

**2005/06 Complaints Report**

State Water Corporation is required as part of its Operating Licence to establish and maintain a complaints handling system. An Annual Report of Complaints is submitted to Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) and is required to be made publicly available on State Water’s website: [www.statewater.com.au](http://www.statewater.com.au)

State Water relies on feedback to continually improve our service to meet our customers’ needs and provide the best bulk water delivery service available. We respect the rights of community members and customers to express their concerns and issues that are directly related to our operations.

This report is our first as a corporation and the complaints received have provided us with good feedback that has allowed us to make several improvements to our services. We thank all those customers who have taken the time to write and provide us with this valuable feedback.

**Overview:**

During the 2005/06 reporting year, State Water Corporation recorded 54 complaints. Based on the IPART categories, the majority of complaints were in the billing area and water release/operations, which were all resolved through further clarification and improved understandings. All concerns and issues raised with us about our operations are dealt with confidentially and in keeping with our privacy policy.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Complaints</b>
Asset Management	8
Water Releases/Operations	17
Water Metering	1
Annual Water Balances	Nil
Environmental Management	Nil
Billing	26*
Customer Service Charter	2
Employee Performance	Nil
Other	Nil
FRWS – standard quality of water delivered	Nil
FRWS – continuity of water delivered	Nil
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>

\* On a daily basis, the Billing Hotline receives up to 20-39 calls regarding customers’ invoices. The majority of the billing enquiries are resolved by the end of the phone call and don’t require further follow up and are not recorded as official complaints, however they are recorded in the customer database “Proclaim”. Several billing enquiries were referred to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as they were related to unregulated and groundwater bills, who are DNR customers. State Water bills DNR customers under contract, and from August 2006, the billing of DNR and State Water charges was separated.

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Summary of Complaints – Valley by Valley

Valley	Category	Action/Status
Barwon-Darling	Billing – unregulated (1)	Referred (DNR)
Border Rivers	Nil return	
Gwydir	Water Release/Operations (2) Billing	Deferred (DNR) Resolved
Namoi	Water Releases/Operations (1) Water Metering (1) Billing (1)	Referred (1) Referred (1) Referred (1)
Peel	Asset Management (2) Billing – water charges (2)	Resolved Referred (IPART)
Macquarie-Cudgegong	Water Releases/Operations (7)  Asset Management (1) Billing – water charges (2)	Resolved (6) Referred (1) (DNR) Resolved Referred (1) (IPART) Resolved (1)
Lachlan	Billing – bulk water charges (6) Asset Management (3) Water Releases/Operations (2)	Resolved Resolved Resolved
Murrumbidgee	Water Releases/Operations (5)  Billing – water charges (3)  Asset Management (1) Customer Service Charter (1)	Resolved (3) Referred (2) (DNR) Referred (1) Resolved (2) Resolved (1) Resolved (1)
Murray-Lower Darling	Billing – water charges (1)	Resolved
Hunter	Billing – Regulated (1) Billing - Unregulated (3) Billing - Groundwater (1)	Resolved Resolved (DNR) Resolved (DNR)
North Coast	Billing - Unregulated (1) Billing – Groundwater (1)	Referred (DNR) Referred (DNR)
South Coast	Billing – unregulated (1) Billing Groundwater – (1)	Referred (DNR) Referred (DNR)
FRWS	Customer Service Charter (1) Asset Management (1)	Resolved Resolved
Statewide	Billing (numerous) Address Problems Licence Confusion Water Charges	Resolved Referred (DNR) Referred (IPART)

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### **Data Collection:**

Prior to the introduction in September 2006 of a revised Complaints Handling System, State Water had three mechanisms for recording complaints. They were:

- Customer Service Manager files, where direct correspondence has been received from complainants;
- The billing system "Proclaim", where complaints and actions are captured from calls to the 1800 hotline or letters received with payments; and
- Letters to Members of Parliament

State Water also seeks feedback on operations through the Customer Service Committees, water user groups and from regular Customer Satisfaction Surveys (June 06).

### **System Improvements:**

#### ***Billing***

New and improved invoice layout was introduced to coincide with the introduction of separate billing. The invoices now have payment options on the back of the invoice, and are different colour for DNR (grey) and State Water (blue). A revised approach to inserting information with the bills was introduced as a result of feedback that the previous materials resembled marketing material. Therefore, the new information included with the bills is in an A4 "information sheet" format, rather than brochure style.

DNR water charges are now invoiced using DNR letterhead and envelopes, with details for mailing being direct to an independent and separate mailbag and bank account. This has helped avoid the confusion between the two organisations.

With regards to lost invoices, State Water Policy is that if past payment record is reasonable, then customer's claim of not receiving a bill is accepted and adjustments made accordingly to interest charges and the bill reissued.

All information included in bills is reviewed by Communication Services and peer reviewed by Billing Enquiries Hotline attendants.

#### ***Confusion between DNR and State Water roles and responsibilities***

New information sheets have been developed that differentiate State Water and DNR roles. A handy reference guide will be included with the next billing run (State Water General Brochure and State Water – "What We Do" reference guide).

Enquiries or complaints in writing that are received that need to be referred are now responded to using a standard response letter that clearly states State water's roles and responsibilities.

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***Water Charges***

With the confusion over the State Water pricing submission and the IPART Determination process and outcomes, including how water charges are calculated and what they cover, State Water developed a 20-part series of fact sheets that outlined the various elements of IPART's determination (available on the Website).

***Misunderstanding about Asset Projects and Water Delivery Operations***

State Water has increased face-to-face meetings with water user groups and impacted communities to improve two way communications during special projects and operations. It is State Water's intention to keep communications line open and encourage water users to read their local papers, which publish weekly reports provided to them by State Water. State Water also regularly communicates directly with customers via fax stream dispatch of "Customer Notices".

***Raising a Concerns***

State Water endeavours to resolve any problems as quickly as possible. We encourage our local officers to work with customers directly to resolve concerns. State Water officers record the nature of a concern or issue, the complainants contact details and the steps involved in resolving the problem. Customers can contact the Area Customer Service Manager in person, by mail or by phone.

After State Water has had the opportunity to resolve an issue locally, if a customer believes that the outcome is not satisfactory, they may choose to contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON). EWON is an independent body that makes decisions that are fair and reasonable for each individual case put forward. EWON can be contacted on 1800 246 545 or [www.ewon.com.au](http://www.ewon.com.au).

Only two matters were raised since State Water joined EWON on 1 January 2006. The first matter was classified by EWON as an 'enquiry' and the second matter was classified as a Level 1 Investigation. Both matters were resolved and closed within 30 days. No determinations were made by EWON in relation to complaints against State Water during 2005-2006.

**Reported Compiled by:**  
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