

Fair, independent, free

# SWITCHED ON

ISSUE ONE | FEBRUARY 2017



UTILITIES  
DISPUTES<sup>LTD</sup>  
TAUTOHETOHE WHAIPAINGA

## Welcome from the Commissioner, Nanette Moreau



### We changed our name and scope to better serve you

This past year has been an exciting time of change and progress. The electricity and gas sector continues to evolve with many companies taking on new roles, offering new services and adopting new technologies. Based on feedback we received from experts and our stakeholder community, we decided we had to change to better serve you, the electricity and gas consumer, as well as providers of utilities.

As a result of this decision, on 1 November 2016, the Office of the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commissioner became Utilities Disputes Ltd. We came up with a new logo, redesigned our website, republished all our resources – and used all tasks as an opportunity to make everything better. Going forward, by publishing this newsletter, we will keep you informed regarding the types of disputes we can resolve, new resources, systemic issues, useful advice and more.

Of course our core values have not changed. We are still focused on resolving complaints about electricity and gas as a free, fair and independent service that is committed to the highest quality dispute resolution skills.

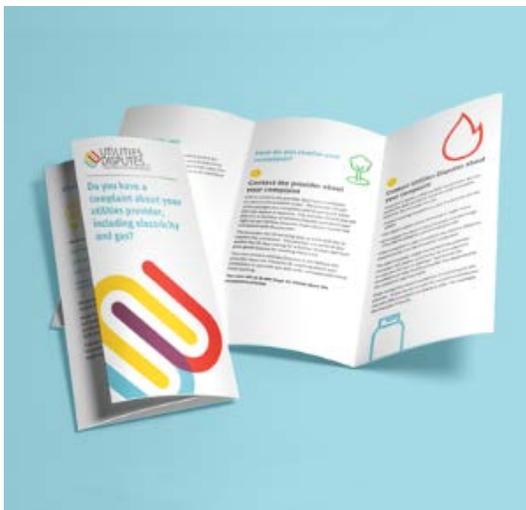
Thank you for joining us in helping your communities achieve successful and innovative utilities dispute resolution. We hope you enjoy *Switched On*, the first consumer newsletter of Utilities Disputes.

Best regards,  
Nanette Moreau

---

## Serving the community

As mediators and experts in dispute resolution, we enjoy serving community organisations in New Zealand. We travel all over the country to speak at your team meetings, conferences and community gatherings. We are inspired by educating consumers and advocates about the best way to handle complaints about electricity and gas, should they arise.



We tailor our presentations to your group's concerns, walking through specific examples of issues your community (businesses or individuals) may be dealing with, often using sample [case notes](#).

At any time, we are happy to provide your community's organisations with free [brochures and fact sheets](#). We have an optional order form you can use, or just email us with your requests.

Please feel free to contact us! We look forward to hearing from you.

Contact us

### Interview with Hon. Jacqui Dean

Jacqui is the Minister of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Minister for Small Business, Associate Minister for ACC and Associate Minister of Local Government.

Jacqui spoke about the importance of ombudsman services such as Utilities Disputes.

[Read more](#)



### Top five tips in 2017 for electricity and gas

Most people take a stable supply of electricity and gas for granted, but if these utilities suddenly aren't available or suddenly cost too much, here are some 2017 tips to help you prepare.

[Read more](#)

## Systemic issues

At Utilities Disputes, we encounter some issues much more frequently than others. Set out below are two of the most common complaints we get, and the many ways we go about resolving them. **In either scenario, we will help you with your complaint.**

### Smart meter installed - now the bills are higher

#### The scenario:

The provider has removed the standard analogue meter at your property and installed a smart meter. Following the installation of the smart meter, the charges on your bills have increased, and you decide to make a complaint.

Our office can help you with your complaint and assist you in contacting your provider, considering many factors, including:

- Is the bill an estimated reading or actual reading?
- What is the time frame or cycle of the billing?
- Is the increase due to seasonal fluctuation?
- Is there a faulty appliance?
- Can you set the hot water to heat during off peak hours?
- And more...

## Disconnection notices because a bill is in arrears

### The scenario:

You have received a letter from your provider advising your electricity bill is in arrears. The letter requests payment in full or the electricity supply will be disconnected.

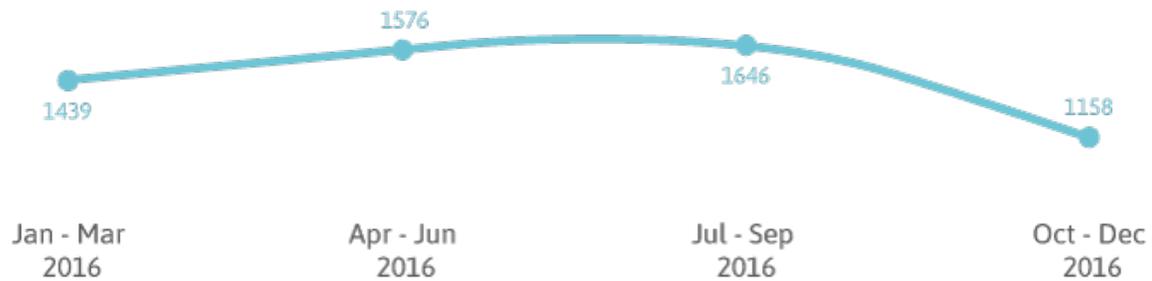
Our office can help you with your complaint, considering many factors, including:

- How were the arrears accrued and calculated, what was the time frame?
- Has the provider followed its arrears or disconnection notification process?
- Are you being charged the most appropriate tariff/pricing plan?
- Are the charges related to the correct ICP/meter?
- Are repayment options available for new usage and arrears?
- And more...

## Issues in complaints (1 Oct - 31 Dec 2016)



## Cases by quarter



## 2016 Case Notes

The following case notes provide insight into how we handle many types of complaints. The first complaint is about a transformer, the second about pole placement on a property. To understand more about the wide range of complaints we resolve, please visit our list of [posted case notes](#) and use the search function to find examples that may be similar to your issue or concern.

### Electrical equipment - health and safety - customer service - complaint handling



**Case Number:** 62275      **Outcome:** Settled

#### The Complaint:

Mr U said the network company had offered to install the new transformer further from his home. However, he said the network company would charge him \$6,000-\$8,000 and he believed he should not have to pay.

Mr U complained the network company upgraded a transformer at a pole near his home. He said the new transformer increased the electromagnetic field (EMF) and this might affect his family's health.

#### The Outcome:

Utilities Disputes arranged a meeting between the parties at Mr U's home. During the meeting, the parties settled the complaint.

The network company measured the magnetic fields from the transformer and some other appliances at Mr U's home. The network company explained the magnetic field decreases exponentially the further away from the source of the magnetic field. The measurements showed the magnetic field from the

transformer, at the base of the pole, was well within the recommended guidelines.[1]

Mr U said comparing the measurements from the transformer with measurements from his home appliances reassured him about his health concerns.

Mr U said the network company did not fully explain why the upgrade was necessary. He said the network company first said it needed to upgrade the transformer to keep up the quality of supply. He said the network company later told him it upgraded the transformer because a neighbour needed more capacity.

The network company apologised to Mr U for the lack of communication. The network company said it hired a customer service adviser, who would work with concerned customers like Mr U to avoid communication problems in future.

#### Footnotes:

[1] International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Guidelines for limiting exposure to time-varying electric, magnetic and electromagnetic fields (Up To 300 GHz)" (1998), available at <http://www.icnirp.org>.

## Pole - placement - customer service

**Case Number:** 65304      **Outcome:** Recommendation - upheld



### The Complaint:

Mr R complained his network company installed a pole outside his property in an inconvenient position. Mr R said he prefers to drive on to the footpath outside his house and then reverse down his driveway. He said he prefers to access his property this was because he lives on a busy road and he can exit his property more safely if he reverses down his driveway. Mr R said the pole's position means it is hard for him to access his property.

Mr R's network company said it was entitled to install the pole where it did.

### The Outcome:

Utilities Disputes arranged a visit to Mr R's property and a face-to-face conciliation conference. During the conference, Mr R and his network company agreed his network company would excavate at the pole and decide whether the pole could be moved. After two months, the network company had not completed the excavation. The network company said it had decided not to excavate after reviewing its information.

Following the network company's decision not to excavate, the parties asked the Commissioner to make a recommendation.

The Commissioner found the pole did not materially affect Mr R because:

- The network company was not required to consult with Mr R under the district plan
- The pole did not prevent Mr R from accessing his property in a way he was entitled to

The Commissioner also found the network company should pay Mr R \$250 because its customer service could have been better. The Commissioner said this was because the network company took an unreasonable length of time to tell Mr R it would not excavate as agreed. The Commissioner said while she accepted the network company's reasons for deciding not to do the work, she did not believe it was reasonable for the network company to take 12 weeks to give Mr R its decision.

Based on these findings, the Commissioner proposed recommending the network company pay Mr R a customer service payment of \$250. The network company accepted the Commissioner's proposed recommendation but Mr R rejected. Mr R provided comments on the Commissioner's decision. Mr R raised concerns about whether the network company had followed an appropriate process before installing the pole.

After reviewing Mr R's comments, the Commissioner's decision remained the same and she issued a final recommendation. The Commissioner said this was because Mr R's comments about whether or not the network company followed an appropriate process were not material to his complaint. The Commissioner this was because she believed the pole's placement did not materially affect Mr R.

The network company accepted the Commissioner's recommendation. Mr R rejected the Commissioner's recommendation and the file was closed.

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





*Copyright © 2017 Utilities Disputes Ltd, All rights reserved.*

**Our email address is:**

[communications@utilitiesdisputes.co.nz](mailto:communications@utilitiesdisputes.co.nz)