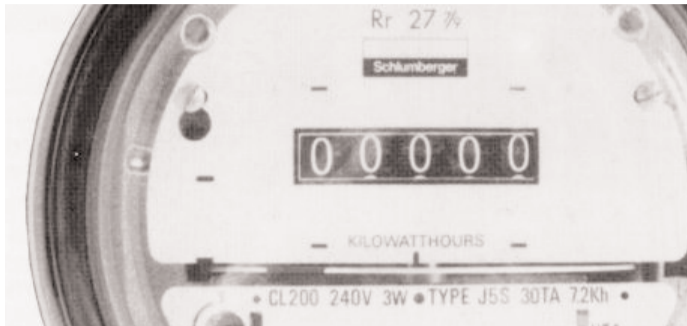


Energy and water customers struggling to pay their bills

The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) Annual Report 2007-2008 shows utility complaints are on the rise, with the agency closing 8913 cases last year, a 3% increase from the previous year.

“Given that there was a decrease in energy marketing activity last year, we see the overall increase in complaints as significant”, says Clare Petre, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW. “While billing was the leading issue for complaints to EWON, it is the increase in affordability and transfer related problems which concerns us. “We are seeing more people who have been cut off or facing disconnection because they can’t afford to pay their bills. We had



1484 credit-related disconnection complaints, a 32% increase from the previous year.

“Some customers have substantial arrears on their account which they are having trouble reducing because they are struggling to cover their usage costs. We urge customers to speak to their provider about how they can reduce their consumption to keep their costs down. Customers can also seek emergency financial assistance to help with arrears on their energy and water bills.”

Ms Petre says EWON is

also receiving complaints from customers who have been caught in the middle when transfers of energy accounts between retailers don’t go smoothly.

“Retailers successfully deal with thousands of transactions but when things do go wrong, customers can be seriously inconvenienced. Sometimes contacting EWON is the only way for customers to find out who their energy retailer is.

“The worst case scenario is that a customer is disconnected in error. These customers are understandably frustrated when they

contact their retailer, especially if their payments are up to date.”

This year also marks EWON’s tenth year in operation. The Ombudsman notes in her Annual Report that generally, energy and water companies have been supportive of and worked with EWON to achieve reasonable outcomes for customers.

“We look forward to continuing our work with retailers, government, regulators and community stakeholders, on customer issues such as affordability and errors in the switching process between retailers,” says Ms Petre.

Customers in who are unable to resolve problems directly with their energy or water provider can contact EWON on freecall 1800 246 545 or visit www.ewon.com.au to lodge a complaint online.

Government Opportunity to provide Preschools

The NSW government has the perfect opportunity to continue to support and develop preschool education by purchasing childcare centre buildings in the wake of industry turmoil.

The Rudd Government pledged to ensure universal availability of preschool education for all Australian four-year-olds. The existing public school system is the ideal place to begin to address social equity issues and provide affordable, quality preschool education to all students.

In 2003 the NSW government opened 21 new preschools in areas of social disadvantage after having been identified as having the worst provision of preschool education in Australia.

100 public schools now have preschools but more needs to be done.

With the collapse of ABC Learning Centres and CFK child care centres, the Federation has written to NSW Minister for Education Verity Firth to increase the number of preschools attached to public schools. The NSW Teachers Federation represents qualified early childhood teachers in public schools preschools and TAFE childcare centres.

In the first instance, Federation calls on the NSW government to conduct a study of the failed private centres to match them with locations of areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

In 2006, Professor Tony Vinson stated that the “NSW government has a responsibility for ensuring that areas of concentrated social disadvantage are served by a low cost, high quality preschool.”

The NSW Government already owns land and schools under the Public Private Partnerships Scheme which host ABC Learning Centres under a lease arrangement. These lease arrangements should be immediately discussed and brought under Department of Education and Training provision.

Brightest talents form 2009 National Squad

Golf Australia is pleased to announce the members of the 2009 Golf Australia National Squad and also the AIS squad.

The male National Squad members are Scott Arnold (NSW), Jason Scrivener (WA), Matt Jager (WA), Grant Scott (NSW), Brendan Smith (NSW), Daniel Nisbet (QLD), Ryan McCarthy (TAS) and Daniel Beckmann (VIC).

Victorians Matthew Griffin and Josh Younger depart the squad as well as New South Wales’ Tim Stewart and Rohan Blizard and Western Australian Michael Foster with all five men committed to pursuing a career in professional golf.

The female National Squad members are Stacey Keating (VIC), Julia Boland (NSW), Rebecca Flood (NSW) and Whitney Hillier (WA). Stephanie Na (SA) and Clare Choi (VIC) will both be seeking to gain Tour cards and become professionals.

The Australian Institute of Sport squad members are Scott Arnold, Brendan Smith, Jason Scrivener, Matt Jager, Daniel Nisbet, Stacey Keating and Julia Boland.

Golf Australia Director-National Elite Development Peter Knight said he was pleased with the squads.

“Both of these squads are made up of our best amateur talent and the inclusion of Daniel Nisbet and Ryan McCarthy shows the quality of players who are not long out of junior golf,” Knight said. “These squads are slightly smaller than our allowable numbers and for that reason there will be a review of the squads in the new year with the opportunity of adding to both the National and AIS squads”.

“The players who are beginning a career in professional golf do so after having been such great ambassadors for Australia and their respective



states. They have our best wishes for long and successful careers as professionals”.

‘WorkChoices’ Scrapped as the Government moves Forward with Fairness

Federal Member for Blaxland, Jason Clare MP, today welcomed the introduction of the Government’s new workplace relations legislation into the Parliament. “These new laws get the balance right. They bring the workplace pendulum back to the middle where it should be,” said Mr Clare.

The Fair Work Bill delivers on the Rudd Government’s promise to get rid of ‘WorkChoices’.

“The new workplace relations system will provide a strong safety net that workers can rely on. It gets rid of the extreme WorkChoices laws, the laws rejected by Australians at the last election,” said Mr Clare.

More than 18,000 people in Blaxland are employed in

the manufacturing, construction and retail industries. These are the people who were worst effected by the unfair ‘WorkChoice’ laws. “These new laws will protect workers. It provides a safety net of ten employment standards that cannot be taken away. It also gives legal protection to workers who have been unfairly dismissed,” Mr Clare said. The Bill delivers on the Government’s commitment to establish a new independent industrial umpire, Fair Work Australia, to assist with enterprise negotiations workplace relations issues and enforce legal entitlements.

Separate legislation will be introduced in the first half of 2009 to ensure a smooth, simple transition to the new system.