Economic Regulation Authority

Energy retailers and distributors 2024

Annual data report

3 February 2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

At the ERA we value our cultural diversity and respect the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work.

We acknowledge their continuing connection to culture and community, their traditions and stories. We commit to listening, continuously improving our performance and building a brighter future together.

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1. Introduction

The Economic Regulation Authority is Western Australia's independent regulator of electricity, gas, water, and rail services. We administer licensing schemes for essential services like retail electricity and gas, and natural monopoly infrastructure such as Western Power and ATCO Gas distribution networks.

We license energy utilities and enforce industry codes of conduct that protect small use electricity and gas customers.[1,2,3] The customer protection framework sets standards for how customers are to be treated regarding bills, complaints, payments, bill debts, disconnections, and when customers are affected by financial hardship or family violence. The ERA reports on providers in these areas to improve public understanding of utilities and to facilitate discussion about customer protection regulation.

Electricity small use customers are households and businesses that use less than 160 megawatt hours (MWh) each year. This is an annual bill below approximately $45,000, meaning "small use" encompasses a wide range of customers – from small households to commercial customers.

Customers who use 160 MWh or more are large use customers and are not covered by the Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers.

The South West Interconnected System (SWIS) spans from Kalbarri to Albany and Kalgoorlie In the SWIS, small use customers can either be contestable or non-contestable. Non-contestable customers use less than 50 MWh each year and are supplied by Synergy. Contestable customers are those who use more than 50 MWh and can choose their retailer.

Gas small use customers are households and business that use less than one terajoule of gas each year – which is an annual bill also approximately below $45,000.

All gas customers are contestable, meaning they can choose their retailer. Retailers that supply gas through piped distribution systems may charge no more than the maximum regulated tariff.

Contestable/non-contestable: This report refers to electricity small use customers using less than 50MWh per year as non-contestable and customers using between 50MWh and 160MWh as contestable. As Horizon Power is the only retailer operating outside the SWIS, only contestable customers within the SWIS can choose their retailer.

1.1 Changes to this year's report

We collect data from energy retailers and distributors each year and report changes in utility performance as well as broader customer trends. This year's report combines both data sets to provide a broader look at energy utilities across Western Australia.

We have improved the tools we use to capture and process utility data to make it more accessible and useful for stakeholders. That has enabled us, for the first time, to include data for up to 10 years.

1 Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers 2022 (online).

2 Compendium of gas customer licence conditions is set of conditions attached to each gas trading and gas distribution licence issued by the ERA (online).

3 Gas Marketing Code of Conduct 2022 (online).

We have also created two new dashboards on our website to help visualise data we collect – one each for retail data and distributor data. We will keep improving them based on user feedback.

Since 2022, we have extensively reviewed customer protection codes for electricity and gas customers and have introduced a range of new protections. This report is the first to include a full year of data since those changes.

Billing and payments

We made fee-free payment plans and bill deadline extensions available to all residential customers that request them, not just those identified as being in financial hardship. The changes are intended to make it easier for customers to manage short term cashflow problems. The same entitlements were extended to gas customers on 1 July 2024.

Most customers can use their online account to extend their bill deadline and customers are entitled to at least two bill deadline extensions and two payment plans each year. Retailers may deny subsequent requests if customers do not pay their bill by the extended deadline or follow agreed payment plan terms.

Family and domestic violence protections

When electricity retailers identify that a residential customer is affected by family violence, they cannot disconnect this customer for non-payment for at least nine months.

We also implemented added privacy protections and new customer service obligations to minimise the number of times customers must discuss the issue with their retailer.[4] The changes require retailers to develop policies that respond to the needs of those customers and have driven specialised staff training, improved privacy measures, and tailored financial support.

Payment plan and family violence protections commenced for gas customers on 1 July 2024 and data will be available on these protections in next year's report.[5]

4 ERA, review of the Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Consumers 2022 (online).

5 Economic Regulation Authority, 3 April 2024. Final decision – 2023 Review of the compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations (online)

2. Overview

In Western Australia, there are approximately 1.2 million small use customer accounts for electricity and 800,000 for gas. Most customers are managing their electricity and gas bills: 98.5 per cent of electricity and 97.7 per cent of gas customers did not have a bill debt at the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

Customer service has improved, with more customers getting through to call centre operators within 30 seconds than last year, and complaints to utilities have fallen for the second year in a row.

Some customers are experiencing cost of living pressures and seeking support to pay their electricity and gas bills. In the first full year of data since payment options in the Electricity Code were expanded, 98,186 residential customers used a bill extension and 62,426 used a payment plan, either for overdue bills or to smooth bill cycles into easier monthly payments.

Across both electricity and gas, there were 33,915 residential and 1,712 business customers with bill debts, excluding customers in hardship programs. The number of residential customers repaying a gas bill debt fell and the average residential bill debt increased to $457. Residential customers repaying an electricity bill debt grew by more than a third to 15,856 and the average bill debt fell to $652, which may be due to government bill credits.

Disconnections for bill non-payment

Residential electricity disconnections increased for the fourth year in a row to 12,744 while residential gas disconnections decreased to 3,965. Disconnection rates – the number of disconnection events relative to the number of customers – were around 1.2 per cent for electricity and 0.5 per cent for gas.

Around half of disconnected Synergy customers were reconnected within one week, and around three in four Horizon Power customers. The one-week reconnection rate is noticeably lower for gas retailers than for electricity retailers, suggesting disconnected customers prioritised being reconnected to electricity. Retailers advised us they are seeking to engage earlier with customers to offer support to avoid disconnections.

Financial hardship programs

Some residential customers with bill debt receive support through retailer financial hardship programs – 3.2 per cent of electricity customers and 0.6 per cent of gas customers. This can include fee waivers, referrals to financial counsellors and partial debt-write offs. The number of customers in gas or electricity hardship programs has fallen for the last three years to 38,694 customers in 2023/24.

The number of customers starting a financial hardship program with more than $500 in bill debt has increased for the last three years. In 2023/24 2,786 customers started a hardship program with more than $2,500 of bill debt, up 6.5 per cent from the previous year.

Around 4 in every 5 customers enrolled in hardship programs successfully complete them, but completion rates vary between electricity and gas – 92 per cent for electricity and 43 per cent for gas. Of electricity customers who completed hardship programs in the past two years, 3,490 were subsequently disconnected in 2023/24 for not paying their bill. That compares with 2,965 of these disconnections the year before. Only 35 per cent of these customers (1,235 households) were able to come to an arrangement with a retailer and be reconnected within a week. That also worsened slightly from the year before, when 40 per cent were reconnected within the week.

Network reliability

In 2023/24, the number of premises affected by extended outages (12 hours or more) increased from 44,314 to 98,114 after a 45 per cent decrease in 2022/23, driven partly by the January 2024 outages in Kalgoorlie.

The number of customers who experienced frequent electricity outages also increased. Customers in urban areas who experienced more than nine outages increased to 10,346, from 3,719 the year before. Regional customers who experienced more than 16 outages during the year increased from 2,528 to 7,340. Fewer customers connected to Horizon Power networks experienced extended outages compared to the year before, down from 1,329 to 596.

While this report presents data from electricity retailers and distributors - Synergy, Horizon Power and Western Power – comparisons between the entities may not be useful given the different customer groups and the locations that each entity services.

2.1 Customer numbers

Western Australia's growing population is not necessarily reflected in customer numbers because utilities report the number of retail accounts or network connections not the number of people living at each address.

Table 2.1 Small use electricity customers on 30 June 2024

Customer type	Customers	Change from 2022/23 (%)
Total residential customers	**1,071,612**	**▼2.64**
Contestable (more than 50 MWh)	774	▲11.21
Non-contestable	1,069,411	▼2.65
Pre-payment meter customers	1,426	▼2.40
Total business customers	**105,672**	**▼0.20**
Contestable	9,854	▲10.57
Non-contestable	95,818	▼1.19

Synergy is the supplier for most small use electricity customers and is prohibited from supplying gas to customers who use less than 180 GJ a year.[6]

Table 2.2 Small use gas customers on 30 June 2024

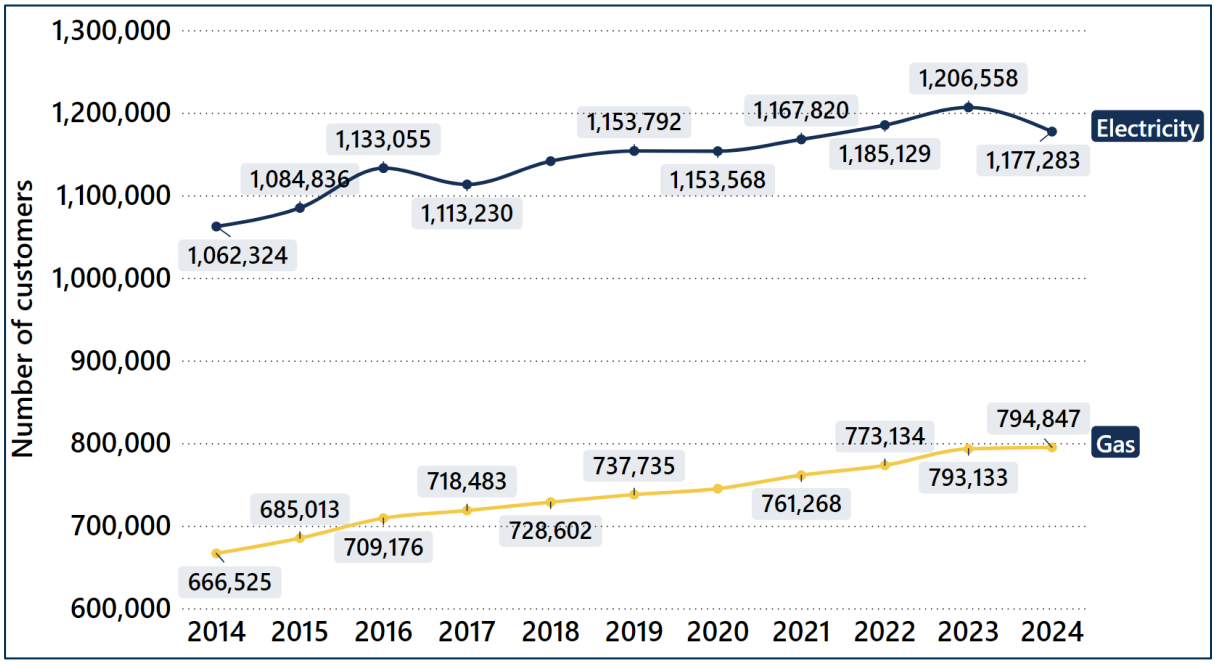
Customer type	Customers	Change from 2022/23 (%)
Total residential customers	**785,239**	**▲0.21**
Covered by moratorium (less than 180 GJ)	783,661	▲0.48
Not covered by moratorium	1,578	▼57
Total business customers	**9,608**	**▲0.57**
Covered by moratorium	7,173	▲3.69
Not covered by moratorium	2,435	▼7.63

6 Gas market moratorium for customers who use less than 180 gigajoules annually (online).

The combined number of retail electricity and gas customers shrank 1.38 per cent in the 12 months to 30 June 2024, the first overall decrease in five years (Figure 2.1).

The overall decrease was driven by a 2.6 per cent fall in non-contestable residential electricity customers, the largest customer cohort overall. These customers are supplied by Synergy or Horizon Power. This decrease in customer numbers may be due to changes in the composition of housing across the metropolitan area. Such as the infill development of existing land into medium and high-density strata complexes, where multiple customers receive separate bills under a single overarching retail account. Synergy reported observing a five-year trend towards this type of retail account and expects it to continue. Changes in housing composition may have also contributed to the increase in the number of contestable residential customers (up 11.2 per cent) – those are customers using more than 50 megawatt hour a year.[7]

Figure 2.1 Small use electricity and gas retail accounts (combined residential and business)



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 1, CCR 2, CCR 4, CCR 5, CCR 7 (non-contestable residential, contestable residential, non-contestable business, contestable business, prepayment customers). Gas retail indicators R 1, R 3 (total residential, total business). Years are financial years: 2024 means FY2023/24.

2.2 Energy supplied to customers

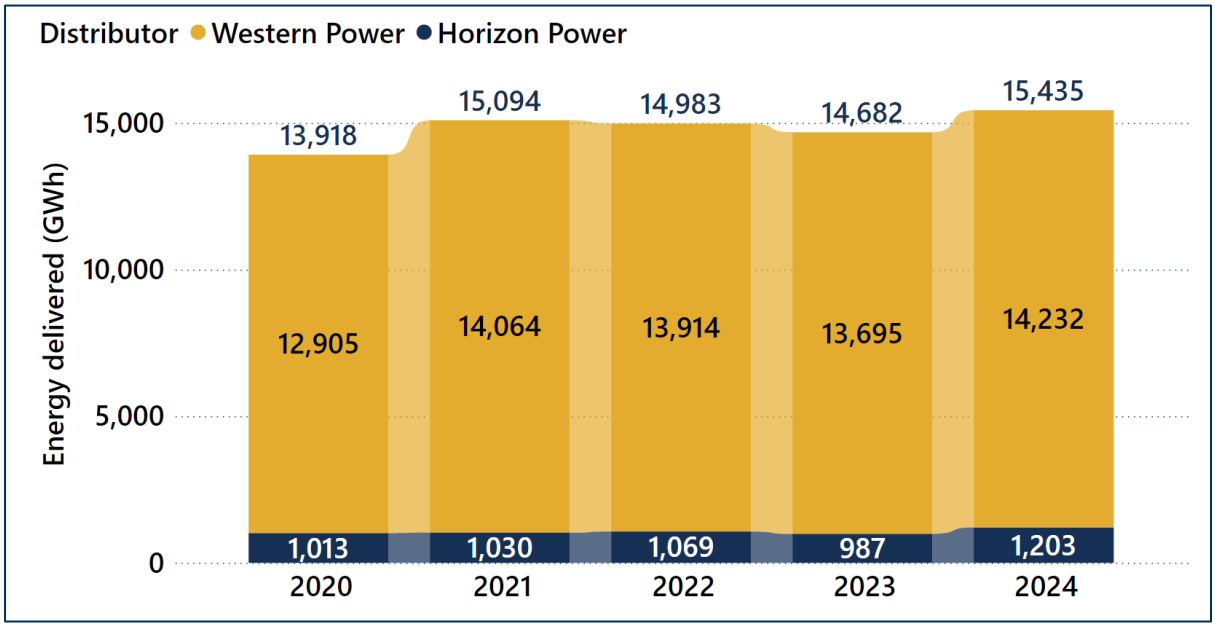
While the number of retail electricity customers fell in 2023/24, energy delivered through the electricity distribution network grew by 5.1 per cent. In the five years to 2024, energy delivered to customers through Western Power's network was up more than 10 per cent (Figure 2.2).

Growth in energy delivered may be due to population growth in Western Australia, and increased use in air conditioning because of record warm weather.[8]

7 In April 2024, the WA Parliament passed legislative changes that will set up a new regulatory framework to extend customer protections to more customers, including those in strata complexes supplied by embedded network operators. Electricity Industry Amendment (Alternative Electricity Services) Act 2024 (online)

8 Bureau of Meteorology, 2 January 2025. Annual statement – Climate summary information for 2024 (online)

Figure 2.2 Electricity delivered through distribution networks in GWh



Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 14 (energy delivered by feeder category). Data aggregated to show totals for each distributor. Excludes distribution losses (NQR 17).

In 2023/24, distributors added 16,278 connections to electricity distribution networks, a 1.1 per cent increase and consistent with previous years. Most new connections are on Western Power's network in the southwest of the state (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 New and total electricity distribution network connections, 2024

Distributor	Total connections	New connections	Yearly change (%)
Western Power	1,218,307	15,752	▲1.06
Horizon Power	53,694	526	▼0.95

Source: Electricity distribution indicators CCD 1, CCD 7 (new connections, total connections on 30 June 2024). Yearly change (%) shows overall change in total connections (CCD 7) from the year before.

Gas delivered to customers decreased 1.1 per cent in 2023/24 and has remained stable over the past five years. In 2023/24, ATCO delivered 3,253 GWh while Kleenheat delivered 3 GWh, due to the significantly smaller size of its network. New gas connections were mostly to ATCO networks in new housing developments in Perth's fringe with Kleenheat reporting a small number of new connections to its networks (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4 New and total gas distribution network connections, 2024

Distributor	Total connections	New connections	Yearly change (%)
ATCO Gas	817,445	14,988	▲1.67
Kleenheat	1,236	7	▲1.31

Source: Gas distribution indicators D 1, D 7 (connections provided, total connections on 30 June 2024). Yearly change (%) shows overall change in total connections (D 7) from the year before.

2.3 Residential electricity pre-payment customers

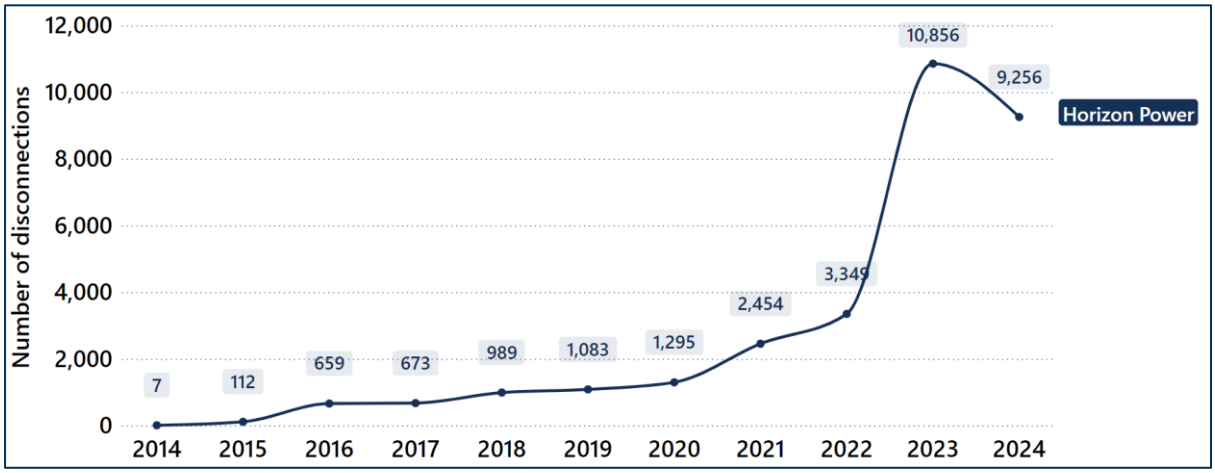
Households using pre-payment meters pay for electricity prior to consumption and are predominantly Horizon Power customers living in regional and remote areas. Customers can choose to be on a standard meter or a pre-payment meter.

Since 2017/18, the number of pre-payment meter customers has risen from 1,237 to 1,426. Horizon Power supplies 1,415 of these customers, who make up almost 4 per cent of its total residential customer base. The remaining 11 are Synergy customers. Currently, all instances of pre-payment customers running out of account credit and losing electricity are recorded as disconnections, even if customers top up their account and are reconnected within a few minutes.

In 2023/24, there were 49,302 pre-payment customer disconnection events – broadly consistent with the 49,799 disconnections in 2022/23. We are currently considering which other pre-payment customer data would better reflect differences between short and longer-term disconnections.

Horizon Power reported that pre-payment meter customers disconnect frequently but are promptly reconnected when they add credit to their accounts. There was a 14.7 per cent decrease in pre-payment customer disconnections lasting longer than two hours and more than once a month. Instances of this remain much higher than in previous years (Figure 2.3).[9]

Figure 2.3 Horizon Power pre-payment disconnections, where a customer was disconnected for longer than two hours more than once in a month



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 53.

The higher number of disconnections for Horizon Power's pre-payment meter customers in 2021/22 was due to the State Government halting disconnections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disconnections resumed in July 2021. Horizon Power implemented further pauses in 2022 to help customers remain connected while it resolved a technical issue with the pre-payment metering system. The system did not recognise payments by some customers to their accounts, and did not re-energise the meters.

2.4 Customer service summary

We collect information from utilities on customer service measures like the number of customer complaints, calls to utilities, and average call wait times. Changes to customer service measures over time can tell us different things, such as changes in customer

[9] In last year's annual data report, we reported that Horizon Power had 2,721 of these disconnections. Horizon Power informed us this year that it provided an incorrect number for 2022/23, which has been corrected in this report.

satisfaction with utilities or in the channels customers use to contact utilities. Data on these measures are for residential and business customers combined unless otherwise stated.

For the first time, this report includes complaints data from the Energy and Water Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is an independent body that investigates and resolves complaints about electricity, gas, and water utilities. We require all utilities to be members of the Ombudsman scheme.[10]

What counts as a complaint?

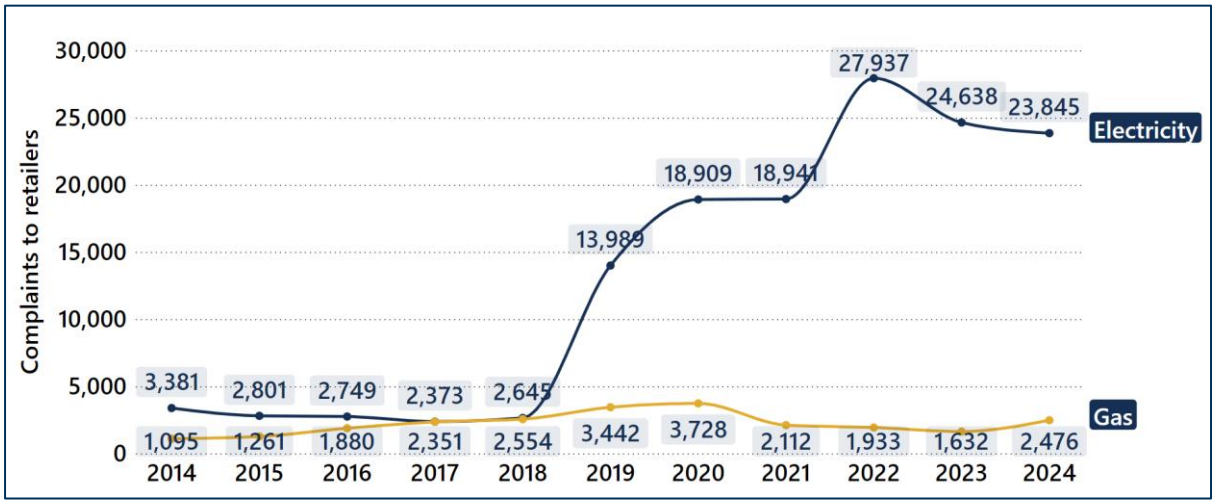
Complaints do not need to be formal. Electricity and gas utilities must record all instances of customers expressing dissatisfaction about its products, services, staff, or the handling of a separate complaint. Customers can also make more than one complaint during a single interaction with a utility.

Data we collect from retailers and distributors is separated by category type. Some customer complaints are general, such as those about what is shown on their bill. Other complaints are more technical, such as those about energy supply reliability.

Complaints about reliability and other technical issues will be recorded by electricity distributors under the Network Quality and Reliability of Supply Code if those complaints relate to breaches of standards required by the code.[11] We include NQ&R Code complaints when discussing total complaint trends in section 2.3. Data that breaks down different types of complaint is recorded separately in section 5 to distinguish complaints recorded under the NQ&R Code from more general complaints.

In 2023/24, residential and business customer complaints to electricity retailers fell 3.2 per cent, the second consecutive decrease after the record high in 2021/22. Complaints to gas retailers remain lower, but increased year on year from 1,632 to 2,476 (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4 Complaints to retailers (combined residential and business)



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 72, CCR 73 (total, residential & business complaints to retailers). Gas retail indicators R 59, R 60 (total, residential & business complaints to retailers).

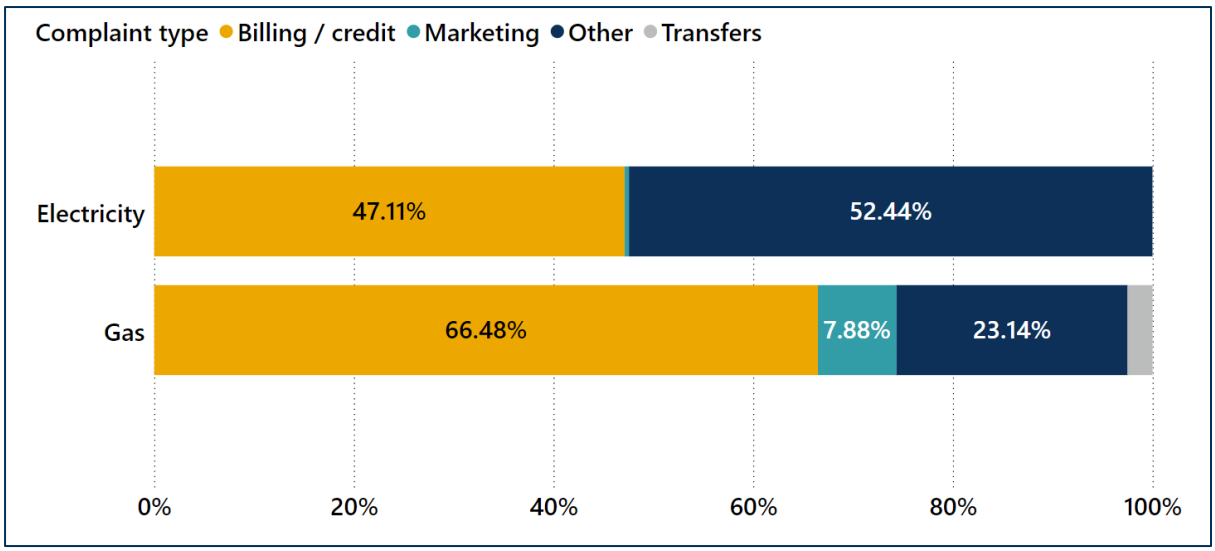
[10] Energy and Water Ombudsman WA, *Our role* (online)

[11] Electricity Industry (Network Quality and Reliability of Supply) Code 2005, division 2 (online)

Billing and credit complaints, which often relate to how bills were calculated, made up 49 per cent of all complaints to retailers in 2023/24. The proportion of billing complaints was higher for gas retailers than for electricity retailers (Figure 2.5).

Synergy reported that billing and credit complaints have decreased due to changes in its billing and account system, meaning fewer bills were being issued late and customers could more easily monitor energy usage during the bill period.

Figure 2.5 Breakdown of 2024 customer complaints to retailers

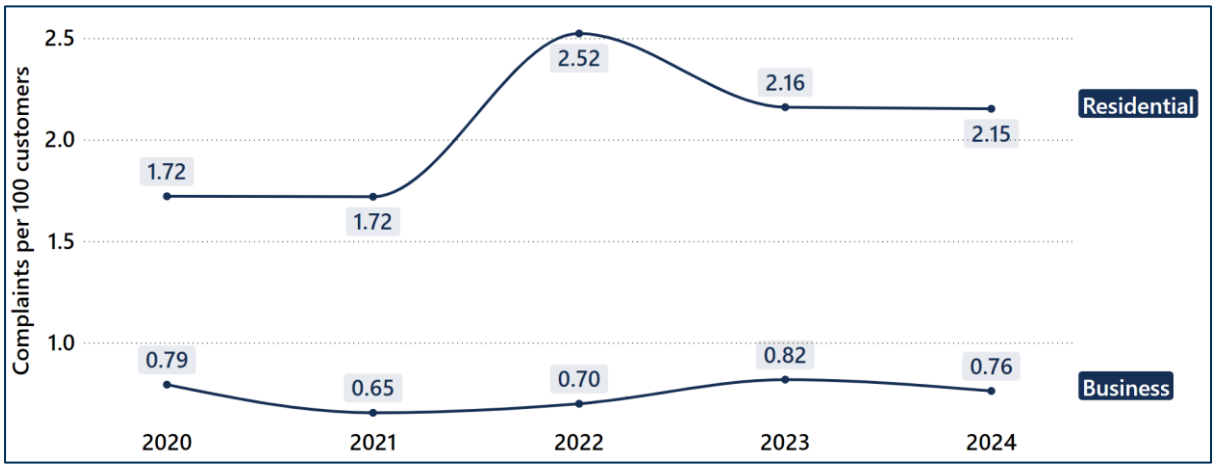


Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 72, CCR 73 (separate, residential & business complaints to retailers), each relative to every 100 residential (CCR 1, CCR 2) and business (CCR 4, CCR 5) customers. Excludes pre-payment meter customers (CCR 7).

Customer complaints to energy utilities

Residential customer complaints make up most of the complaints to electricity retailers and are the reason for the significant increase between 2017/18 and 2021/22. Complaints from business customers have been steady over the last 10 years. In 2023/24, residential complaints to electricity retailers fell from 23,772 to 23,061, while business customer complaints fell from 866 to 784. To account for differences in numbers of residential and business customers, we look at complaints per 100 of each retailer's customers. Residential customer complaints are nearly three times higher than from business customers (Figure 2.6).

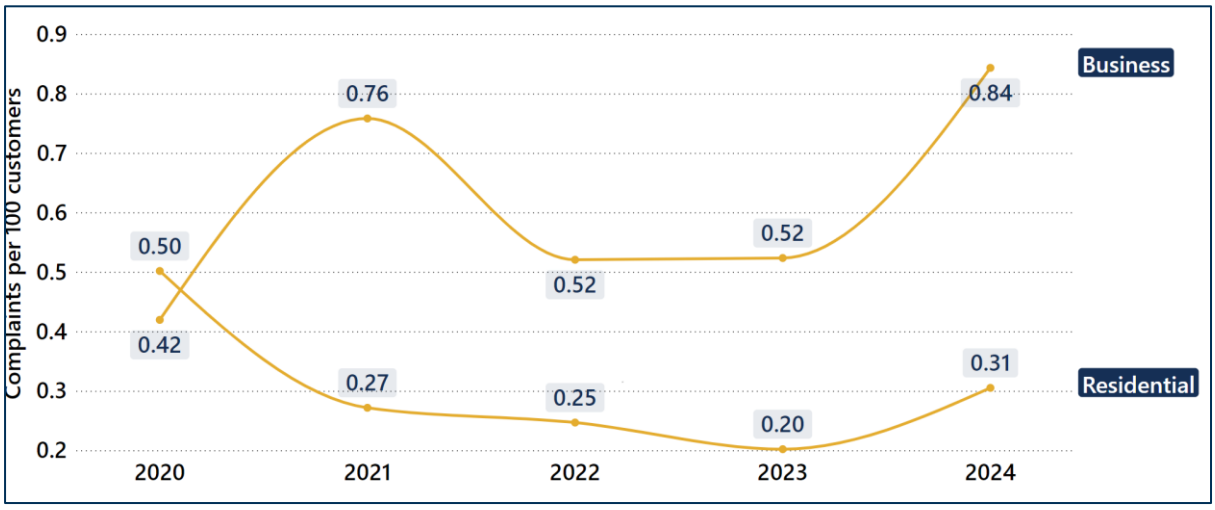
Figure 2.6 Complaints to electricity retailers per 100 customers



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 72, CCR 73 (separate, residential & business complaints to retailers), each relative to every 100 residential (CCR 1, CCR 2) and business (CCR 4, CCR 5) customers.

Consistent with electricity, trends in complaints to gas retailers are driven by residential customers. In 2023/24, residential complaints to gas retailers increased for the first time in three years, from 1,582 to 2,395. Business complaints increased from 50 to 81. There were 0.31 complaints for every 100 residential customers and 0.84 for every 100 business customers (Figure 2.7). Unlike electricity, rates of business customer complaints are higher than for residential customers.

Figure 2.7 Complaints to gas retailers per 100 customers



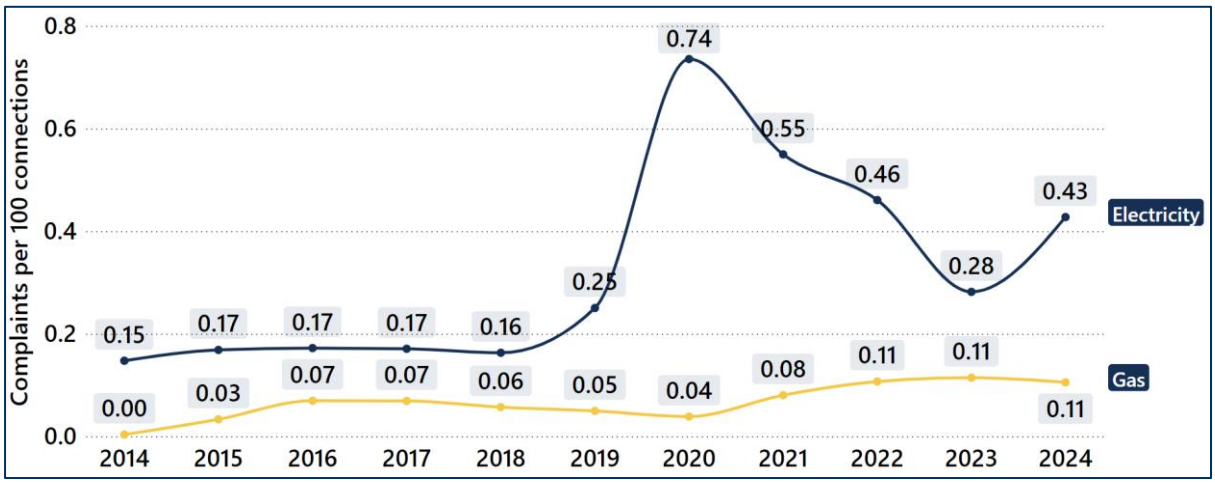
Source: Gas retail indicators R 59, R 60 (separate, residential & business complaints to retailers), each relative to every 100 residential (R 1) and business (R 3) customers.

Distributor data is not disaggregated by customer type – information is for all customers combined. This section of the report focusses on general complaints, such as customer service and admin issues. Complaints recorded under the Network Quality and Reliability of

Supply Code (NQ&R Code) are included in Figure 2.9 to show changes in the total number of complaints to electricity distributors over time but are excluded from data on general complaints in section 3.5. A detailed breakdown of complaints relevant to the NQ&R Code are in section 5 of the report and relate to issues like reliability.

In 2023/24, the overall number of complaints to electricity distributors increased for the first time in three years, from 3,548 to 5,440. Complaints to gas distributors remain lower and fell slightly from 922 to 864 (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8 Complaints to distributors per 100 customers (overall)

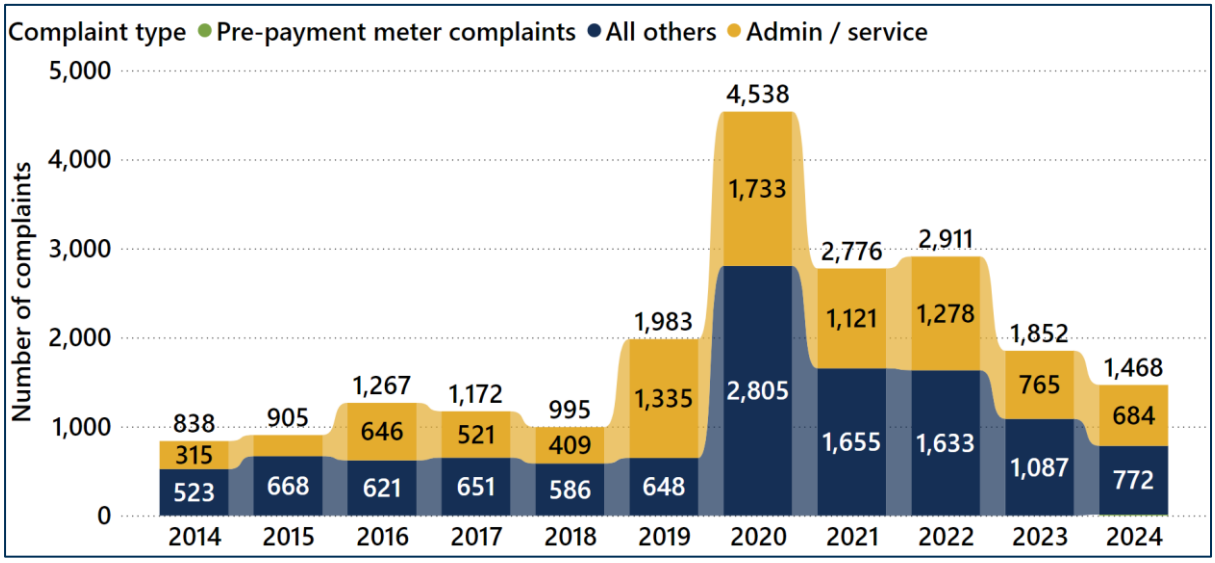


Source: Electricity distribution indicator CCD 15. Gas distribution indicator D 17 (combined total numbers of non-technical and technical complaints) for every 100 electricity (CCD 7) and gas (D 7) connections.

General complaints

In the last five years, complaints to electricity distributors about issues like customer service and admin have fallen noticeably and are now approaching pre-COVID-19 levels (Figure 2.9). Decreasing numbers of these types of complaint suggest system and customer service improvements are mostly well received by customers.

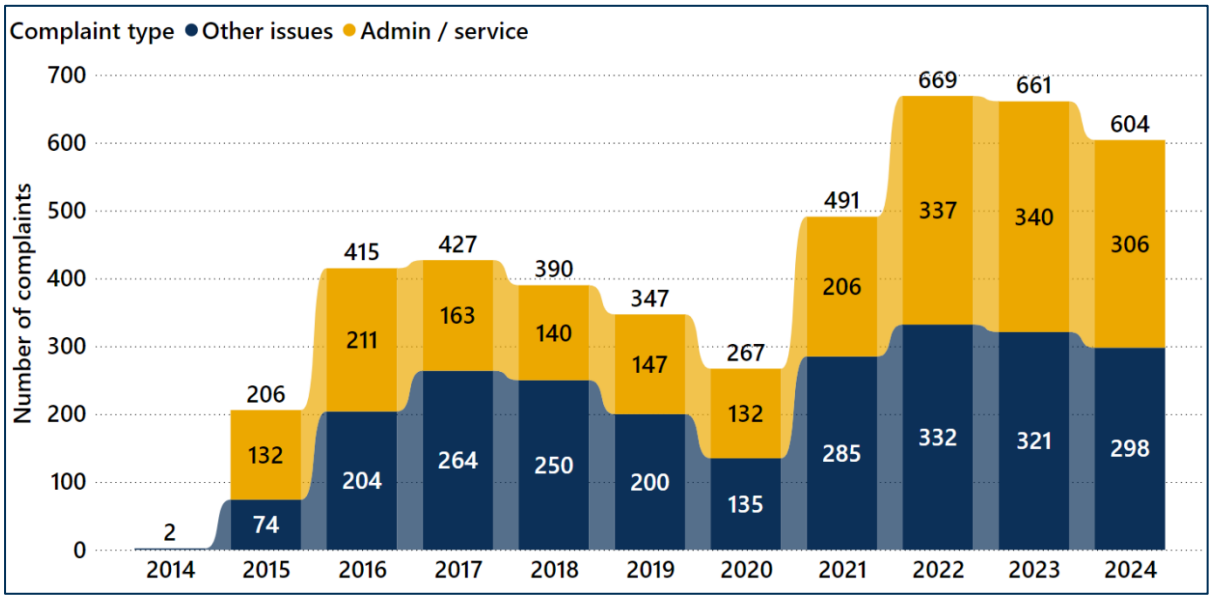
Figure 2.9 General complaints to electricity distributors



Source: Electricity distribution indicators CCD 9, CCD 10, CCD 19 (customer complaints about an administrative process or customer service / other / installation or operation of a pre-payment meter).

For gas distributors, administration or service complaints decreased 10 per cent from the year before. Miscellaneous complaints about other issues also decreased 7 per cent. Non-technical complaints to gas distributors remain above pre-COVID-19 levels (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10 General complaints to gas distributors



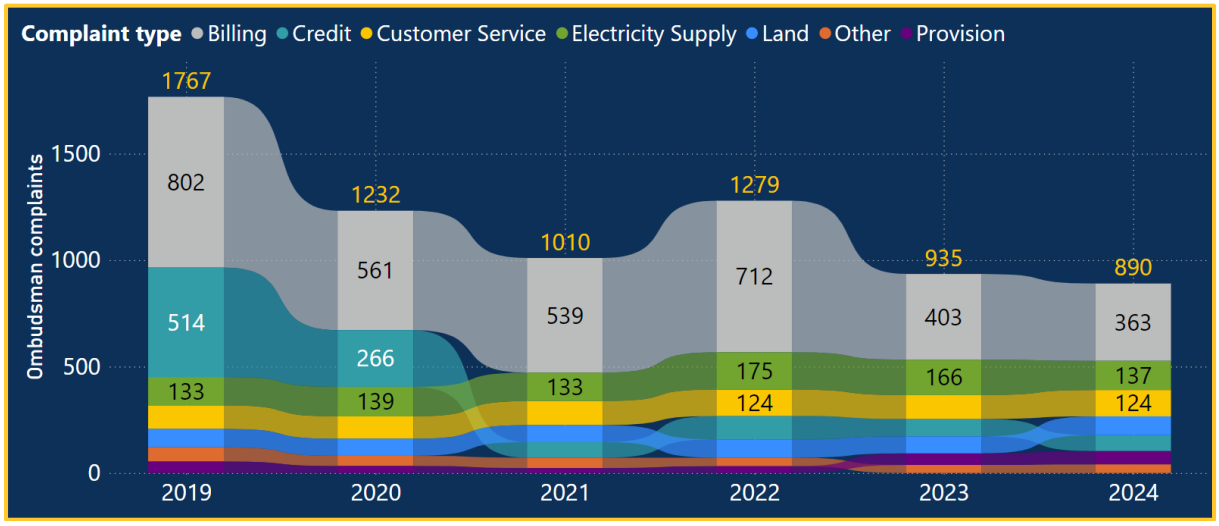
Source: Gas distribution indicators D 18, D 19 (customer complaints about admin or customer service / other).

Complaints escalated to the Ombudsman

Complaints to the Energy and Water Ombudsman about utility service providers have decreased over the past six years, from 2,153 to 1,198. The downward trend in complaints to the Ombudsman differs from an increase in complaints to utilities more generally, suggesting that a growing number of customers have been able to resolve complaints directly with their utility. Billing and credit complaints collectively make up most of the complaints to the Ombudsman for both electricity and gas, meaning most complaints are about retailers rather than distributors.

Billing complaints about electricity are significantly lower in 2023/24 – at 363 compared to 712 in 2021/22. Those changes align with a fall in billing complaints directly to Synergy, corresponding with improvements to its billing system (Figure 2.11).

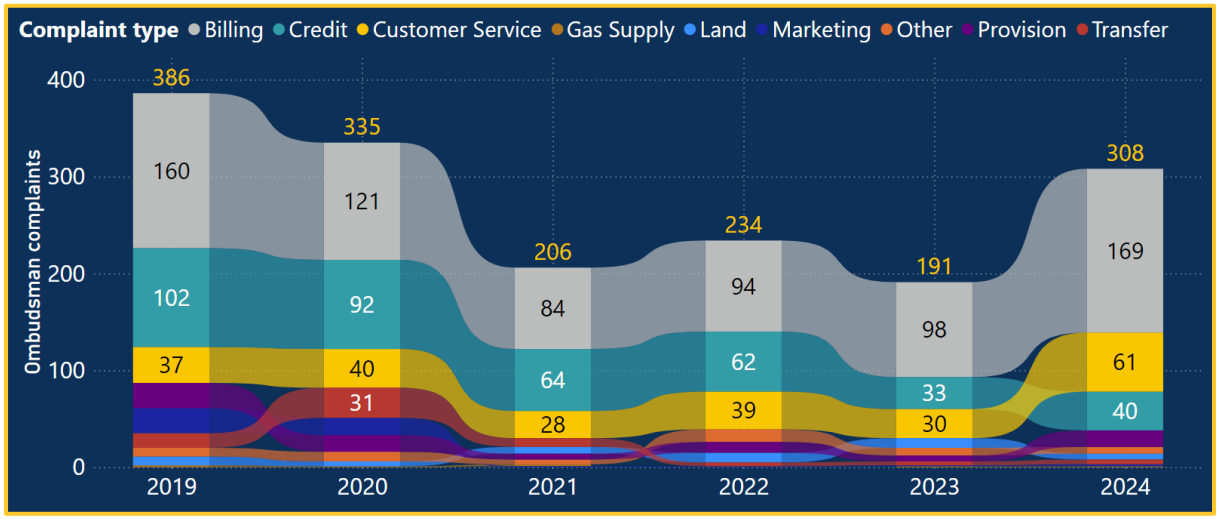
Figure 2.11 Customer complaints to the Ombudsman about electricity utilities



Source: Energy and Water Ombudsman WA. Electricity complaint trends (online)

Credit complaints about gas have also decreased to 40, down from 102 in 2018/19. Billing complaints noticeably increased year on year in 2023/24, from 98 to 168, but the number overall remains low and consistent with 2018/19 (Figure 2.12).

Figure 2.12 Customer complaints to the Ombudsman about gas utilities



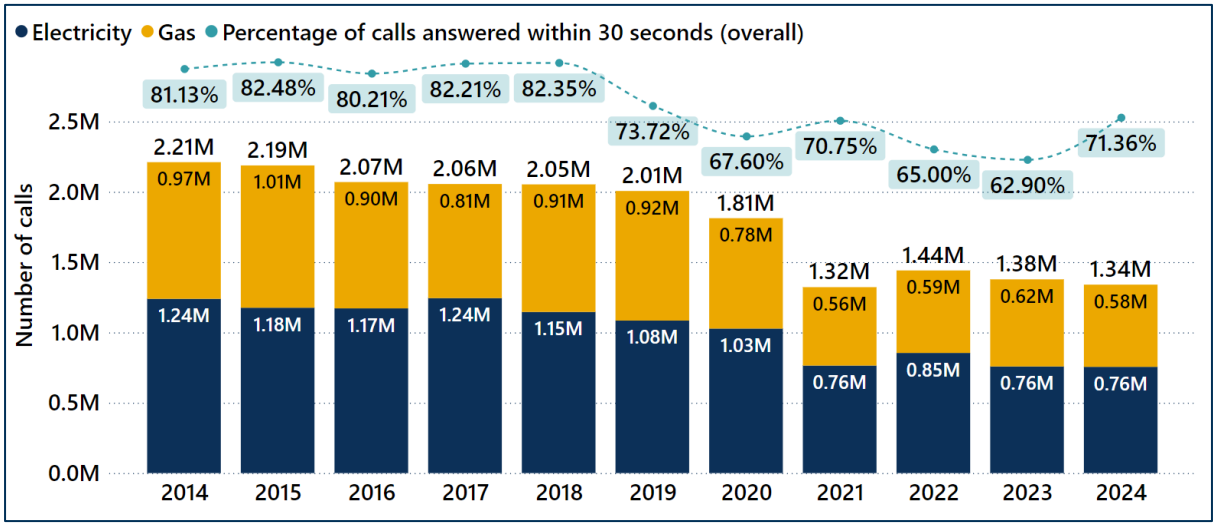
Source: Energy and Water Ombudsman WA. Gas complaint trends (online)

Energy utility call volumes

This section includes data for all customer calls, such as those for complaints, billing, or queries about new energy plans.[12] Retailer call volumes decreased again in 2023/24, down 4.3 per cent for gas and 0.4 per cent for electricity, mirroring steady decreases since 2013/14.

After three years of declining performance in calls being answered within 30 seconds, retailers recorded an improvement from 62.9 per cent in 2022/23 to 71.4 per cent in 2023/24 (Figure 2.13). Electricity retailers recorded the biggest improvement, from 61.2 per cent in 2022/23 to 74.9 per cent in 2023/24. Gas retailers reported a smaller improvement, from 66.8 per cent to 67.8 per cent. These changes are likely driven by customers using other channels like web forms and social media for simple queries.

Figure 2.13 Calls to retailers, and percentage answered within 30 seconds (combined)

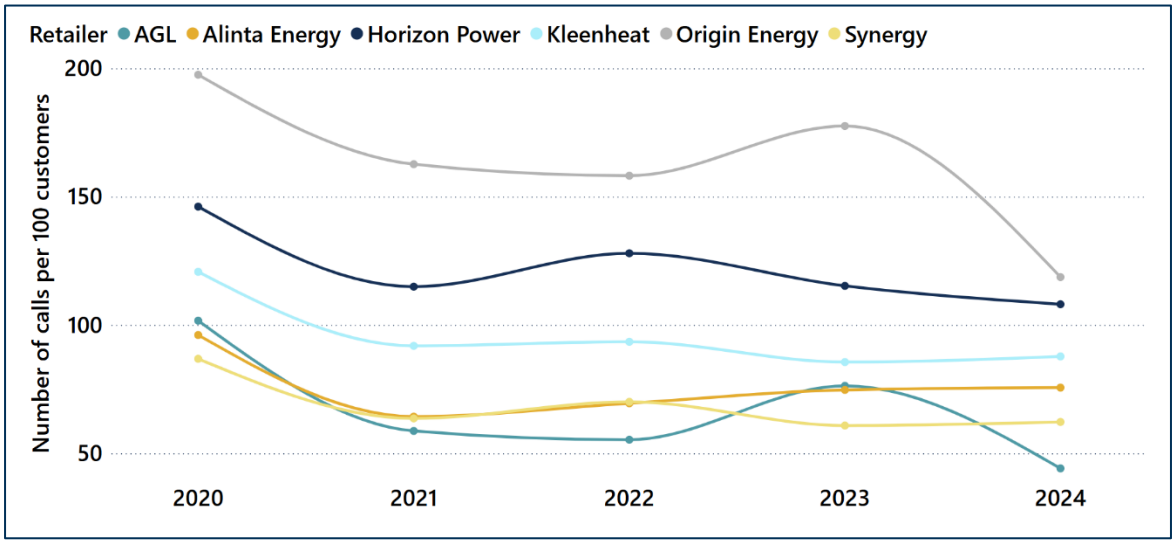


Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 109. Gas retail indicator R 85 (calls attempts to a retailer call centre). Percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds is as a percentage of all call attempts.

Relative to numbers of customers, call rates are typically lower for electricity retailers. Origin received the most calls relative to customers for the second year in a row (Figure 2.14). It is possible that higher call volumes to gas retailers reflect market contestability, with customers calling to ask questions about different plans or to sign up as a new customer.

[12] The report excludes ENGIE call data because it did not provide it by the reporting deadline.

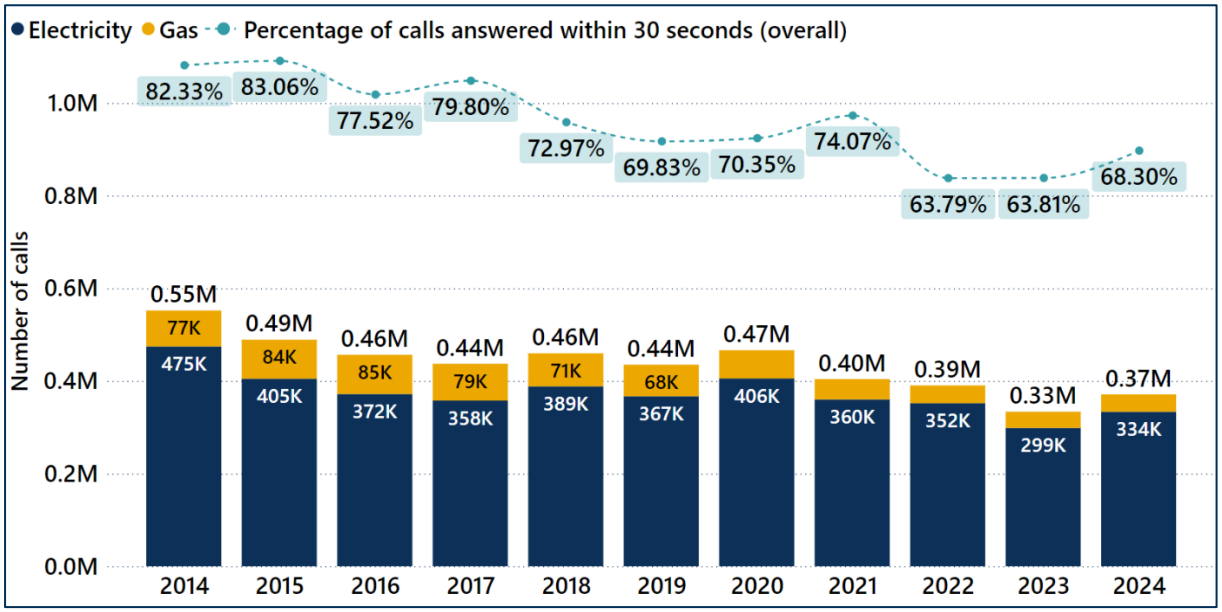
Figure 2.14 Calls to retailers per 100 customers



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 109. Gas retail indicator R 85 (calls attempts to retailer call centre) for every 100 of each retailer's customers (Electricity: CCR 1, CCR 2, CCR 4, CCR 5, CCR 7. Gas: R 1, R 3).

Customer calls increased 11.7 per cent for electricity distributors and 7.6 per cent for gas (Figure 2.15). Distributor calls answered within 30 seconds remain consistent and largely mirrors decreases for retailers since 2021/22.

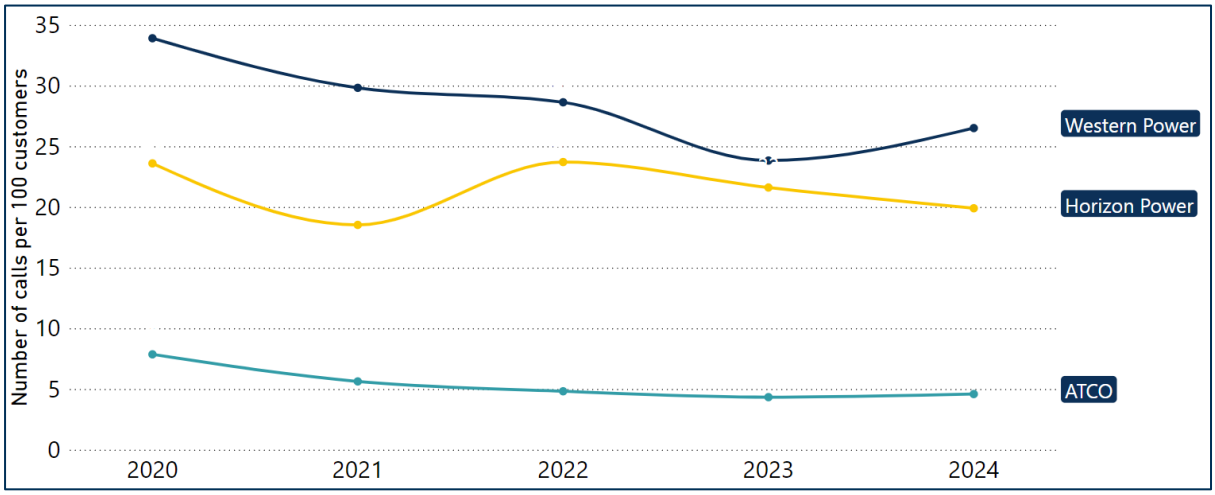
Figure 2.15 Calls to distributors, and percentage answered within 30 seconds (combined)



Source: Electricity distribution indicator CCD 34. Gas distribution indicator D 28 (calls attempts to a distributor call centre). Percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds is total calls for electricity (CCD 35) or gas (D 29) as a percentage of all call attempts. Gas data for ATCO only as Kleenheat distribution calls are combined with retail.

Horizon Power and Western Power calls were higher than for ATCO, which is consistent with every year we have collected call data (Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.16 Calls to electricity and gas distributors per 100 connections



Source: Electricity distribution indicator CCD 34. Gas distribution indicator D 28 (calls attempts to distributor call centre) for every 100 of each distributor's network connections (Electricity: CCD 7. Gas: D 7).

3. Residential customers

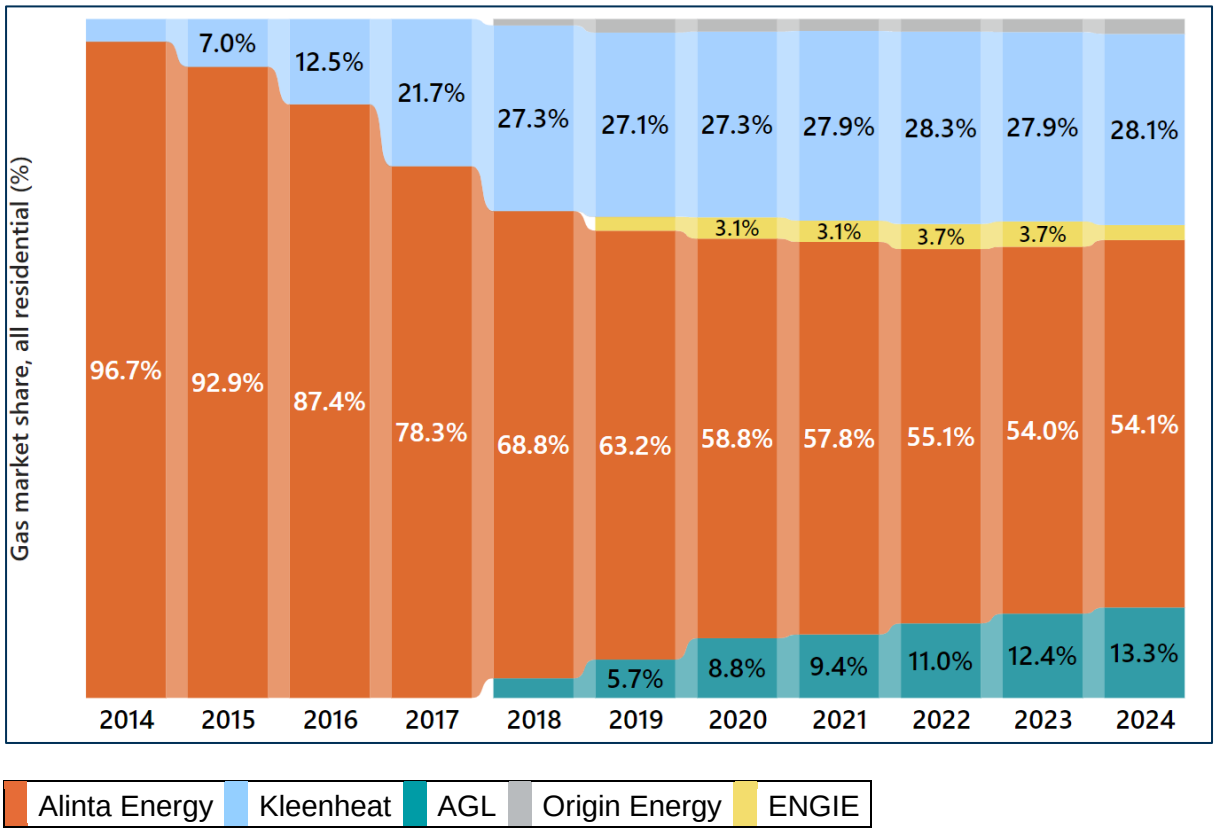
Synergy and Horizon Power supply electricity to nearly all residential customers in Western Australia. Often, where customers are supplied through an embedded network such as caravan parks and apartment buildings, customers may not have their own retail account but will still be supplied by Synergy or Horizon Power.

A small number of residential customers in the Pilbara are supplied electricity by other businesses, such as BHP and Rio Tinto.

Retailer market share of residential gas customers was consistent with the previous year (Figure 3.1). Alinta continues to supply most residential customers, followed by Kleenheat and AGL. ENGIE (formerly Simply Energy) and Origin continue to supply only a small fraction of the market. The number of gas retailers remains unchanged at eight.

Not every retailer operates in each supply area and retailers are not required to report where they supply customers.

Figure 3.1 Market share percentage of residential gas customers



Source: Gas retail indicator R 1 (total residential customers). Percentages are the number of R 1 customers reported by each retailer as a proportion of all R 1 customers for that year.

3.1 Electricity and gas bill debts

Customers are entitled to at least two payment extensions and two payment plans per year.

Most customers can use their online account to extend their bill deadline or enter a payment plan without applying to the retailer. Retailers may refuse subsequent extension or payment plan requests if customers do not pay their bill by the extended deadline or if they do not meet agreed repayment terms.

Data we collect from energy retailers on payment methods for bills and debt, and on levels of bill debt, tell us about uptake of available payment options so that we can assess their suitability for customers.

In 2023/24, all households and eligible small businesses received at least a $400 electricity credit to their Synergy and Horizon Power customer accounts in two instalments.[13] These payments may have contributed to the decrease in average electricity bill debt and the increase in the number of electricity customers repaying debt to their retailers.

In July and December 2024, State and Federal Government electricity assistance payments totalling $700 were credited to Synergy and Horizon Power customer accounts. The effects of these bill credits on customer debt levels are not reflected in 2023/24 data and will instead be included in our 2024/25 report.[14,15]

Bill credits were not available for gas customers, but each retailer offers gas plans with rates that are discounted compared to the maximum regulated tariff. Customers may be able to save money on their gas bill by switching to a cheaper plan.

Customers with valid concession cards may be eligible for other support to help with energy costs:

- Dependent child rebate.
- Air conditioning rebate: Since air conditioners can use lots of energy, customers in some of the hottest parts of Western Australia can get rebates to assist with their running cost during warmer periods of the year.[16]
- Concession customers who do not have an account with Synergy or Horizon Power, such as those who live in an apartment, may still be eligible for the same assistance through the Energy Concession Extension Scheme. Customers can find out more information through the Department of Finance website: Energy Concession Extension Scheme

13 State Government, 5 May 2023. Electricity credit available (online)

14 State Government, 17 September 2024. Household energy pricing and payment support (online)

15 Australian Government, 14 May 2024. New power bill relief (online)

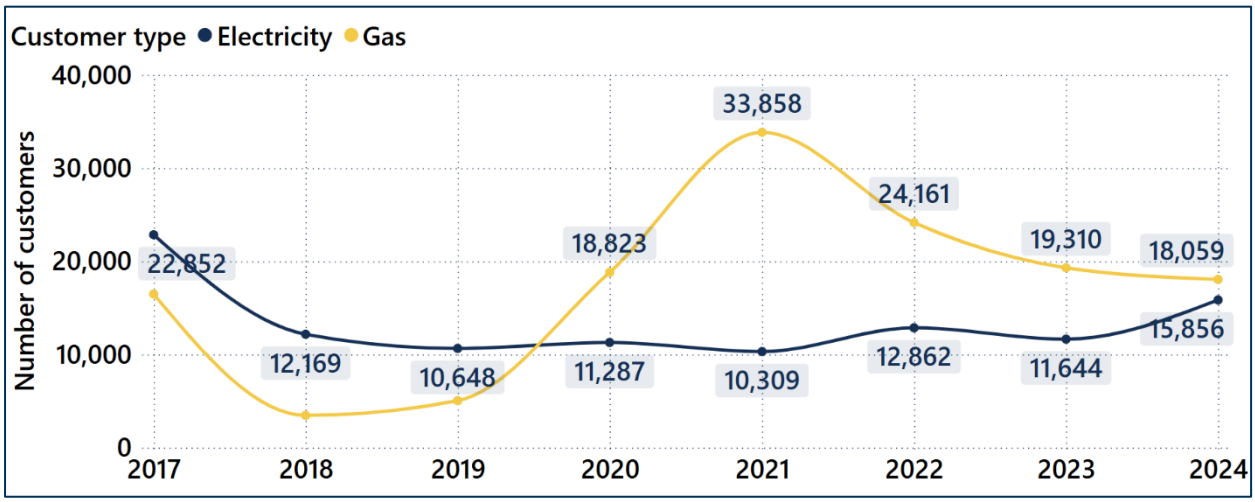
16 State Government, 1 October 2024. Energy concession extension scheme > Eligible towns for air conditioning rebate (online)

Number of customers repaying bill debts

As of 30 June 2024, around 1.5 per cent of residential electricity customers were repaying a bill debt. Bill debts for residential gas fell for the third year in a row but remain slightly higher than electricity, with around 2.3 per cent of customers repaying a bill debt.

Electricity and gas combined; the number of residential bill debts increased 9.6 per cent compared to the year before. The overall increase was driven by growth in electricity customer bill debts, which were up by more than a third compared to gas customers (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Residential customers repaying bill debt



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 115 (residential customers repaying electricity bill debt). Gas retail indicator R 91 (residential customers repaying gas bill debt).

The number of residential customers repaying gas bill debts decreased across the same period but remain higher than those repaying electricity debts.

Some gas retailers linked the change to improvements in how they engage with customers when trying to collect outstanding account balances.

Nearly three quarters of residential customers in Western Australia have both a gas and electricity retail account, meaning some customers will be counted twice because they have both an electricity and a gas bill debt. Retailers reported to us that, while the increase in bill debt may be a symptom of higher ongoing costs of living, sustained high temperatures during the 2023/24 summer also resulted in higher residential electricity consumption.

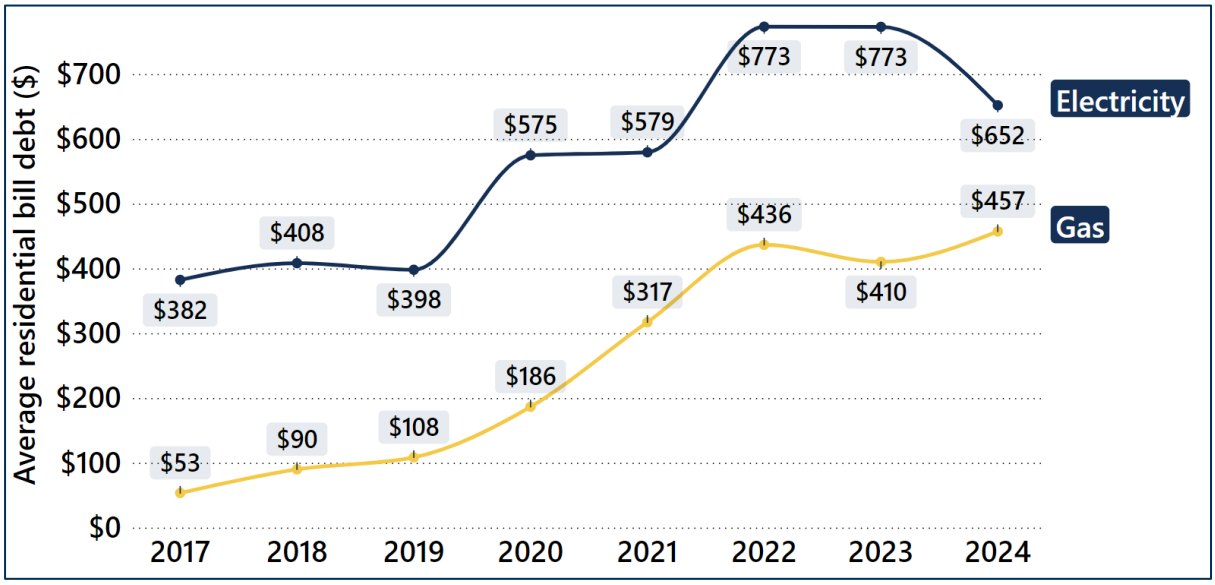
Average amounts of customer bill debt

The average combined electricity and gas bill debt for residential customers has steadily increased since 2017 but fell in 2023/24 (Figure 3.3).

The average amount of each electricity bill debt fell by 15.6 per cent to $652, which suggests government bill assistance for electricity is putting downward pressure on average levels of customer bill debt.

Meanwhile, the average gas bill debt grew 11.5 per cent to $457 – the highest since we started collecting this data. Gas bill debt figures highlight the importance of customers searching for retail plans that offer discounts from the regulated tariff.

Figure 3.3 Residential customer average bill debt

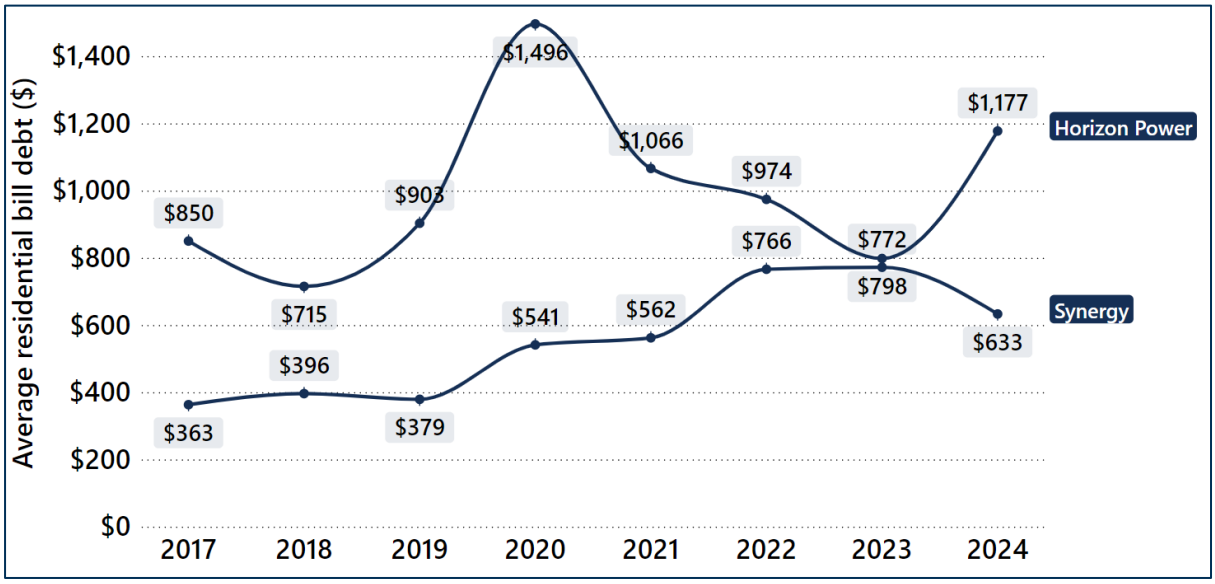


Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 118 (residential customer average bill debt) weighted by the number of residential customers (CCR 3) for each retailer. Gas retail indicator R 94 (residential customer average bill debt) weighted by the number of residential customers (R 1) for each retailer.

Average levels of debt between Synergy and Horizon Power's customers diverged in 2023/24 after a year of similar average debt. Significant differences between Synergy and Horizon Power customer bases mean it is difficult to directly compare them without more granular data on where customers are located (Figure 3.4).

The State Government's uniform tariff policy means Synergy and Horizon Power residential customers are charged the same amount for electricity. Energy use and bills may be higher for Horizon Power customers due to the extreme temperatures experienced by some regional and remote parts of the state.[17]

Figure 3.4 Synergy and Horizon Power residential electricity customer average bill debt



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 118 (residential customer average bill debt).

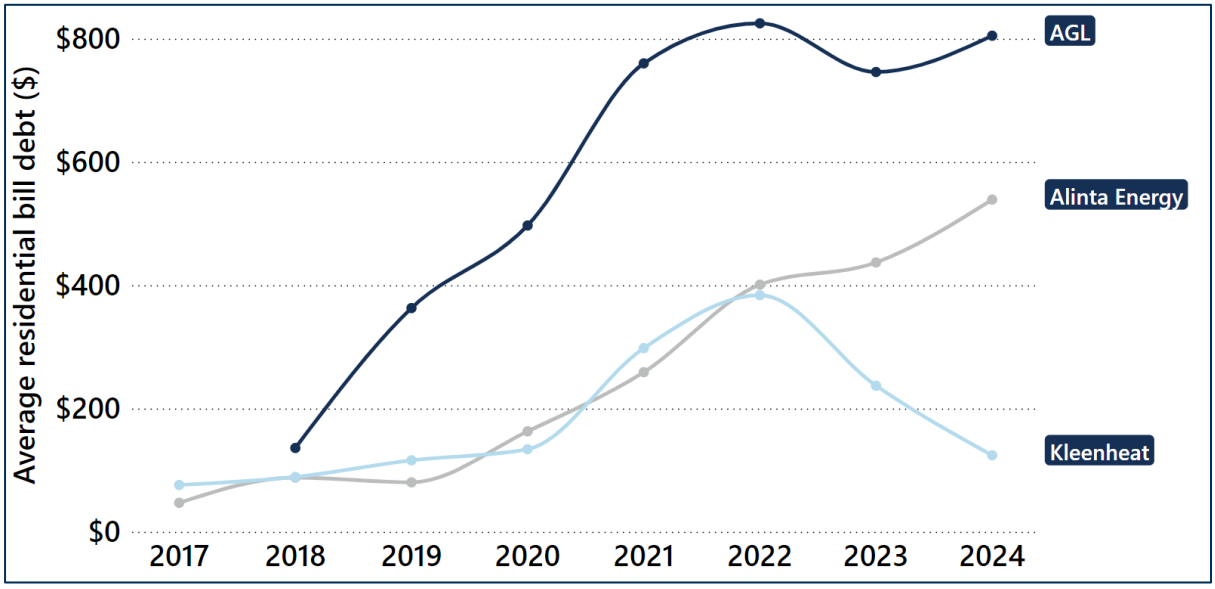
[17] State Government, 15 October 2024. Household electricity pricing > Uniform tariff policy (online)

Average residential gas bill debts varied significantly between the three biggest retailers in 2023/24, as they did the year before (Figure 3.5):

The average bill debt of Kleenheat customers decreased for the second year in a row and is now consistent with pre-COVID-19 levels. In contrast, Alinta customer average bill debt increased and has increased every year since 2019, which the retailer attributed to broader cost of living increases for its customers.

Average bill debt was similar for the two smaller retailers, Origin ($511) and ENGIE ($538).

Figure 3.5 Alinta Energy, Kleenheat, and AGL average residential gas debt



Source: Gas retail indicator R 94 (residential customer average bill debt).

Customers in elevated bill debt brackets

Most customer bill debts are for amounts less than $500, which means they are not counted within any of the elevated debt brackets:

- Between $500 and $1,500
- Between $1,500 and $2,500
- More than $2,500.

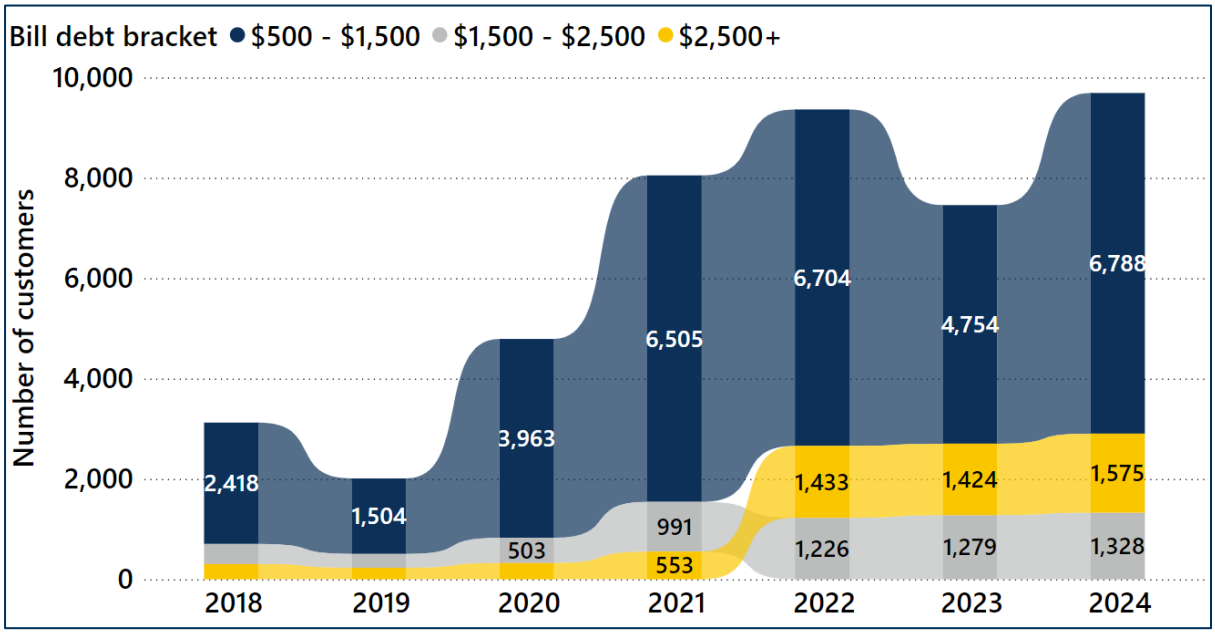
This section contains data on customers with bill debt in one of these brackets who are not in a retailer's financial hardship program.

The combined number of electricity and gas customers with elevated bill debt rose 30 per cent from 7,457 to 9,691 in 2023/24, meaning elevated debts grew at a faster rate than overall debts. The increase was similar for electricity and gas customers, at 29 and 31 per cent respectively.

In 2021/22 – after COVID-19 disconnection moratoriums ended – the number of gas and electricity customers with more than $2,500 of bill debt increased from 533 to 1,433 customers. The number of debts more than $2,500 grew from 1,424 to 1,575 customers.

Debts between $1,500 and $2,500 increased from 1,279 to 1,328 customers, while debts between $500 and $1,500 increased from 4,754 to 6,788 customers (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6 Residential customers in different debt brackets (combined electricity and gas)



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 122, CCR 123, CCR 124 (separated). Gas retail indicators R 98, R 99, R 100 (separated). Residential customers with bill debt <$500, $1,500 to $2,500, more than $2,500.

3.2 Financial hardship bill support

This section includes information on residential electricity and gas customers experiencing financial hardship and receiving retailer support to make repayments to avoid disconnection. Hardship protections in the customer protection codes are limited to residential customers.

What is financial hardship?

Some payment difficulties can be short-term and happen because of an unexpected event or crisis. Financial hardship signals ongoing difficulty meeting basic living costs over a longer period, often six months or more. Through their financial hardship programs, retailers assist these customers to manage repayments and stay connected to their electricity or gas supply.

We require retailers supplying residential customers to develop a hardship policy outlining how they will assist customers.[18] Retailers aim to identify struggling customers early, so assistance can commence before customers accrue large debts.

The ERA provides guidance to retailers on good practice for developing hardship policies.[19,20]

Hardship policies encourage retailers to train staff to identify and support customers experiencing hardship, who might be hesitant to contact their retailer for assistance. Policies outline support that a retailer can offer to a customer experiencing hardship:

- Waivers of certain fees or interest on late bills
- Referrals to financial counsellors
- Bill extensions and payment plans
- Debt write-off in certain circumstances.

Customers in a retailer's financial hardship program may also access the State Government's Hardship Utility Grant Scheme to assist with their bills.[21] The HUGS grant cannot exceed 85 per cent of the outstanding bill. Customers south of the 26th parallel may access up to $640 each financial year and customers in the north of the State may access up to $1,060.

Electricity retailer hardship programs are used at greater rates than gas retailer programs. As of 30 June 2024, 3.2 per cent of all electricity customers were receiving hardship assistance, which is consistent with each other year we have collected this data. Gas customers enrolled in retailer hardship programs represent approximately 0.6 per cent of all customers.

As a proportion of total customers, the number of customers in retailer hardship programs has remained relatively consistent in the past three years. The actual number of customers in hardship programs fell to 38,694 customers in 2023/24 (Figure 3.7).

Fewer customers in hardship programs since 2021/22 may be due to government bill credits, customers seeking help earlier, retailers informing customers of early bill supports to minimise the need for more intensive support as bill debt grows, and the overall fall in electricity retail customer numbers.

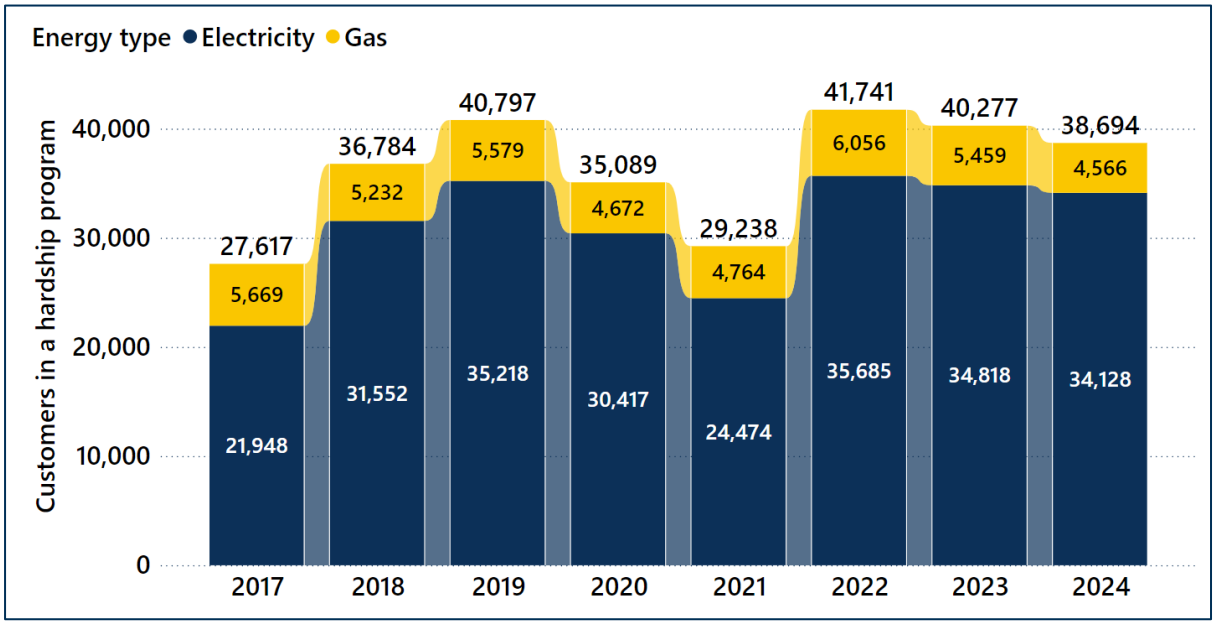
18 ERA, Financial hardship policies – Electricity retailers (online) Gas retailers (online).

19 ERA, May 2023. Financial hardship policy guidelines – Electricity licences (online)

20 ERA, July 2024. Financial hardship policy guidelines – Gas licences (online)

21 State Government. 19 August 2024, Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (online)

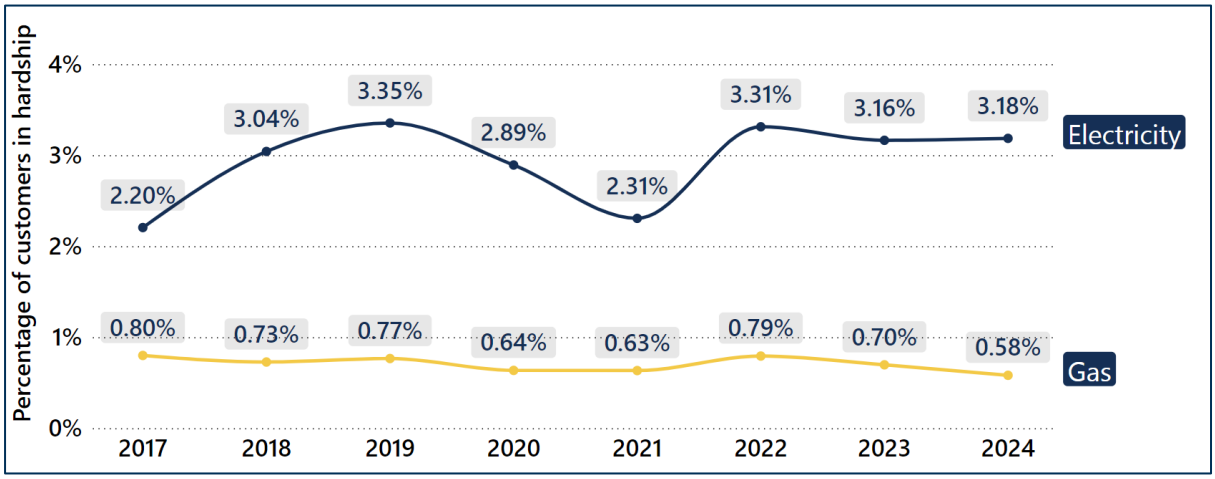
Figure 3.7 Residential customers in retailer hardship programs



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 120. Gas retail indicator R 96 (residential customers in a hardship program on 30 June 2024).

The proportion of gas customers receiving similar assistance fell slightly to 0.6 per cent, which has trended down slowly since 2016/17 (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8 Percentage of residential customers in retailer hardship programs

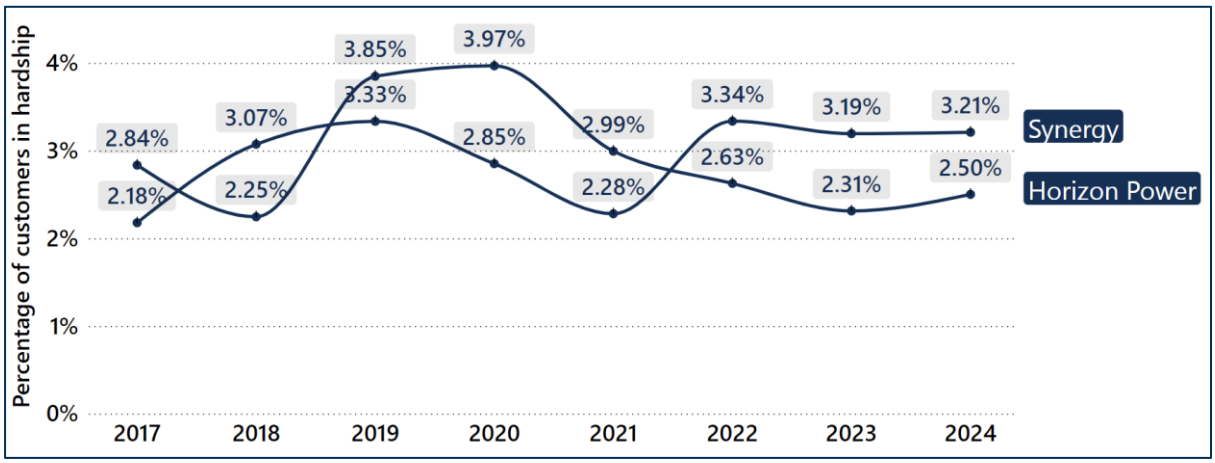


Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 120, CCR 1. CCR 2. CCR 7. Gas retail indicators R96/R 1 (residential customers in a hardship program on 30 June 2024 as a percentage of total residential customers).

The number of customers in hardship programs may reflect general cost of living pressures on households and increasing awareness of the programs. In 2024, some retailers reported engaging customers earlier to offer hardship assistance; for example, by lowering the amount of debt at which they proactively offer support.

The proportion of Synergy customers in a hardship program (3.2 per cent) was slightly higher than for Horizon Power (2.5 per cent) for the third year, but rates remain relatively consistent for both retailers (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9 Percentage of electricity customers in hardship programs for each retailer

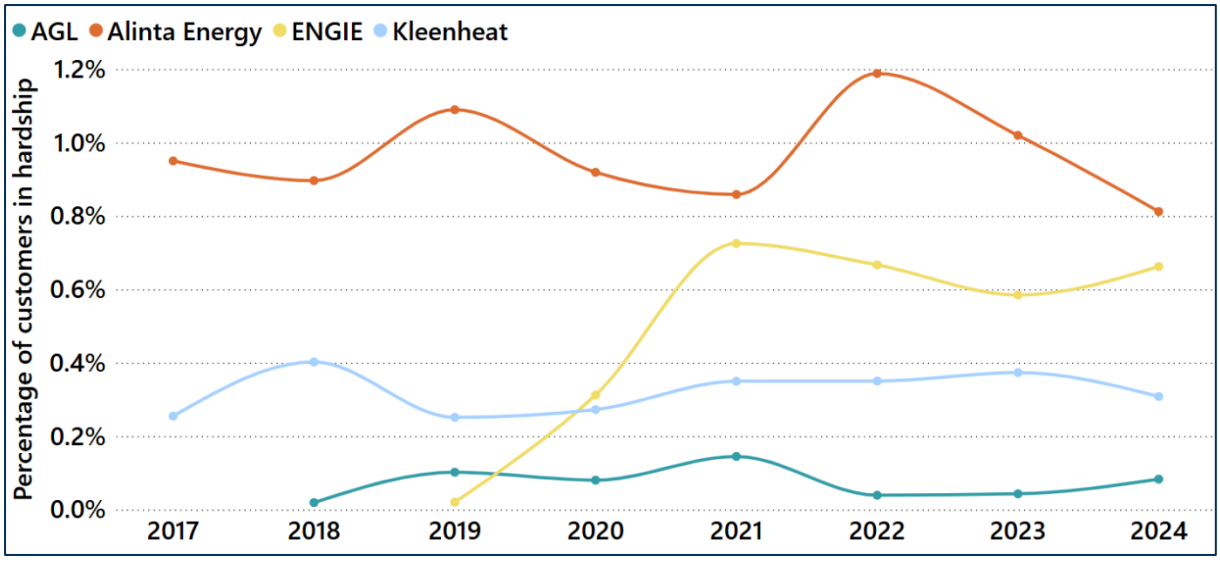


Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 120, CCR 1. CCR 2. CCR 7. (Residential customers in each retailer's hardship program on 30 June 2024 as a percentage of each retailer's total residential customers).

Trends were less consistent for gas customers. AGL and Kleenheat have the smallest proportions, at 0.1 per cent and 0.3 per cent respectively. ENGIE and Alinta Energy follow, at 0.7 per cent and 0.8 per cent respectively (Figure 3.10 which shows only the four largest retailers).

Alinta reported that the significant yearly decrease in customers in its hardship program reflects new hardship supports.

Figure 3.10 Percentage of gas customers in hardship programs for each retailer

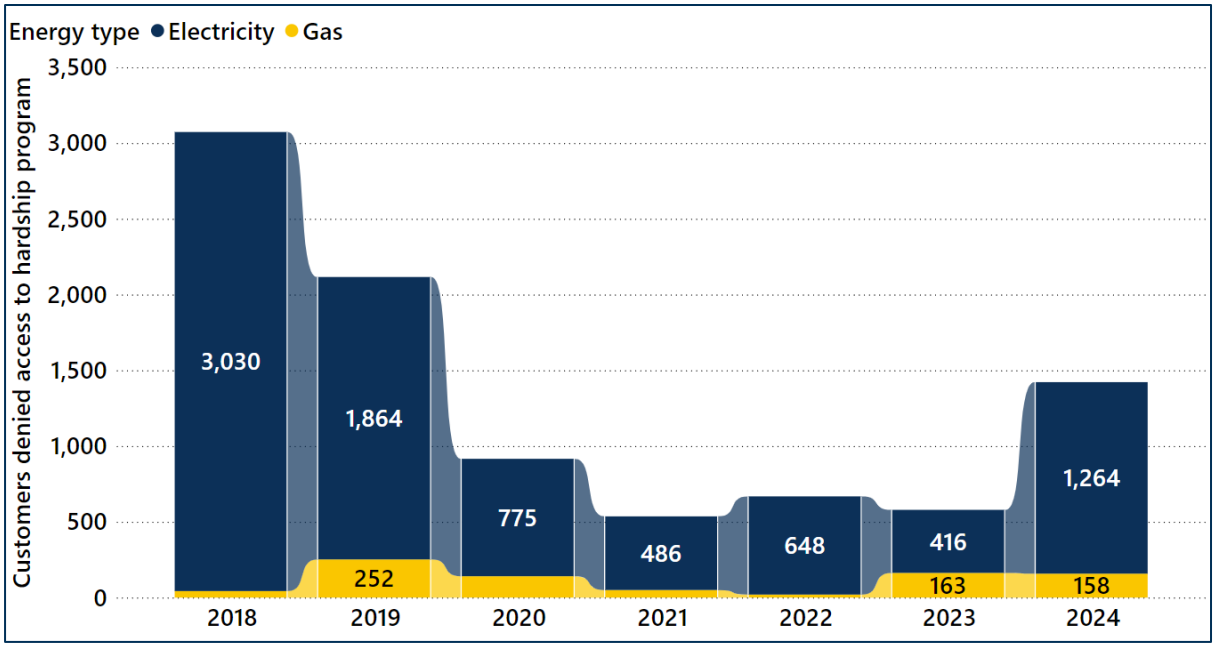


Source: Gas retail indicators R 96, R1 (Residential customers in each retailer's hardship program on 30 June 2024 as a percentage of each retailer's total residential customers). Origin not displayed because of yearly volatility related to its smaller customer base than other retailers. Percentage of Origin customers in a hardship program was 1.34% as of 30 June 2024.

Although a small number of customers overall, instances of customers denied access to hardship programs tripled in 2023/24 (Figure 3.11). Retailers may deny access to a hardship program for different reasons, such as if customers have previously been accepted into a program and then have not followed the agreed terms.

Retailers may also deny access to a hardship program if customers apply when other supports are more appropriate. Synergy reported some customers' first contact for support being a hardship program application, rather than a payment extension. A proportion of those customers will accept other bill support, but their hardship application will be recorded as denied. Synergy also reported that increases in hardship application denials reflect the greater number of hardship assessments being completed generally.

Figure 3.11 Customers denied access to retailer hardship programs



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 129. Gas retail indicator R 105 (Residential customers denied access to a retailer hardship program).

Amounts of bill debt when entering financial hardship programs

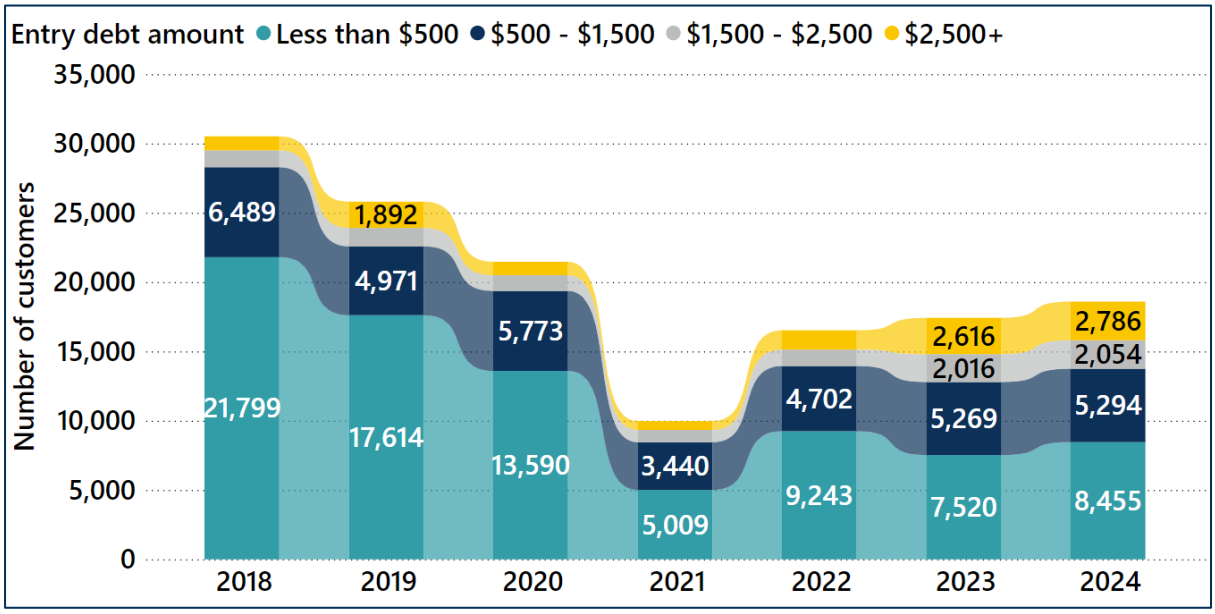
The size of a customer's bill debt at the start of a financial hardship program affects the amount of assistance that retailers provide, and the length of time required to reduce debt. We collect data on customer bill debt in four brackets, and average amounts of customer bill debt. Elevated bill debt is any of the three highest brackets of bill debt:

- Between $500 and $1,500
- Between $1,500 and $2,500
- More than $2,500.

Customers entering hardship programs with elevated levels of bill debt rose across each of the three brackets: $500 to $1500 (up 0.5 per cent), $1,500 to $2,500 (up 2 per cent), and more than $2,500 (up 6.5 per cent) in 2023/24.

While the number of customers entering hardship programs with debt below $500 has fallen dramatically since 2017/18, customers in the highest two brackets (over $1,500) has increased to nearly 5,000 customers. The number of customers entering hardship programs with debt remains lower overall than before COVID-19. (Figure 3.12).

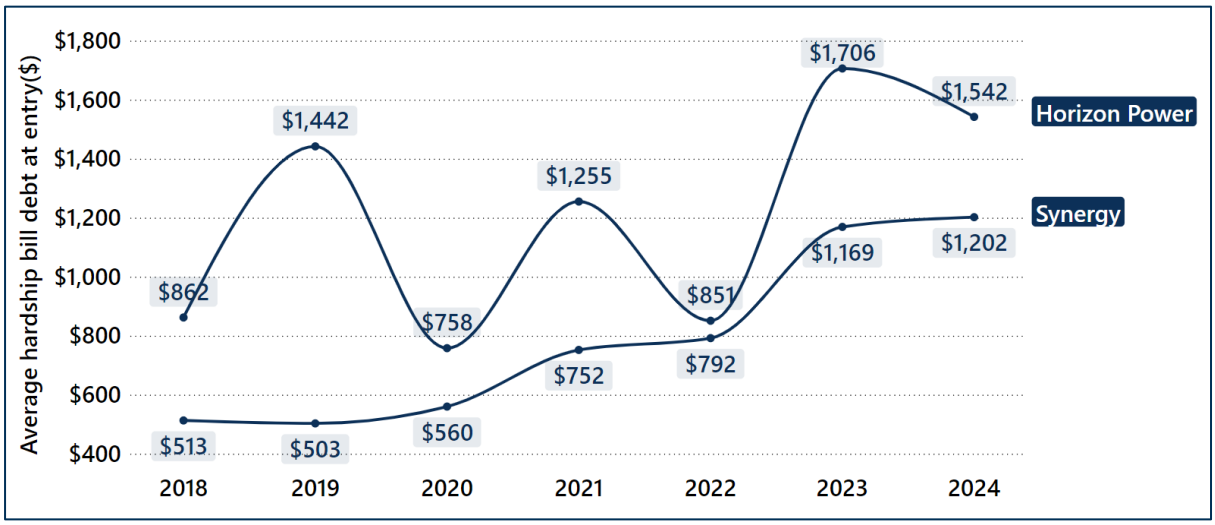
Figure 3.12 Customers in each debt bracket when entering a hardship program



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 131, CCR 132, CCR 133, CCR 134. Gas retail indicators R 107, R 108, R 109, R 110 (Customers entering a retailer hardship program within different debt brackets: Less than $500, $500 - $1,500, $1,500 - $2,500, More than $2,500).

There was an increase in the average electricity bill debt at the point customers enter hardship programs, up 2.5 per cent to $1,212 in 2023/24. For Synergy customers, average bill debt was up 2.8 per cent to $1,202 and down 9.6 per cent for Horizon Power customers to $1,542 (Figure 3.13).

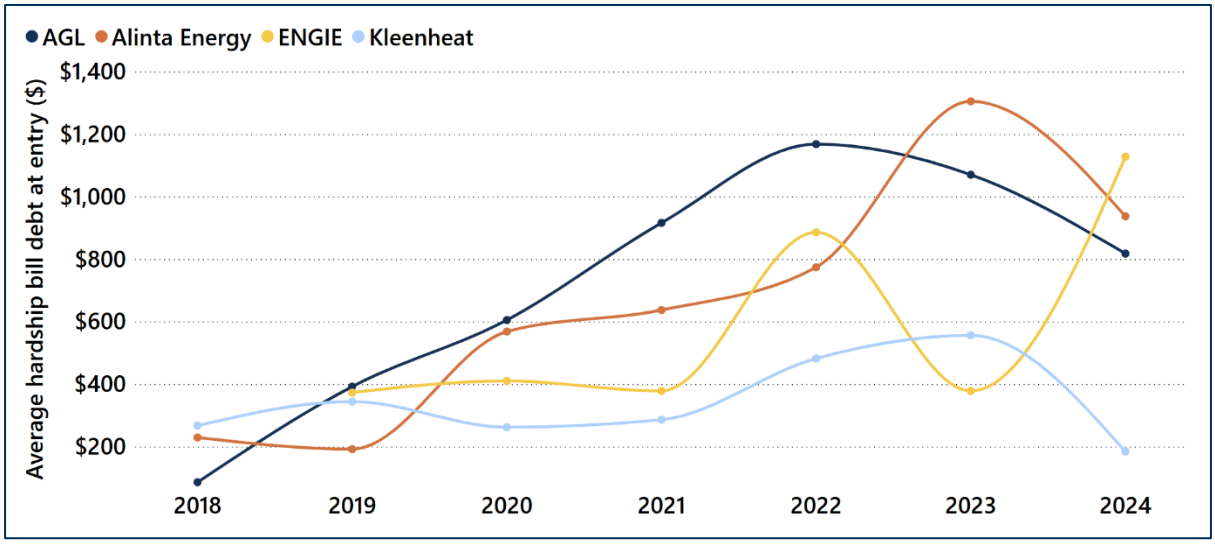
Figure 3.13 Average bill debt when entering hardship program, Synergy and Horizon Power



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 130 (Average customer bill debt when entering retailer hardship program).

Overall, average gas bill debt for customers entering a hardship program was down from $1,143 to $792 (Figure 3.14). Alinta reported that more customers were contacting them for financial hardship support with lower levels of debt, which is reflected in ongoing growth in the number of customers entering hardship programs with lower levels of debt, and of falling average entry debt for gas customers generally.

Figure 3.14 Average bill debt when entering hardship programs, residential gas



Source: Gas retail indicator R 106 (Average customer bill debt when entering retailer hardship program).

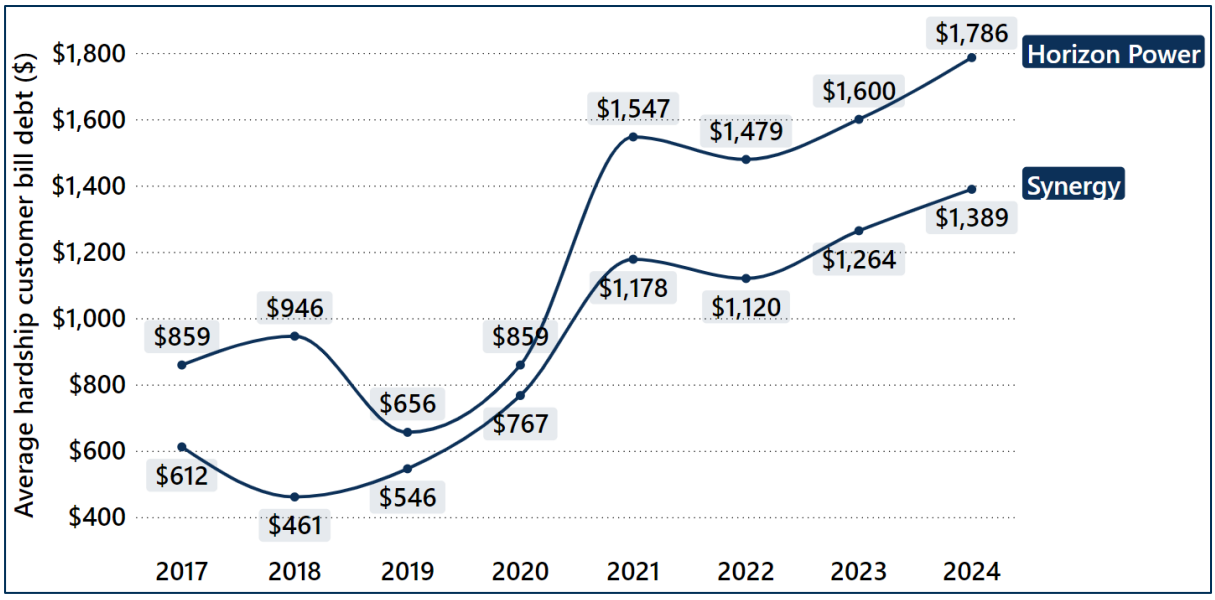
Current bill debt amounts for customers in financial hardship

The average bill debt of customers in retailer hardship programs increased for both electricity and gas in 2023/24. Average debt for customers in hardship programs grew 10 per cent to $1,400 for electricity, and 11 per cent to $1,089 for gas.

Average bill debts for customers in both Synergy ($1,389) and Horizon Power ($1,786) hardship programs rose for the third year in a row and reached a new all-time high for both retailer's customers (Figure 3.15).

Bill debts for customers in hardship programs are higher for Horizon Power than Synergy on average, which reflects differences elsewhere in this report between customers in different areas of Western Australia. Growth between the two has remained about the same in recent years, and differences in the average amounts of bill debt point to higher energy use and higher bills in warmer parts of the state serviced by Horizon Power.

Figure 3.15 Average bill debt, electricity customers in hardship programs



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 121 (Average bill debt of customers in each retailer's hardship program).

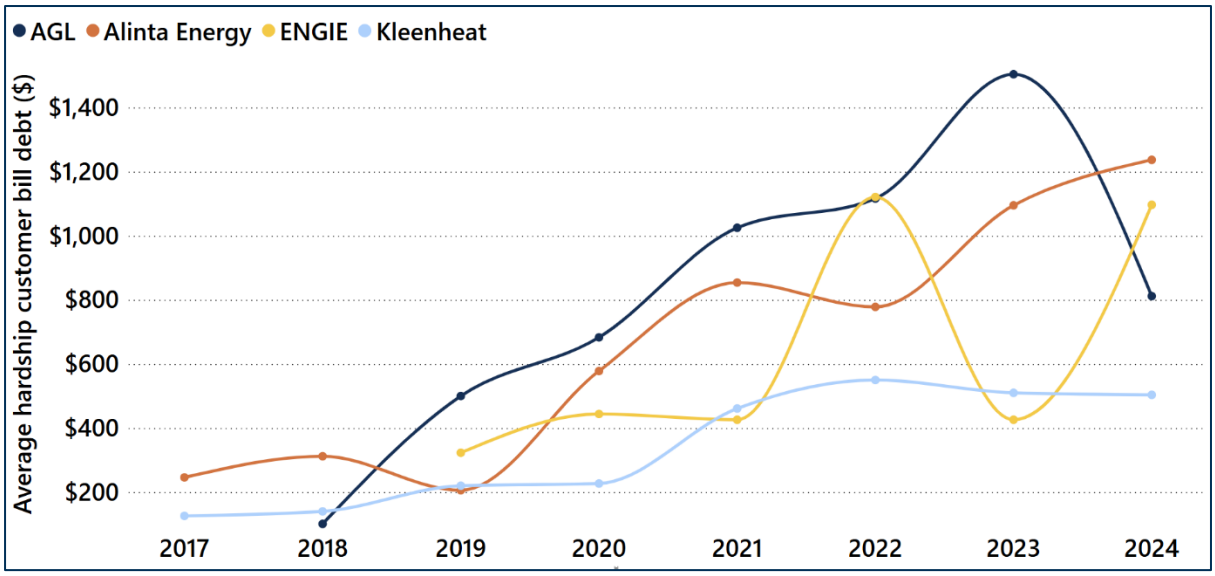
Bill debt trends for customers in gas retailer hardship programs are less consistent than for electricity (Figure 3.16). Most of the increase was driven by Alinta customers, whose average hardship bill debt grew 13 per cent to $1,237.

In contrast, average bill debt decreased for hardship customers with Kleenheat ($510 to $504), Origin Energy ($746 to $710) and AGL ($1,504 to $812).

AGL reported it is seeing an increase in the number of customers seeking hardship assistance with lower debt amounts, again pointing to customers struggling with cost-of-living pressure.

ENGIE reported another large fluctuation in average debt levels for customers in its hardship program ($426 to $1,097), but the small number of customers in its program means data for this indicator is sensitive to small changes.

Figure 3.16 Average bill debt, gas customers in hardship programs



Source: Gas retail indicators R 97 (Average bill debt of customers in each retailer's hardship program).

Hardship program completions and exclusions

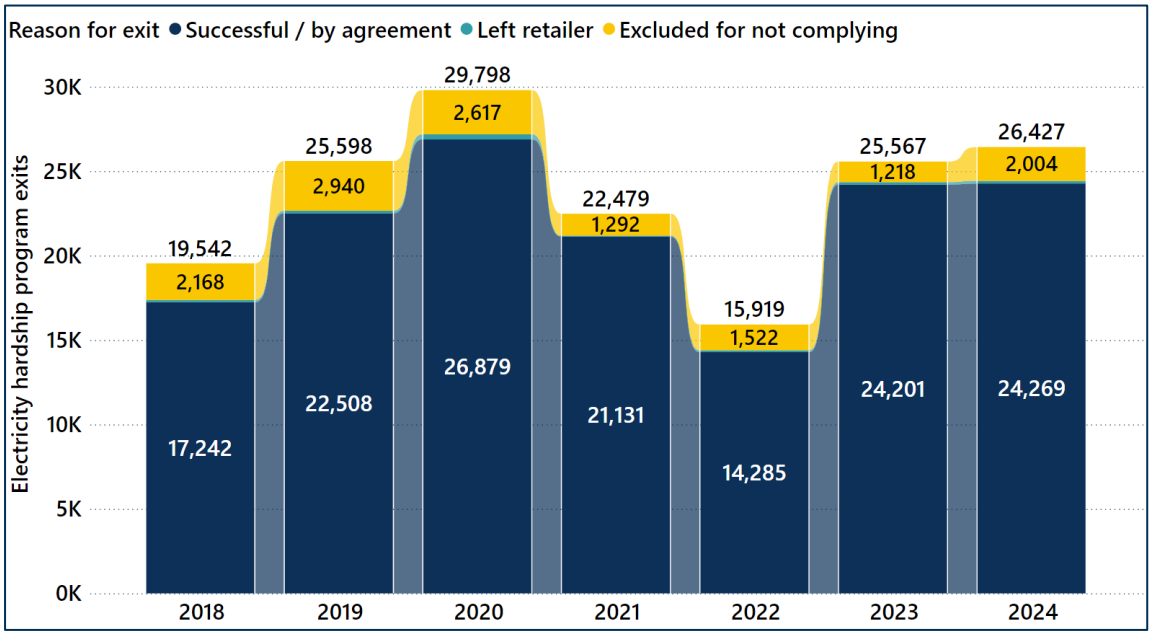
We collect data on numbers of customers who exit hardship programs across three categories:

- Customers who left the program either because they successfully completed it, or by mutual agreement with the retailer. When customers complete a hardship program, it typically means they have repaid their bill debt.
- Customers who left the retailer (such as changing gas retailer or leaving the Horizon Power supply area because the customer has moved into Synergy's area).
- Customers excluded from the program for not complying with the terms agreed with the retailer.

In 2023/24, 82 per cent of all customers who entered a hardship program successfully completed it or exited by mutual agreement with their retailer – a success rate that has been consistent since we started collecting this data.

Hardship program exclusions increased 2.8 per cent in 2023/24. Exclusions remain less prevalent than from 2017 to 2020, but were more prevalent than from 2021 to 2023 (Figure 3.17 and Figure 3.18). Synergy attributed the increase in exclusions (from 881 to 1,851) to more regular contact with customers. Its hardship case management team contacts customers in hardship programs during each bill cycle to assess progress and support options. Synergy can remove customers if it does not hear from them after several contact attempts.

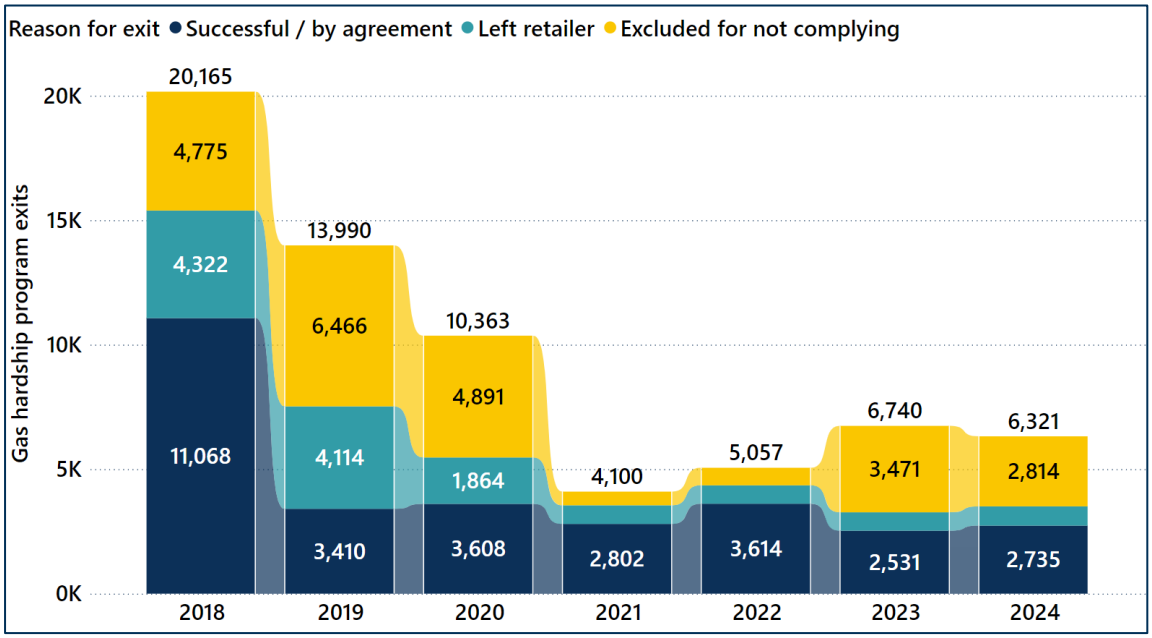
Figure 3.17 Electricity hardship program exits and reason for exit



Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 138, CCR 139, CCR 140 (Customers who exited a hardship program because they successfully completed it / were excluded / left retailer).

Despite lower levels of hardship gas customer debt, 2023/24 hardship program exclusions exceeded program completions for the second consecutive year. Kleenheat reported it more proactively assessed engagement with its hardship program, which it attributed as the reason for increases in both completions – from 602 to 1,000 – and exclusions – from 719 to 918. Alinta reported a decrease in the number of customers it excluded from its program from 2,642 to 1,665.

Figure 3.18 Gas hardship program exits and reason for exit



Source: Gas retail indicators R 114, R 115, R 116 (Customers who exited a hardship program because they successfully completed it / were excluded / left retailer).

Disconnections after completing a hardship program

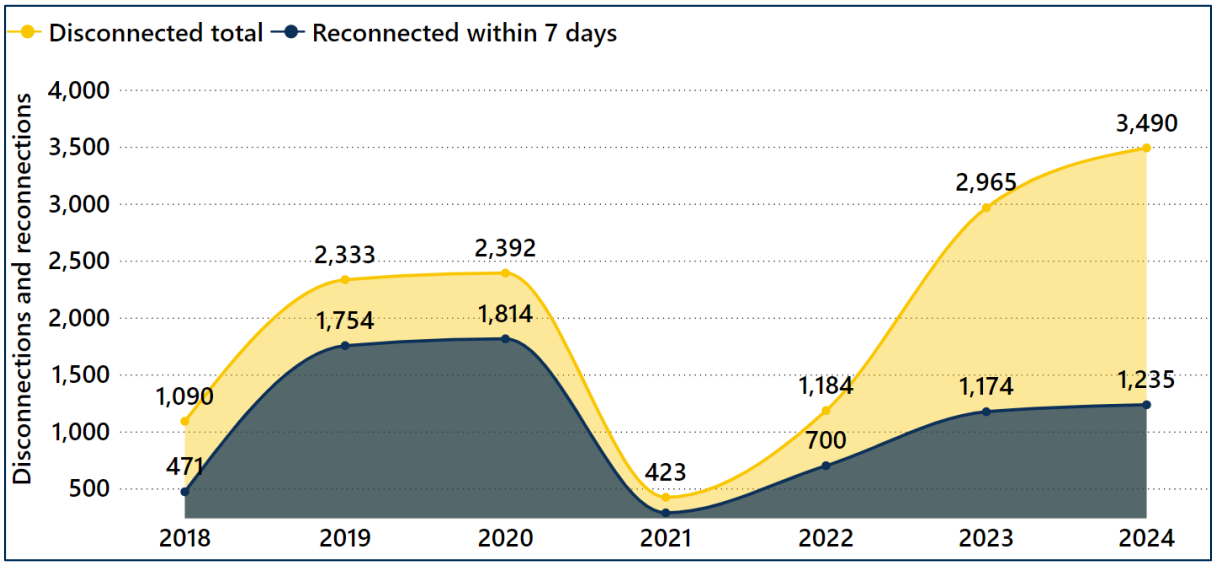
Customers who seek support from a retailer and are enrolled and then successfully complete a hardship program may continue to find themselves struggling to manage debt and stay engaged with their retailer once the hardship program ends. These customers, without ongoing engagement with their retailer, may be disconnected for non-payment.

Disconnections fell sharply for all customers in 2020/21 due to COVID-19 disconnection pauses. Since then, disconnections of customers who have previously completed hardship programs have increased, but gas customer disconnections have remained well below 2018/19 to 2019/20 levels.

Disconnections of customers following completion of a hardship program are greater for electricity customers (Figure 3.19). Some of this increase represents customers disconnected because they have left a property and may also include customers who might have been disconnected in 2020/21 if not for disconnection pauses.

In 2023/24, around 35 per cent of former hardship program customers were reconnected within a week of disconnection, compared to 40 per cent the year before and around 75 per cent the year before that. It is the second consecutive year that more than half of these customers are without power a week later.

Figure 3.19 Electricity disconnections and one-week reconnections, customers who have completed a hardship program in the previous two years

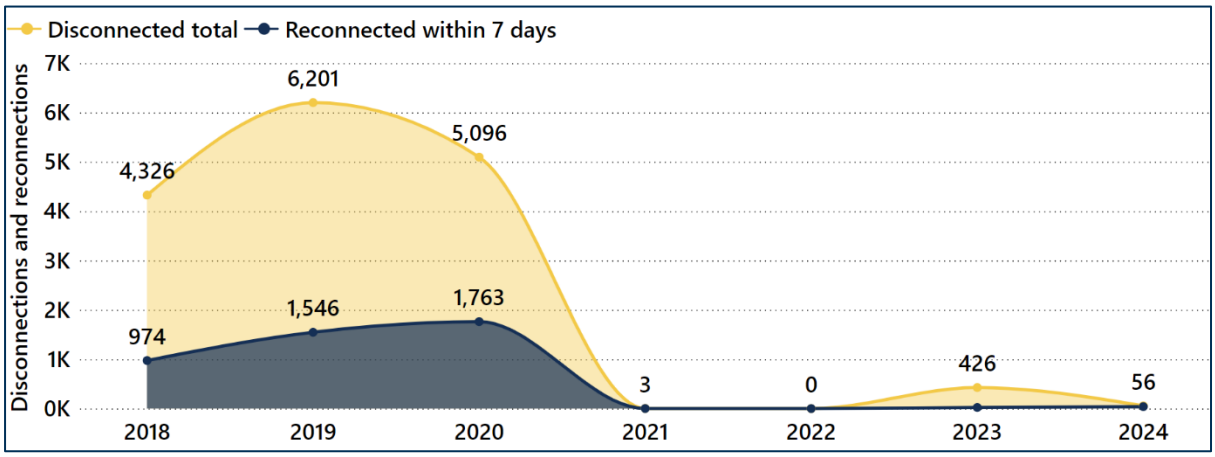


Source: Electricity retail indicators CCR 141, CCR 142 (Customers disconnected after completing hardship program or left with agreement in previous two years, and those reconnected within seven days).

Very few gas customers are disconnected after completing hardship programs, and in 2023/24, most of those customers were reconnected within the week (Figure 3.20).

Before the end of the disconnection moratorium, significantly more gas customers who had completed hardship programs were disconnected, and fewer customers had their supply reconnected within the week.

Figure 3.20 Gas disconnections and one-week reconnections, customers who have completed a hardship program in the previous two years



Source: Gas retail indicators R 117, R 118 (Customers disconnected after completing hardship program or left with agreement in previous two years, and those reconnected within seven days).

3.3 Customers affected by family and domestic violence

In February 2023, new customer protections commenced for residential electricity customers affected by family violence. When a retailer identifies a customer as affected by family violence, they are considered a vulnerable customer under the Electricity Code and receive extra protections. Retailers must train staff to identify and deal sensitively with vulnerable customers, and to minimise the need for customers to repeatedly disclose their experience.

The Electricity Code requires Synergy and Horizon Power to develop and publish policies for how they interact with these vulnerable customers, to implement measures to protect their privacy, and to suspend disconnections for non-payment for at least nine months.

The 2023/24 year is the first full year that we have data on vulnerable electricity customers indicators added to our reporting handbook.[22]

All gas and electricity retailers supplying residential customers must now also develop and publish a family violence policy.[23] When a retailer identifies a customer as affected by family violence, they receive extra protections. This obligation for electricity retailers commenced in 2023 when the new Electricity Code became effective, and in July 2024 for gas retailers, when the updated Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations commenced.[24]

Next year, we will report yearly changes on family violence indicators from electricity retailers and the first year of data from gas retailers.

Electricity customers

In 2023/24, 3,229 residential electricity customers were identified by retailers as being affected by family violence. Due to the small numbers of customers for each retailer, we have not included a breakdown in customer numbers by retailer in this report. Where possible, other information we collect from retailers is included as percentages of the total number of affected customers.

22 ERA, May 2024, Performance indicators and definitions handbook - Electricity retailers (online).

23 ERA, Family violence policies – Electricity retailers (online) Gas retailers (online).

24 ERA, April 2024. Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations (online).

For customers identified by Synergy as affected by family violence, the average bill debt was $1,810. For Horizon Power customers, it was $1,571. Both Synergy and Horizon Power reported that no vulnerable customers were using pre-payment meters.

For Synergy, 51 per cent of customers identified as vulnerable customers were still on a nine-month disconnection moratorium at the time of reporting on 30 June 2024. All customers identified by Horizon Power were still on the disconnection moratorium at the same time.

Under the changes we made to the Electricity Code, retailers must take reasonable steps to protect the information of customers affected by family violence. When a person affected by family violence is named on another person's account, a retailer may be unable to protect all a customer's information such as their phone number or email address and must advise customers of that. We collect information from retailers on the number of customers with accounts in their own name, and the number of customers named on another person's account.

For Synergy, 98 per cent of customers identified as vulnerable have their retail account in their own name, while 96.5 per cent of Horizon Power customers do. The remaining customers have an electricity retail account in a different person's name, for example, their partner. Recording who is the primary account holder assists the retailer to keep the vulnerable person's information private.

To support the first year of data, and because we cannot yet report on yearly changes, Horizon Power and Synergy have provided qualitative information on how the family violence provisions are being implemented.

Horizon Power

A positive outcome of the changes over the past year is that Horizon Power has seen a drop in average levels of bill debt and average bill amounts for customers receiving the family violence protections under the Electricity Code.

Cultural and social factors surrounding the topic of family violence contribute to the challenge for retailers to independently identify and offer support to affected customers. Most customers voluntarily identify before a retailer is aware of their situation.

Up to three quarters of all identifications happen when customers call the Horizon Power call centre or the hardship support team. Most of the time, customers are calling with more general enquiries about billing or credit and are identified when customers are discussing their situation with a Horizon Power employee.

Other identifications happen when Horizon Power calls customers directly, because it has been notified by advocacy groups or local regional teams that the customer may be affected by family violence and eligible for retailer support.

More than half of customers identified as affected by family violence are people already receiving support through Horizon Power's hardship program, highlighting the importance of early and proactive engagement with customers by dedicated teams.

Horizon Power is considering how it can improve identification rates, for example, through engagement with financial counsellors and consumer advocacy groups. It offers family violence awareness training for all new staff, and refresher training for existing staff. Horizon Power is developing and implementing a specific and dedicated Vulnerable Customer Management Framework to ensure those affected by family violence can access the full range of support options and stay connected

Synergy

Synergy has supported the introduction of the Electricity Code family violence protections by:

- Developing and publishing Synergy's Family Violence Policy which sets outs its commitment to customers who are experiencing or are recovering from family violence.
- Continuing its commitment to best practices in staff training by enhancing its specialised team to support vulnerable customers affected by family violence. These efforts include advancing training modules focused on identifying family violence triggers and trauma-informed practices.
- Introducing a new customer service framework to equip staff with the necessary skills to better understand vulnerable customers, enabling tailored conversations and appropriate support based on individual circumstances. For example, coaching agents to pick up on conversation triggers that may suggest a customer needs family violence support.

Ensuring that customers who are experiencing or are recovering from family violence have the opportunity for any fees, charges or debt that would otherwise be payable by the customer, to be reduced or waived by Synergy.

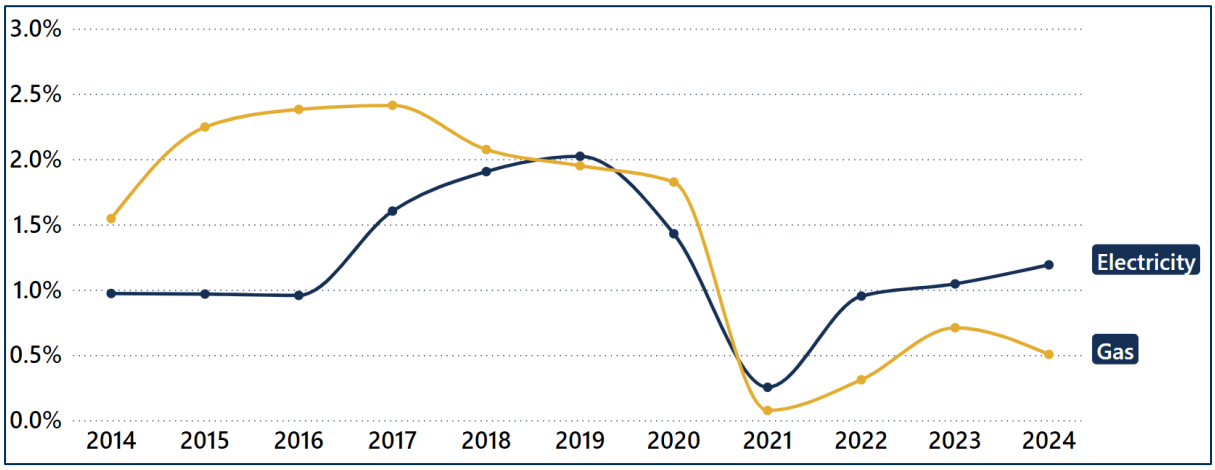
In a recent example, Synergy's Case Management program had been supporting a customer who disclosed he was experiencing family violence. One key aspect of the program is Synergy's commitment to ongoing support, which includes regular check-ins to ensure customers receive the help they need, especially as circumstances evolve or they feel more comfortable sharing information. Synergy's Fresh Start program also provides resources and referrals to family violence services, allowing customers to obtain professional and timely assistance.

3.4 Disconnections and reconnections

Customers disconnected for not paying their bill remain lower than the longer-term average but have increased again in the previous two years. These increases may reflect customer difficulty with bills or a return to more typical disconnection rates following of the COVID-19 disconnection pauses. There were 12,744 electricity and 3,965 gas disconnections during the year, excluding pre-payment customers. Disconnections represent 1.2 per cent of residential electricity and 0.5 per cent of residential gas customers (Figure 3.21).

Some customers may be disconnected for non-payment of bills more than once a year. We record each disconnection separately. To account for changes in customer numbers each year, we track disconnections against the overall number of small use customers. A disconnection rate of 1 per cent means the number of disconnection events during the year is equivalent to 1 per cent of customers.

Figure 3.21 Residential disconnection rates



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 40 (res. disconnections for bill non-payment) as a percentage of CCR 1, CCR 2 (residential customer total). Gas retail indicator R 33 (res. disconnections for non-payment) as a percentage of R 1 (residential customers total).

Retailers are obliged to give customers notice of pending disconnections and give customers opportunities to pay the debt, such as by entering a payment plan. Customers cannot be disconnected before their debt balance exceeds $300.

Consumer protection instruments prevent retailers disconnecting customers for non-payment if someone at the address uses life support equipment, if a customer has an outstanding complaint about the reason for disconnection, and during certain times.

Customers cannot be disconnected during these time periods

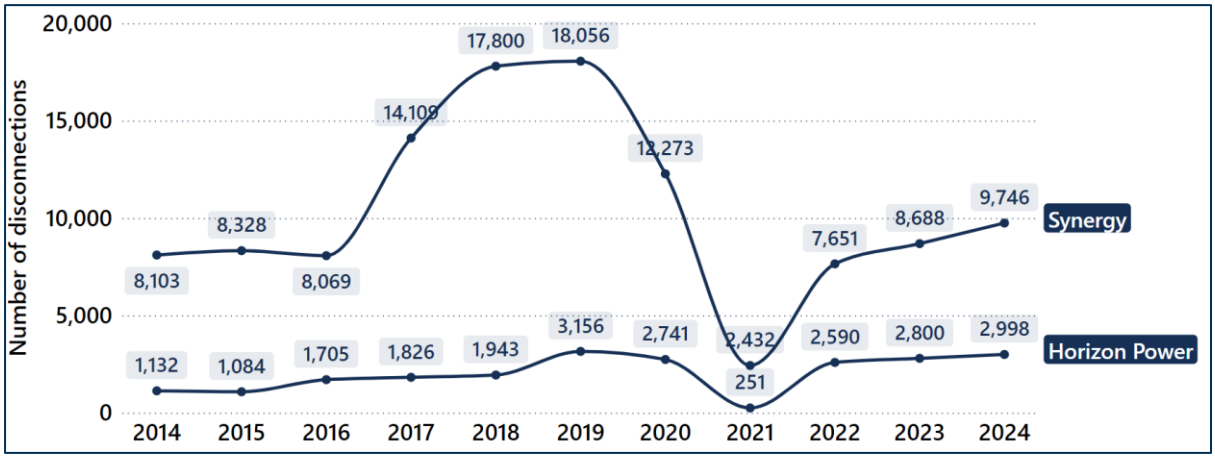
- Monday to Thursday – later than 3 pm
- Friday – after 12 pm (electricity only), at any time (gas only)
- Weekends and public holidays – at any time.
- Day before a public holiday – at any time.

Electricity disconnections

Since we started collecting data in 2013/14, residential electricity disconnections by Horizon Power have more than doubled to 2,998 (Figure 3.22). Synergy disconnections spiked between 2017 and 2020 but have not returned to that level. Data on pre-payment meter disconnections are reported separately in section 2.3.

Residential disconnections rose for the fourth year in a row for electricity customers. Disconnection events were up 7.7 per cent to 12,744 across both Synergy and Horizon Power. As some customers may be disconnected for non-payment more than once in the year, it is not clear how many individual households were affected by the 12,744 disconnections.

Figure 3.22 Residential electricity disconnections



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 40 (residential disconnections for bill non-payment)

Synergy noted that the increase in residential customers disconnected for non-payment during 2023/24 reflects ongoing broader cost of living challenges for customers. Synergy's methods to reach customers prior to arranging a disconnection for non-payment include:

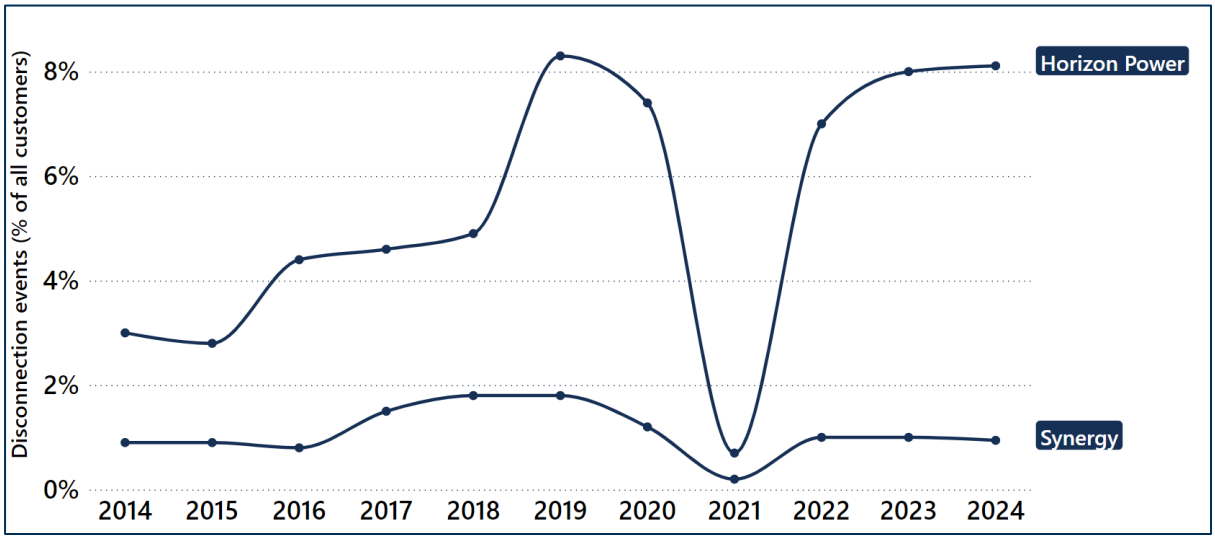
- A proactive SMS two days prior to the bill due date
- A written reminder and additional reminder email
- SMS and/or a phone call once the bill is overdue
- A disconnection warning letter if payment is still not made.

Both Synergy and Horizon Power report proactively identifying customers eligible for concessions and other government assistance. Synergy's Keeping Connected program and case management team regularly review and engage with customers to identify opportunities to reduce consumption and assist in line with the customer's capacity to pay.

Horizon Power noted that part of the increase in disconnections reflects customers entering repayment arrangements to avoid being disconnected, but then not being able to meet the repayment agreement.

To account for Synergy's significantly larger customer base, we look at how disconnections vary as a percentage of each retailer's customers. Horizon Power customers are disconnected at higher rates (8 per cent) than Synergy customers (1 per cent) (Figure 3.23).

Figure 3.23 Residential electricity disconnection rates



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 40 (residential disconnections for bill non-payment) as a percentage of CCR 1, CCR 2 (residential customer total).

How do reconnections work?

Retailers do not reconnect customers by themselves. Electricity and gas distributors, like Western Power and ATCO Gas, reconnect customers when a retailer contacts them and requests it, usually after a customer has arranged to pay their bill.

In 2023/24 there was a significant increase in the number of Horizon Power reconnections within one week of the initial disconnection (Figure 3.24). This suggests that more customers are contacting Horizon Power to pay outstanding bills and being reconnected earlier. Nearly three quarters of Horizon Power reconnection requests happen within a week. Synergy's one-week reconnection rate is around 50 per cent – lower than 10 years ago.

Advanced meters mean customers can usually be reconnected remotely soon after the retailer requests reconnection. Most Horizon Power customers have advanced meters and, as of 30 June 2024, 700,000 (or 60 per cent) of Synergy's customer base have advanced meters.[25] Western Power is currently rolling out advanced meters to the rest of Synergy's customers.[26]

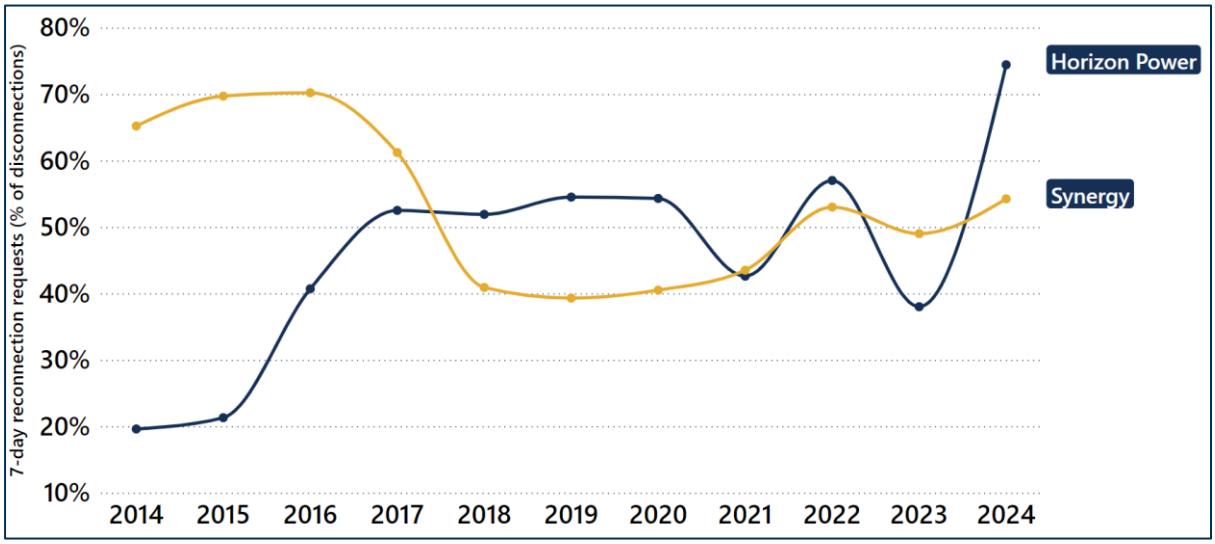
The statutory committee tasked with reviewing the Electricity Code recently considered how customers can be supported to remain in touch with their retailer and reduce disconnections for non-payment.[27] The committee's report outlined the "door knock to stay connected" initiative used in other states where the distributor visits a customer scheduled to be disconnected, to provide a final opportunity to make payment and stay connected. Until further work is done investigating the effectiveness of this approach in Western Australia, the committee did not recommend including it in the Code. However, the committee did identify opportunities for retailers to learn from the initiative by improving the information provided to customers facing disconnection.

25 Western Power, *Annual report 2024*, pg. 91 (online)

26 Western Power. *Advanced metering infrastructure* (online)

27 ERA, Dec 2024. Electricity Code Consultative Committee (ECCC), Final Review Report. (online).

Figure 3.24 Residential electricity one-week reconnection request rates



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 42A (disconnections requested to be reconnected within one week).

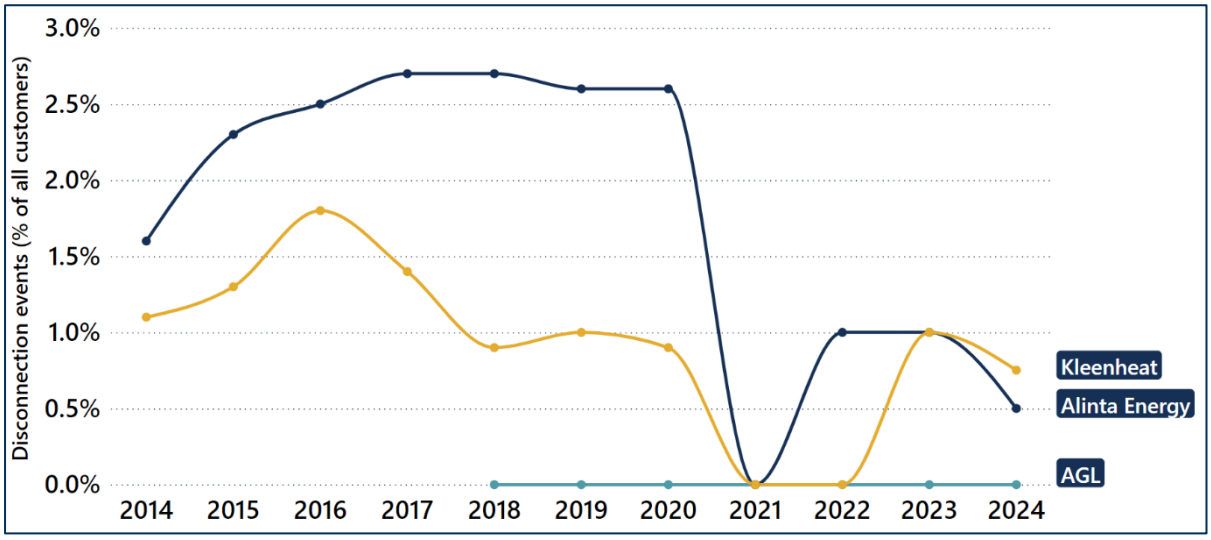
Gas disconnections

Residential gas disconnections have trended generally downwards since 2013/14.

In 2023/24, residential gas disconnections reversed some of the increase observed the year before and were down to 3,965. The decrease was driven by Alinta making half as many disconnections, down to 2,127. In comparison, Kleenheat disconnections increased to 1,777, which still represents a lower disconnection rate because its customer base grew. There were 61 disconnections by ENGIE – a small proportion of disconnections overall. Origin and AGL did not disconnect any customers in 2023/24.

Recent data shows how disconnections changed following the COVID-19 disconnection moratorium. While Kleenheat and Alinta disconnection rates initially increased, both fell in 2023/24. Kleenheat disconnections represent around 0.8 per cent of its customers, while Alinta disconnections represent around 0.5 per cent.

Figure 3.25 Residential gas disconnection rates for AGL, Alinta Energy, and Kleenheat

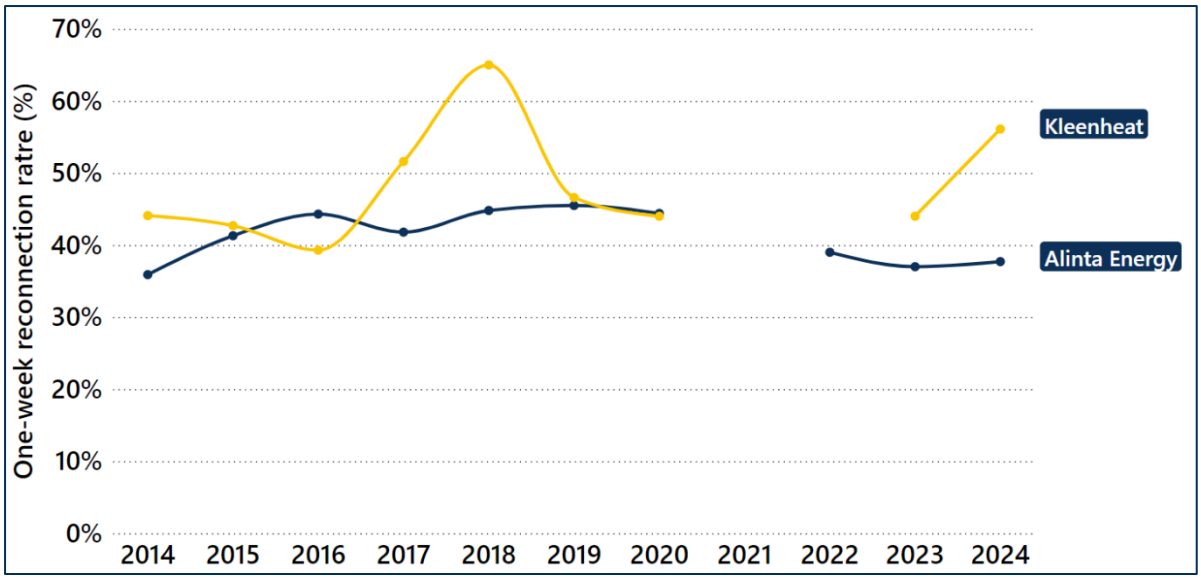


Source: Gas retail indicator R 33 (residential disconnections for bill non-payment) as a percentage of R 1 (residential customers).

The one-week reconnection request rates were 56 per cent for Kleenheat and 38 per cent for Alinta (Figure 3.26). That contrasts electricity reconnection request rates of more than 50 per

cent for both Horizon Power and Synergy in Figure 3.24, suggesting customer prioritise paying their electricity retailer to get electricity reconnected first.

Figure 3.26 One-week reconnection request rate



Source: Gas retail indicator R 42 (residential disconnections requested by retailer to be reconnected within one week of disconnection) as a percentage of disconnections (R 33). Gaps in reconnection data for 2021 and 2022 reflect that Kleenheat and Alinta did not disconnect customers during those years.

3.5 Residential customer complaints to retailers

This section includes a breakdown of residential customer complaints to each retailer for every 100 of their customers. For example, complaints to Synergy per 100 Synergy customers.

In 2023/24, residential customer complaints were relatively consistent with the year before for electricity retailers and slightly higher for each gas retailer (Figure 3.27).

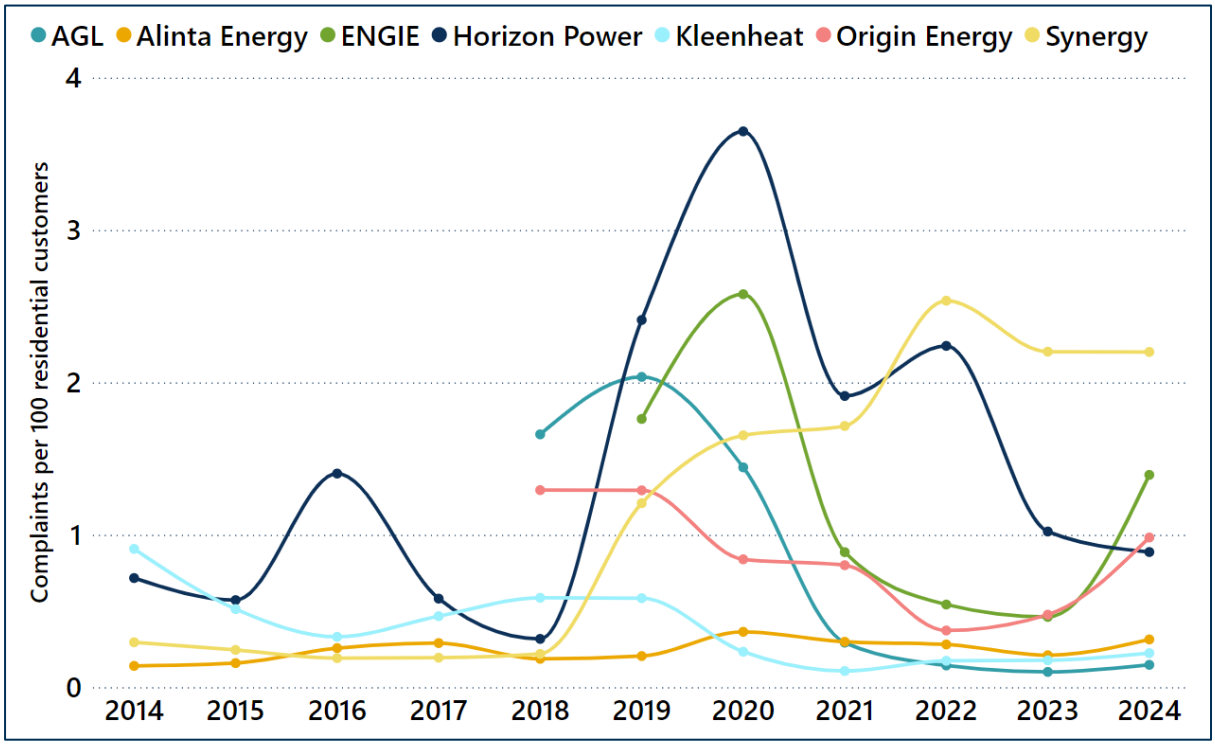
Residential customer complaints to Synergy in 2023/24 were consistent with 2022/23. Decreases in Synergy billing complaints were offset by increases in complaints about multifactor authentication. Synergy noted that it rolled out multifactor account authentication measures quickly to respond to a possible cybersecurity threat, meaning communication of the change with customers was limited.

Residential complaints to Kleenheat have remained below one in 100 for the past 10 years, but it also reported that some customers had issues with multifactor authentication.

Complaints to Horizon Power have steadily decreased after reaching a 10 year high in 2019/20. Horizon Power attributed decreases to fewer complaints about solar systems and self-service accounts.

Gas retailers particularly noted increases in the number of billing complaints that stem from increased bill scrutiny because of cost-of-living pressure.

Figure 3.27 Residential complaints to retailers per 100 customers



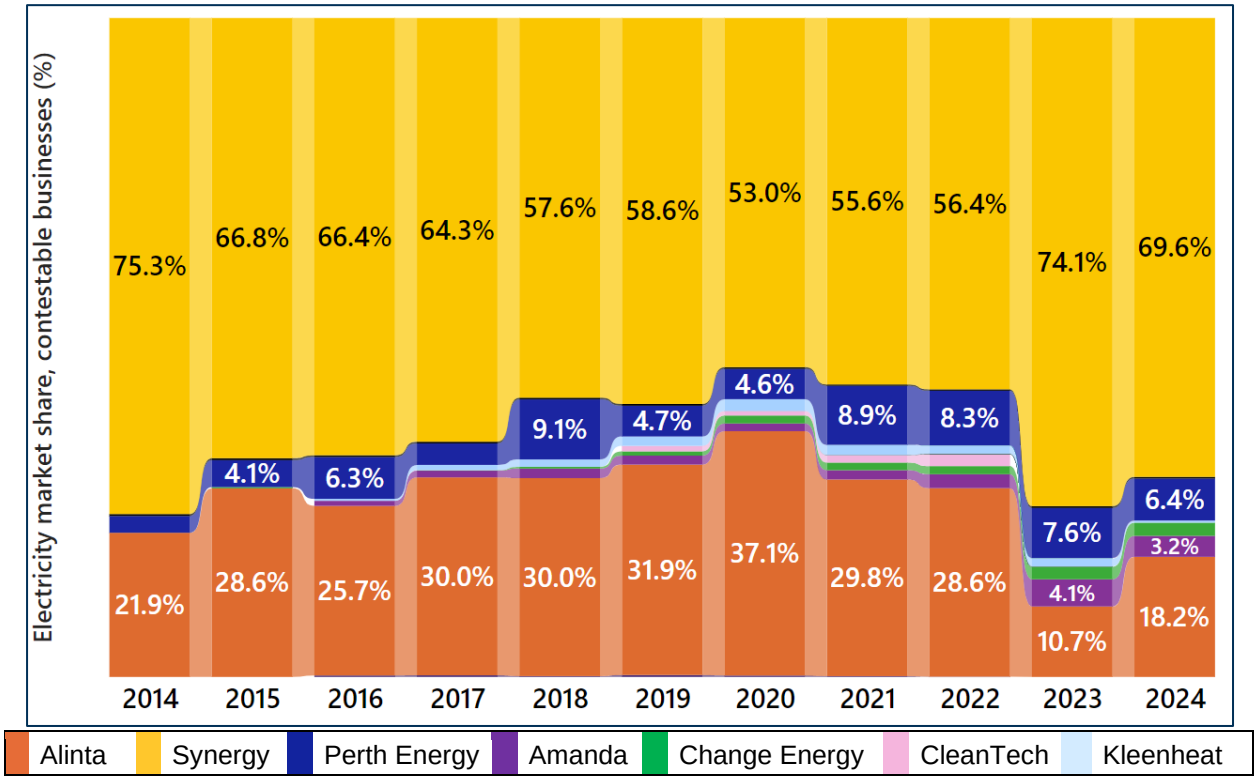
Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 72. Gas retail indicator R 59 (residential customer complaints to retailers) for every 100 of each retailer's residential customers (electricity: CCR 1, CCR 2. Gas: R1).

4. Business customers

As with residential customers, Synergy and Horizon Power supply electricity to nearly all small use business customers in Western Australia because most small use business customers are non-contestable. Earlier in this report, Table 2.1 shows that contestable business customers make up around 1 in 10 of all business customers and that the cohort grew more than 10 per cent in 2023/24.

The number of electricity retailers supplying small use contestable business customers remain at 13. The combined market share of Synergy and Alinta Energy increased to almost 90 per cent and market share changes between those retailers indicate most switching is between those two retailers only (Figure 4.1).[28]

Figure 4.1 Market share of SWIS contestable business customers



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 4 (contestable business customers). Percentages are the number of CCR 4 customers reported by each retailer as a proportion of all CCR 4 customers for that year.

Table 4.1 shows changes in contestable business electricity customers to the end of 2023/24. Alinta Energy customer growth broadly mirrors new business customers overall, indicating most new customers in the market went to Alinta.

Table 4.1 Contestable business electricity customers

Retailer	2023	2024	Change (%)
Synergy	6,602	6,862	▲3.94
Alinta	953	1796	▲88.46
Perth Energy	675	627	▼7.11
Amanda Energy	368	314	▼14.67
Change Energy	168	197	▲17.26

[28] Year-to-year changes do not account for business customers towards the upper end of the small use customer threshold that become large use customers in subsequent years and are then no longer captured in data that retailers provide to the ERA.

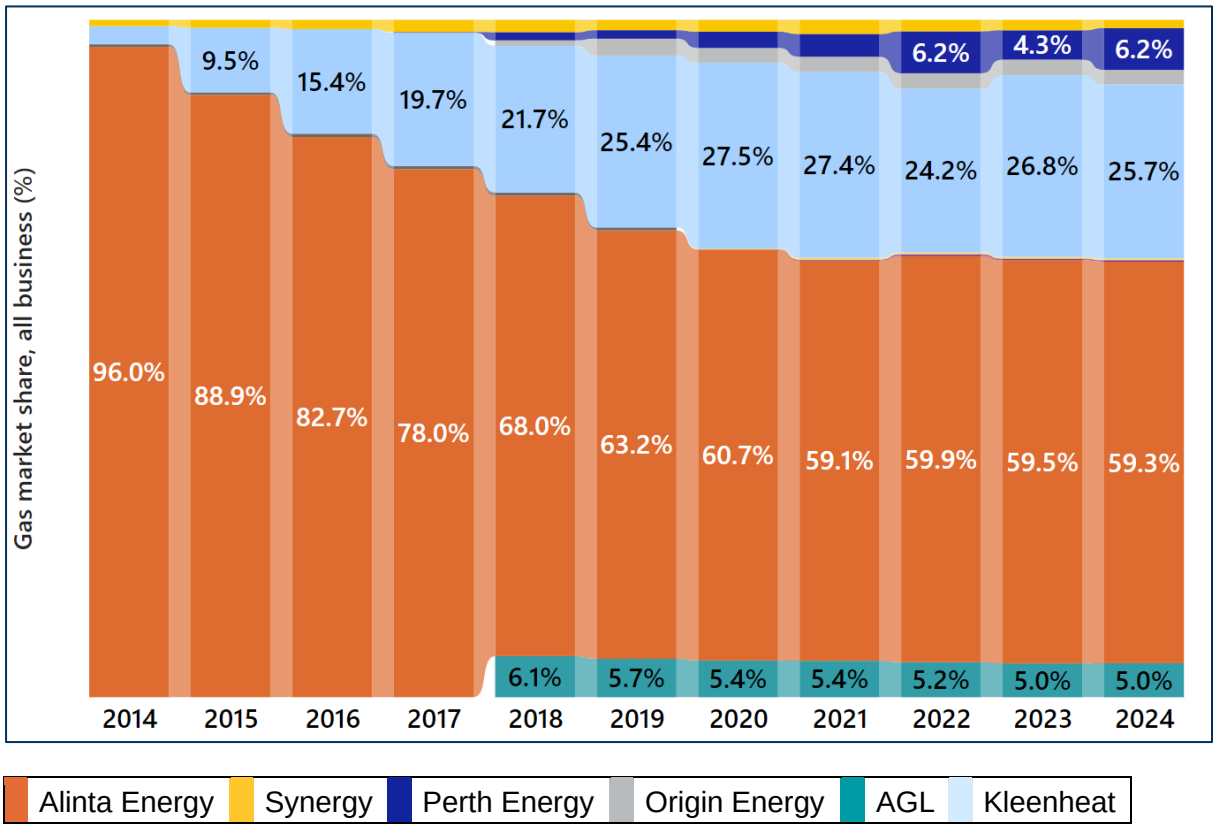
Retailer	2023	2024	Change (%)
Kleenheat	105	32	▼69.52
Rottnest Island Authority	25	25	0
Perdaman Energy	1	1	0

Our data include overall numbers of contestable small use business customers, but do not include a breakdown of retailers supplying customers in different regions. We are aware some small business customers have found it difficult to shop around due to the lack of retailers offering plans in their area.

There was little change in business customer market share between gas retailers in 2023/24. At 63.2 per cent, Alinta holds a greater share of the business market than it does the residential market (54.1 per cent). Kleenheat holds 27.4 per cent of the business gas market, similar to the 28.1 per cent it holds of the residential market (Figure 4.2).

The data show that rates of business customer switching have slowed since 2018, when Kleenheat and AGL expanded their market presence.[29]

Figure 4.2 Market share percentage of business gas customers



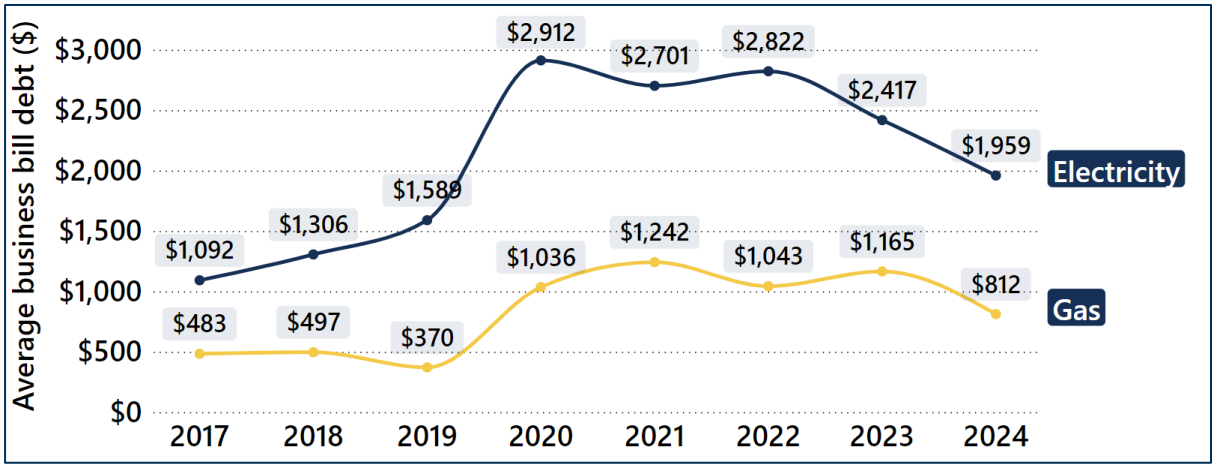
Source: Gas retail indicator R 3 (total business customers). Percentages are the number of R 3 customers reported by each retailer as a proportion of all R 3 customers for that year.

[29] Esperance Gas Distribution Company is excluded following its winding up, and subsequent transition by most Esperance customers to exclusively electricity or to electricity and bottled gas (online).

4.1 Electricity and gas bill debts

The number of business customers with electricity debts fell by 232 to 1,448, while the number of business customer gas debts were stable at 264. The combined value of electricity and gas debts continues to trend downward for businesses and are at their lowest levels since 2018/19. Average business bill debt decreased to $1,959 for electricity and $812 for gas (Figure 4.3).

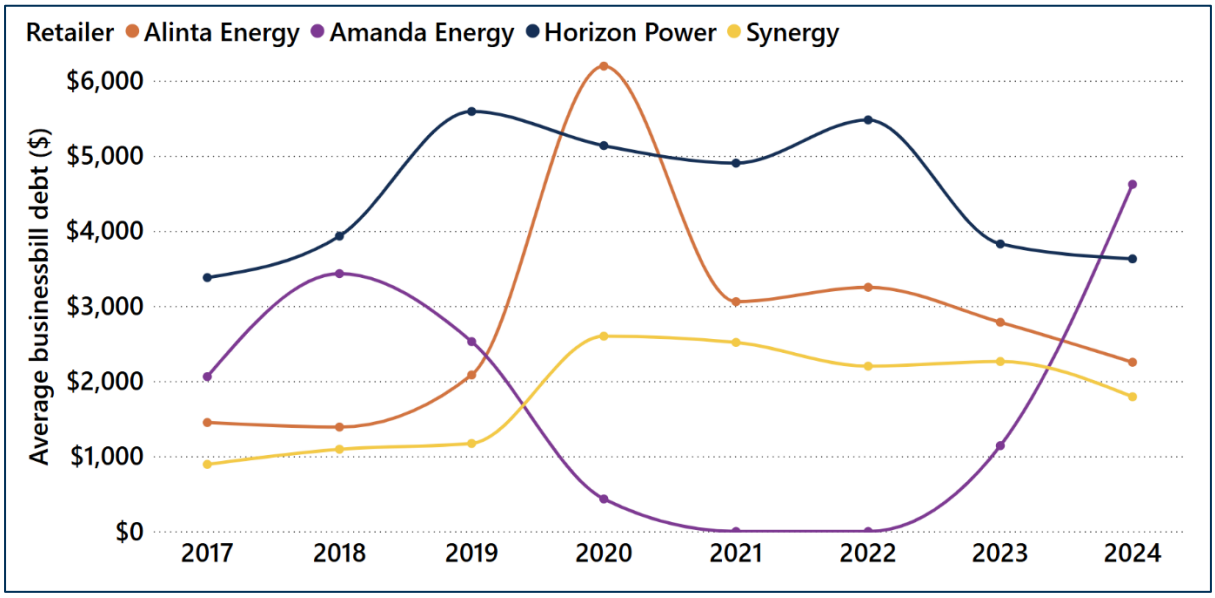
Figure 4.3 Business customer average bill debt



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 119 (business customer average bill debt) weighted by the number of business customers (CCR 6) for each retailer. Gas retail indicator R 95 (business customer average bill debt) weighted by the number of business customers (R 3) for each retailer.

Bill debts fluctuate between retailers' business customers (Figure 4.4). Average Synergy and Alinta bill debts have trended down in the previous two years, driving the downward trend across the market because of their large market share. Amanda Energy reported the highest business customer average bill debt, but their smaller number of customers means the data is sensitive to changes.

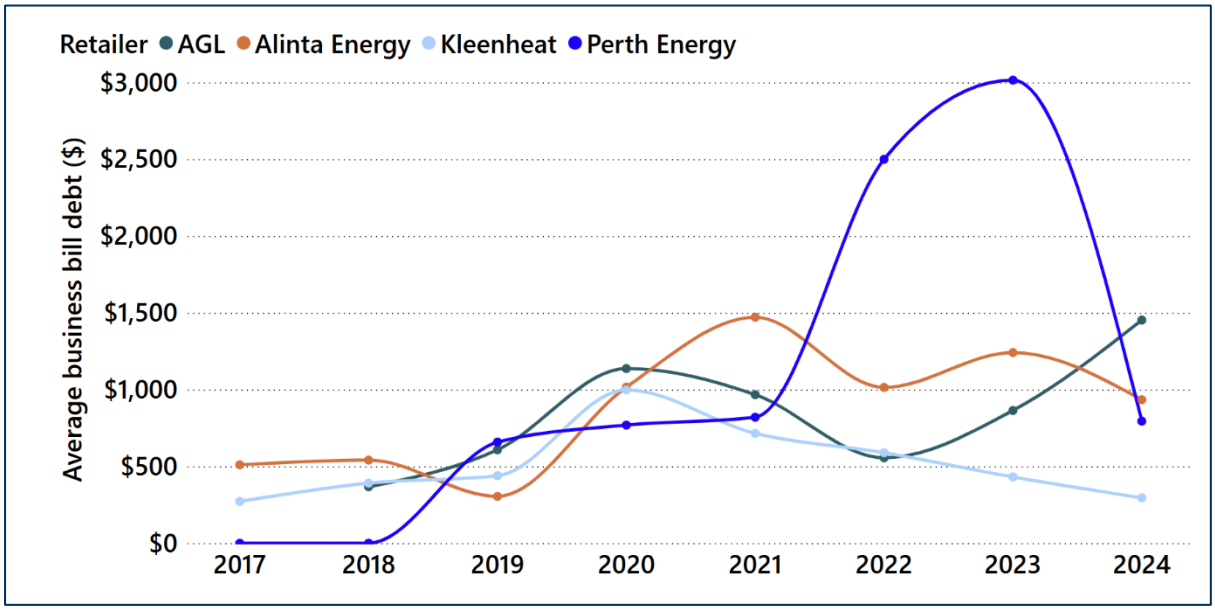
Figure 4.4 Electricity business customer average bill debt by retailer



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 119 (business customer average bill debt) Perth Energy not displayed on figure for visual clarity because of volatile data in 2022. Average Perth Energy business customer bill debt in 2023/24 was $2,563.

Average gas bill debts also fluctuate year to year, but have trended downwards across the past several years for customers of the two largest retailers, Alinta and Kleenheat (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Gas business customer average bill debt by retailer



Source: Gas retail indicator R 95 (business customer average bill debt). Synergy not displayed for visual clarity.

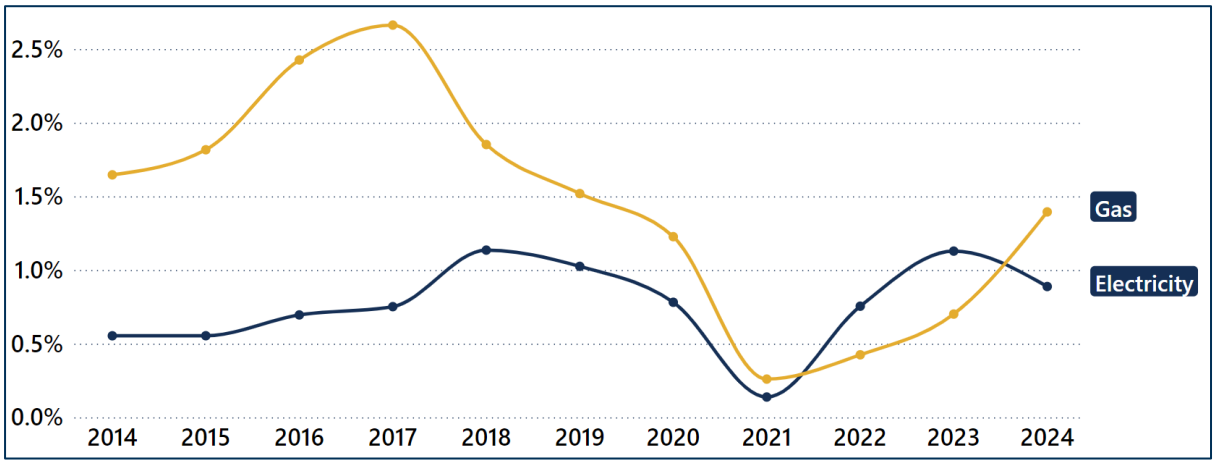
4.2 Disconnections and reconnections

Disconnection rates for electricity and gas business customers are also lower than the 10-year average, but as with residential customers, have increased since 2020/21. There was a small decrease in electricity disconnection rates in 2023/24.

During the year, there were 914 business electricity and 134 business gas disconnections, which represent 0.9 per cent of electricity customers and 1.4 per cent of gas customers (Figure 4.6).

Disconnections rates have been similar between different retailers since 2013/14.

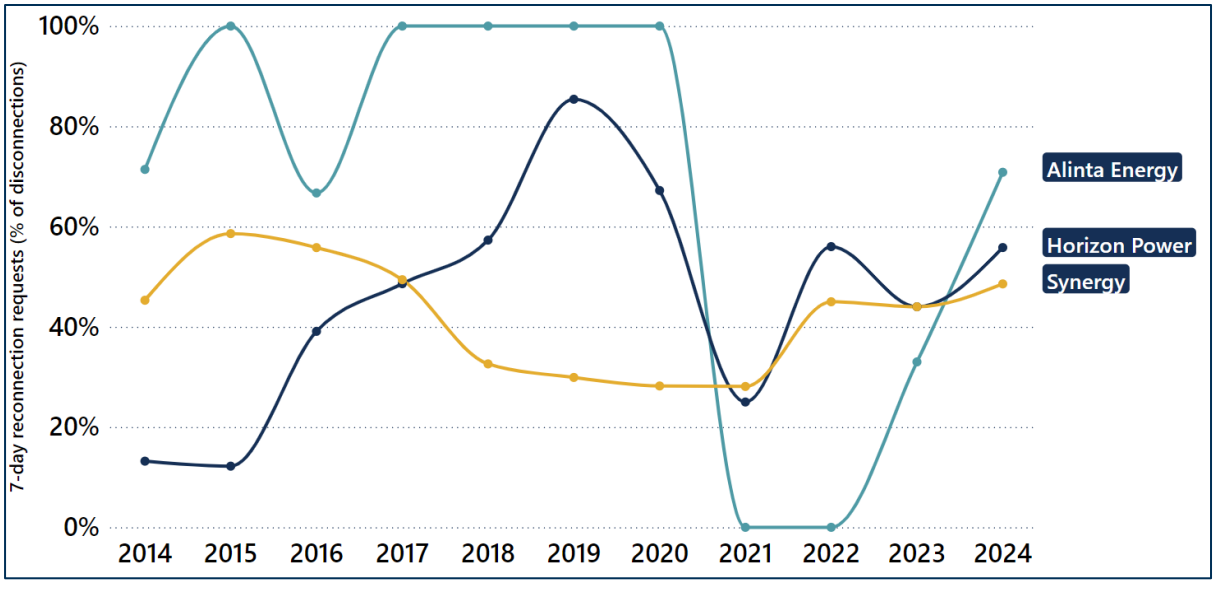
Figure 4.6 Business disconnection rates



Source: Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 42 (bus. disconnections for bill non-payment) as a percentage of CCR 4, CCR 5 (business customer total). Gas retail indicator R 35 (bus. disconnections for non-payment) as a percentage of R 3 (residential customers total).

Horizon Power and Synergy one-week reconnection rates were similar in 2023/24, at 55.8 per cent and 48.6 per cent respectively. Alinta's reconnection rates have trended back up in the previous two years and are again higher than Synergy and Horizon Power (Figure 4.7). While these 50 to 60 per cent rates can appear low overall, customers not reconnected within a week have often vacated a premises and were not seeking reconnection.

Figure 4.7 Business electricity one-week reconnection request rates



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 68 (business disconnections requested to be reconnected within one week).

4.3 Business customer complaints to retailers

As with residential customer complaints, recent increases in complaints per 100 business customers was driven mostly by gas retailers, but with still only small increases recorded compared to the year before (Figure 4.8).

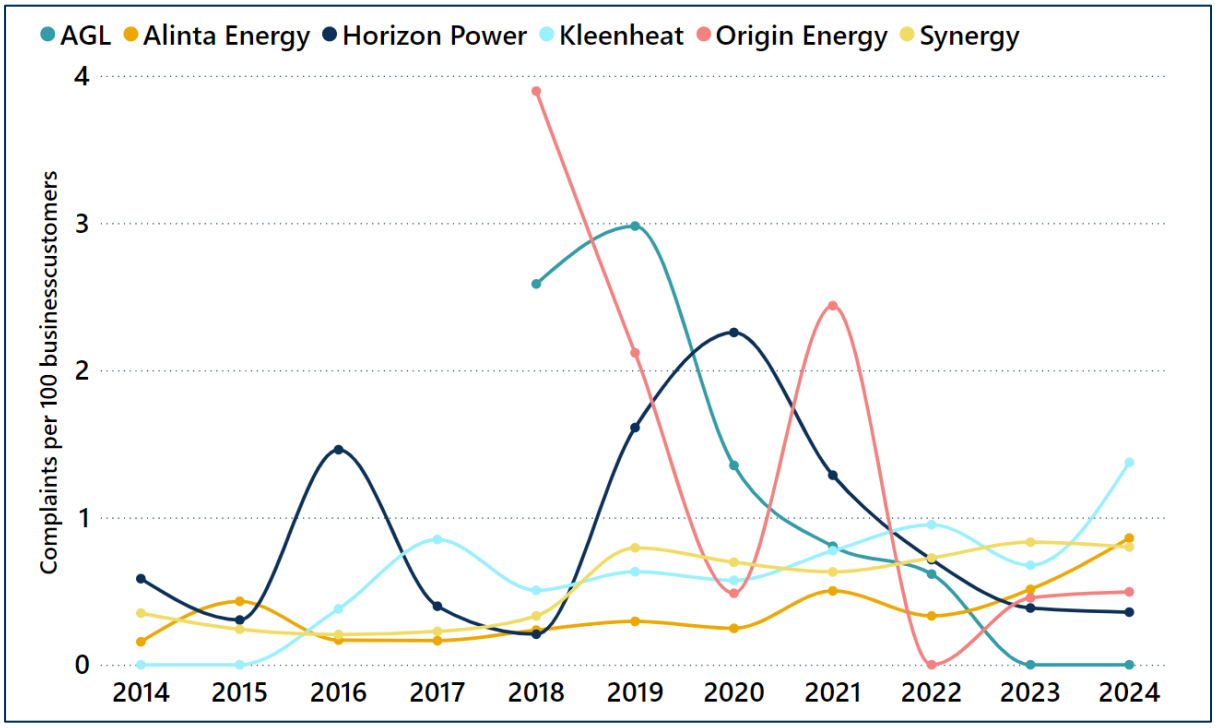
As with residential customer complaints, rates of business customer complaints continued to fall, and Horizon Power received only 34 in 2023/24. Complaints per 100 Synergy business customers were significantly lower than for residential customers.

Synergy reported complaints from business customers about multifactor authentication, where individual customers access an online Synergy account in several different locations. These complaints are recorded as administrative and not billing complaints. Business complaints to Synergy about billing specifically have fallen noticeably, and we would expect to see the overall number of complaints per 100 business customers decrease for Synergy in next year's data once customers have adjusted to the rollout of account cybersecurity protections. Figure 4.8 collates all complaint types and does not demonstrate the changes in different types of complaints.

Kleenheat received the most complaints per 100 business customers, almost all of which were about gas. Kleenheat recorded only one business complaint that was electricity related. The retailer attributed increases in complaints per 100 customers to extra bill scrutiny as business customers seek to better manage operating costs.

Alinta Energy recorded an increase in rates of business complaints from 0.5 to 0.8 per 100 customers, but it had the lowest rates of business customer complaints in the sector from 2016 to 2021.

Figure 4.8 Business complaints to retailers per 100 customers



Source: Electricity retail indicator CCR 73. Gas retail indicator R 60 (business customer complaints to retailers) for every 100 of each retailer's business customers (electricity: CCR 4, CCR 5. Gas: R3).

5. Distribution network complaints

In addition to more general customer service complaints in section 2.3, this section contains information on specific customer issues and complaints to distributors, such as technical issues with a customer's energy supply, or network fees and charges. Most complaints customers make to electricity distributors are recorded under the Network Quality and Reliability of Supply Code, which provides a mechanism for customers dissatisfied with their electricity supply.[30]

We report on complaints to Western Power and Horizon Power separately because of the significant differences in size and location of each network. More information about the technical standards in the NQ&R Code is included in section 6 of this report. Areas we collect data on are set by the NQ&R Code:

- Perth CBD (the areas supplied by Hay St or Milligan St electrical substations)
- Urban areas (excluding Perth CBD)[31]
- All other areas of the state.

Standalone power system complaints are reported as their own category regardless of the location of the systems.

We also collect data on payments made by distributors because of complaints made under the NQ&R Code. The Code requires distributors to make specific payments to customers if they fail to meet certain reliability standards, with exceptions where a distributor acts for safety reasons or during emergencies.

Payments are not made to customers automatically – customers must apply within 60 days of the interruption to receive payments under the NQ&R Code.

This section of the report includes the number and total value of payments made to customers. Separate to those customer payments, this section also includes the amount distributors spent dealing with complaints, such as resources to address a technical issue.

Section 18 payments

$20 payments – when a distributor fails to give customers at least three days' notice of a planned interruption.

Section 19 payments

$120 payments – when a customer's electricity supply is interrupted for more than 12 hours continuously.

30 See Sections 18 and 19: Electricity Industry (Network Quality and Reliability of Supply) Code 2005 (online).

31 Districts of Albany, Armadale, Bassendean, Bayswater, Belmont, Bunbury, Cambridge, Canning, Claremont, Cockburn, Cottesloe, East Fremantle, Fremantle, Geraldton, Gosnells, Joondalup, Kalamunda, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Kwinana, Mandurah, Melville, Mosman Park, Mundaring, Nedlands, Peppermint Grove, Perth (except Perth CBD region), Rockingham, Serpentine-Jarrahdale, South Perth, Stirling, Subiaco, Swan, Victoria Park, Vincent, Wanneroo, Mandurah, and part of Murray.

5.1 Western Power

NQ&R Code complaints to Western Power increased 21 per cent in 2023/24 to 1,947 but remain less than half the all-time high of 4,315 in 2019/20.

Consistent with previous years, most complaints were from the two largest cohorts of customers – those in the "urban" and "all other" areas under the NQ&R Code (Figure 5.1). Those customers cover most metropolitan and regional customers across Western Australia. The rate of increase was similar for both, up 21 per cent for urban customers and 20 per cent for regional areas. Five complaints were made by Perth CBD customers in 2023/24, one more than the year before.

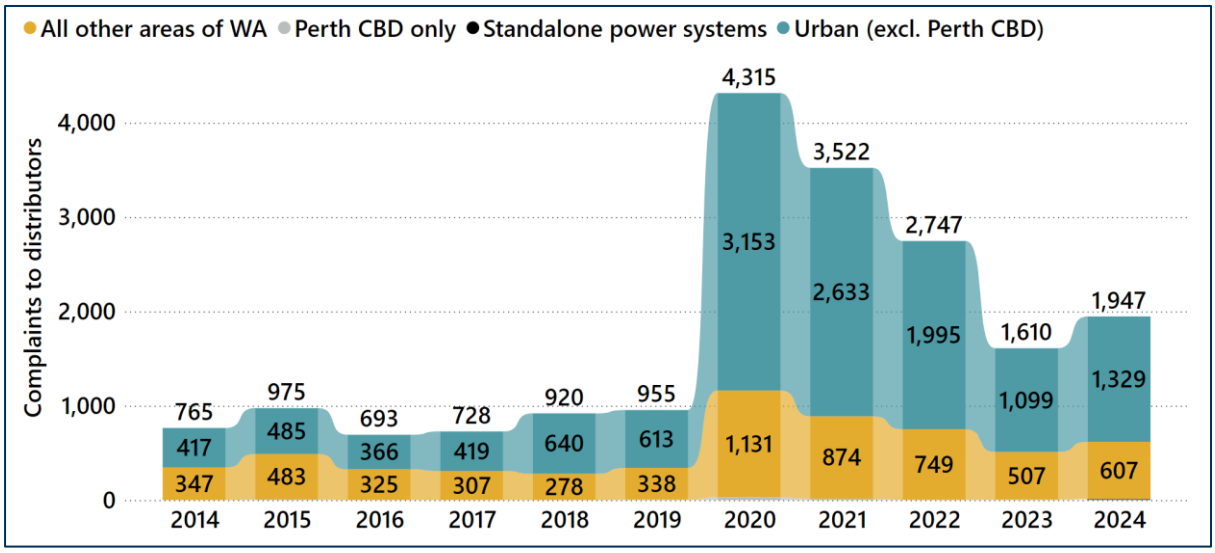
The 2023/24 year is the first that we have NQ&R complaints data for standalone power system customers: six complaints were made to Western Power by those customers.

Western Power spent $499,827 investigating or addressing NQ&R Code complaints in 2023/24.[32]

Western Power made 219 payments to customers for failing to provide at least three days' notice of a planned interruption. The total value of those section 18 payments was $4,380.

Western Power also made 55,502 payments to customers whose supply was interrupted for more than 12 hours. The total value of those section 19 payments was $10,019,720.

Figure 5.1 Western Power NQ&R Code complaints



Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 8 (total number of NQ&R Code complaints by discrete area). Complaints increased in 2019/20 due to the inclusion of complaints both received and resolved at the first point of contact.

5.2 Horizon Power

Horizon Power distribution networks do not supply customers in the Perth CBD or in NQ&R-defined urban areas. As its complaints data covers customers across a geographically large area, it may not accurately depict the experience of customers in different regions.

[32] See Clauses 97 and 98: Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers 2022 (online).

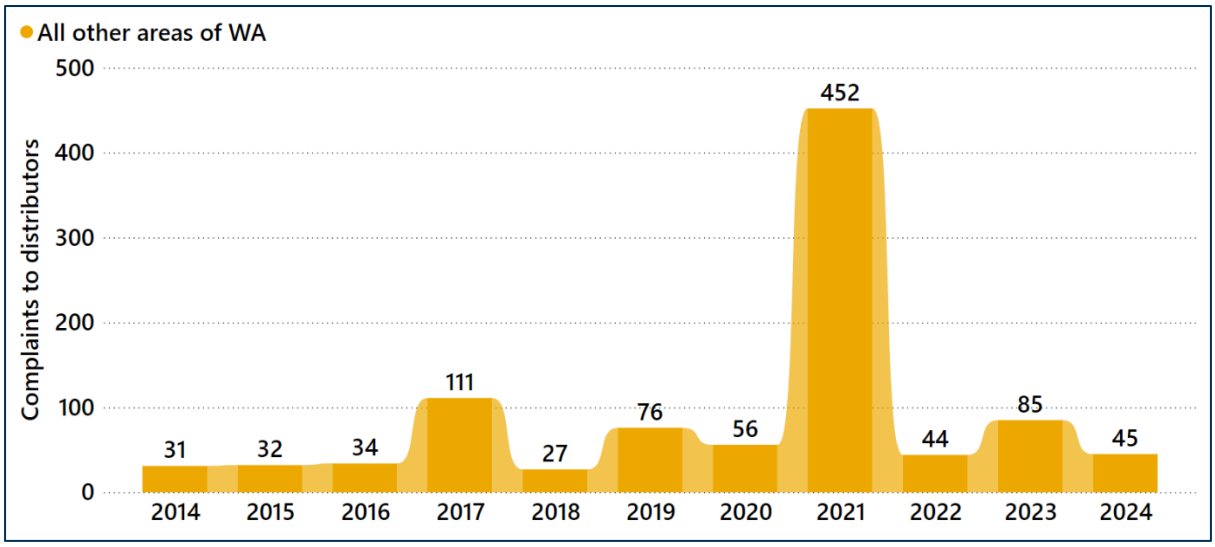
The number of NQ&R Code complaints to Horizon Power is generally low because it has relatively few network connections. The number of complaints in 2023/24 was 45, down from 85 the year before (Figure 5.2).

No standalone power system customers made NQ&R Code complaints.

Horizon Power spent $1,456,528 addressing NQ&R Code complaints in 2023/24, which represents an average cost of addressing each complaint of more than $32,000. That again excludes the section 18 and 19 payments it paid to customers.

Horizon Power made a single $20 payment for failing to provide three days' notice of an interruption. It also made 40 payments to customers whose supply was interrupted for more than 12 hours. The total value of those section 19 payments was $4,800.

Figure 5.2 Horizon Power NQ&R Code complaints



Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 8 (total number of NQ&R Code complaints by discrete area).

5.3 ATCO Gas

As with Western Power and Horizon Power for electricity, there are significant differences in the size and location of gas distribution networks operated by ATCO Gas and, in 2023/24, Kleenheat.

Those differences mean Kleenheat has received only a small number of distribution-related complaints since we started collecting this data. As such, we have not included separate graphs showing complaints to each distributor in this section of the report.

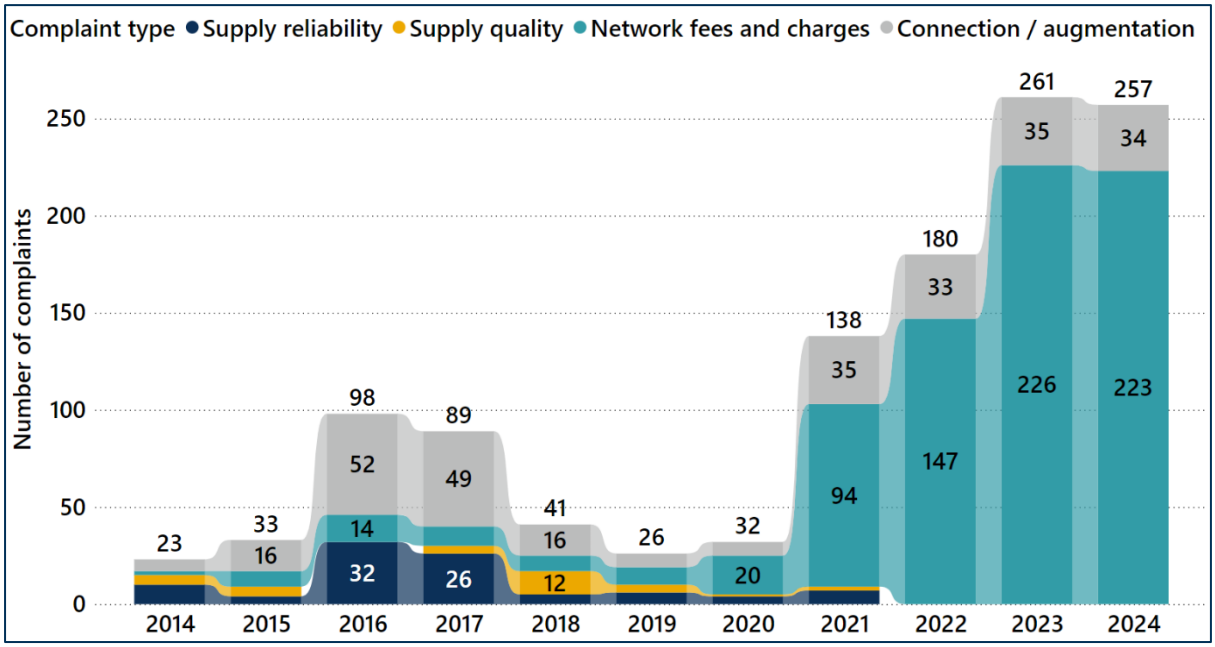
In 2023/24, Kleenheat received three specific distribution complaints – two about supply reliability and one about network fees and charges. It was the first time since 2019/20 that it received distribution complaints, when it received one.

Since 2013/14, ATCO Gas has received a relatively small but growing number of complaints (Figure 5.3). Complaint volumes remain lower overall compared to electricity distributors.

In the last five years, most complaints to ATCO have been related to network fees and charges, with a smaller number of complaints related to network connections. Network fee and connection complaints were about the same in 2023/24 as the year before. When categorising complaints, network charges and cost complaints include any fee or charge levied by the distributor such as service fees for relocating or re-connecting gas meters.

ATCO reported that increases in these types of complaints were linked to higher levels of inflation across the same period and noted that it assists with cost pressures by offering payment plans where possible.

Figure 5.3 ATCO Gas complaints



Source: Gas distribution indicators D 20, D 21, D 22, D 23 (customer complaints about connection or augmentation / supply reliability / supply quality / network charges and costs).

6. Distribution network reliability

This section includes information on electricity and gas distribution network reliability. Data in this section is combined for residential and business customers. Notably, reliability issues for distribution connections can represent a relatively large number of individual people. Apartment buildings, caravan parks, or commercial tenancy complexes often have a single connection. Data we collect from distribution providers counts each network connection as a single customer.

Western Power is the electricity distributor for the SWIS and Horizon Power is the distributor elsewhere. Horizon Power networks cover most remote and regional areas of Western Australia and operates several standalone networks, whereas almost all Western Power's customers are supplied by a single interconnected network.

ATCO is the largest gas distributor in the state and its networks are in the Mid West and South West plus Kalgoorlie and Albany. Kleenheat's former distribution network – now operated by Supagas – serves four small systems in the Goldfields, Margaret River and Albany.

Network reliability is a large part of how customers experience the energy system overall and can affect customers in several ways. For businesses, outages mean lost trade while for households, they disrupt cooking, leisure, and remote work. Electricity outages can cause significant disruption for customers who use life support equipment.

Extended electricity outages were widely reported during the year, particularly for Kalgoorlie customers without power in January 2024 when temperatures exceeded 40 degrees.[33] More than 20,000 customers were affected after storms damaged Western Power's main transmission link to the city and Synergy back-up generation failed.

While transmission related outages - like Kalgoorlie in January 2024 - are high profile, most outages customers experience are related to the local distribution network. Data we collect captures both major transmission outages and local network outages that might only affect a relatively small number of customers. We collect reliability data by feeder type, and against reliability standards in the Network Quality and Reliability of Supply Code.

6.1 Feeder-type electrical reliability

Feeder-type reliability is a globally common way to measure distribution reliability. Our reliability information is separated by the four feeder types used to supply electricity to customers:

- Perth CBD (areas supplied by Hay St or Milligan St substations)
- Urban[34]
- Short rural (feeders shorter than 200 kilometres)
- Long rural (feeders longer than 200 kilometres).

Reliability data for electrical feeder types is "normalised", meaning it excludes certain outages, such as planned outages or those caused by a third party. It also excludes major event days, so that individual large outages do not skew the average we report.[35] Since some outages are

[33] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 19 January 2024. Power being restored to Kalgoorlie-Boulder after outages ground the Goldfields city to a halt (online)

[34] Feeders with a maximum electrical demand exceeding 300 kilovolt-amps per kilometre across the year, and located in the districts of Karratha, Port Hedland, South Hedland, and those in footnote 31.

[35] Standard Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). *1366-2003 – Guide for Electric Power Distribution Reliability Indices, Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers*. Section 4.5 describes a statistical approach to calculate a major event day threshold (MED) based on outages during the year.

excluded, feeder type reliability data in this section may understate how customers experience electricity reliability in their area.

We use two standardised metrics to measure reliability for each electrical feeder type.

System average interruption duration index (SAIDI)

The average cumulative outage time for each customer connection, in minutes.

System average duration frequency index (SAIFI)

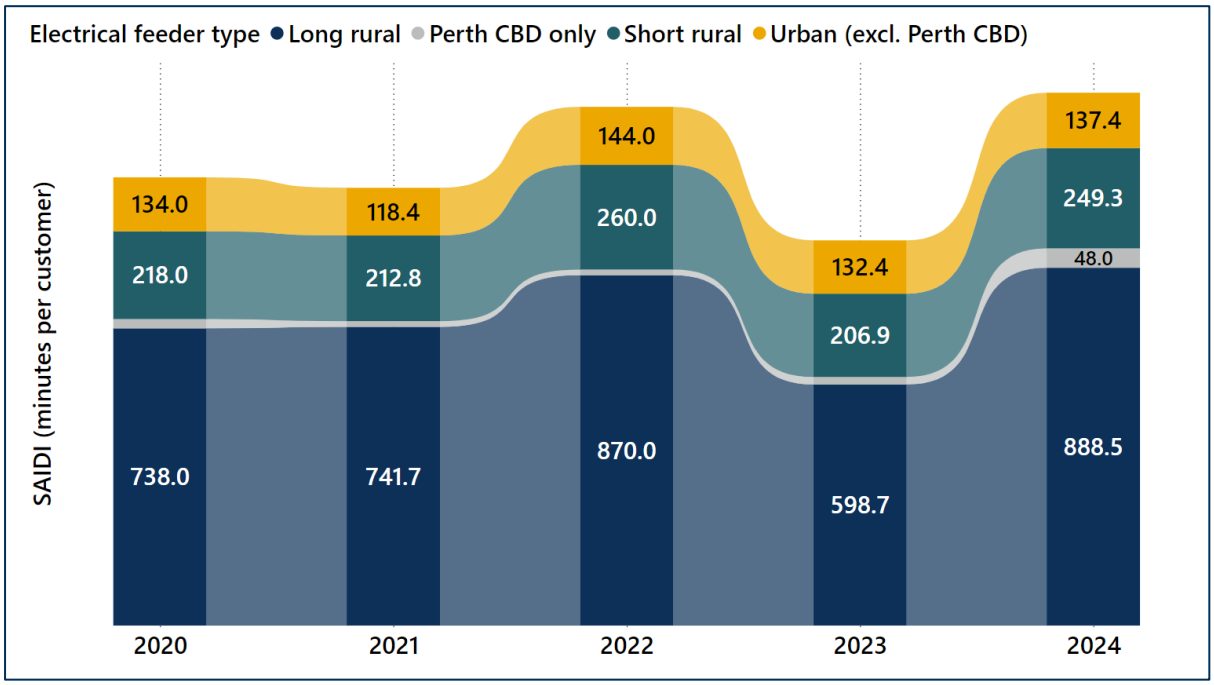
The average number of outages for each customer connection during the year.

Western Power

In 2023/24, customers connected to Western Power's distribution network experienced more outage time (SAIDI) for each feeder type than the year before (Figure 6.1). Long rural feeder connections had 14 hours and 48 minutes of outage time on average, nearly 50 per cent more than the year before. Short rural and urban (excluding Perth CBD) feeders also saw increased outage time, at 4 hours and 9 minutes for short rural (up 20.5 per cent) and 2 hours and 17 minutes for urban (up 3.8 per cent). Perth CBD outage time more than doubled to 48 minutes.

Western Power noted in its service standard report to the ERA that 2023/24 was marked by multiple severe weather events affecting its network.[36] It noted particularly that storms and bushfires across different parts of the network, in addition to pole top fires, affected more than 100,000 distribution customers in rural areas, leading to increases in outage time.

Figure 6.1 Average cumulative outages (SAIDI), Western Power, minutes per customer



Source: Electricity distribution indicator FC 4 (normalised distribution network SAIDI for each feeder type).

In addition to a longer cumulative outage time in 2023/24, customers on Western Power's network experienced a five-year high in average outage frequency (SAIFI) (Figure 6.2).[36]

[36] Western Power, 31 October 2024. Service standard performance report for the year ended 30 June 2024 (online)

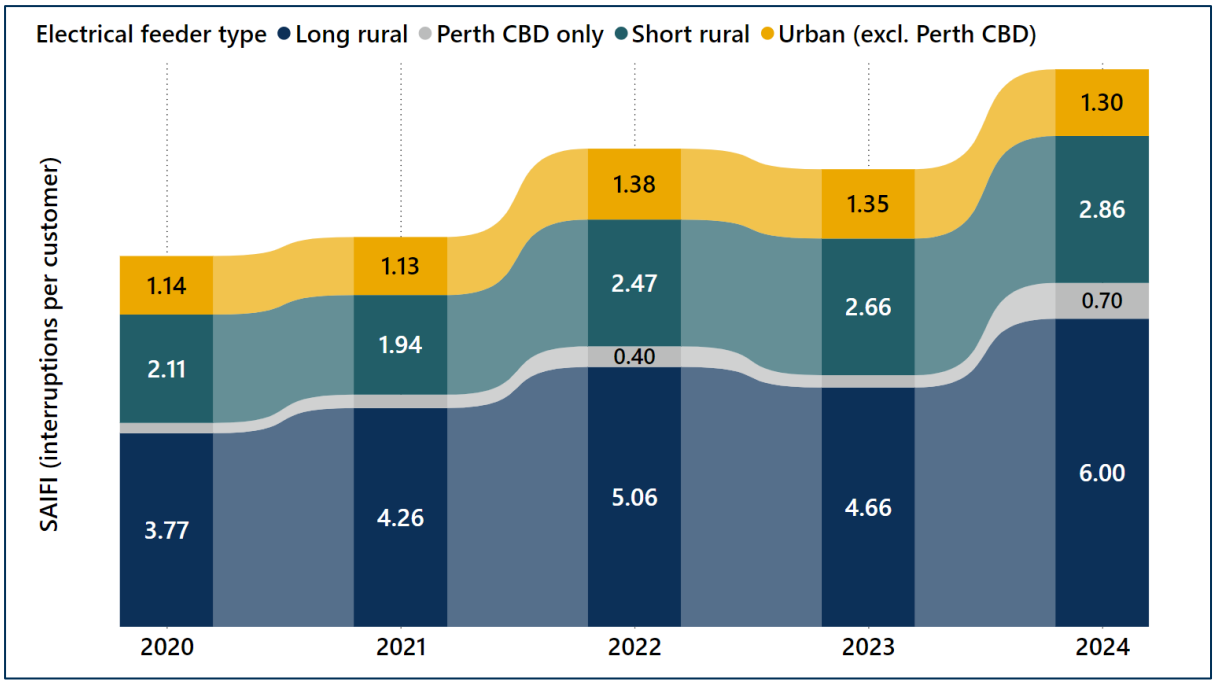
Western Power also noted the SAIFI data excluded five major event days: severe weather caused major event days in August 2023, September 2023, and January 2024. While major event days are excluded from the data, their effects can cause issues for customers beyond the days that are excluded from outage data.

Customers on long rural feeders experienced an average of six outages during the year, up 28.7 per cent from the year before. Short rural connections saw a 7.6 per cent increase in average outages to 2.86, while urban feeder outages decreased by around four per cent to 1.30. Perth CBD outages increased to 0.7 interruptions per customer.

Some notable but uncommon events did not reach the major event day threshold, meaning they are included in reliability data and at least partly responsible for increases in the number of interruptions from the year before:

- A trip on the Hay Street substation caused outages for more than 2,500 Perth CBD customers in March 2024.
- A tornado in Bunbury caused significant damage and resulted in outages to 6,700 customers in May 2024.

Figure 6.2 Average outage frequency (SAIFI), Western Power, outages per customer



Source: Electricity distribution indicator FC 8 (normalised distribution network SAIFI for each feeder type).

In March 2023, we published our final decision on changes to the service standard scheme for Western Power's network, as part of our role reviewing its five-yearly access arrangement.[37] Our decision reset the standard Western Power must meet for customers on rural long feeders to be in line with the requirements of the Network Quality and Reliability of Supply Code. It required Western Power to develop and implement a plan to address regional reliability, and it is required to provide updates on the plan in its annual service standard reports.

[37] Economic Regulation Authority, 31 March 2023. Final decision – Access arrangement (AA5) for the Western Power network for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2027 (online)

Horizon Power

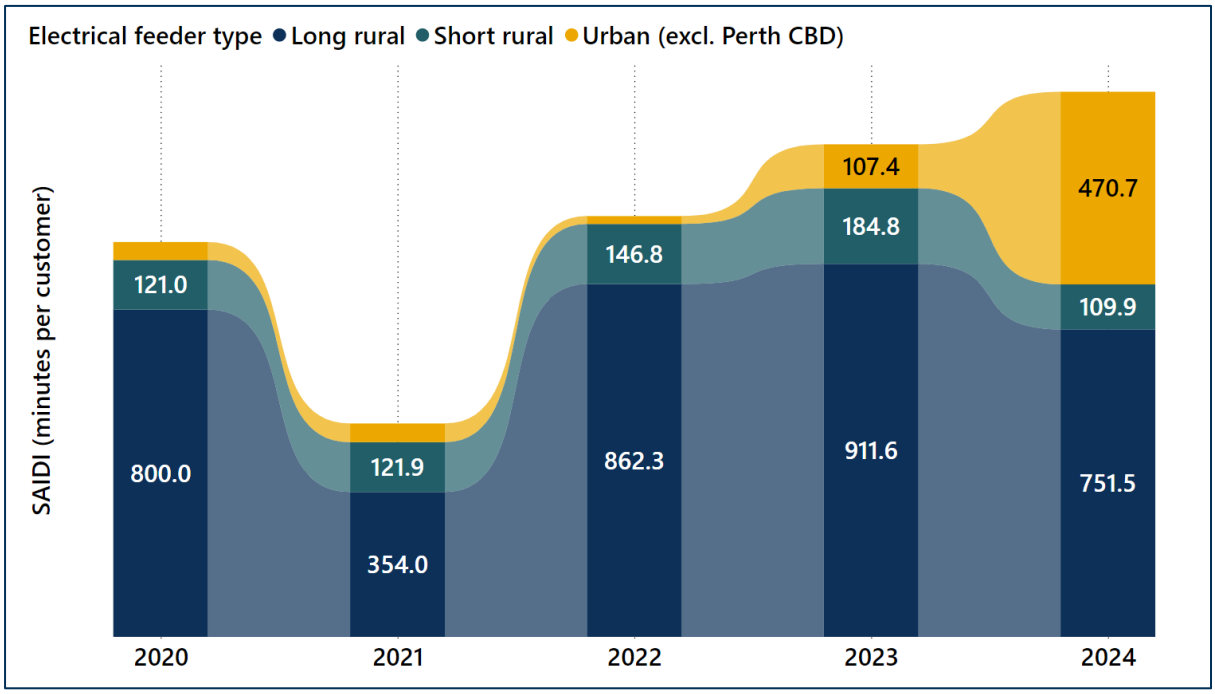
Horizon Power operates several networks across different parts of Western Australia, each with different weather patterns that may affect network reliability.

Horizon Power did not report any severe weather events in 2023/24 and noted that yearly changes in short rural and urban feeder reliability are because electrical feeders were reclassified during the year.

Several Horizon Power feeders categorised as urban in 2022/23 (because their maximum electrical demand exceeded 300 kilovolt-amps per kilometre) were reclassified as short rural feeders in 2023/24. That means the number of customers supplied by urban feeders in 2023/24 was around 90 per cent less than the year before, so urban feeder reliability looks significantly worse even if there is little overall change. Reclassified feeders were mostly in Karratha and Port Hedland.

Nonetheless, Horizon Power's long rural outage times (SAIDI) improved to 12 hours and 31 minutes but remain higher than the 2020/21 low of less than six hours (Figure 6.3).

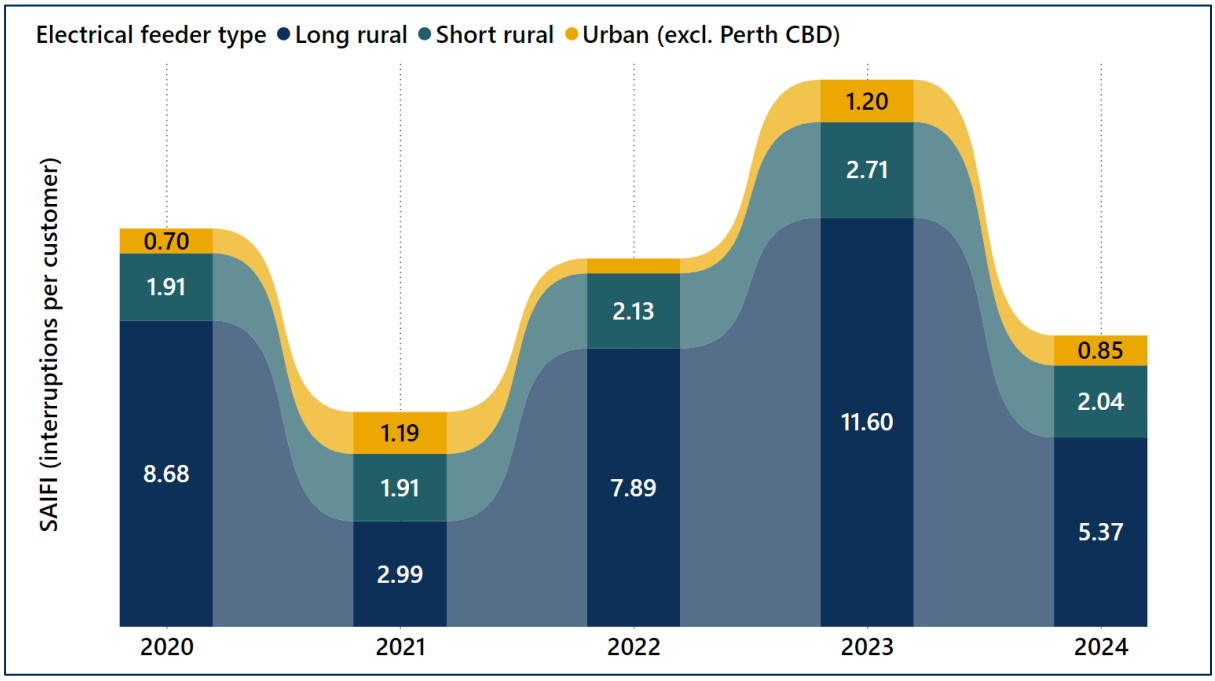
Figure 6.3 Average cumulative outages (SAIDI), Horizon Power, minutes per customer



Source: Electricity distribution indicator FC 4 (normalised distribution network SAIDI for each feeder type). The 470.7 minutes of cumulative outage time does not represent worsening reliability but comes from reclassification of electrical feeders because of yearly changes in electrical demand.

Horizon Power outages have fluctuated more than Western Power over the past five years, with the average number of interruptions per customer (SAIFI) down in 2023/24 following two years of increases (Figure 6.4). Again, reliability data for urban and short rural feeders is difficult to compare with the year before because feeders supplying customers in Karratha and Port Hedland were reclassified. Long rural outages more than halved to 5.37 per customer on average. Horizon Power reported zero major event days during 2023/24.

Figure 6.4 Average outage frequency (SAIFI), Horizon Power, outages per customer



Source: Electricity distribution indicator FC 8 (normalised distribution network SAIFI for each feeder type).

6.2 Regulated electrical reliability standards

- The NQ&R Code sets area-based standards for outage duration and frequency that apply to Western Power and Horizon Power. This reliability data includes all outages customers experience, including planned outages and major event days caused by severe weather. Including all interruptions is important because even if an interruption is planned, it can still be disruptive for customers, who may be unable to trade or work remotely. The area-based reliability data are more representative of how customers experience electricity reliability day to day compared to feeder-type reliability.

Western Power and Horizon Power also separately publish information on reliability by area on their websites.[38,39] This section includes information on the number of times Western Power and Horizon Power have failed to meet the regulated reliability standard set in the NQ&R Code.

[38] Western Power. *Annual reliability and power quality report for the year ended 30 June 2024* (online)

[39] Horizon Power. *Network quality and reliability of supply code performance report 2023/24* (online)

- The NQ&R Code requires Western Power and Horizon Power to pay customers $120 for outages that last longer than 12 hours, except for emergency outages. Customers must apply to the distributor to receive the payment. The NQ&R Code also sets standards for the maximum number of times customers should experience outages longer than one minute, and for average total outage time for customers.

Maximum number of outages

Perth CBD and other urban areas – 9 outages

All other areas – 16 outages

Maximum total outage time (4 year rolling average)

Perth CBD – 30 minutes

Urban areas – 160 minutes

All other areas – 290 minutes

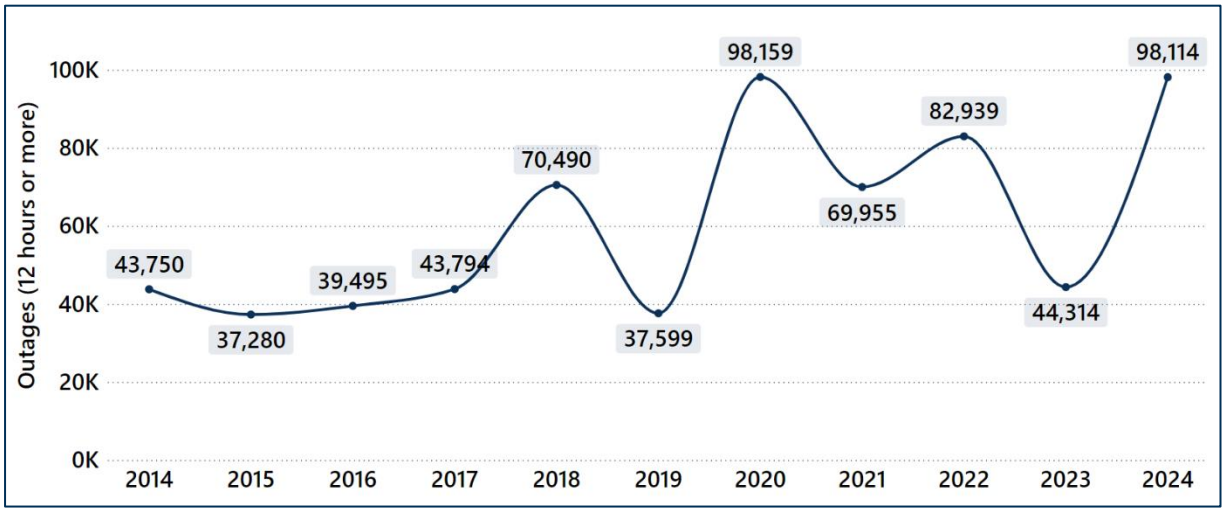
Western Power

- Customers affected by outages exceeding 12 hours nearly doubled from 44,314 to 98,114 in 2023/24 (Figure 6.5).

The large number of affected customers corresponds with the more than $10 million Western Power paid to customers under section 19 of the NQ&R Code in 2023/24. Of the 98,114 customers affected by outages exceeding 12 hours, 55,502 applied to Western Power to receive a compensation payment.

- The State Government temporarily increased the outage payment from $120 to $240 for claims related to outages during the period 12 - 18 January 2024.[40] The increase was primarily to address outages for customers in Kalgoorlie, though all customers who experienced extended outages during these dates were eligible for the increased amount.

Figure 6.5 Premises affected by outages lasting longer than what is allowed under the NQ&R reliability standard (12 hours), Western Power

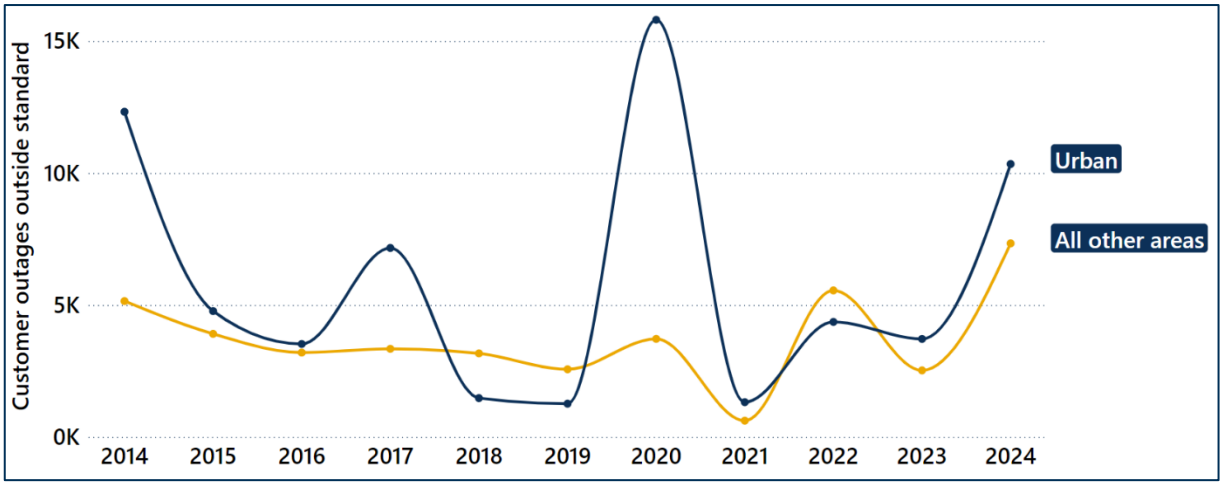


Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 1 (premises affected by outages longer than 12 hours).

[40] Western Power, 1 October 2024 *Annual Reliability and Power Quality Report for the year ended 30 June 2024.* table 5, p 14 (online).

Western Power reported worse reliability for outage frequency as well in 2023/24. For both urban and all other (regional) customers, the number of premises affected by frequent outages outside the reliability standard increased. Customers in urban areas who experienced more than nine outages during the year more than doubled from 3,719 to 10,346 (Figure 6.6). For all other areas, customers who experienced more than 16 outages during the year also more than doubled, from 2,528 to 7,340.

Figure 6.6 Premises affected by more outages than allowed under the NQ&R reliability standard (9 for urban, 16 for all other areas), Western Power



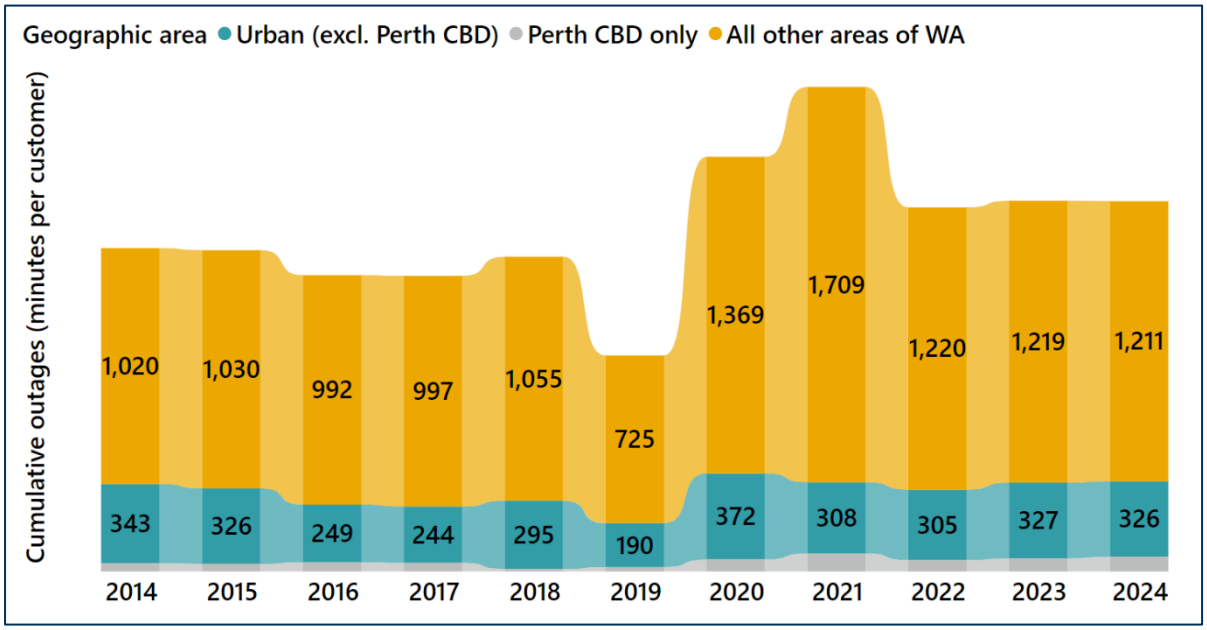
Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 2 (premises interrupted more than 9 times (urban), 16 times (regional).

The four-year average cumulative outage time remains lower than the peak in 2020/21 but higher than in any of the six years leading up to that point (Figure 6.7).

Cumulative outage time for customers in the Perth CBD increased from 57 minutes to 1 hour and 4 minutes, and for other urban customers it decreased by one minute to 5 hours and 26 minutes. For customers in all other areas of the state, cumulative outage time averages (at 20 hours and 11 minutes) were largely consistent with the year before but remain significantly longer than urban customers and significantly worse than the NQ&R Code reliability standard (290 minutes).

Western Power failed to meet the regulated reliability standard for each NQ&R Code area.

Figure 6.7 Western Power cumulative outages, four-year average, minutes per customers



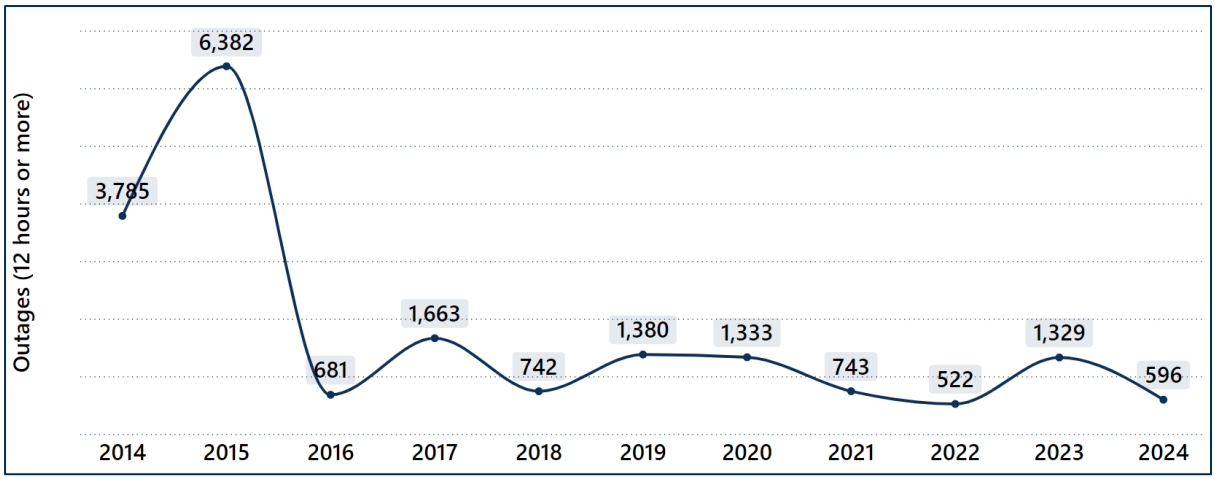
Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 6 (average cumulative duration of supply interruptions for each area).

Horizon Power

Horizon Power compliance with the reliability standard for outage durations has remained relatively consistent since 2015/16 (Figure 6.8). Fewer customers connected to Horizon Power networks experienced extended outages in 2023/24 compared to the year before, down from 1,329 to 596 – meaning Horizon Power compliance with the reliability standard improved.

The amount paid by Horizon Power to customers experiencing outages of 12 hours or more, indicates that most affected customers did not apply for the $120 compensation payment. Horizon Power paid around $8 on average for each outage lasting more than 12 hours in 2023/24.[41]

Figure 6.8 Premises affected by outages lasting longer than what is allowed under the NQ&R reliability standard (12 hours), Horizon Power

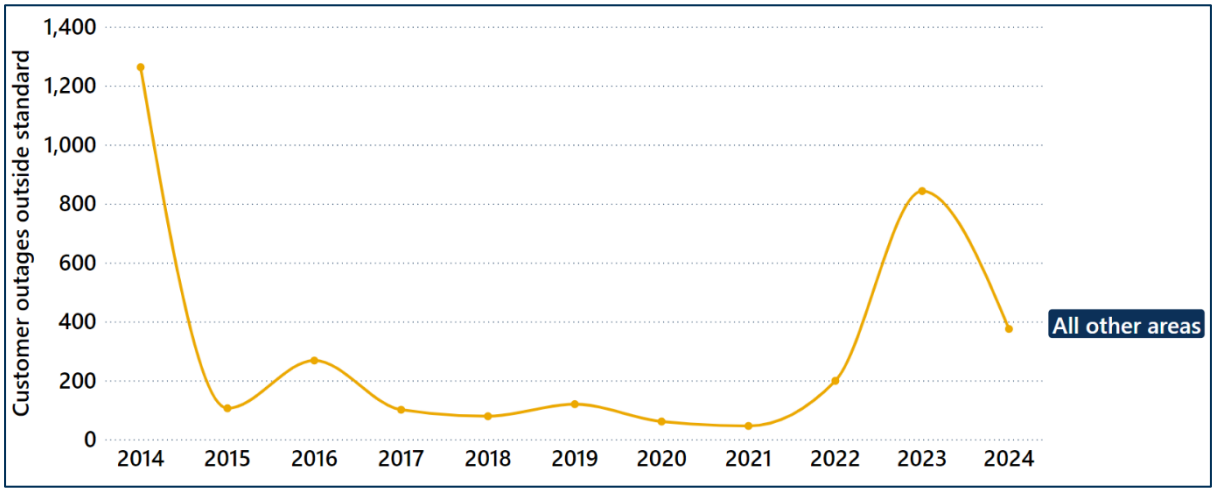


Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 1 (premises affected by outages lasting more than 12 hours).

[41] Horizon Power paid $4,800 to customers under section 19 of the NQ&R Code (electricity distribution indicator NQR 11), which equals $8.05 for each of the 596 premises affected (indicator NQR 1).

- Since Horizon Power does not supply any areas classed as urban, it only reports against the regional reliability standard. As with extended outages, the number of customers interrupted more than 16 times during 2023/24 fell compared to the year before (Figure 6.9).
- The number of customers affected by those frequent outages more than halved, from 843 to 375, meaning Horizon Power compliance with that reliability standard also improved.

Figure 6.9 Premises affected by more outages than allowed under the NQ&R reliability standard (9 for urban, 16 for all other areas), Horizon Power

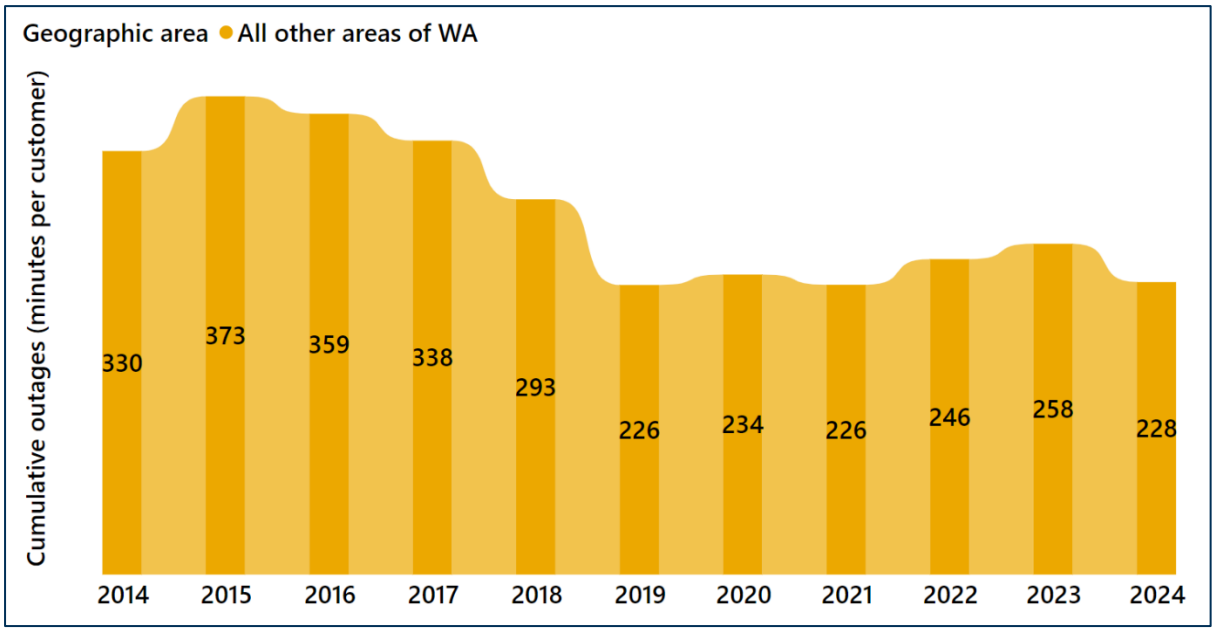


Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 2 (premises interrupted more than 9 times (urban), 16 times (regional).

The four-year average for cumulative outage time on Horizon Power networks improved by half an hour across 2023/24, down to three hours and 48 minutes (Figure 6.10).

That means that, on average across its different networks, Horizon Power did meet the reliability standard set in the NQ&R Code for cumulative outage time in the areas that it serves.

Figure 6.10 Horizon Power cumulative outages, four-year average, minutes per customers



Source: Electricity distribution indicator NQR 6 (average cumulative duration of supply interruptions for each area).

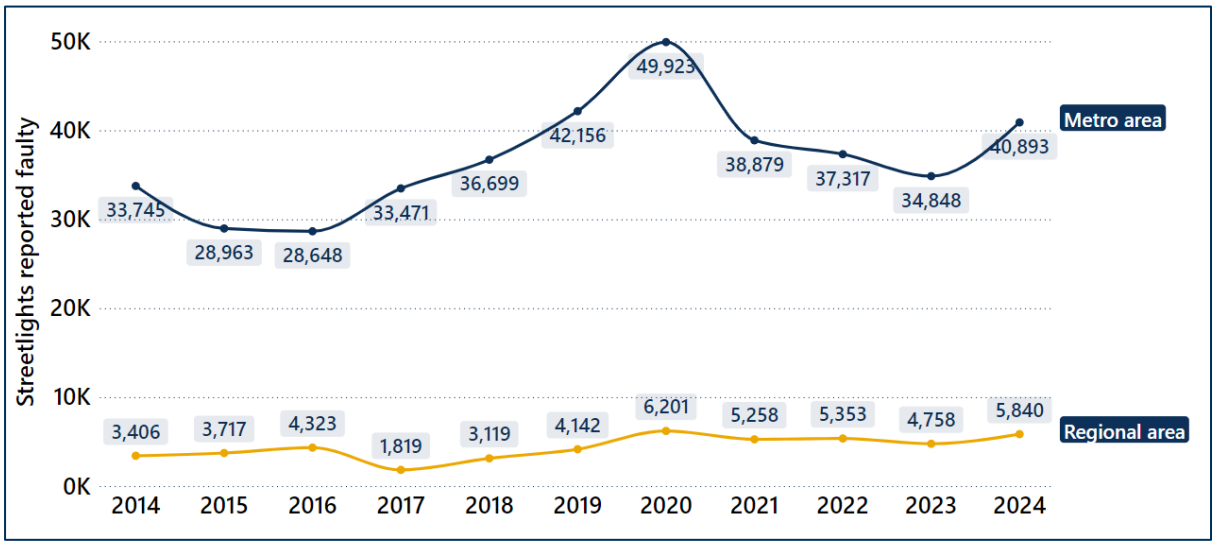
Streetlight repairs

There are no reliability standards for streetlights in the NQ&R Code, but we collect information from distributors on repair times in metropolitan and regional areas. For metropolitan areas, we collect data on the number of streetlights not repaired within five days and regional areas,

9 days. Streetlight reliability and pricing are also parts of the access arrangements we set for Western Power.

The number of faulty streetlight reports increased for both metropolitan and regional areas in 2023/24. There were 46,733 reports in total compared to 39,606 in 2022/23 (Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11 Streetlights reported faulty

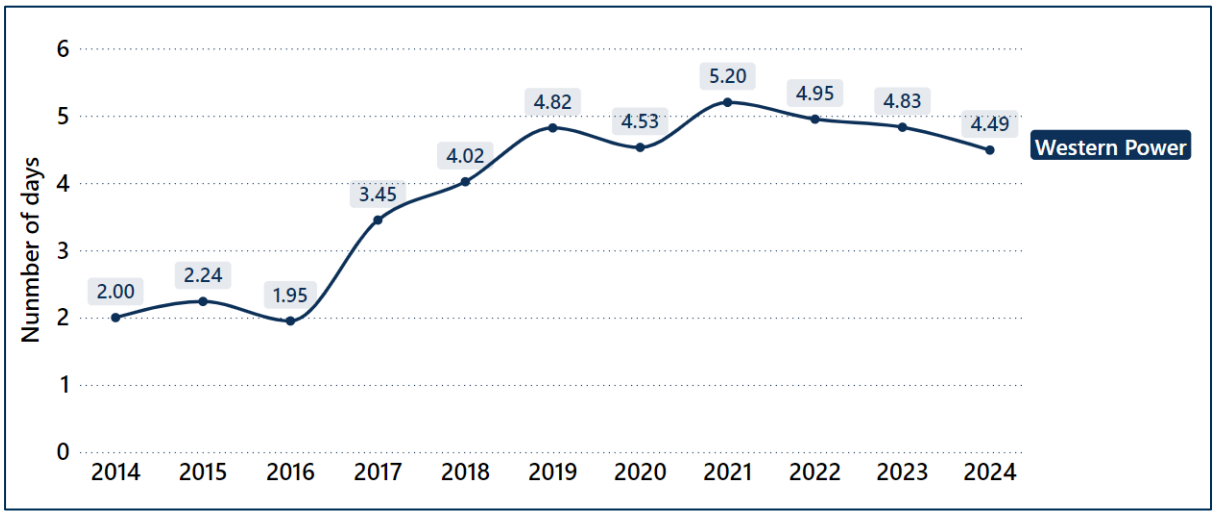


Source: Electricity distribution indicators CCD 24. CCD 25 (metropolitan / regional streetlight fault reports).

Only Wester Power manages streetlights in the metropolitan area, and average repair times for those improved again in 2023/24. The average repair time was 4.5 days, down from the 10-year high of 5.2 days in 2020/21 (Figure 6.12).

Performance improved for metropolitan streetlight repairs, with the proportion not repaired within five days falling from 25.5 per cent to 18.7 per cent. Western Power reported that better planning and grouping of faulty streetlights for repair in metropolitan and regional areas has improved repair times.

Figure 6.12 Metropolitan, average number of days for streetlights to be repaired



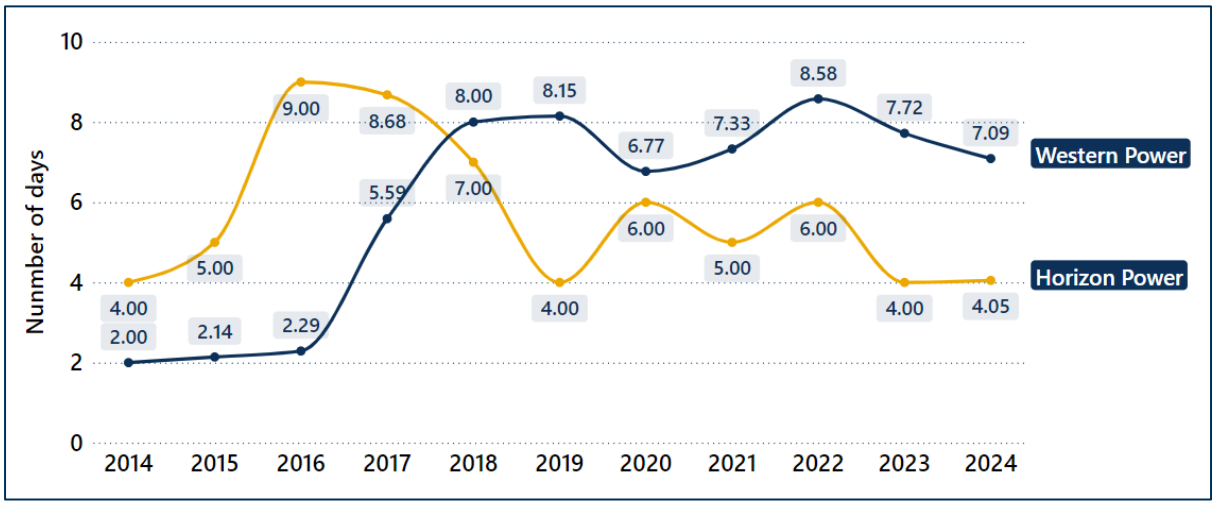
Source: Electricity distribution indicator CCD 32 (average number of days to repair faulty metropolitan streetlights).

All streetlights maintained by Horizon Power are in regional areas, meaning its repair times are all measured against the nine-day repair time. Horizon Power's average repair time remained around four days in 2023/24 – an improvement on 2019/20 to 2021/22 (Figure 6.13). Streetlights not repaired within nine days worsened marginally from 12.4 per cent to 13.4 per cent. Horizon Power noted the slight increase was because of increases in faulty reports

several hours away from its depots, and because it can take up to two weeks for local government approval of traffic management plans for repair work.

Western Power improved repair performance for regional streetlights, with the average repair time decreasing from 7.7 days to 7.1. The proportion not repaired within nine days also fell slightly from 18.4 per cent to 16.4 per cent. Western Power reported it has improved its streetlight data and, as a result it has reclassified or deleted some obsolete streetlight records.

Figure 6.13 Regional, average number of days for streetlights to be repaired



Source: Electricity distribution indicator CCD 33 (average number of days to repair faulty metropolitan streetlights).

6.3 Gas reliability

Gas distributors report the number of customer connections that experienced outages lasting longer than 12 hours. All outages that last more than five minutes are counted but are reported on a per customer basis. That means a connection is only counted once even if it has multiple outages during the year, meaning gas and electricity outage data are not directly comparable.

On 4 November 2024, we approved the transfer of Kleenheat's gas distribution licence to Supagas, but we refer to Kleenheat in this part of the report because it was the distribution operator for all of 2023/24.

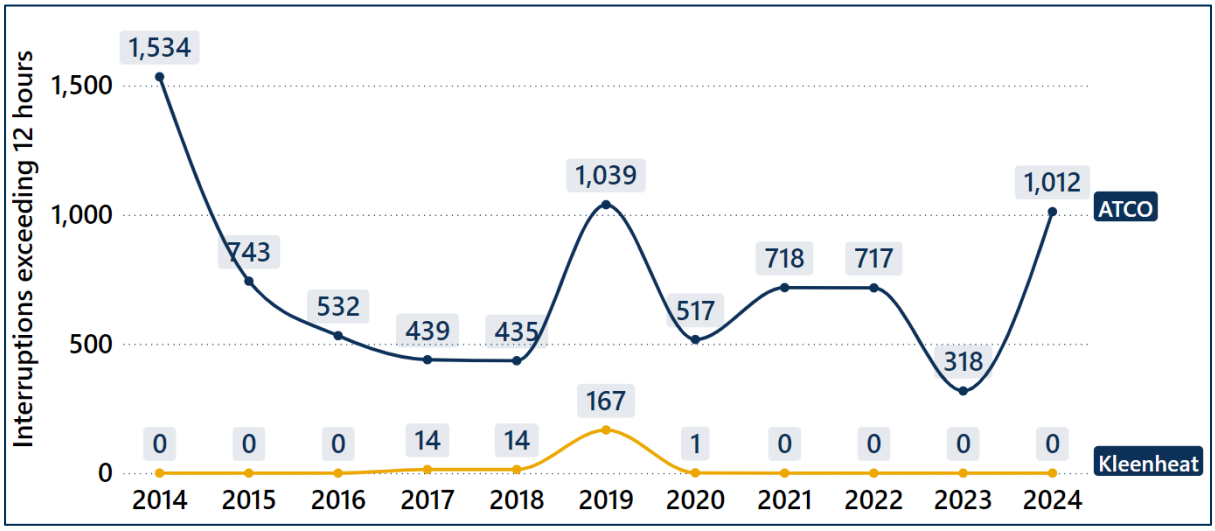
ATCO Gas

ATCO networks supply most gas customers in Western Australia, including all customers in the Perth and Peel metropolitan areas. As a result, it has reported the most supply interruptions over the past 10 years (Figure 6.14).

In 2023/24, ATCO interruptions lasting longer than 12 hours increased from 318 to 1,012 – the highest since 2019.

ATCO again attributed interruptions to water entering gas pipes. Water ingress is the most common cause of interruptions each year. ATCO also reported that third party-damage to mains was behind the gas supplies being interrupted for 114 customers for more than 12 hours.

Figure 6.14 Gas supply interruption events lasting longer 12 hours



Source: Gas distribution indicator D 14 (interruptions lasting longer than 12 hours).

Leak repairs

Gas distributors repair leaks to prevent gas losses on mains, service pipes, meters, regulators, or related distribution equipment. Data in this section excludes instances where further investigation finds no leaks.

Kleenheat and ATCO report low, medium and high-pressure repairs across their distribution networks and for each pressure category, repairs are segmented into mains, connections and meters.

Low, medium, and high pressure

When collecting data for any indicators related to leaks:

- Low pressure pipes are up to 7 kilopascals.
- Medium pressure is between 7 and 210 kilopascals.
- High pressure is 210 kilopascals or more.

Kleenheat reported only 43 leak repairs throughout the year. Most leak repairs are on ATCO networks because it has significantly more connections.

- Mains repairs increased from 203 to 370, which ATCO attributed to standard cycles in surveying for leaks year to year. Leak detection surveys take place over several years and mains repairs are more frequent in older suburbs.
- Connection repairs decreased from 5,809 to 5,238, while meter repairs increased from 1,002 to 2,369. ATCO attributed the increase in meter repairs to an increase in leak reports from members of the public. As with gas mains, distributors are also more likely to detect meter leaks in older suburbs, because older meters have a greater proportion of PCV components compared to those in newer suburbs.

Appendix 1 List of Tables

Appendix 2 List of Figures