



**MEDIA RELEASE- 25th September 2017**

## **Are rising power bills impacting your business?**

Across regional Queensland businesses are being asked “*are rising power bills impacting on your business and your regional town?*”

Coordinator of the Queensland Electricity Users Network (QEUN) Jennifer Brownie is urging more businesses in the Southern Downs, Mt Isa and the Whitsunday regional council areas to paint a picture of how a decade of rising power bills has impacted on them.

“Households across regional Queensland are struggling to pay their power bills and this flows through to the amount of money spent at local businesses and in local towns.”

“Businesses know it’s important to voice their opinion but they struggle to find the time.”

“That’s why we are offering businesses the option of completing the survey online or by telephone.”

The online survey is accessed via the website [www.qeun.com.au](http://www.qeun.com.au) or a convenient time can be booked by calling (07) 4031 2970.

“In March this year, nearly 21,000 homes in regional Queensland were experiencing moderate to severe difficulties paying their power bills (*see attached*). This number is expected to rise significantly due to the Queensland Government’s announcement of yet another rise in electricity prices.”

“There are more homes and small businesses in regional Queensland being disconnected because they can’t pay their electricity bills than in the states of South Australia and Tasmania (*see attached*),” she said.

In regional Queensland most businesses and homes receive their electricity bills from Ergon Energy. Ergon Energy is 100 percent owned by the Queensland Government and as such it can only charge customers the electricity prices set by the Queensland Government.

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017 the Queensland Government authorised another rise in electricity prices. This caused power bills in regional Queensland to rise by 4.1 to 7.4 percent for businesses and by 3.1 to 4.3 percent for households.

To determine the impact of rising power bills in regional Queensland, the QEUN has a target of 200 business surveys from four council areas each with distinct climates and industry bases. To date 87 surveys have been received from the Southern Downs, 84 from the Whitsundays and 48 from Mt Isa.

Mareeba businesses have surpassed the target with 219 surveys. Responses were received from a wide range of businesses including different types of farmers, tourism and mining through to those servicing the general community such as butchers, bakers, hairdressers, accountants, health professionals, hotels, cafes and supermarkets.

The QEUN website is updated daily with the total number of surveys received from each of the four council areas. The more surveys received the stronger the voice from businesses.

All individual responses to the survey are aggregated allowing a business to voice an opinion without being identified.

**We urge all types of businesses to complete the survey by 30<sup>th</sup> September on [www.qeun.com.au](http://www.qeun.com.au) or call (07) 4031 2970 to book a time to complete over the telephone.**

**Further information please contact: Jennifer Brownie, Coordinator, QEUN, Ph: (07) 4031 2865**

## Customers disconnected for non-payment of electricity

### Small business

The Top 5 of 18 electricity retailers disconnecting small business customers for non-payment of electricity in Q3 2016-17 (refer Figure 1 below) are:

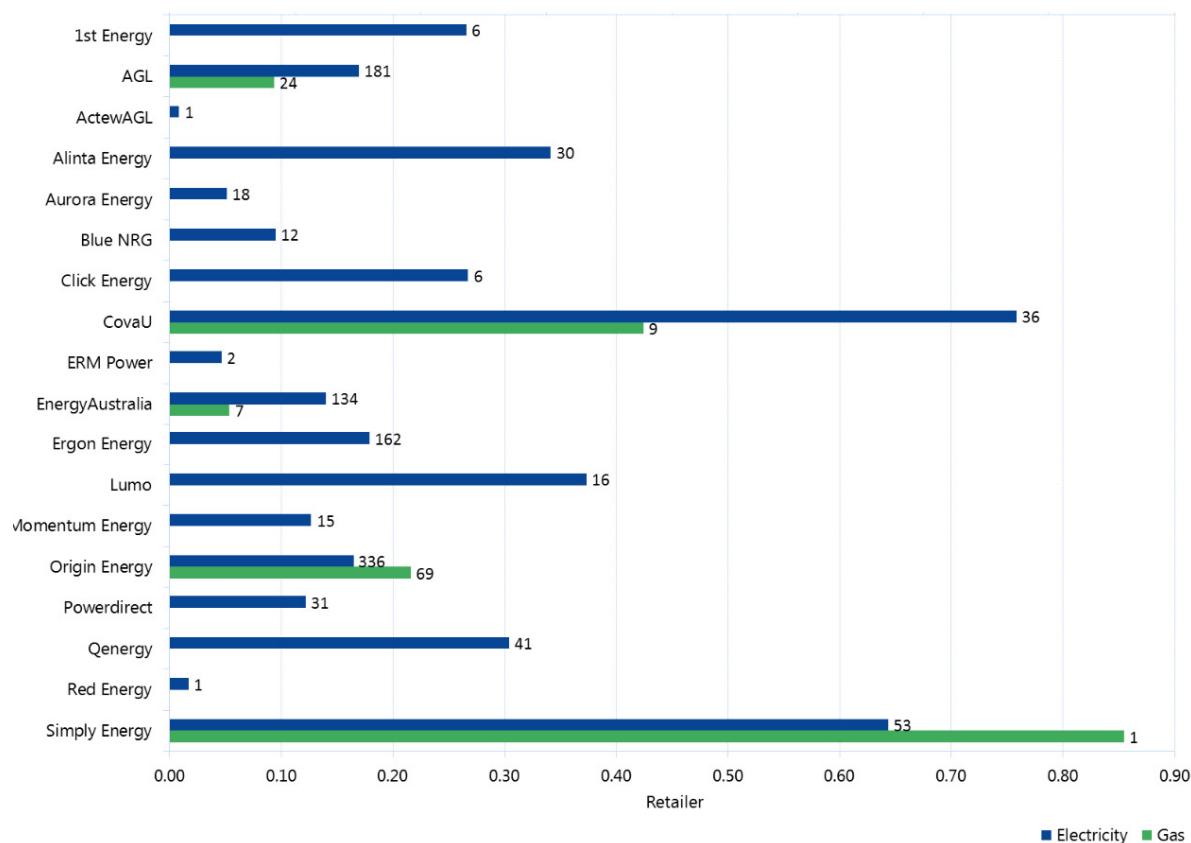
Origin Energy	336
AGL	181
<b>Ergon Energy</b>	<b>162</b>
Energy Australia	134
Simply Energy	53

Small business customers disconnected for non-payment of electricity in Q3 2016-17 by jurisdiction <sup>1</sup>:

New South Wales	495
Queensland	417
<b>(Ergon Energy in regional Queensland 162)</b>	
South Australia	102
Tasmania	18
ACT	14

1. Under the National Energy Retail Law the Australian Energy Regulator is not responsible for the reporting of retailer performance in Victoria.

**Figure 1: Small business customers disconnected for non- payment by retailer in Q3 2016-17**



Source: Australian Energy Regulator, last updated 1 June 2017

## Customers disconnected for non-payment of electricity

### Residential

Residential customers disconnected for non-payment of electricity in Q3 2016-17 by jurisdiction <sup>2</sup>:

New South Wales	7,775
Queensland	7,176
<b>(Ergon Energy in regional Queensland 2,975)</b>	
South Australia	2,879
Tasmania	258
ACT	78

2. Under the National Energy Retail Law the Australian Energy Regulator is not responsible for the reporting of retailer performance in Victoria.

## Customers on payment plans

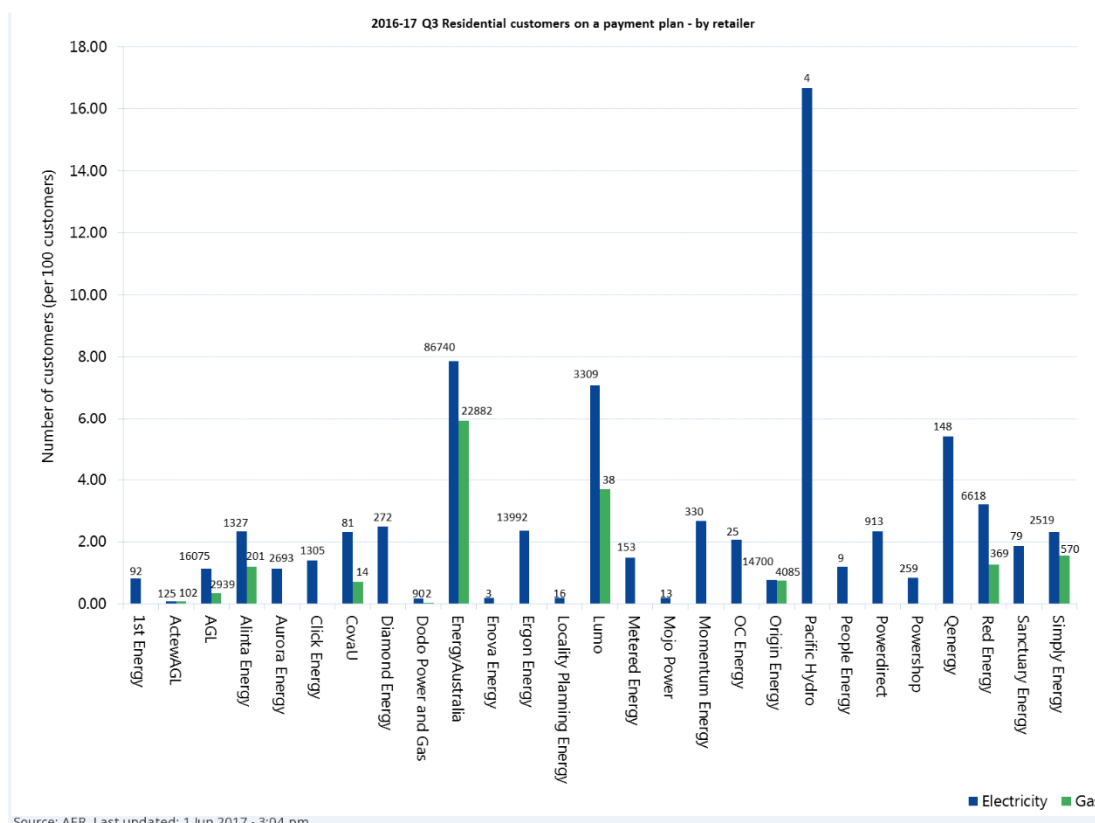
### What is a Payment Plan?

A payment plan is a plan for a *residential* customer experiencing payment difficulties to pay an electricity retailer in periodic instalments any overdue amount.

The Top 5 of 27 electricity retailers with customers on a payment plan in Q3 2016-17 are:

Energy Australia	86,740
AGL	16,075
Origin Energy	14,700
Ergon Energy	13,992
Red Energy	6,618

**Figure 2: Residential customers on a payment plan by retailer in Q3 2016-17**



Source: Australian Energy Regulator, last updated 1 June 2017

## Customers on hardship programs

### What is a hardship program?

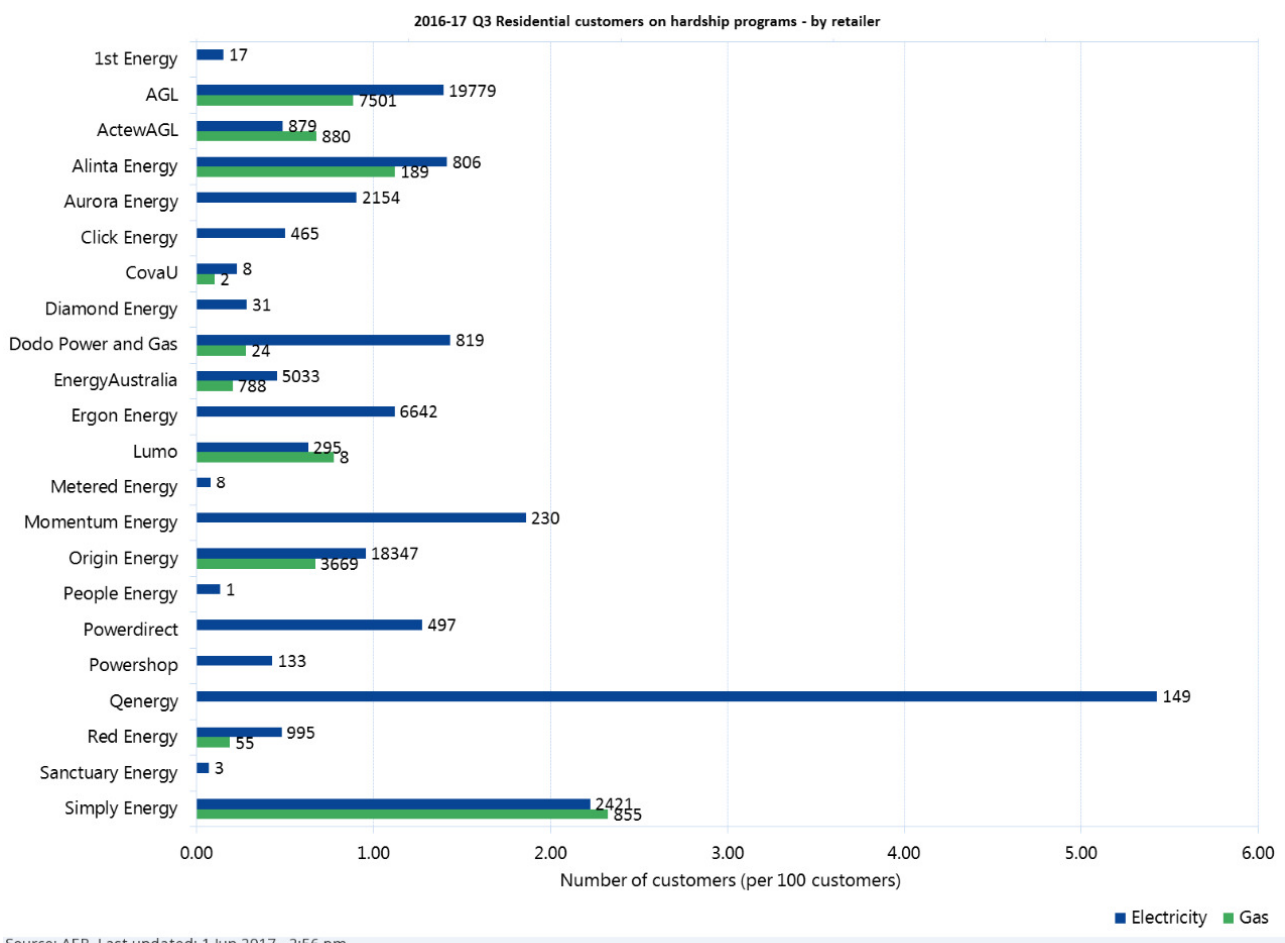
A residential customer experiencing moderate payment difficulties will be placed on a payment plan by an electricity retailer whilst those identified with chronic and severe difficulties will enter a hardship program. A customer on a hardship program will not be disconnected while they continue to meet the agreed payment arrangements.

Business customers cannot access hardship programs.

The Top 5 of 22 electricity retailers with customers on a hardship program in Q3 2016-17 are:

AGL	19,779
Origin Energy	18,347
Ergon Energy	6,642
Energy Australia	5,033
Aurora Energy	2,154

**Figure 3: Residential customers on a hardship program by retailer in Q3 2016-17**



Source: AER, Last updated: 1 Jun 2017 - 2:56 pm

Source: Australian Energy Regulator, last updated 1 June 2017