

**NO CONTACT / SUSPENSION OF COLLECTION ACTIVITY POLICY
June 2013**

BACKGROUND

Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) complies with the National *Benchmarks for Industry-Based Customer Dispute Resolution Schemes 1997*.¹ In doing so, EWOV has developed Board approved case handling policies and procedures to ensure that its service is effective and efficient. This includes ensuring that complaints are dealt with by the appropriate process.

This document outlines EWOV's policy on:

- suspension of collection action by providers; and
- no contact between providers and customers

This document is to be read in conjunction with EWOV's Enquiry, Complaint and Communication Process Procedure, Hardship Policy, Payment of Undisputed Amounts Policy (Residential) and Payment of Undisputed Amounts Policy (Business).

Suspension of collection action

During the course of an EWOV investigation all providers are required to suspend internal and external debt collection activity on amounts that are either in dispute or amounts that cannot be paid by the customer due to their financial circumstances.

Suspension of collection activity must take place on the same day that the provider is notified of EWOV's receipt of a complaint for investigation. This notification may be by phone, email or fax and is usually in the form of an acknowledgement letter or complaint notification. The suspension is to remain in place throughout EWOV's investigation.

This policy is subject to the Ombudsman's discretion where circumstances may indicate that suspension of collection action is not appropriate e.g. illegal use.

No Contact between Scheme Participants and Customers

All providers have agreed not to make contact with customers regarding the issues in dispute for the duration of EWOV's investigation.

This policy is conveyed to customers by EWOV upon receipt of their complaint.

If contact between the provider and the customer is necessary to progress the complaint, approval from EWOV must be obtained before contact is made.

Where a provider initiates contact with the customer during an EWOV investigation without EWOV's approval, EWOV may upgrade the complaint to the next stage of investigation.

¹ <http://www.consumersonline.gov.au/downloads/selfreg/benchmarks/BMARK1.rtf>