 per cent of electricity and 25 per cent of gas accounts – were supplied under standard contracts.

## CUSTOMER TRANSFERS

During the reporting period, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) recorded 722 403 electricity consumer transfers in Victoria, and 422 154 in respect of gas customers. These numbers suggest that approximately 27 per cent of electricity customers and 22 per cent of gas customers in Victoria transferred between retailers during the reporting period. However, the Commission notes that these figures include transfers resulting from customers moving in and out of premises and new meter installations.

The rates of transfer in Victoria remained markedly higher than in other jurisdictions, continuing a trend that has persisted for some years.

## **RETAILER PERFORMANCE IN ASSISTING WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES**

Despite a 30 per cent increase in the number of customers participating in retailer hardship programs, the data in 2014-15 continues to demonstrate that customers experiencing payment difficulties are not consistently being provided with assistance by retailers.

In the 2014-15 period, retailers reported a monthly average of over 130 000 customers paying for electricity and/or gas by an instalment payment plan; equivalent to 3.2

per cent of all residential customers. Of these, only about 30 000 were participating in a hardship program.

The data on instalment plans and hardship program participation also indicates wide variations between retailers with regard to:

- the proportion of customers provided access to hardship programs,
- the level of debt on entry to a hardship program, and
- the likelihood of customer debt level being reduced over time after entry into a hardship program.

In February 2015, the Commission commenced an inquiry into best practice financial hardship programs within the energy retail industry. In conducting the inquiry the Commission consulted widely to identify steps that should be consistently taken by retailers to minimise the risk of disconnection of customers facing payment difficulties. In its final report, the Commission presented a new approach and regulatory framework for implementation by mid-2017 (see: *Supporting Customers, Avoiding Labels – Energy Hardship Inquiry Final Report*, March 2016).

## DISCONNECTION OF CUSTOMERS FOR NON-PAYMENT

During the reporting year, 34 418 residential electricity customers and 22 322 residential gas customers were disconnected from supply due to non-payment of an outstanding account. Table 1 shows that after a significant rise in disconnection rates in 2013-14, disconnection rates in 2014-15 remained high by recent historical standards.

**TABLE 1 DISCONNECTIONS FOR NON-PAYMENT IN VICTORIA - RESIDENTIAL**  
2010-11 to 2014-15

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Electricity disconnections	17 871	23 805	25 254	34 496	34 418
Disconnections per 100 customers	0.77	1.02	1.07	1.47	1.45
Gas disconnections	13 741	20 483	16 979	24 007	22 322
Disconnections per 100 customers	0.74	1.13	0.90	1.31	1.20



The data also demonstrated significant variations in the rates at which different retailers disconnect customers for non-payment, and significant variations in the rates at which different retailers disconnect customers from year to year. This is likely due to differences in the way in which retailers opt to apply financial hardship policies, and differences in the credit management strategies applied by individual retailers from year to year.

## WRONGFUL DISCONNECTIONS

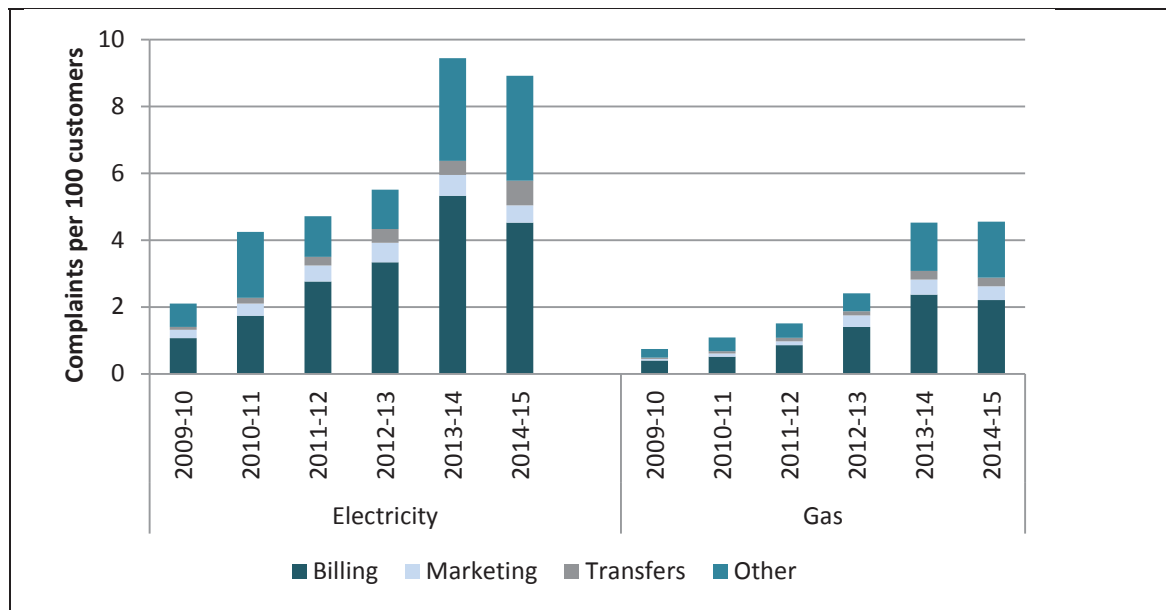
Retailers are required to make a payment to a customer if they disconnect the customer's energy supply contrary to the terms and conditions of the customer's energy supply contract. In this report the Commission reports wrongful disconnections as a performance indicator for the first time. During 2014-15, retailers reported 1097 cases of wrongful disconnection payments being made. This equates to almost two per cent of all residential disconnections. This is in addition to the 393 wrongful disconnection assessments settled with the assistance of the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV).

## CALL CENTRE PERFORMANCE AND COMPLAINTS

Retailer call centre performance generally continued to improve across the industry. The total number of contacts received by phone declined by 12 per cent compared with the 2013-14 period. At the same time, the timeliness of retailer attendance to calls generally improved (78 per cent of calls forwarded to an operator were attended to within 30 seconds, up from 69 per cent in the previous year).

Although the number of complaints recorded across the industry declined in comparison to the prior period, complaint rates still remain high by recent historical standards. Retailers continued to record high rates of complaints concerning 'billing', including complaints about prices, overcharging and high bills. Figure 2 illustrates the elevated complaint figures since 2012-13.

**FIGURE 2 COMPLAINTS TO RETAILERS – ELECTRICITY AND GAS**  
2010-11 to 2014-15



EWOV reported the number of complaint investigations at EWOV decreased in 2014-15. This supports the contention that there has been improvement by the industry in responding in a timely way to issues raised by customers.

# 1 ABOUT OUR REPORT

The objectives of the Essential Services Commission with respect to the electricity and gas retail industries include promoting:

- the long term interests of Victorian consumers
- the development of full retail competition, and
- protections for customers, including in relation to assisting customers who are facing payment difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

In promoting its objects, the Commission performs a ‘public education’ function and collects and reports data in a suite of public reports each year.<sup>2</sup>

The Commission has been reporting on the performance of Victorian energy retailers since the mid-1990s. In conducting its reporting function, the aim of the Commission is to provide information to Victorian consumers about the energy market and its operation.

This report presents information on four key topics:

1. Changes in the structure of retail energy markets in Victoria
2. Financial assistance provided by retailers in Victoria to customers facing payment difficulties
3. Rates of disconnection for non-payment, and

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<sup>1</sup> See section 8 of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001 (Vic)*, section 10 of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000 (Vic)*, and section 18 of the *Gas Industry Act 2001 (Vic)*.

<sup>2</sup> The Commission’s ‘public education’ function is set out in section 10(f) of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001 (Vic)*. In recent years, information has been presented in three annual reports covering ‘pricing’, ‘regulatory compliance’ and ‘customer service’. Following the passage of the *Energy Legislation Amendment (Consumer Protection) Act 2015 (Vic)*, the Commission will produce a consolidated annual ‘Compliance and Enforcement Report’ and move to a quarterly reporting regime.

#### 4. Call centre performance and complaints.

The data in the report was collected by the Commission primarily from energy retailers.<sup>3</sup> Other sources of data in the report include the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, the Australian Energy Market Operator, and the Australian Energy Regulator.

## 1.2 CORRECTION OF DATA FOR PRIOR YEARS

### 1.2.1 ORIGIN ENERGY RESUBMISSION OF 2013-14 DATA

In August 2015, following preliminary findings of an audit conducted by the Commission, Origin Energy became aware of some significant errors relating to its reporting of performance indicators – in particular its methodology for calculating performance indicators relating to hardship and payment plan participation, and disconnection for non-payment.

In November 2015, Origin Energy provided the Commission with corrected data for the 2013-14 financial year. The data presented in this report includes Origin Energy's corrected data. As a consequence, there are variations in the figures presented in this report in comparison with the Commission's report for the 2013-14 year for payment plan, hardship, and disconnection performance indicators. Origin Energy's revised figures contain an additional 2000 hardship program participants as their original submission did not factor in gas customers. Revisions to Origin Energy's procedures for meeting reporting requirements for payment plans and disconnection indicators led to variation in the calculation of all metrics that use hardship program participation or payment plans as a denominator. Significant deviations from last year's report are noted in the relevant chapters.

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<sup>3</sup> Licensed energy retailers are required to report 'performance indicators' to the Commission. The specifications of the performance indicators are set out in *Energy Retail Performance Indicators – Effective 2013-14* available at: <http://www.esc.vic.gov.au/getattachment/b4bdf78e-71df-41af-9ced-1742fae070ad/Energy-Retail-Performance-Indicators-2013-14.pdf>.

### **1.2.2 ADDITION OF RETAILER DATA ON A NEW PERFORMANCE INDICATOR**

In 2013-14, the Commission added a new performance indicator which captures customers who exit hardship programs by transferring between retailers. The calculation of total hardship participants in the 2013-14 report did not include these customers. Due to the inclusion of data for this performance indicator, and Origin Energy's updated figures, the calculation of total hardship program participants has been revised upward from 33 673 to 40 620 for the 2013-14 reporting period.

### **1.3 FUTURE REPORTING ON PERFORMANCE**

Under legislation that commenced in January 2016, the Commission's reporting obligations have changed.<sup>4</sup> In response to the new legislation, the timing and format of future performance reports by the Commission on the retail energy market will be revised commencing with the 2015-16 reporting year. The subject matter covered in this report will continue to be published, but in a more comprehensive report which will include information on retailer compliance and the Commission's enforcement activities.

As part of the transition to the new requirements, this report includes wrongful disconnections as an indicator of retailer performance. Wrongful disconnections have historically been reported in the Commission's annual compliance report. In 2014-15, wrongful disconnections will appear in both the compliance and the performance reports.

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<sup>4</sup> See section 54V of the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001 (Vic)* introduced by the *Energy Legislation Amendment (Consumer Protection) Act 2015 (Vic)*.



## 2 ENERGY MARKETS

### KEY OBSERVATIONS

In comparison to the prior reporting period, the total number of electricity customers in Victoria grew by approximately 1.6 per cent and the number of gas customers grew by approximately 2.0 per cent.

Eight new retailers became active in the electricity sector, and one new retailer commenced activity in the gas sector, giving a total of 30 active electricity retail businesses and 11 gas retail businesses. The significant number of new market entrants in the electricity retail market during the reporting period, and entry of a new gas retailer tends to confirm that businesses and investors perceive that there is scope to compete in the Victorian energy retail market.

Snowy Hydro's acquisition of Lumo Energy, in combination with its ownership of Red Energy, has it supplying about 16 per cent of electricity and gas customers. AGL, Origin Energy, EnergyAustralia and Snowy Hydro together hold about 80 per cent of the residential electricity market and 88 per cent of the residential gas market.

The number of residential customers on standing offer contracts remained stable, but there was a notable increase in the proportion of small business electricity customers moving on to market contracts.

Data reported by the Australian Energy Market Operator indicates that Victorian energy customers continue to switch between retailers more frequently than customers in other states.

## 2.1 RETAIL MARKET SIZE

Retailers are required to report their customer numbers to the Commission, which allows us to track changes in market share between retailers. Customers are free to choose their retailer, and data showing the rate at which customers exercise this choice can be an indicator of the level of customer engagement in the market. Retailers gain customers by providing offers that attract both new customers and customers from competitors. New customers are created when new connections are added to the network.

New retailers enter the market on the basis that they can provide competitive services that will entice customers from other businesses. Retailers can also gain customers by acquiring an existing retail business.

### 2.1.1 NEW ENTRY AND ACQUISITION ACTIVITY

During 2014-15, AGL completed its acquisition of Australian Power & Gas and thereby acquired nearly 100 000 new electricity and gas customers. Similarly, following Alinta Energy's acquisition of Neighbourhood Energy, former electricity customers of Neighbourhood were transferred to the Alinta brand.<sup>1</sup> Snowy Hydro, the parent company of Red Energy, purchased Lumo Energy in September 2014, but retained both brands as separate trading entities during the period.

Table 2.1 below provides an overview of the market segments in which each retailer operated during 2013-14 and 2014-15. The table shows that during 2014-15, eight new retail brands entered the electricity retail market. These were: CovaU, Go Energy, Macquarie Bank, Next Business Energy, Online Power and Gas, Progressive Green Energy, Stanwell Corporation, and Sumo Power. In 2014-15, ERM Business Energy, Click Energy, and Momentum Energy expanded their operations to include gas as well as electricity. Aurora Energy and Australian Power & Gas ceased operation in both the electricity and gas retail markets in 2013-14.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood Energy did not operate in the gas market.



**TABLE 2.1 RETAILER PARTICIPATION BY FUEL AND CUSTOMER SEGMENT**

	Electricity						Gas					
	2013-14			2014-15			2013-14			2014-15		
	Res	Sml Bus	Lge Bus	Res	Sml Bus	Lge Bus	Res	Sml Bus	Lge Bus	Res	Sml Bus	Lge Bus
AGL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
AGL Sales (Old)		✓	✓		✓	✓						
Alinta Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Aurora			✓						✓			
Aust Power & Gas	✓	✓	✓				✓					
Blue NRG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Click Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
CovaU				✓	✓	✓						
Diamond Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
EnergyAustralia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EnergyAustralia Yallourn			✓			✓						
ERM Business Energy		✓	✓		✓	✓						✓
Go Energy					✓	✓						
Lumo Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
M2 Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Macquarie Bank						✓						
Momentum Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Next Business Energy				✓	✓	✓						
Neighbourhood Energy	✓			✓								
Online Power and Gas				✓	✓	✓						
Origin Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pacific Hydro			✓	✓	✓	✓						
People Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Powerdirect	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Powershop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Progressive Green Energy						✓						
QEnergy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Red Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Simply Energy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stanwell Corporation						✓						
Sun Retail	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Sumo Power				✓								
<b>TOTAL (32)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

## 2.2 ELECTRICITY RETAIL CUSTOMERS

Table 2.2 below provides an overview of changes in customer numbers for electricity retailers in Victoria since the last reporting period. Retailers report to the Commission on the number of customers that are in contract on the last day of each month. The customer numbers presented in Table 2.2 are the average of the monthly figures reported.

For the purposes of interpreting the information in Table 2.2, the following points are relevant:

- Small business customers are defined as non-residential customers that consume under 40MWh per annum
- Sun Retail is owned by Origin Energy
- Powerdirect is owned by AGL
- M2 trades under the Dodo and Commander brands.

**TABLE 2.2 ELECTRICITY RETAILER CUSTOMER NUMBERS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

	Residential			Small Business (<40MWh)			Large Business (>40MWh)		
	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)
AGL	487 966	538 895	10	41 469	40 400	-3	11 484	10 547	-8
AGL Sales (Qld)	0	0		14	18	31	100	115	15
Alinta Energy	47 474	64 728	36	228	1 220	435	175	383	119
Aurora Energy	0	0		0	0		6	0	
Aust Power & Gas	97 475	0		1	0		1	0	
Blue NRG	83	94	13	2 361	4 924	109	989	2 075	110
Click Energy	25 978	25 121	3	771	623	-19	166	116	-30
CovaU	0	12		0	70		0	3	
Diamond Energy	2 294	3 070	34	146	192	32	24	25	4
EnergyAustralia	505 264	479 707	5	45 275	41 348	-9	8 147	3 188	-61
EnergyAustralia Yallourn	0	0		0	0		2 103	3 952	88
ERM Business Energy	0	0		254	3 258	1184	2 948	3 817	29
Go Energy	0	0		0	1		0	8	
Lumo Energy	188 882	196 685	4	12 534	13 524	8	1 761	2 000	14
M2 Energy	34 909	44 788	28	654	1 250	91	133	109	-18
Macquarie Bank	0	0		0	0		0	13	
Momentum Energy	35 932	49 977	39	29 363	33 798	15	17 996	11 372	-9
Next Business Energy	0	12		0	31		0	8	
Neighbourhood Energy	31 665	11 456	-64	0	0		0	0	
Online Power and Gas	0	31		0	6		0	875	
Origin Energy	507 359	492 290	-3	73 756	71 282	-3	10 834	10 591	-2
Pacific Hydro	0	61		0	48		28	132	379
People Energy	5 279	5 048	-4	131	190	45	21	26	24
Powerdirect	35 275	36 175	2.5	15 985	14 389	-10	9 291	7 777	-16
Powershop	3 972	27 070	582	294	1 759	499	46	263	466
Progressive Green	0	0		0	0		0	124	
QEnergy	776	1 165	50	593	3 757	534	94	541	478
Red Energy	192 884	215 544	12	6 953	7 548	9	1 961	2 357	20
Simply Energy	144 990	187 856	30	11 379	16 934	49	2 348	2 433	4
Stanwell Corporation	0	0		0	0		0	1	
Sun Retail	4	2	-50	26	85	224	9	228	2510
Sumo Power	0	46		0	0		0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2 348 459</b>	<b>2 379 833</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>242 185</b>	<b>256 653</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>70 666</b>	<b>68 081</b>	<b>-3.7</b>

Table 2.2 indicates that the total number of electricity customers in Victoria increased by approximately 1.6 per cent compared to the prior reporting period (an increase of 43 257 customers). An additional 31 374 residential and 14 468 small business customers were added to the network, but there were 2585 fewer large business customers in 2014-15 compared with 2013-14. The growth in residential and small business customers equated to year on year increases of approximately 1.3 per cent and 6.0 per cent respectively, while the reduction in large business customers equated to a decrease of approximately 3.7 per cent.

Residential customers were distributed between 23 retailers in 2014-15, while small business customers were shared between 24 retailers. Despite the reduced number of large business customers in comparison to 2013-14, there were 28 retailers servicing this segment of the retail market in 2014-15 (an increase of five in comparison to the prior year).

Table 2.2 shows that during 2014-15, several retailers experienced notable changes in customer numbers:

- Momentum Energy increased its residential and small business customer numbers by 39 and 15 per cent respectively, although its large electricity customers reduced by about 9 per cent.
- Powershop, which entered the market two years ago, increased its total customer base from approximately 4 300 to approximately 29 000 customers.
- Simply Energy, which had just under 150 000 customers in 2013-14, increased to over 200 000 customers, mostly in the residential sector.
- AGL's customer base (calculated together with the APG customers in 2013-14) reduced by 50 000 in 2014-15 compared with 2013-14.
- Click Energy had reductions in small and large business customers, but maintained its residential customer base.

During the 2014-15 period the ex-local retailers<sup>2</sup> held a combined market share of approximately 64.7 per cent,<sup>3</sup> a decrease of about 1.3 per cent in comparison to the

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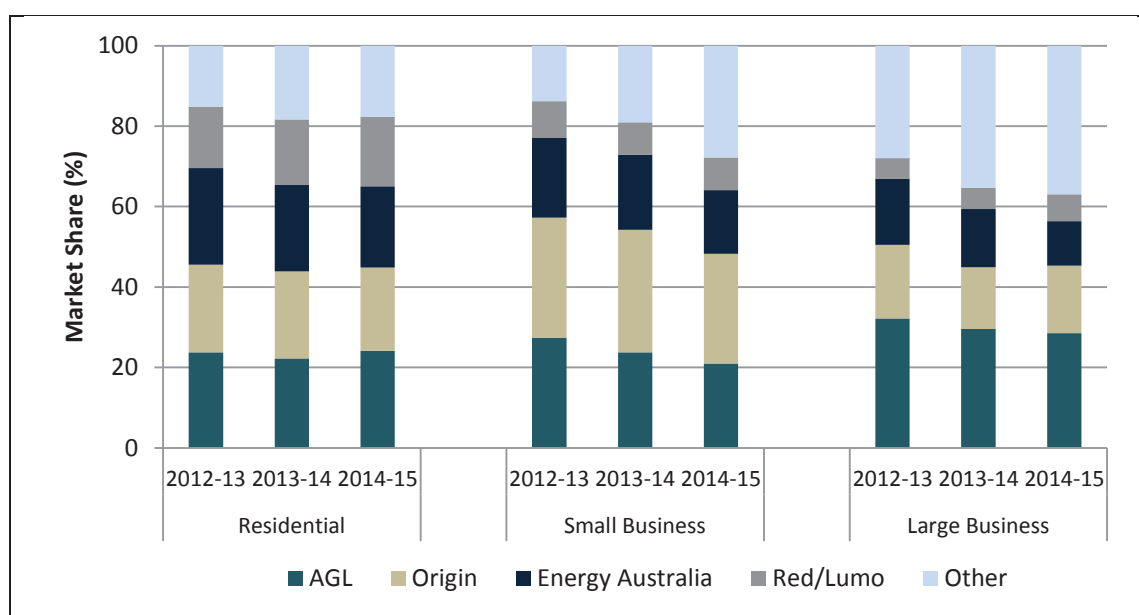
<sup>2</sup> The 'ex-local retailers' include AGL, EnergyAustralia (formerly TRUenergy) and Origin Energy. Prior to 2002, these businesses were the exclusive retailers of energy in defined geographical areas in Victoria. In 2002, the energy retail

prior period. Alternately stated, in 2014-15 about 35.3 per cent of customers were contracted with companies that have entered the electricity retail market since 2002.

Snowy Hydro Limited now has market share of over 16 per cent in Victoria taking into account its ownership of Red Energy and Lumo Energy. Collectively, four companies (AGL, Energy Australia, Origin Energy, and Snowy Hydro) held over 80 per cent of the total electricity retail market. The remaining market was divided among 21 other competing retailers.

Figure 2.1 below shows the distribution of residential, small business and large business customers between the ex-local retailers, Snowy Hydro, and 'other' retailers. It is evident that customers are distributed differently within different customer segments and that the residential segment remains the most concentrated.

**FIGURE 2.1 DISTRIBUTION OF CUSTOMERS BETWEEN RETAILERS**  
2012-13 to 2014-15



markets in Victoria were opened to competition. See section 3.4 of this report for further information about the transition to full competition in the Victorian energy retail industry.

<sup>3</sup> This figure takes into account AGL's ownership of Powerdirect and AGL Sales (Qld), Origin Energy's ownership of Sun Retail, and EnergyAustralia's Yallourn brand.

## 2.3 GAS RETAIL CUSTOMERS

Table 2.3 below provides an overview of the distribution of customers among gas retailers in Victoria during the reporting period. Retailers report to the Commission on the number of customers that are in contract on the last day of each month. The customer numbers presented in Table 2.3 are the average of the monthly figures reported.

**TABLE 2.3 GAS RETAILER CUSTOMER NUMBERS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

	Residential			Small Business (<1000GJ)			Large Business (>1000GJ)		
	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)	2013-14 (no.)	2014-15 (no.)	Change (%)
AGL	479 767	531 670	11	14 509	15 559	7	1 231	281	-77
Alinta Energy	30 204	37 281	23	3	6	100	0	0	
Aust Power & Gas	88 276	0		0	0		0	0	
Click Energy	0	2 426		0	4		0	0	
EnergyAustralia	440 042	424 702	-3	14 601	12 971	-11	1 394	1 243	-11
ERM Business Energy	0	0		0	0		0	7	
Lumo Energy	146 528	156 475	7	1 668	2 012	21	64	70	9
M2 Energy	18 452	32 129	74	0	0		0	0	
Momentum Energy	0	2 868		0	200		0	12	
Origin Energy	387 239	383 247	-1	15 651	17 779	14	875	1 043	19
Red Energy	116 838	136 357	17	2 966	2 988	1	17	24	45
Simply Energy	112 050	145 564	30	2 540	5 115	101	133	149	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1 819 396</b>	<b>1 852 718</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>51 938</b>	<b>56 632</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3 716</b>	<b>2 830</b>	<b>-24</b>

Table 2.3 shows that there are 11 active gas retailers in Victoria. Each of the gas retailers also sells electricity. Retailing both fuels offers retailers an economy of scope, as billing, customer service and other activities can be shared between the two fuels.

Table 2.3 shows that in 2014-15, the total number of retail gas customers in Victoria increased by approximately 2.0 per cent in comparison to the prior reporting period (an increase of 37 130 customers).

There was a significant decrease in the number of large business gas customers, with approximately 24 per cent fewer reported in comparison to the prior year.

Within the reporting period, Momentum Energy and Click Energy commenced selling gas to residential and small business customers, and ERM Business Energy commenced selling gas to large business customers.

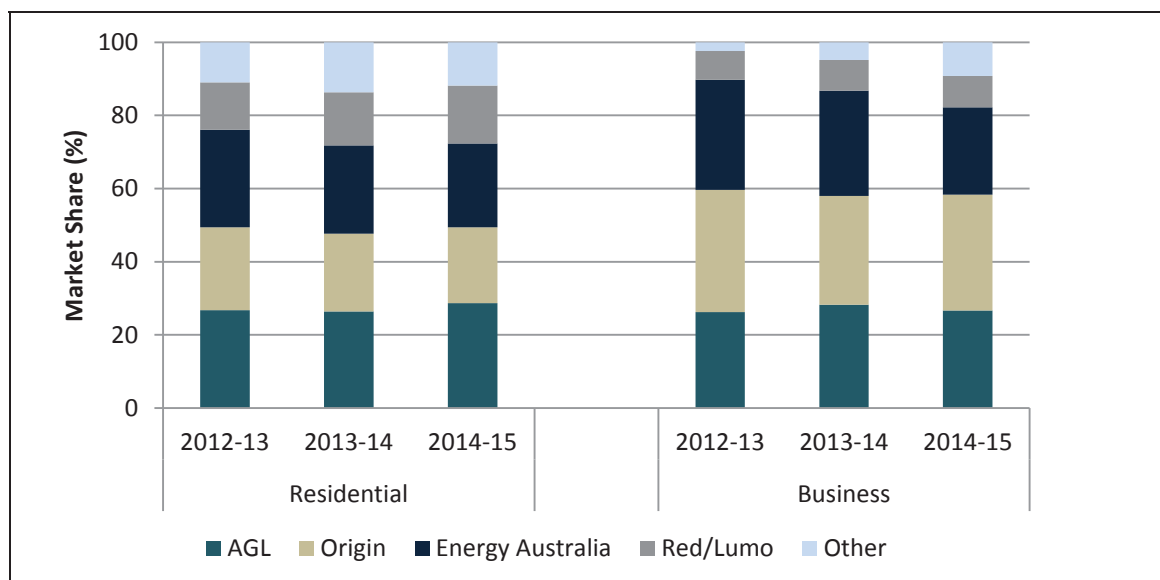
There were ten retailers selling gas in the residential market, nine in the small business market, and eight in the large business market. In comparison to the previous reporting period, this amounts to an increase of one retailer in the residential market, two retailers in the small business market, and one retailer in the large business market.

Considering the data in Table 2.3, points worth noting include:

- Snowy Hydro Limited now has a total gas retail market share of approximately 15.6 per cent taking into account its ownership of Red Energy and Lumo Energy.
- Simply Energy added over 30 000 new residential customers and doubled its small business customer base.
- M2, under its Dodo and Commander brands, increased its residential customer base by over 13 600 customers.
- AGL grew its residential customer numbers by 11 per cent following its acquisition of Australian Power & Gas.
- Alinta gained 7000 residential customers.
- Origin Energy, Red Energy, Simply Energy, and Lumo Energy all reported increased numbers of large business customers.
- The ex-local retailers continued to service 72 per cent of residential gas customers – the same as in 2013-14.

Figure 2.2 below provides a visual representation of the distribution of market share in the residential and business customer segments. Notably, the gas retail market is more concentrated than electricity. Collectively, four companies (AGL, Energy Australia, Origin Energy and Snowy Hydro) held over 88 per cent of the total gas retail market.

**FIGURE 2.2 DISTRIBUTION OF CUSTOMERS BETWEEN RETAILERS**  
2012-13 to 2014-15



**Note:** Small business and large business customers have been combined into a single 'Business' category to allow comparison with 2012-13 figures.

## 2.4 STANDING OFFERS

### 2.4.1 STANDARD CONTRACTS

Prior to 2002, residential and small business energy customers in Victoria could not choose their energy retailer. Energy was exclusively sold by three retailers<sup>4</sup> within defined geographical distribution zones. Retail prices paid by customers in each of the zones were regulated by the Victorian Government.

<sup>4</sup> AGL, EnergyAustralia (formerly TRUenergy) and Origin Energy – collectively referred to in this report as 'ex local retailers'.



In January 2002, Full Retail Competition (FRC) was introduced to Victoria's residential and small business retail energy markets. After that time, the ex-local retailers could compete against each other for customers in all geographic zones. More significantly, the energy market was opened to new retailers who were allowed to compete alongside the ex-local retailers. FRC continued a progressive phasing-in of competition which had begun with larger customers in the 1990s.

At the introduction of FRC, the ex-local retailers were obliged to continue to make energy available under 'standing offer' prices. Standing offer prices were regulated by government. However, it also became open to all retailers, both ex-local and new market entrants, to make 'market offers' to compete alongside the standing offers. Accordingly, it became open to residential and small business customers to either continue to purchase energy from an ex-local retailer under a default standard contract, or choose to purchase energy under the terms of a market contract. Because market offers were competing with standing offers, energy prices were generally lower under the terms of the market offers.

From 1 January 2009, Victoria transitioned to a fully deregulated energy pricing market and standing offer prices have not been regulated by government since that time. All retailers are now obliged to publish standing offer prices. However, in practice, a small customer will only be on a standard contract in one of four circumstances:

1. Where the customer has not taken any steps since 2002 to choose their energy retailer – in these circumstances the customer will continue to receive energy from the ex-local retailer at prices defined by that retailer's current standing offer
2. Where the customer has moved into a new premises and is using energy from a pre-existing supply – until the customer makes contact with an energy retailer to enter a market contract, energy will be deemed to be supplied by the pre-existing retailer under that retailer's standard contract
3. Where the customer entered a fixed term market offer contract that expired and reverted to the terms of the standing offer, or
4. Where the customer actively chooses to receive energy from a retailer under the terms of that retailer's standard contract, and the retailer agrees to supply energy under that contract.

## 2.4.2 VICTORIAN CONSUMERS ON STANDARD CONTRACTS

During the 2014-15 reporting period:

- 9.6 per cent of residential customers (about 228 000 customers) were supplied with electricity under a standard contract – a decrease of about 1.4 per cent in comparison to 2013-14
- 18.7 per cent of small business customers (about 49 000 customers) were supplied with electricity under a standard contract – a decrease of about 7.3 per cent in comparison to 2013-14
- 11.7 per cent of residential customers (about 217 000 customers) were supplied with gas under a standard contract – a decrease of about 1.3 per cent in comparison to 2013-14, and
- 24.6 per cent of small business customers (about 14 000 customers) were supplied with gas under a standard contract – a decrease of about 3.4 per cent in comparison to 2013-14.

Figure 2.3 below shows the proportion of residential customers that have purchased energy under a standard contract in each year since FRC. The figure shows that while the proportion of customers on standing offer contracts has been reducing, about 10 per cent of Victorian residential customers continue to remain on standard contracts.

**FIGURE 2.3 RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY AND GAS CUSTOMERS ON STANDING OFFERS**  
2002 to 2015



Table 2.4 below provides an indication of the proportions of residential and small business customers that purchased electricity and gas pursuant to standard contracts and market contracts during 2013-14 and 2014-15. The table shows that:

- higher proportions of small business customers continue to purchase energy under standard contracts compared with residential customers
- the vast majority of customers who purchase energy under standard contracts are customers of the ex-local retailers.

**TABLE 2.4 DISTRIBUTION OF CUSTOMERS BY OFFER TYPE**  
Percentage of customers, 2013-14 and 2014-15

	Electricity				Gas			
	Residential		Small Business		Residential		Small Business	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
<b>Standard Contracts</b>								
with ex-local	10	9	25	18	13	11	27	24
with other retailer	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Market Contracts</b>								
with ex-local	53	55	41	42	59	61	59	57
with other retailer	35	36	33	39	27	27	13	18
	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

## 2.5 RATES OF TRANSFER IN VICTORIA

Data concerning the rates at which small customers in Victoria transferred their retail electricity and gas accounts between businesses are published online each month by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO).<sup>5</sup> During the reporting period, the AEMO recorded 722 403 consumer transfers in Victoria in respect of electricity, and 422 154 in respect of gas.<sup>6</sup> These numbers suggest that approximately 27 per cent of electricity customers and 22 per cent of gas customers in Victoria transferred between retailers during the reporting period (rates of 28 per cent and 24 per cent were recorded in the prior period). However the AEMO transfer data includes incidences in which one customer moves out of a premises and another moves in, and incidences of meter installations for new dwellings.<sup>7</sup> The transfer data does not distinguish between

<sup>5</sup> Information concerning electricity transfers is accessible at: <http://www.aemo.com.au/Electricity/Data/Metering/Retail-Transfer-Statistical-Data>. Information concerning gas transfers is accessible at: <http://www.aemo.com.au/Gas/Market-Data/Gas--Retail-Transfer-Statistical-Data>.

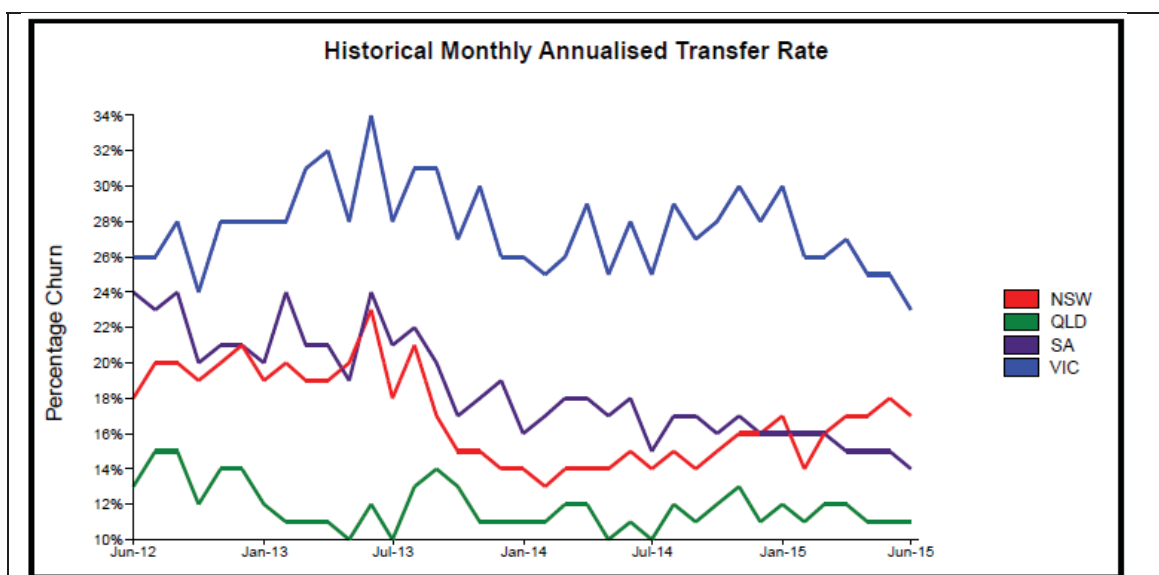
<sup>6</sup> Electricity transfers have been calculated by subtracting the number of transfers recorded at June 2015 from the number of transfers recorded at June 2014. Gas transfers have been calculated by adding 'customer transfers' recorded in each month from July 2014 to June 2015.

<sup>7</sup> In 2013, the Essential Services Commission published a research paper titled 'Progress of Electricity Retail Competition in Victoria'. Among other things, the paper analysed the AEMO switching data for Victoria and attempted to account for 'move-ins' and 'new metering installations'. It concluded that after factoring out these items from the AEMO data, the actual switching rate for retail electricity customers in Victoria would be reduced from an annual rate of approximately 27% to an annual rate of approximately 17% in both 2011 and 2012.

residential and business customers, and includes all customers consuming less than 160MWh per annum.

Despite the limitations of the data, one trend is clearly apparent: throughout the reporting period, the AEMO consistently recorded a markedly higher rate of transfer between retailers by Victorian customers in respect of both electricity and gas in comparison to New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia. Figure 2.4 is a reproduction of a chart produced by the AEMO in its June 2015 monthly report on National Electricity Market transfer statistics.<sup>8</sup> The chart indicates that Victorian electricity consumers transferred between retailers at least 30 to 50 per cent more often than customers in other jurisdictions during the reporting period. Moreover, a brief review of AEMO’s historical transfer data shows that this elevated rate of transfer activity in Victoria in comparison to other jurisdictions has continued for some years.

**FIGURE 2.4 AEMO CUSTOMER TRANSFERS**  
2012 to 2015



Data source: AEMO, June 2015 monthly report on Market transfer statistics

<sup>8</sup> The report is accessible at: <http://www.aemo.com.au/Electricity/Data/Metering/Retail-Transfer-Statistical-Data>.



## 3 ASSISTING CUSTOMERS WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES

### KEY OBSERVATIONS

Data on the use of instalment plans and participation in hardship programs shows significant variation in practices between retailers.

The number of customers participating in hardship programs has risen by more than 10 000 customers (32 per cent) since last year's report.

The average energy debt of a customer entering a hardship program is significant (\$928).

For most retailers, the average debt increased during participation in hardship programs, especially when their debt on entry is comparatively high.

As at 30 June 2015, the total outstanding debt of customers in hardship programs amounted to approximately \$34.7 million.

2912 customers were disconnected within 12 months of exiting a retailer hardship program, an increase of 50 per cent for this metric year-on-year.

Total spending on energy concessions by the Department of Health and Human Services reduced by 13 per cent compared with 2013-14.

## 3.1 OVERVIEW

Electricity and gas are essential services that are needed by people to maintain a reasonable standard of living. In particular, heating, lighting, cooking, refrigeration and communication are widely regarded as universal standards of modern life. Without access to these services, individuals and families can suffer social and economic isolation.

Victorian legislation aims ‘to promote best practice’ in facilitating continuity of energy supply to domestic customers experiencing financial hardship,<sup>1</sup> and prescribes that the Essential Services Commission may issue guidelines setting out the obligations of energy retailers.<sup>2</sup> The Energy Retail Code is the primary instrument that sets out obligations of energy retail businesses with respect to customers experiencing financial hardship.

In this section we report on a series of indicators designed to provide insight into the financial assistance provided by energy retailers to customers experiencing payment difficulties during the reporting period.

The first series of indicators report on the number of customers that were provided ‘instalment payment plans’ by retailers during the period. Under the Energy Retail Code, a retailer must offer and apply an instalment payment plan in circumstances where a residential customer advises of payment difficulties, or where the retailer otherwise believes that the customer requires payment assistance.<sup>3</sup>

The second series of indicators pertains to customers provided access to ‘customer hardship programs’ by retailers. The Energy Retail Code defines a hardship customer as being ‘a residential customer of a retailer who is identified as a customer experiencing financial payment difficulties due to hardship in accordance with the retailer’s customer hardship policy’.<sup>4</sup> Once a retailer has assessed a customer as being ‘in hardship’, the retailer must inform the customer of the existence of the retailer’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), s 42(b) and *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic), s 48F(b).

<sup>2</sup> *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), s 44 and *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic), s 48H.

<sup>3</sup> Energy Retail Code Version 11, 2015, cl 33.

<sup>4</sup> Energy Retail Code Version 11, 2015, cl 3.



customer hardship policy, and provide 'equitable access' to options available under the policy.

Finally, we conclude this chapter by providing data on the financial assistance provided by the Victorian Government to low income individuals and families in respect of energy costs.

## 3.2 INSTALMENT PAYMENT PLANS

Table 3.1 below reports the average number of customers who paid for electricity via an instalment payment plan in each month during the reporting period for each retailer.

**TABLE 3.1 INSTALMENT PAYMENT PLANS – ELECTRICITY**  
2012-13 to 2014-15

Retailer	2014-15 Instalment payment plans (monthly average)		Instalment payment plans per 100 customers (monthly average)		
	Hardship	Non-hardship	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	6 074	2 149	0.35	1.58	1.53
Alinta Energy	254	2 378	0.81	2.80	4.07
Australian Power & Gas	-	-	3.37	3.51	-
Click Energy	70	342	0.81	1.40	1.64
Diamond Energy	1	7	0.52	0.39	0.26
EnergyAustralia	3 223	40 556	4.92	7.74	9.13
Lumo Energy	1 247	3 421	2.91	2.61	2.37
M2 Energy	238	7	0.04	0.61	0.55
Momentum Energy	74	256	0.40	0.72	0.66
Neighbourhood Energy	15	401	4.39	0.95	3.63
Origin Energy	4 273	2 717	1.95	1.58*	1.42
People Energy	16	37	-	2.38	1.05
Powerdirect	1	36	0.11	0.12	0.10
Powershop	33	69	-	-	0.38
QEnergy	19	2	-	0.52	1.80
Red Energy	671	3 727	2.63	2.44	2.04
Simply Energy	1 627	5 395	4.87	3.96	3.74
<b>Total</b>	<b>17 836</b>	<b>61 500</b>	<b>2.63</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>3.33</b>

\*This has been revised down from 3.27 due to Origin Energy's correction of its 2013-14 data as explained in section 2.1 of this report.

Table 3.2 reports the average number of customers who paid for gas via an instalment payment plan in each month during the reporting period for each retailer.

**TABLE 3.2 INSTALMENT PAYMENT PLANS – GAS**  
2012-13 to 2014-15

Retailer	2014-15 Instalment payment plans (monthly average)		Instalment payment plans per 100 customers (monthly average)		
	Hardship	Non-hardship	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	5 259	1 148	0.19	1.18	1.21
Alinta Energy	133	1 113	0.50	2.01	3.34
Australian Power & Gas	-	-	2.52	2.75	-
Click Energy	0	7	-	-	0.29
EnergyAustralia	1 745	33 569	4.34	7.25	8.31
Lumo Energy	1 047	2 949	3.26	2.87	2.55
M2 Energy	122	4	-	0.30	0.39
Momentum Energy	1	1	-	-	0.07
Origin Energy	2 232	2 057	1.56	1.14*	1.12
Red Energy	396	1 782	2.37	2.05	1.60
Simply Energy	1 225	3 933	4.43	3.81	3.54
<b>Total</b>	<b>12 160</b>	<b>46 563</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>3.17</b>

\*This has been revised down from 2.70 due to due to Origin Energy's correction of its 2013-14 data as explained in section 2.1 of this report.

The figures in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that only about 20 per cent of the customers who paid for energy via an instalment payment plan were engaged in their retailer's hardship program. These customers are unlikely to have received the benefit of energy management advice and other assistance that retailers may offer under hardship policies.

The data demonstrates there is no consistent pattern either in the proportion of customers accessing payment plans at different retailers, or the number of customers with payment plans who are also participating in a hardship program.

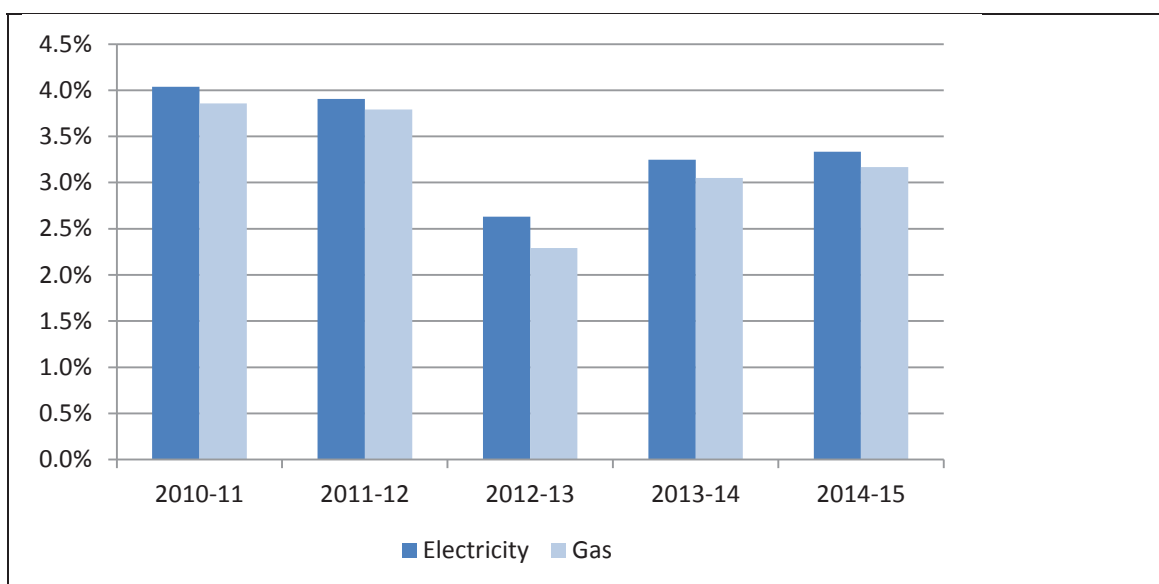
The numbers in respect of instalment payment plans reported by EnergyAustralia are noteworthy. EnergyAustralia, for some years, has continued to report very large numbers of 'non-hardship' customers paying via instalment payment plans.

EnergyAustralia reported that an average of 43 779 of its electricity customers, and 35 314 of its gas customers, paid via an instalment payment plan in each month. It reported that it provided access to its hardship program to significantly less than 10 per cent of these customers. These high numbers strongly influence the industry totals.

The variety of results illustrates the range of practices between retailers. The Commission has no information about the size of the debts being managed with payment plans, the duration of the plans, or the success of these plans in reducing debt. As such, it is difficult to draw any firm observations from the data in terms of customer outcomes at different businesses.

Figure 3.1 below shows the longer term trend displaying the average monthly percentage of electricity and gas customers who paid for electricity and gas via an instalment payment plan in each of the past five years across all retailers.

**FIGURE 3.1 CUSTOMERS PAYING BY INSTALMENT PAYMENT PLAN**  
(Monthly Average) – 2010-11 to 2014-15



In prior reports it was noted that some retailers were unable to distinguish between customers who used payment plans to address payment difficulties and those who used plans for convenience. The Essential Services Commission has specified that customers using a payment plan as a matter of convenience should not be counted by

retailers for the purpose of reporting this indicator.<sup>5</sup> Between 2011-12 and 2012-13 Origin Energy introduced this distinction, reducing the reported number of customers on payment plans by more than 20 000 for gas and 27 000 for electricity. The step change is evident in Figure 3.1. Since then, the rate of customers using instalment plans has risen across the industry.

### 3.3 FINANCIAL HARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Retailers are required to have a policy to deal with domestic customers experiencing financial hardship.<sup>6</sup> These policies must be approved by the Commission. Hardship programs are intended to provide a more intensive form of support for customers experiencing payment difficulties. Energy businesses are permitted to set their own criteria for acceptance into their programs, the scope of assistance that will be provided, and the conditions on which access to assistance is withdrawn.

Table 3.3 below presents key data collected by the Commission from retailers in relation to activity undertaken as part of hardship programs.

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<sup>5</sup> Essential Services Commission, *Energy Retail Performance Indicators – Effective 2013-14*, p 13.

<sup>6</sup> See *Electricity Industry Act 2000 (Vic)*, s 43 and *Gas Industry Act 2001 (Vic)*, s 48GC.

**TABLE 3.3 FINANCIAL HARDSHIP PROGRAMS – SUMMARY**  
2012-13 to 2014-15

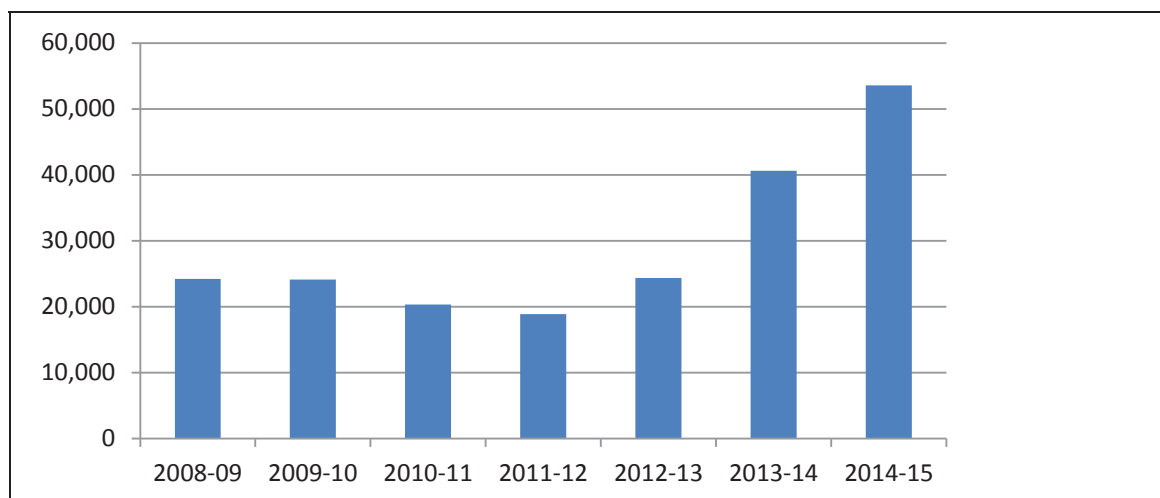
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Hardship program participants – yearly total (number of participants at 30 June plus total number of exits during year)	24 356	40 620 <sup>a</sup>	53 565
Hardship program participants – monthly average (average of number of participants at end of month plus total number of exits during month)	12 075	20 195	28 551
Hardship program participants as at 30 June	13 493	21 603	29 626
Hardship program participants who were concession card holders – monthly average	7 941	13 272	19 845
Customers denied access to a retailer’s hardship program during the period	801	750	506
Average debt of new entrants to a hardship program (\$)	742	1 066	928
Average debt of customers in a hardship program at 30 June (\$)	na	1 374	1 172
Average length of customers’ participation in a hardship program (days)	363	275	274
Participants exiting a hardship program after successful completion or by agreement with the retailer	4 463	4 754	6 315
Hardship program participants excluded for not complying with requirements	6 400	9 182	11 819
Participants exiting a hardship program by switching retailers	na	5 081	5 805
Disconnections of previous participants within 12 months of leaving a hardship program	935	1 941	2 912
Reconnections of previous participants within 12 months of leaving a hardship program	445	945	1 678
Energy field audits provided at no cost to customer	524	449	178
Appliances provided under a hardship program	142 <sup>b</sup>	Small: 1 234 Large: 4	Small: 336 Large: 82

<sup>a</sup> Origin Energy’s revised figures and correction of the Commission’s calculation resulted in this figure changing from the 33 673 reported in 2013-14 (see section 2.1 of this report for further information).

<sup>b</sup> From 1 July 2013, light globes are counted as ‘small appliances’.

**FIGURE 3.2 ENERGY CUSTOMERS PARTICIPATING IN RETAILER HARDSHIP PROGRAMS (YEARLY TOTALS)**

2010-11 to 2014-15



**Note:** In 2013-14 the methodology used to calculate the number of participants was adjusted to account for customers who exited programs by switching to another retailer. This resulted in the addition of approximately 5000 customers to the total participants in that year.

Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2 above show that participation by customers in energy retailer hardship programs has continued to grow at a high rate. During the 2014-15 reporting period, 53 565 energy customers participated in energy retail hardship programs in Victoria. This is an increase of approximately 30 per cent in comparison to the prior reporting period, and follows a significant increase recorded between 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Table 3.3 also indicates that:

- Approximately 30 per cent of hardship program participants were not concession card holders. Accordingly it is likely that in many cases, energy customers who encounter difficulties in meeting payments for energy consumption may not qualify for direct government support.
- The average debt of Victorian customers who entered a hardship program in 2014-15 was \$928, and the average debt of all customers in hardship programs at 30 June 2015 was \$1172.
- In 2014-15, 23 939 customers exited energy retail hardship programs. Approximately 75 per cent of these customers were excluded for not complying with retailers' hardship policy requirements, or exited by switching retailers. On the basis

of information currently reported to the Commission, the magnitude and status of any debt owed by these customers is unclear.<sup>7</sup>

- In 2014-15, 2912 customers were disconnected within 12 months of exiting a retailer hardship program. This is a 50 per cent year-on-year increase for this indicator. On the basis of the information currently reported to the Commission, it is not clear how many customers transferred retailers after being excluded from a hardship program.
- The figures show that energy field audits are not being provided to customers by retailers to any meaningful extent. AGL and Origin Energy were the only retailers that reported having provided energy field audits to assist hardship customers to identify opportunities to manage their energy use during 2014-15.
- It is apparent that relief in the form of replacement appliances is rarely provided to hardship customers by retailers. Origin Energy was the only retailer that reported having provided relief in this way during the period.

During its inquiry into hardship arrangements, the Commission found that ‘customers on payment plans and in hardship programs use, on average, more than twice as much electricity as other customers in their postcode’.<sup>8</sup> In circumstances where customers experiencing payment difficulties are not assisted to understand and manage their energy consumption, it is much less likely that the customer will resolve their payment difficulties in a sustainable way.

As at 30 June 2015, Victoria had a relatively high proportion of hardship program participants in comparison to other jurisdictions. Calculated as a proportion of residential electricity customers, 1.24 per cent of Victorian customers were participating

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<sup>7</sup> Retailers have the option to block transfers where a customer requesting to transfer away has debt outstanding.

<sup>8</sup> Essential Services Commission 2015, *Supporting Customers, Avoiding Labels. Energy Hardship Inquiry Draft Report*, September 2015, p. 32.



in hardship programs.<sup>9</sup> Participation in other Australian jurisdictions has been reported as follows:<sup>10</sup>

- New South Wales 0.74 per cent
- South Australia 1.51 per cent
- ACT 0.42 per cent
- Tasmania 0.71 per cent

Table 3.4 below indicates that across the industry, during the reporting period, hardship customers comprised approximately 1.2 per cent of all residential electricity customers. However, there was significant variation in the proportion of hardship customers reported by retailers (0 to 1.93 per cent calculated as a percentage of residential electricity customers). Variations in the proportion of hardship program customers reported by retailers are likely to be caused by both variations in retailer policies and practices regarding the admission of customers into hardship programs, and variations in the profile of a retailer's customer base. The latter could be affected by procedures employed by retailers prior to entering an energy supply contract with customers, such as credit checking.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that 'hardship program participants' are reported to the Essential Services Commission by retailers 'under a single "Energy" category': see Essential Services Commission, *Energy Retail Performance Indicators – Effective 2013-14*, p. 18. However, retailers report customer numbers separately for 'electricity' and 'gas' and do not report customer numbers in terms of a single 'energy category'. Therefore, based on current information provided by retailers, it is not possible for the Commission to calculate hardship customers as a proportion of retailer 'energy customers'.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Energy Regulator, *Annual Report on the Performance of the Retail Energy Market 2014-15*, p. 25.

**TABLE 3.4 HARDSHIP PROGRAM – RETAILER PARTICIPATION INDICATORS**  
2014-15

Retailer	Participants	Exit by agreement with retailer	Exit by transfer	Exit for not complying	Participants	Participants per 100 electricity customers	Concession card holders
	Yearly total	Yearly total	Yearly total	Yearly total	Monthly average	Monthly average	Monthly average
AGL Sales	12 714	1 323	1 509	2 701	7 288	1.35	5 386
Alinta Energy	2 162	191	160	987	674	1.04	409
Blue NRG	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
Click Energy	403	230	9	46	99	0.39	55
CovaU	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
Diamond Energy	5	3	0	1	2	0.06	0
EnergyAustralia	13 328	746	850	1 251	7 980	1.66	5 368
Lumo Energy	3 359	653	550	958	1 525	0.78	1 160
M2 Energy	1 827	147	328	630	866	1.93	429
Momentum Energy	792	22	57	165	325	0.65	226
Neighbourhood Energy	77	7	10	17	49	0.43	13
Next Business Energy	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
Online Power and Gas	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
Origin Energy	10 957	1 765	1 412	2 884	6 044	1.23	3 796
Pacific Hydro	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
People Energy	53	19	20	0	16	0.32	14
Powerdirect	246	43	0	61	170	0.47	124
Powershop	107	0	28	0	36	0.13	15
QEnergy	23	2	8	0	19	1.66	0
Red Energy	2 201	562	221	740	852	0.40	543
Simply Energy	5 311	602	643	1 378	2 606	1.39	2 305
Sumo Power	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
Sun Retail	0	-	-	-	0	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>53 565</b>	<b>6 315</b>	<b>5 805</b>	<b>11 819</b>	<b>28 551</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>19 843</b>

Table 3.5 below indicates that, across the industry, relatively few customers were ‘denied access’ to a hardship program (less than 1 per cent of total assessments for admission resulted in access being denied). However the variation in the number of

customers reported as being 'denied access' by various retailers, suggests that there are material differences in the policies and processes adopted by different retailers in deciding whether to provide particular customers access to hardship programs.

Table 3.5 also shows that there is significant variation in the level of debt of new entrants to hardship programs reported by individual retailers, and that there is a strong correlation between a relatively high level of debt on entry and increased average debt at 30 June 2015. Only two retailers (Momentum Energy and Red Energy) reported an 'average debt of program participants as at 30 June 2015' that was lower than their reported 'average debt of new entrants'. For all the other retailers, the average participant's debt continued to increase notwithstanding participation in a hardship program. Red Energy and Momentum Energy both had a low average debt of new entrants in comparison to other retailers.

Noting that there was a monthly average of 28 551 participants in hardship programs during the reporting period, and an average outstanding debt of \$1172 as at 30 June 2015, it is apparent that the total outstanding debt of customers in hardship programs amounted to approximately \$34.7 million as at 30 June 2015.

The average length of participation by customers in hardship programs was 283 days. However, again, Table 3.5 demonstrates that there is significant variation in the average length of participation reported by different retailers. Retailers that reported relatively short average participation periods also reported proportionately high levels of customers exiting programs 'by agreement', 'by switching', or due to 'exclusion for non-compliance'.

Analysis of figures in Tables 3.4 and 3.5 shows that AGL reported a high percentage of 'disconnections of previous hardship customers' as a proportion of customers 'excluded for not complying with requirements' (approximately 50 per cent). The average rate of disconnection of previous hardship customers as a proportion of customers excluded for not complying with requirements was approximately 25 per cent.

**TABLE 3.5 HARDSHIP PROGRAM – RETAILER COMPARATIVE INDICATORS**  
2014-15

<b>Retailer</b>	Participants	Customers denied access	Debt of new entrants (\$)	Debt of participants (\$)	Length of participation (days)	Disconnections of previous hardship customers	Reconnections of previous hardship customers
	Yearly total	Yearly total	Average	At 30 June 2015	Average	Yearly total	Yearly total
AGL Sales	12 714	101	1 591	1 816	378	1 436	882
Alinta Energy	2 162	0	459	614	84	23	13
Blue NRG	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Click Energy	403	0	701	931	39	6	0
CovaU	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Diamond Energy	5	0	1 048	1 530	63	0	0
EnergyAustralia	13 328	0	953	1 125	239	5	3
Lumo Energy	3 359	0	457	779	232	105	44
M2 Energy	1 827	0	923	940	180	18	7
Momentum Energy	792	116	502	312	195	79	59
Neighbourhood Energy	77	0	1 947	0	131	0	0
Next Business Energy	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Online Power and Gas	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Origin Energy	10 957	0	796	886	340	747	400
Pacific Hydro	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
People Energy	53	8	996	1 562	139	0	0
Powerdirect	246	6	1 518	1 851	370	0	0
Powershop	107	0	781	788	73	0	0
QEnergy	23	0	336	580	283	0	0
Red Energy	2 201	81	215	131	143	182	51
Simply Energy	5 311	194	911	1 012	209	311	219
Sumo Power	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sun Retail	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>53 565</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>1 003</b>	<b>1 172</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>2 912</b>	<b>1 678</b>

### 3.4 VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Victorian Government (Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)) operates programs to improve the affordability of energy for individuals and families in Victoria that meet low income eligibility requirements. Assistance is provided in the form of energy concessions, and payments administered under the Utility Relief Grant Scheme (URGS). Retailers are required to provide information to customers about the availability of government funded concession and relief schemes in circumstances where a customer is experiencing hardship or payment difficulties.

#### 3.4.1 CONCESSIONS

Table 3.6 below provides information concerning energy concession expenditure by the Victorian Government during the reporting period.

**TABLE 3.6 VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ENERGY CONCESSION EXPENDITURE**  
2012-13 to 2014-15

	2012-13 \$m	2013-14 \$m	2014-15 \$m
Off-peak concession (electricity)	12.2	9.9	5.2
Service to property charge concession (electricity)	6.4	7.9	12.6
Annual electricity concession	150.2	154.5	127.9
Winter gas concession	62	58.3	55.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>230.8</b>	<b>230.6</b>	<b>200.7</b>

Table 3.6 shows that total spending on concessions reduced by approximately \$30 million compared with the previous reporting period. DHHS has indicated that the reduced expenditure is attributable to the following factors:

- Concessions are available to holders of eligible cards issued by the Commonwealth Government.<sup>11</sup> The application of concessions is administered by energy retailers on behalf of the DHHS. The reduced concession expenditure in 2014-15 in comparison to 2013-14 reflects efficiency improvements identified during

<sup>11</sup> Pensioner Concession Card, Veterans' Affairs Gold Card and Health Care Card.

compliance audits of concession providers (including energy retailers) and improved administration of energy concessions by retailers.

- Concessions are offered as a proportion of an eligible customer’s bill. As such, the total expenditure is influenced by changes in energy prices. Between 2013-14 and 2014-15 average gas and electricity usage charges reduced as a consequence of the repeal of the carbon tax, which in turn reduced the total expenditure on concessions.

### 3.4.2 UTILITY RELIEF GRANT SCHEME

Tables 3.7 and 3.8 below provide information concerning payments made by the Victorian Government under the URGS during the reporting period. The URGS provides for a grant of up to \$500 for mains electricity, gas or water for eligible health or concession card holders and ‘account holders who do not hold a concession card but are registered with their utility company’s hardship program and are part of a low-income household’.<sup>12</sup>

Under the scheme, energy retailers provide an application form to the customer and provide the customer’s billing information to DHHS. The customer then completes and submits the application to DHHS for assessment.

**TABLE 3.7 UTILITY RELIEF GRANTS – ELECTRICITY**  
2014-15

<b>Retailer</b>	<b>Customers provided with grant forms (no.)</b>	<b>Applications sent to DHHS by customers (no.)</b>	<b>Grants approved (no.)</b>	<b>Average grant amount (\$)</b>
AGL Sales	9 681	5 742	4 866	436
Alinta Energy	1 721	894	776	467
Click Energy	349	185	167	473
Diamond Energy	4	4	5	403
EnergyAustralia	5 877	3 268	2 974	455

<sup>12</sup> See Department of Health & Human Services, Utility Relief Grant Scheme (Mains), Fact Sheet, June 2015, available at: <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/utility-relief-grant-scheme-mains-fact-sheet>.

Lumo Energy	1 986	1 231	1 117	484
M2 Energy	430	135	111	477
Momentum Energy	384	239	220	472
Neighbourhood Energy	129	89	99	475
Origin Energy	6 237	3 169	2 890	443
People Energy	118	57	45	481
Powerdirect	346	205	190	463
Powershop	69	40	35	465
QEnergy	10	7	6	425
Red Energy	2 053	1 274	1 206	445
Simply Energy	4 100	2 268	1 919	443
<b>Total</b>	<b>33 494</b>	<b>18 807</b>	<b>16 626</b>	<b>449</b>

**TABLE 3.8 UTILITY RELIEF GRANTS – GAS**  
2014-15

<b>Retailer</b>	<b>Customers provided with grant forms (no.)</b>	<b>Applications sent to DHHS by customers (no.)</b>	<b>Grants approved (no.)</b>	<b>Average grant amount (\$)</b>
AGL	6 871	4 053	3 507	404
Alinta Energy	891	467	418	435
EnergyAustralia	3 833	2 178	1 979	425
Lumo Energy	1 525	944	860	460
M2 Energy	250	81	65	454
Momentum Energy	4	3	1	149
Origin Energy	3 684	1 871	1 698	406
Red Energy	969	586	539	394
Simply Energy	2 814	1 539	1 297	402
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 841</b>	<b>11 722</b>	<b>10 364</b>	<b>414</b>

Tables 3.7 and 3.8 show that during the reporting period 30 529 applications were made in respect of URGS electricity and gas grants. This is a reduction of approximately 9 per cent from the prior period, when 29 661 applications were made.

Approximately 56 per cent of URGS application forms provided by retailers to customers were completed by customers and submitted to DHHS for assessment. This is down from 59 per cent in 2013-14.

Approximately 88 per cent of the applications received by DHHS were approved. This ratio is consistent with the previous period.

A total of \$11.6 million was granted under the scheme, with an average of \$449 granted for electricity costs, and an average of \$414 granted for gas costs.



## 4 DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION

### KEY OBSERVATIONS

During 2014-15, 34 418 residential electricity customers and 22 322 residential gas customers were disconnected from supply due to non-payment of an outstanding account.

Victoria continues to report the highest levels of disconnection in Australia.

In 2014-15, approximately 20 per cent of residential electricity and gas customers who were disconnected had previously been paying via an instalment payment plan.

The percentage of disconnected customers each year who previously paid via an instalment plan has been steadily decreasing since 2011-12, despite total disconnections increasing. This suggests that instalment payment plans are an effective method of avoiding disconnection.

The rate of disconnection for non-payment of small business customers decreased for both electricity and gas during the reporting period.

During the reporting period retailers reported over 1000 wrongful disconnections. This equates to almost one in every fifty residential disconnections.

## 4.1 OVERVIEW

In the following section we report on the rate at which retailers disconnected customers for non-payment during the reporting period, and the proportion of disconnected customers who obtained reconnection.

Victorian legislation recognises that disconnection of a residential customer from electricity or gas supply for not paying an account should only occur as a last resort.<sup>1</sup> Under the Energy Retail Code (ERC), it is prescribed that a retailer may only disconnect a customer who is experiencing payment difficulties if the retailer has first taken the required steps to assist the customer to manage the payment difficulties.<sup>2</sup> In circumstances where a customer is experiencing payment difficulties and is disconnected contrary to the ERC, the disconnection will be wrongful and compensation is payable.<sup>3</sup>

During 2014-15, 34 418 residential electricity customers and 22 322 residential gas customers were disconnected from supply due to non-payment of an outstanding account. After a significant rise in disconnection rates in 2013-14, disconnection rates in the 2014-15 reporting period have remained high.

Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1 below confirm that rates of disconnection of customers from supply for non-payment remain elevated. The historically high rate of disconnection in Victoria remains a key focus of the Commission's analysis of retailer performance.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), s 45(2)(d) and *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic), s 48(2)(d).

<sup>2</sup> Energy Retail Code Version 11, 2015, cl 111(2).

<sup>3</sup> See *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), s 40B and *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic), s 48A.

**TABLE 4.1 DISCONNECTIONS FOR NON-PAYMENT IN VICTORIA – RESIDENTIAL**  
2010-11 to 2014-15

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Electricity disconnections	17 871	23 805	25 254	34 496	34 418
Disconnections per 100 customers	0.77	1.02	1.07	1.47	1.45
Gas disconnections	13 741	20 483	16 979	24 007	22 322
Disconnections per 100 customers	0.74	1.13	0.90	1.31	1.20

**FIGURE 4.1 DISCONNECTIONS IN VICTORIA**  
Residential and Small Business combined 1990 to 2014-15

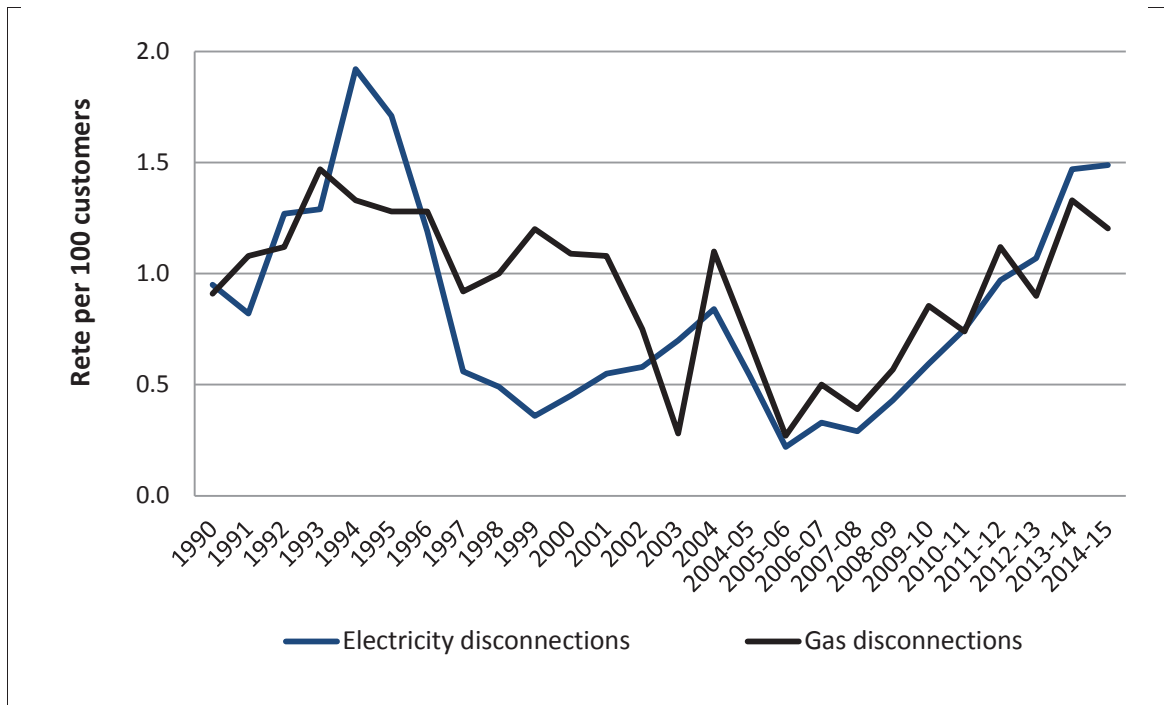


Table 4.2 below shows the rate at which residential customers were disconnected from electricity supply in a selection of Australian jurisdictions over the past five years. It confirms that disconnection rates have generally remained at high levels across Australia, and that Victoria's disconnection rate continues to be the highest in Australia.

**TABLE 4.2 DISCONNECTIONS BY JURISDICTION – RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY**  
Per 100 customers, 2010-11 to 2014-15

Jurisdiction	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Victoria	0.77	1.02	1.07	1.47	1.45
New South Wales	0.61	0.80	0.83	1.03	1.06
ACT	0.26	na	0.05	0.17	0.21
South Australia	1.01	1.35	1.50	1.37	1.36
Queensland	1.22	1.16	0.94 <sup>a</sup>	1.31 <sup>a</sup>	1.41 <sup>a</sup>
Tasmania	0.51	0.08	0.46	0.68	0.45
Western Australia	0.90	0.87	0.72	0.97	0.97

<sup>a</sup> This ratio is based on disconnections of 'small customers' defined as those consuming less than 100 MWh per year. This includes residential and small business customers.

Data source: Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (NSW), Essential Services Commission of South Australia, Economic Regulation Authority (WA), Department of Energy and Water Supply (Qld), Australian Energy Regulator.

## 4.2 RESIDENTIAL DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION

Tables 4.3–4.6 below provide performance indicator information concerning disconnection and reconnection rates for 2013-14 and 2014-15 for individual retailers.

Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show that there are significant variations in both:

- the rates at which different retailers disconnect customers for non-payment in the same year, and
- the rates at which the same retailer disconnects customers in different years.

Differences between retailers in the same year are likely due to variation in both the content and application of retailer financial hardship policies. Variations for the same retailer in different years likely reflects variation in the credit management strategies adopted by individual retailers in those years.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 show that during 2014-15, approximately 56 per cent of residential electricity customers and 33 per cent of residential gas customers who were disconnected for non-payment were reconnected by the same retailer within seven days. A further 10 per cent of residential electricity customers and 6 per cent of residential gas customers were reconnected after seven days. Therefore, approximately 34 per cent of residential electricity customers and 61 per cent of residential gas customers that were disconnected for non-payment were not reconnected by the same retailer. This amounted to approximately 11 700 electricity customers and 13 600 gas customers. It is possible that these customers moved to a different property, reconnected with a different retailer, or reconnected in a different name.

**TABLE 4.3 DISCONNECTIONS — RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Total disconnections (per year)		Disconnections per 100 customers (per year)		Reconnections in the same name within 7 days		All reconnections in the same name		Customers previously on an instalment payment plan		Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months		Concession card holders	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	9 313	12 218	1.91	2.27	52	59	55	63	24	23	25	23	29	37
Alinta Energy	980	288	2.06	0.44	49	48	54	51	26	92	8	15	43	54
Australian Power & Gas	3 216	-	3.30	-	57	-	62	-	41	-	12	-	32	-
Blue NRG	0	2	0	2.13	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	0	0
Click Energy	709	707	2.73	2.81	40	40	46	46	15	24	8	8	18	18
CovaU	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Diamond Energy	2	2	0.09	0.07	100	50	100	50	0	50	0	0	0	0
EnergyAustralia	904	656	0.16	0.14	15	31	50	17	3	6	0	0	13	16
Lumo Energy	1 427	1 464	0.76	0.74	25	9	28	10	19	12	8	4	9	6
M2 Energy	14	89	0.04	0.20	21	16	29	25	0	0	0	1	36	20
Momentum	291	700	0.81	1.40	50	31	62	73	23	46	15	18	19	14
Neighbourhood Energy	1 632	142	5.15	1.24	11	17	25	17	48	91	14	34	28	15
Next Business Energy	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Online Power and Gas	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Retailer	Total disconnections (per year)		Disconnections per 100 customers (per year)		Reconnections in the same name within 7 days		All reconnections in the same name		Customers previously on an instalment payment plan		Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months		Concession card holders	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
Origin Energy	9 747	10 141	1.92	2.06	56	65	95	84	26	16	13	22	35	35
Pacific Hydro	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
People Energy	54	260	1.02	5.15	31	29	35	42	0	15	0	11	44	5
Powerdirect	219	173	0.62	0.48	56	59	65	64	0	3	12	14	28	25
Powershop	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
QEnergy	8	6	1.03	0.51	63	83	63	83	0	0	13	0	0	0
Red Energy	2 200	1 485	1.14	0.69	52	46	57	51	22	28	18	18	28	39
Simply Energy	3 780	6 085	2.61	3.24	54	61	66	73	20	19	12	20	28	30
Sumo Power	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sun Retail	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Electricity total</b>	<b>34 496</b>	<b>34 418</b>	<b>1.47</b>	<b>1.45</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>

**TABLE 4.4 DISCONNECTIONS — RESIDENTIAL GAS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Total disconnections (per year)		Disconnections per 100 customers (per year)		Reconnections in the same name within 7 days		All reconnections in the same name		Customers previously on an instalment payment plan		Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months		Concession card holders	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	5 883	8 309	1.23	1.56	41	43	47	50	24	22	20	17	33	38
Alinta Energy	963	478	3.19	1.28	46	30	60	28	25	66	12	16	55	39
Australian Power & Gas	3 922	-	4.44	-	45	-	39	-	37	-	12	-	28	-
Click Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
EnergyAustralia	921	497	0.21	0.12	10	31	61	7	2	5	0	1	6	25
Lumo Energy	3 201	3 647	2.18	2.33	16	8	21	10	19	7	10	5	9	5
M2 Energy	4	57	0.02	0.18	25	30	25	56	0	0	0	0	75	23
Momentum Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Origin Energy	5 391	4 882	1.34	1.27	47	43	60	50	21	15	16	18	39	39
Red Energy	1 071	598	0.92	0.44	46	37	59	47	23	32	17	18	35	42
Simply Energy	2 651	3 854	2.37	2.65	24	23	32	32	11	10	9	10	19	17
<b>Gas total</b>	<b>24 007</b>	<b>22 322</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>



**TABLE 4.5 RECONNECTIONS — RESIDENTIAL ELECTRICITY**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Reconnections within 7 days (per year)		Reconnections within 7 days per 100 customers (per year)		All reconnections in the same name		Customers previously on an instalment payment plan		Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months		Concession card holders	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	4 845	7 226	0.99	1.34	5 134	7 642	31	28	29	26	34	41
Alinta Energy	481	137	1.01	0.21	529	148	60	95	9	2	48	64
Australian Power & Gas	1 832	-	1.88	-	1 988	-	55	-	15	-	32	-
Blue NRG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Click Energy	282	282	1.09	1.12	329	328	17	34	13	11	26	27
CovaU	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Diamond Energy	2	1	0.09	0.03	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
EnergyAustralia	133	203	0.03	0.04	448	112	1	15	0	0	3	30
Lumo Energy	352	139	0.19	0.07	401	147	38	35	14	13	18	14
M2 Energy	3	14	0.01	0.03	4	22	0	0	0	7	33	43
Momentum	145	214	0.40	0.43	180	508	31	45	31	17	24	8
Neighbourhood Energy	181	24	0.57	0.21	402	24	62	54	9	38	94	21
Next Business Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Online Power and Gas	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0

Retailer	Reconnections within 7 days (per year)		Reconnections within 7 days per 100 customers (per year)		All reconnections in the same name		Customers previously on an instalment payment plan		Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months		Concession card holders	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
Origin Energy	5 463	6 559	1.08	1.33	9 266	8 496	30	17	16	25	39	34
Pacific Hydro	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
People Energy	17	75	0.32	1.49	19	108	0	40	0	24	29	9
Powerdirect	122	102	0.35	0.28	143	111	0	0	12	13	0	0
Powershop	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
QEnergy	5	5	0.64	0.43	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Red Energy	1 141	687	0.59	0.32	1 247	757	30	36	19	20	29	42
Simply Energy	2 047	3 725	1.41	1.98	2 509	4 464	27	24	11	22	34	35
Sumo Power	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Sun Retail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Electricity total</b>	<b>17 051</b>	<b>19 393</b>	<b>0.73</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>22 606</b>	<b>22 874</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>37</b>

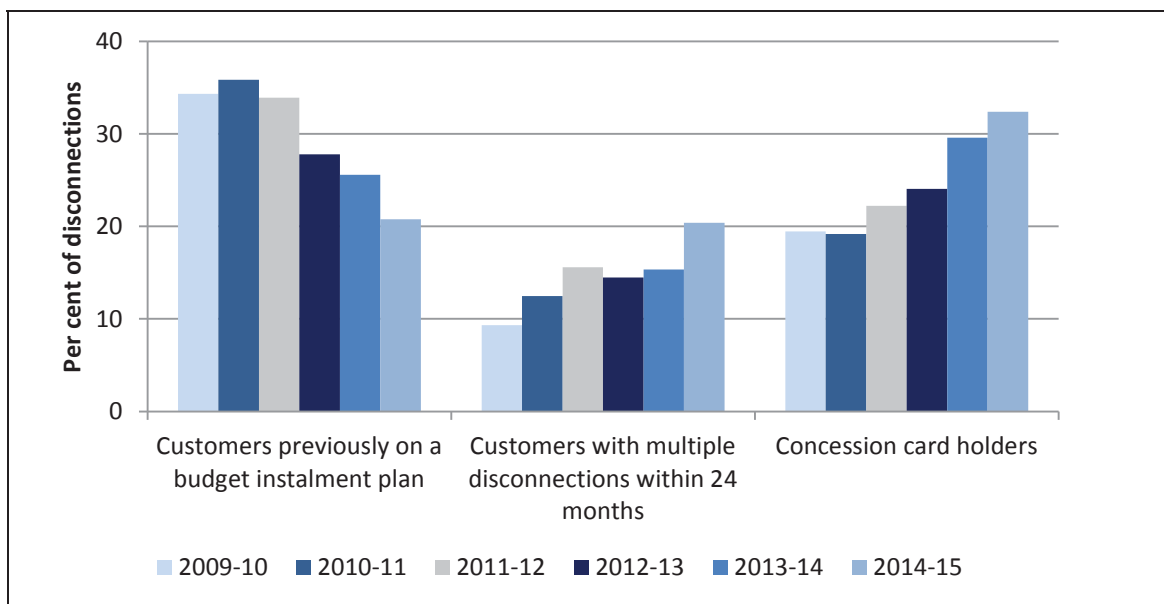
**TABLE 4.6 RECONNECTIONS — RESIDENTIAL GAS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Total reconnections within 7 days (per year)			Reconnections within 7 days per 100 customers (per year)			All reconnections in the same name			Customers previously on instalment payment plan			Customers with multiple disconnections within 24 months			Concession card holders		
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	2 427	3 571	0.51	0.67	2 760	4 113	32	30	24	17	40	46						
Alinta Energy	441	143	1.46	0.38	573	134	70	78	1	3	56	49						
Australian Power & Gas	1 777	-	2.01	-	1 548	-	54	-	16	-	31	-						
Click Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0						
EnergyAustralia	94	155	0.02	0.04	560	35	9	10	0	3	14	41						
Lumo Energy	497	292	0.34	0.19	661	365	52	40	16	15	27	20						
M2 Energy	1	17	0.01	0.05	1	32	0	18	0	0	0	41						
Momentum Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0						
Origin Energy	2 527	2 090	0.63	0.55	3 208	2 454	25	20	17	24	42	46						
Red Energy	491	224	0.42	0.16	629	283	31	44	20	22	33	42						
Simply Energy	627	887	0.56	0.61	855	1 227	25	25	9	11	31	34						
<b>Gas total</b>	<b>8 882</b>	<b>7 379</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>10 795</b>	<b>8 643</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>44</b>						

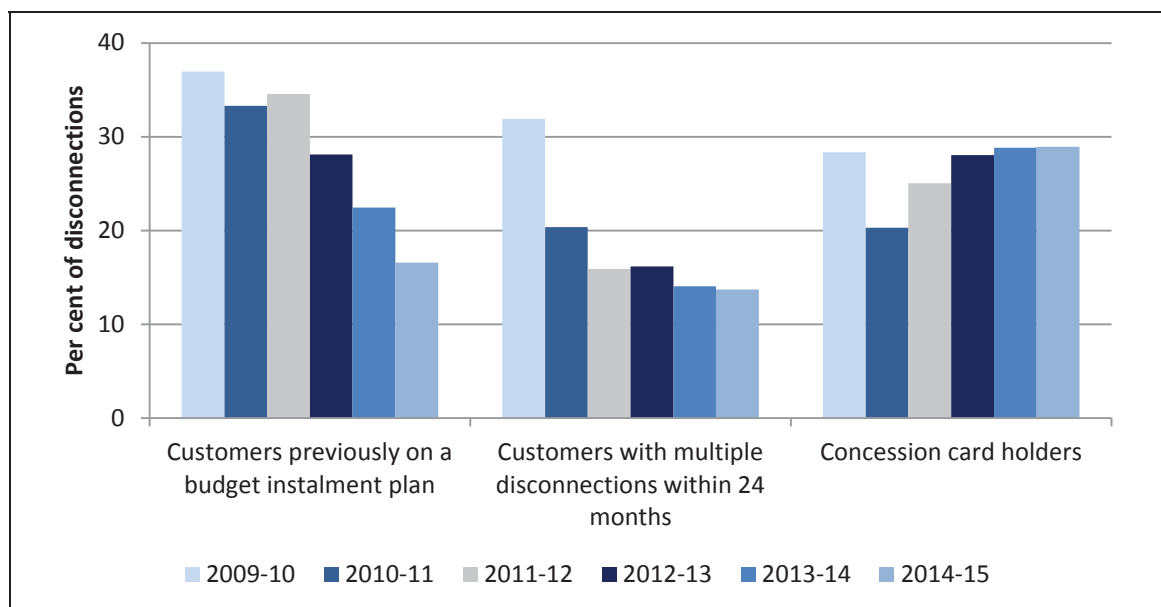
Figures 4.2 and 4.3 below demonstrate that the percentage of disconnected customers each year who previously paid via an instalment plan has been steadily decreasing since 2011-12. Table 4.2 above confirms that over the same period, the overall rate of disconnections has increased significantly. The fact that the rate of disconnection of customers who previously paid via an instalment payment plan has not increased at the same pace as the overall rate of disconnections suggests that instalment payment plans are an effective method of managing payment difficulties and avoiding disconnection.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 also indicate that approximately 70 per cent of customers who are disconnected for non-payment do not hold a concession card. It is apparent that a significant proportion of customers who are disconnected for non-payment either do not qualify or have not applied for government funded energy concessions.

**FIGURE 4.2 DISCONNECTIONS OF CUSTOMERS WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES — ELECTRICITY**  
2009-2010 to 2014-15



**FIGURE 4.3 DISCONNECTIONS OF CUSTOMERS WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES – GAS**  
2009-2010 to 2014-15



### 4.3 SMALL BUSINESS DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 below provide retailer specific data on rates of disconnection and reconnection of small business customers for non-payment for 2014-15 and the prior reporting period.

The rate of disconnection for non-payment of small business customers decreased in respect of both electricity and gas during 2014-15. Approximately 1.88 per cent of small business electricity customers and 1.14 per cent of small business gas customers were disconnected from supply (down from 2.19 per cent and 1.25 respectively in the previous period).

Approximately 40 per cent of small business electricity customers and 30 per cent of small business gas customers were reconnected to supply following disconnection during the reporting period.

**TABLE 4.7 DISCONNECTIONS AND RECONNECTIONS —  
SMALL BUSINESS ELECTRICITY**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Total disconnections		Disconnections per 100 customers		Total reconnections		Reconnections per 100 customers	
	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	
AGL	1 261	3.03	3.12	437	526	1.05	1.30	
Alinta Energy	3	0	0.25	0	1	0	0.08	
Blue NRG	75	0.25	1.52	0	1	0.00	0.02	
Click Energy	25	3.11	4.01	4	4	0.52	0.64	
CovaU	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	
Diamond Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
EnergyAustralia	58	0.82	0.14	13	12	0.03	0.03	
ERM Business Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Go Energy	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	
Lumo Energy	160	2.79	1.18	93	24	0.74	0.18	
M2 Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Momentum Energy	998	2.91	2.59	471	241	1.60	0.63	
Next Business Energy	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	
Online Power and Gas	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	
Origin Energy	1 280	1.90	1.80	596	648	0.81	0.91	
Pacific Hydro	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	
People Energy	1	0	0.53	0	1	0	0.53	
Powerdirect	204	1.95	1.42	170	99	1.06	0.69	
Powershop	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
QEnergy	13	1.01	0.35	3	8	0.51	0.21	
Red Energy	97	1.73	1.29	46	26	0.66	0.34	
Simply Energy	731	5.29	4.32	289	457	2.54	2.70	
Sun Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Electricity total</b>	<b>4 906</b>	<b>2.19</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>2 122</b>	<b>2 048</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.78</b>	

**TABLE 4.8 DISCONNECTIONS AND RECONNECTIONS —  
SMALL BUSINESS GAS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Total disconnections	Disconnections per 100 customers		Total reconnections		Reconnections per 100 customers	
	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	261	1.56	1.68	73	70	0.50	0.45
Alinta	3	0	50	0	1	0	16.67
Click Energy	0	-	0	0	0	-	0
EnergyAustralia	15	0.05	0.12	3	3	0.02	0.02
Lumo Energy	36	3.24	1.79	11	2	0.66	0.10
Momentum Energy	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Origin Energy	208	1.64	1.17	96	64	0.61	0.36
Red Energy	8	0.78	0.27	11	3	0.37	0.10
Simply Energy	116	3.35	2.27	38	38	1.50	0.74
<b>Gas total</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>1.25</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>0.32</b>

## 4.4 WRONGFUL DISCONNECTIONS

Under legislation, electricity and gas retailers must compensate customers in cases where energy supply is wrongfully disconnected.<sup>1</sup> Table 4.9 below provides information on the number of instances in which compensation was paid by individual retailers during the 2014-15 period.

The table shows that during the reporting period retailers reported over 1000 wrongful disconnections. This equates to almost two per cent of all residential disconnections. Wrongful disconnections can be identified by retailers within their organisation, or they may be identified by the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) during the investigation of a complaint. In addition to the wrongful disconnections reported by retailers, EWOV reported 393 instances in which it assessed a disconnection and the retailer agreed to make a payment without admission of a breach.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic), s 40B and *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic), s 48A.

<sup>2</sup> Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), *2015 Annual Report*, p 29.

The amount payable during 2014-15 was \$250 for each whole day that the supply was disconnected, and a pro rata amount for each part day of disconnection.<sup>3</sup> From 1 January 2016, the amount payable for wrongful disconnection has been raised to \$500 per day.

The regulatory framework for energy is designed so that disconnection is a last resort. On that basis, it is important that retailers ensure they follow all relevant procedures before taking this step. While it is understood that mistakes can be made in the processes leading up to a disconnection, retailers that show continued patterns of elevated wrongful disconnection rates will be asked to demonstrate how they are improving their processes and procedures to reduce the risk of wrongful disconnection.

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<sup>3</sup> *Electricity Industry Act 2000 (Vic)*, s 40B(5), *Gas Industry Act 2001 (Vic)*, s 48A(5).



**TABLE 4.9 WRONGFUL DISCONNECTION PAYMENTS**  
2014-15

<b>Retailer</b>	<b>WDPs reported</b>	<b>Residential Gas Disconnections</b>	<b>Residential Electricity Disconnections</b>	<b>Total Residential Disconnections</b>	<b>WDPs per 100 Residential Disconnections</b>
AGL	69	8 309	12 218	20 527	0.34
Alinta Energy	23	478	288	766	3.00
BlueNRG	0		2	0	0.00
Click Energy	61	0	707	707	8.63
Diamond Energy	0		2	0	0.00
EnergyAustralia	133	497	656	1 153	11.54
Lumo Energy	390	3 647	1 464	5 111	7.63
M2	2	57	89	146	1.37
Momentum Energy	29	0	700	700	4.14
Neighbourhood Energy	4		142	142	2.82
Origin Energy	213	4 882	10 141	15 023	1.42
People Energy	2		260	260	0.77
Powerdirect	4		173	173	2.31
Qenergy	2		6	6	33.33
Red Energy	10	598	1 485	2 083	0.48
Simply Energy	155	3 854	6 085	9 939	1.56
<b>All retailers</b>	<b>1 097</b>	<b>22 322</b>	<b>34 418</b>	<b>56 736</b>	<b>1.93</b>



# 5 CALL CENTRE PERFORMANCE AND COMPLAINTS

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

Customer phone calls to retailers dropped 12 per cent compared with 2013-14.

Retailers attended to 78 per cent of calls within 30 seconds, improving from 69 per cent in the previous period.

Retailers reported 239 198 complaints related to electricity and 86 940 complaints related to gas.

Approximately 50 per cent of recorded complaints concerned 'billing', which includes complaints concerning prices, overcharging, high bills, billing errors and debt recovery practices.

The Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) received 30 444 complaints about electricity retailers and 12 191 complaints about gas retailers in 2014-15.<sup>1</sup> EWOV reported that it progressed approximately 16 per cent of electricity complaints and 15 per cent of gas complaints to investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> EWOV reported 54 496 complaints about electricity retailers and 19 833 complaints about gas retailers in 2013-14. See Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), *2014 Annual Report*, pp 39 and 45.

## 5.1 CALL CENTRE PERFORMANCE

Table 5.1 below presents retailer data concerning call centre performance for 2014-15. The data shows that:

- Across the industry, retailers received 12 per cent fewer account line contacts in comparison to 2013-14.
- During 2014-15, 84 per cent of calls received by the industry were attended to by an operator (up from 82 per cent in the prior period).
- During 2014-15, 78 per cent of calls forwarded to an operator were attended to within 30 seconds (up from 69 per cent in the prior period).

**TABLE 5.1 CALLS FORWARDED TO OPERATOR, AND ANSWERED WITHIN 30 SECONDS — ELECTRICITY AND GAS**

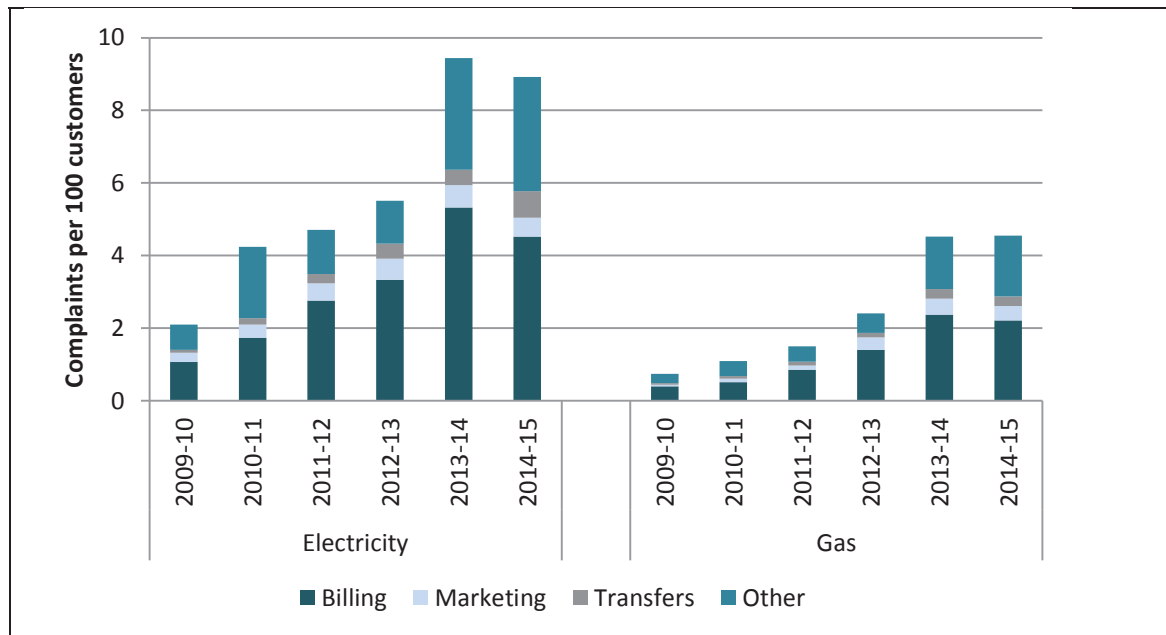
2013-14 and 2014-15

Retailer	Calls to account line		Calls to account line forwarded to an operator		Calls forwarded to an operator answered within 30 seconds (% of calls to operator)	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	1 518 768	1 750 604	962 882	1 226 191	79	85
Alinta Energy	223 529	189 058	214 812	182 034	77	79
Australian Power & Gas	495 205	-	381 929	-	69	-
Blue NRG	3 197	5 285	5 758	11 092	100	60
Click Energy	239 303	210 971	228 175	205 023	72	77
CovaU	-	0	-	0	-	92
Diamond Energy	14 434	18 487	14 434	18 487	100	100
EnergyAustralia	1 238 916	834 916	1 050 363	756 439	46	92
ERM Business Energy	30	2 284	30	2 284	90	96
Go Energy	-	3	-	0	-	0
Lumo Energy	483 526	403 666	452 896	395 483	76	81
M2 Energy	366 392	338 502	226 124	336 337	77	72
Momentum Energy	166 310	194 033	157 230	187 839	67	72
Neighbourhood Energy	55 209	24 036	53 336	22 920	78	69
Next Business Energy	0	448	-	418	-	95
Online Power and Gas	0	3 667	-	251	-	116
Origin Energy	1 192 839	1 013 618	1 135 427	929 215	68	57
Pacific Hydro	2	227	2	202	100	100
People Energy	33 921	21 715	25 630	20 668	71	76
Powerdirect	118 698	104 351	114 173	102 933	45	77
Powershop	18 843	85 054	18 467	82 204	91	79
QEnergy	2 310	5 963	2 310	5 963	86	90
Red Energy	604 927	598 440	428 310	411 470	84	75
Simply Energy	421 843	430 394	401 166	417 162	76	81
Sumo Power	-	477	-	477	-	0
Sun Retail	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 198 202</b>	<b>6 326 199</b>	<b>5 873 454</b>	<b>5 315 092</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>78</b>

## 5.2 CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Figure 5.1 shows that following a significant increase in complaints recorded by retailers in 2013-14, complaints in respect of both electricity and gas have remained elevated.

**FIGURE 5.1 COMPLAINTS — ELECTRICITY AND GAS**  
2009-10 to 2014-15



Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below present complaint data reported by each retailer for electricity and gas for the 2014-15 period.

Approximately 50 per cent of complaints concerned 'billing' (which includes complaints concerning prices, overcharging, high bills, billing errors and debt recovery practices).

In keeping with historical trends, complaints about electricity were recorded at approximately twice the rate as complaints about gas. Retailers recorded 8.9 complaints per 100 customers about electricity and 4.5 complaints per 100 customers about gas.

**TABLE 5.2 COMPLAINTS, BY RETAILER — ELECTRICITY**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

	Billing complaints		Transfer complaints		Marketing complaints		Other complaints		Total complaints		Total complaints per 100 customers	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	34 410	24 874	8 402	5 433	2 410	3 676	19 578	16 141	64 800	50 124	12.0	8.5
Alinta Energy	1 886	1 007	433	200	579	405	886	246	3 784	1 858	7.9	2.8
Australian Power & Gas	2 711	-	456	-	196	-	163	-	3 526	-	3.6	-
Blue NRG	18	88	5	0	16	3	23	35	62	126	1.8	1.8
Click Energy	371	519	24	79	52	25	86	206	533	829	2.0	3.2
CovaU	-	0	-	2	-	1	-	0	-	3	-	3
Diamond Energy	13	14	4	6	1	1	1	6	19	27	0.8	0.8
EnergyAustralia	45 442	21 559	2 800	1 336	1 160	713	11 450	6 718	60 852	30 326	10.9	5.8
ERM Business Energy	2	40	3	41	0	7	0	3	5	91	0.2	1.3
Go Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0
Lumo Energy	7 608	6 007	383	350	796	645	6 453	4 902	15 240	11 904	7.5	5.6
M2 Energy	3 288	1 346	251	137	46	43	590	332	4 175	1 858	11.7	4
Momentum Energy	4 994	502	711	62	7	9	731	405	6 443	978	7.7	1
Neighbourhood Energy	520	144	27	6	1	0	125	41	673	191	2.1	1.7
Next Business Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0

	Billing complaints		Transfer complaints		Marketing complaints		Other complaints		Total complaints		Total complaints per 100 customers	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
Online Power and Gas	-	2	-	12	-	35	-	0	-	49	-	5.2
Origin Energy	20 145	48 970	278	10 229	100	5 529	32 543	45 447	53 066	110 175	9.0	19.2
Pacific Hydro	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
People Energy	460	219	170	15	514	66	144	15	1 288	315	23.7	6.0
Powerdirect	11 313	7 178	1 261	1 227	994	181	4 508	3 809	18 076	12 395	29.9	21.2
Powershop	9	38	6	24	3	6	11	35	29	103	0.7	0.4
QEnergy	64	47	26	20	2	0	11	20	103	87	7.0	1.6
Red Energy	5 514	4 363	397	178	1 226	920	2 352	2 742	9 489	8 203	4.7	3.6
Simply Energy	2 975	4 504	816	315	3 120	1 595	2 047	3 141	8 958	9 555	5.6	4.6
Sumo Power	-	0	-	1	-	0	-	0	-	1	-	1.1
Sun Retail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Electricity Total</b>	<b>141 743</b>	<b>121 421</b>	<b>16 453</b>	<b>19 673</b>	<b>11 223</b>	<b>13 860</b>	<b>81 702</b>	<b>84 244</b>	<b>251 121</b>	<b>239 198</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>8.9</b>



**TABLE 5.3 COMPLAINTS, BY RETAILER — GAS**  
2013-14 and 2014-15

	Billing complaints		Transfer complaints		Marketing complaints		Other complaints		Total complaints		Total complaints per 100 customers	
	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	14 615	16 697	4 926	3850	1 214	2 367	10 437	12 360	31 192	35 274	6.3	6.4
Alinta Energy	736	265	174	73	235	16	319	45	1 464	399	4.8	1.1
Australian Power & Gas	1 410	-	324	-	77	-	79	-	1 890	-	2.1	-
Click Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0.0
EnergyAustralia	17 439	8 537	1 585	911	525	268	5 728	3 610	25 277	13 326	5.5	3.0
Lumo Energy	1 363	399	239	93	119	40	869	365	2 590	897	1.7	0.6
M2 Energy	1 317	719	209	102	31	32	315	215	1 872	1 068	10.1	3.3
Momentum Energy	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0.0
Origin Energy	3 925	11 623	73	2411	23	969	6 975	11 749	10 996	26 752	2.7	6.7
Red Energy	1 373	1 250	163	103	152	124	619	687	2 307	2164	1.9	1.6
Simply Energy	2 280	2 812	653	153	2 589	1 210	1 666	2 885	7 188	7060	6.3	4.7
<b>Gas Total</b>	<b>44 458</b>	<b>42 302</b>	<b>8 346</b>	<b>7 696</b>	<b>4 965</b>	<b>5 026</b>	<b>27 007</b>	<b>31 916</b>	<b>84 776</b>	<b>86 940</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>4.5</b>

### 5.3 ENERGY AND WATER OMBUDSMAN (VICTORIA) (EWOV)

Table 5.4 below presents data recorded by EWOV concerning complaints progressed to investigation in 2014-15. The data shows:

- During the reporting period, EWOV recorded 30 444 complaints about electricity retailers and 12 191 complaints about gas retailers. Significantly, EWOV recorded substantially fewer complaints than were reported by retailers (which reported 239 198 and 86 940 complaints for electricity and gas services respectively). This indicates that in the majority of cases, retailers were successful in responding to and resolving complaints without the involvement of external dispute resolution.
- EWOV may handle a complaint via ‘unassisted referral’, ‘assisted referral’, ‘real time resolution’ or ‘investigation’ depending on the circumstances of the complaint.<sup>1</sup> During the reporting period, EWOV progressed 4841 electricity complaints and 1817 gas complaints to investigation. Of the total complaints received by EWOV, approximately 16 per cent of complaints concerning electricity and 15 per cent of complaints concerning gas were progressed to investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> EWOV progresses a complaint to investigation where ‘Assisted Referral or Real Time Resolution has failed, the matter remains unresolved, and the customer recontacts EWOV’ or ‘the matter is complex and unlikely to be resolved as an Assisted Referral or Real Time Resolution’. See Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), *2015 Annual Report*, pp 22-3 for further information about the dispute resolution methods applied by EWOV.

**TABLE 5.4 EWOV COMPLAINTS PROGRESSED TO INVESTIGATION**  
2014-15

Retailer	Complaints			Investigations			Progression rate
	Electricity	Gas	Total	Electricity	Gas	Total	%
AGL	6 785	3 341	10 126	1 302	570	1 872	18
Alinta Energy	635	262	897	83	25	108	12
Australian Power & Gas	131	59	190	24	13	37	19
Blue NRG	21		21	1		1	5
Click Energy	547	12	559	81	0	81	14
CovaU	1		1	0		0	0
Diamond Energy	9		9	0		0	0
EnergyAustralia	7 771	3 053	10 824	1 205	390	1 595	15
ERM Business Energy	3		3	0		0	0
Go Energy	0		0	0		0	
Lumo Energy	1 993	950	2 943	232	105	337	11
M2 Energy	554	233	787	34	12	46	6
Momentum Energy	1 060	8	1 068	145	0	145	14
Neighbourhood Energy	192		192	19		19	10
Next Business Energy	0		0	0		0	
Online Power and Gas	35		35	0		0	0
Origin Energy	5 515	2 785	8 300	1 083	520	1 603	19
Pacific Hydro	1		1	0		0	0
People Energy	127		127	22		22	17
Powerdirect	1 181		1 181	190		190	16
Powershop	86		86	1		1	1
QEnergy	88		88	10		10	11
Red Energy	1 070	375	1 445	108	44	152	11
Simply Energy	2 639	1 113	3 752	301	138	439	12
Sumo Power	0		0	0		0	
Sun Retail	0		0	0		0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>30 444</b>	<b>12 191</b>	<b>42 635</b>	<b>4 841</b>	<b>1 817</b>	<b>6 658</b>	<b>16</b>

Table 5.5 shows that complaints requiring investigation by EWOV decreased substantially in 2014-15 compared to 2013-14 (30 per cent reduction for electricity, and 24 per cent for gas). This indicates that in 2014-15, industry resolved significantly more complaints at an early stage after EWOV involvement in comparison to 2013-14.

**TABLE 5.5 COMPLAINTS PROGRESSED TO INVESTIGATION BY EWOV**  
2012-13 to 2014-15

Retailer	Electricity			Gas		
	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
AGL	1 501	1 134	1 302	601	381	570
Alinta Energy	14	97	83	2	45	25
Australian Power & Gas	388	981	24	214	571	13
Blue NRG	0	0	1			
Click Energy	38	182	81	-	-	0
CovaU		-	0			
Diamond Energy	5	0	0			
EnergyAustralia	2 589	2 200	1 205	682	685	390
ERM Business Energy	0	0	0			
Go Energy	0	0	0			
Lumo Energy	251	248	232	120	106	105
M2 Energy	12	34	34	0	7	12
Momentum Energy	103	132	145	-	-	0
Neighbourhood Energy	133	127	19			
Next Business Energy		-	0			
Online Power and Gas		-	0			
Origin Energy	1 743	1 112	1 083	492	425	520
Pacific Hydro		-	0			
People Energy		6	22			
Powerdirect	145	252	190			
Powershop		0	1			
QEnergy		1	10			
Red Energy	151	127	108	52	44	44
Simply Energy	164	268	301	65	106	138
Sumo Power		-	0			
Sun Retail	0	0	0			
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 237</b>	<b>6 901</b>	<b>4 841</b>	<b>2 228</b>	<b>2 370</b>	<b>1 817</b>