



Energy & Water
Ombudsman NSW
Free, fair and independent

Building trust from the ground up

Insights from the frontline of Renewable Energy Zones

Women in Energy & Renewables Summit, September 2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I recognise their connection to land, waters, and culture and pay my respects to Elders past and present.



EWON (Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW) is an industry funded external dispute resolution scheme, operating on a not-for-profit basis.

We offer **free, fair and independent** dispute resolution to consumers whose energy /water provider has not resolved their issue.

We **conciliate fair and reasonable outcomes**, having regard to laws, codes and regulations, good industry practice, and the individual circumstances of each complaint.

Where conciliation does not work, the Ombudsman can exercise **binding decision powers**.





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> EWON in FY25



approximately

27,000

complaints received

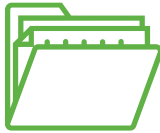
80 FTE (excluding energy transition team)

Budget \$16M



> Charter responsibilities

EWON's Charter outlines our key responsibilities, all of which come together to provide a holistic approach to addressing consumer issues and influence complaint reduction.



Complaints Management



Policy & Influence



Systemic Issues



Stakeholder Engagement



Promotion & Awareness



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➤ Current environment

Building consumer trust and confidence is critical

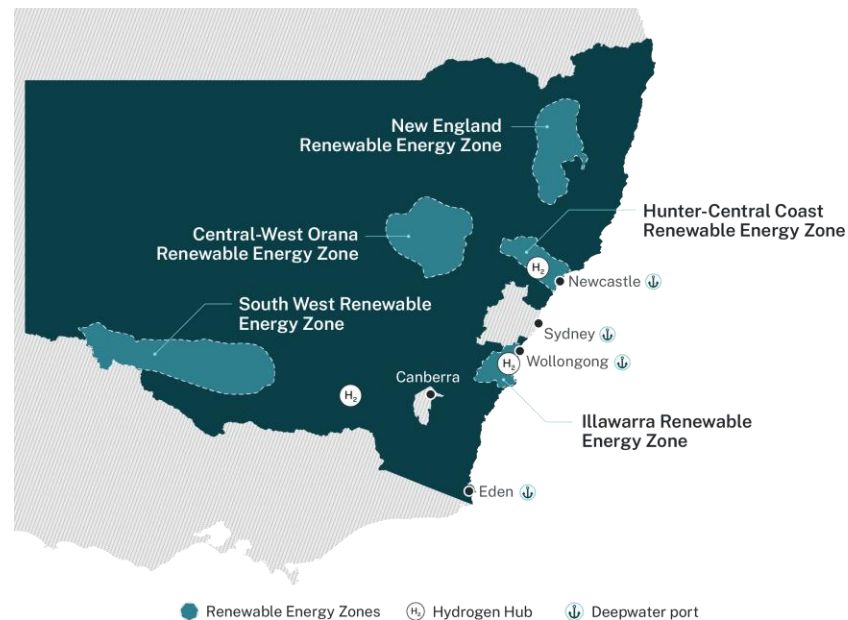
- High energy prices – plus 43% over the last few years
- Low energy literacy
- Lack of trust in the energy sector
- Change, change, change
- Energy transition to renewables
- We've got to get renewable energy transition right and start to build trust!



➤ Renewable energy infrastructure / transmission

How did EWON get involved?

- Transmission jurisdiction since 1998
- March 2024 – Energy Ministers joint response to the AEIC's Community Engagement Report
- April 2024 – NSW DCCEEW invite EWON to the table
- July 2024 – \$1.3M grant funding to establish jurisdiction
- December 2024 – announced expanded jurisdiction



> Why EWON?

- Over 25 years of energy ombudsman experience
- Independence
- Trusted voice
- Dispute resolution specialists – we conciliate / negotiate fair and reasonable outcomes, having regard to laws, codes and regulations and good industry practice (binding decision power if necessary)
- Demonstrated achievements in social justice
- Reputational strength

All difficult to achieve – harder to maintain – and critical to the energy transition.



> Our work

Established 1 December 2024

- Energy Transition team established
- New member engagement
- Launched extensive community engagement program
- Meetings with councils, stakeholders and community representatives on the ground
- Media engagement
- Listening and learning





➤ New and existing renewable energy members

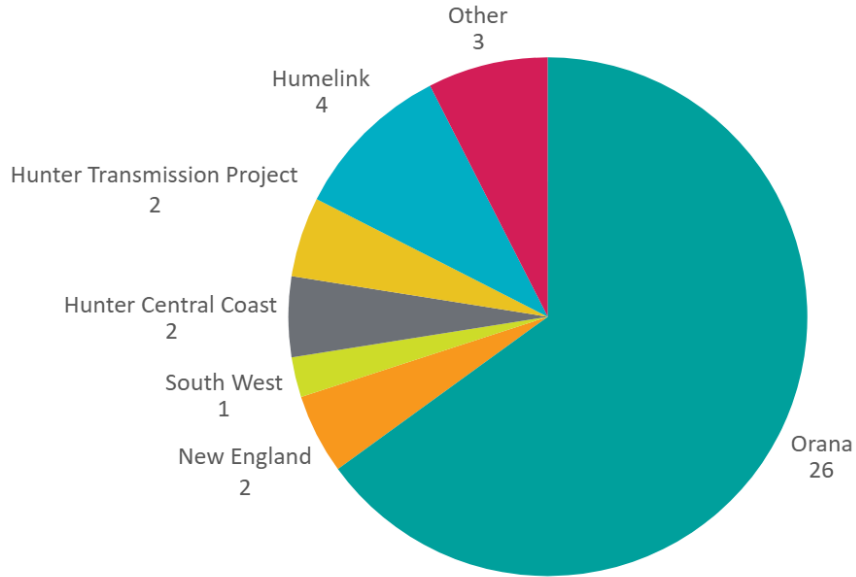
We investigate complaints about:

- EnergyCo
- ACERREZ (Central West Orana REZ)
- Transgrid
- Ausgrid (Hunter Central Coast REZ)
- **And their contractors**

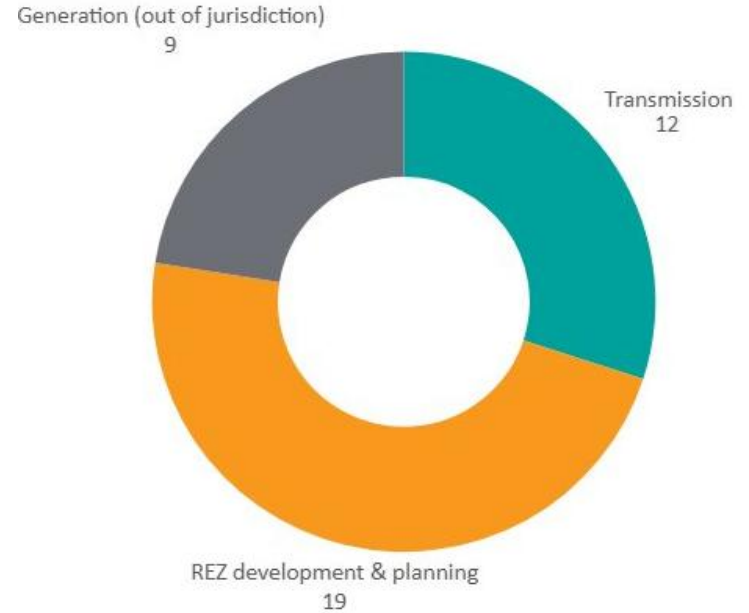
We work with members:

- To establish strong internal complaint handling policies, procedures and practices
- Educate them about EWON's complaint handling policies and processes
- Provide access to complaint data / systemic issues – complaints prevention

> 40 complaints in FY25



Complaints by region / project



Complaints by industry



➤ Value of complaints

Active promotion of dispute resolution – members and EWON

- Complaints can, do and should drive improvement
- Complaints can and do, destroy trust
- The difference – promotion of complaints processes / willingness to receive and resolve complaints
- Transgrid, EnergyCo and ACERERZ all need to better promote their IDR and EWON - including promotion by their contractors
- **Build trust and confidence – in the company, in the sector and in the transition**



> Our jurisdiction

What we can do

- Investigate complaints from individuals directly impacted by:
 - New transmission infrastructure
 - Engagement practices of energy infrastructure entities
 - Land access arrangement breaches
 - The Strategic Benefit Payments scheme
- Take an expansive view of jurisdiction
- Warm referral to other agencies or sources of information

What we can't do

- Stop or delay renewable energy projects



Case study

The Complaint

Frank attended an EWON community event and shared that he was concerned about land acquisition to upgrade and expand a substation, impact on roads and the use of drones over his property.

EWON's investigation:

- We sought advice from the Centre for Property Acquisition

*"a network operator may carry out (...)
(b) work on any land comprising or connected
with the alteration, maintenance or removal
of existing electricity works on any land."*

Our review identified:

- there was no requirement for the road to be asphalted, but some upgrades to the road were being made
- drones are used to complete animal surveys but that had not occurred over Frank's property.



Case study

Outcome

- Frank appreciated EWON's written advice about land acquisition powers and relevant legislation.
- He indicated that he would continue to pursue road improvements directly with the transmission company (as part of the community benefits plan).
- He accepted that the drones he had seen were not transmission related.
- Frank noted his right to reach out again to EWON about any future concerns in relation to the transmission infrastructure project in his area.



> Where we've been



Merotherie road site



Driving through a solar farm
near Dubbo



Gulgong Agricultural Show



Guyra Show



Wagga Wagga
media interview

➤ What we've learned so far

Two sides of the REZ coin

- Disconnect between feedback from industry and the community
- Tensions are high
- Lack of information or conflicting information
- Growing distrust and uncertainty



> Consultation issues

- Each community is unique
- Communities don't feel heard
- "Tick a box" exercise – not genuine
- Local knowledge ignored
- Continuity of contacts – revolving door of consultants involved
- Councils feel caught in the middle – between community and developers



➤ Acquisition issues – landowners

- Initial land valuation is a “joke”
- Need to “fight” for a fair price
- Taxation impacts are unclear
- Long term disruption for the landholder
 - planning and acquisition takes time
 - construction to energise phase takes longer
- Having to learn to live with it, and work around it, is very difficult
- Neighbour relations fractured
- Mental health impacts



➤ Community issues

- Individual benefits overshadow community benefits
- Anger at the loss of prime agricultural land
- Projects are changing the landscape – clearing land, removing trees, changing water flows
- Long-term community impacts not being considered
- Cumulative impacts of the number of developments
- Concern about bushfires / safety / responsibility
- Facilities stretched – water / sewerage / waste
- Traffic impacts on local and main roads



> What needs to change

- **Working together** – CEO down to each contract worker
- **Community benefits** – based on each community needs; create legacy benefits
- **Bespoke approach**
- **Neighbour engagement and benefits**
- **Transparency of information** – the big picture and the finer details
- **Continue the conversation** – in person; in the areas most impacted, and often.



> What should the future look like?

- **Culture of recognition and respect**
- **Cumulative impact analysis** – communicate and act
- **Information sharing across REZs** – learning lessons and committing to not making the same mistakes
- **Promotion of internal and external dispute resolution** – not just EWON, members and government



➤ Building trust in the energy sector

Work in progress

- **Generation and storage** – Working with NSW DCCEEW to further expand into solar, wind and storage – inside and outside of REZ.
- **EWON Renewable Energy Infrastructure Advisory Group** – informing our current work and future expansion.
- **Continued local engagement** – At every level – community members, MPs, councils and others to drive greater awareness of IDR and EDR.



Questions?

