

2023–2024 Annual Report



Utilities such as electricity, gas, water and telecommunications are a vital part of our lives. UDL resolves complaints between utility companies and their customers, restoring trust and doing its part to improve the services that are provided. This is how we do it.



**UTILITIES
DISPUTES**
TAUTOHETOHE
WHAIPAINGA

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A message from the Chair

In October 2024, my term as Tautohetohe Whaipanga | Utilities Disputes Chair will end. I will be stepping away after 10 years in the role. I am grateful for the time I have had at UDL and leave knowing it will continue to grow and develop in my absence.

When I began my term as UDL Chair in 2014, the organisation was known as the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commission. The year I joined, UDL received 6,457 total complaints and enquiries. This year we received 15,177. We had 61 members, all in the Energy Complaints Scheme – we now have 362 in energy, with a total of 369 members across all schemes.

UDL has seen some monumental changes in the past decade. In November 2016 we made the decision to rebrand to Utilities Disputes, to reflect the changing nature of utility complaints. To further address these changes, we have introduced three new schemes since the change: the Broadband Shared Property Access Disputes Scheme, and the voluntary Water Complaints and Telecommunications Complaints Schemes.

This reflection is not without purpose. The landscape in Aotearoa is changing again, with new challenges emerging. Cost of living and severe weather impact more and more consumers, who need an independent body to resolve issues and maintain trust with the industry. We cannot forecast what issues consumers will face in 10 years, but UDL's history suggests we will be ready to adapt, evolve, and continue serving our core purpose.



Our advisory committees are a crucial part to our development and continue to provide expert guidance from both consumer and industry perspectives. The Board joins me in thanking the members of our energy, broadband installation, and water committees for their support in shaping how UDL approaches these schemes.

My thanks to my fellow board members for their continued dedication to UDL. We have welcomed a few new faces this year: Kevin Angland joins us alongside Corey Hebbard, who served as a future director with us from 2022-23. We also welcome Richard Wills as a future director. Ruth Smithers and Kyle Christensen continue as board members.

The Board and I also extend thanks to Commissioner Neil Mallon, Deputy Commissioner Kalina Shipkov, and UDL staff for their continued excellence in supporting providers and consumers with expert dispute resolution. Thanks also to previous Commissioner Mary Ollivier, who exited the organisation in December, for her four years leading UDL.

I wish UDL every success for the future.

Titiro whakamuri, kōkiri whakamua
Look back and reflect so you can move forward

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Heather Roy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Hon Heather Roy

Heamana | UDL Chair

A message from the Commissioner

My time as UDL Commissioner began this year, as I took over from previous Commissioner Mary Ollivier. I am extremely grateful to Mary for her support during my time as Deputy Commissioner, and for her mahi in taking UDL to the great position it is currently in.

The past year has been one of adaptation and challenge as UDL has responded to a significant increase in demand.

The number of complaints received this year, increased by 48% the previous year. We attribute this rise to increased awareness due to our ongoing outreach work and our new customer relationship management (CRM) system, which allows us to better categorise complaints. We also believe consumers are applying more scrutiny to the services utility providers deliver and the bills they receive. A natural effect of the financial pressures we are dealing with at present.

To respond to this increase we restructured our Early Resolution Team so we could improve the support we provide in the early stages of the complaints process. Our new structure emphasises proactivity in working with consumers and providers to look for potential resolutions. It has created an environment where complaints are closed sooner, with less requiring formal investigation.

While we also saw a 19% decrease in the number of queries received, we attribute this to better messaging about our role from both UDL and providers.



This year we successfully piloted a voluntary Telecommunications Complaints Scheme to demonstrate our commitment to providing the best service possible for providers and consumers. We observed the increasing popularity of bundled deals for energy and broadband and tried to create an effective one-stop-shop for bundled complaints.

We also welcomed the results of the five yearly Independent Review of our Energy Complaints Scheme. The review concluded UDL is a trusted agency within the industry and that it was operating effectively. It also included recommendations on how UDL can improve, and we are grateful to Professor Ron Paterson for the review and its recommendations.

Going forward, we will continue to strengthen the delivery of our core services while looking for opportunities to increase the support we give to providers and consumers. Utilities services such as water, energy and telecommunications are fundamental to supporting and maintaining the wellbeing of all whānau. When an issue occurs, providers and customers need an independent service to get it sorted.

We continue our focus on our people. We have strengthened the mental health resources available to staff and improved the tools they use to manage their workload. Their wellbeing remains a priority, especially given the potential stresses of work in dispute resolution, and we will continue taking steps to ensure all staff are supported.

Finally, I want to pay special thanks to our Board, and outgoing Heamana | Chair Hon Heather Roy, who has been instrumental to UDL's success over the last 10 years. I also want to thank the entire UDL whānau for their tireless mahi. It is thanks to our people that we are able to continue growing and improving as a dispute resolution service.

He rangi tā Matawhāiti, he rangi tā Matawhānui.

The person with a narrow vision sees a narrow horizon, the person with a wide vision sees a wide horizon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Mallon', is displayed within a light gray rectangular box.

Neil Mallon

Toihau | Commissioner

Tumu Whakarae | Chief Executive Officer

2023 Independent Review of the UDL Energy Complaints Scheme

The Electricity Industry Act 2010 (Act) requires UDL to undertake an independent review of its energy complaints scheme every five years.

Professor Ron Paterson ONZM was selected to undertake the review and a copy of his report is available on UDL's website.

Professor Paterson reviewed UDL's compliance with the six essential principles from the Act:

- 1 Accessibility
- 2 Independence
- 3 Fairness
- 4 Accountability
- 5 Efficiency
- 6 Effectiveness.

He was also asked to consider whether:

- the energy scheme is operating effectively as an integrated scheme capable of dealing with a wide range of complaints, competently governed and managed, broadly supported by members and adequately funded
- the early resolution model is appropriate
- UDL's dispute resolution practice is consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- what improvements are needed to UDL's dispute resolution practice.

Professor Paterson confirmed UDL's Energy Complaints Scheme is operating effectively and meeting the standards expected of a dispute resolution scheme.

UDL's Energy Complaints Scheme is operating effectively and meeting the standards expected of a dispute resolution scheme.

Some of the report's key findings were:

- the universally held view expressed by external stakeholders is that the energy scheme works well and that UDL is a trusted, independent agency that resolves utilities disputes fairly and reasonably
- the scheme is readily accessible to consumers and easy to use, however, low visibility among members of the public, especially vulnerable communities and individuals experiencing energy hardship, remains an issue
- the quality of decision making is generally high, and fairness and independence is evident at all stages of the complaint handling process
- the commitment to improving UDL's Te Tiriti capability is impressive, and it is reaping benefits by upskilling staff in Te Reo and Te Ao Māori, developing a sense of kotahitanga and ensuring that UDL's dispute resolution services are consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and accessible to Māori complainants.

There were a number of recommendations for improving the scheme, including reducing the time it takes to resolve cases that proceed to formal investigation, increasing our community engagement resources, increasing the publication of guidance and the identification and reporting of systemic issues. UDL is working through the recommendations and has already introduced measures in response that will further improve the services it delivers to providers and consumers.

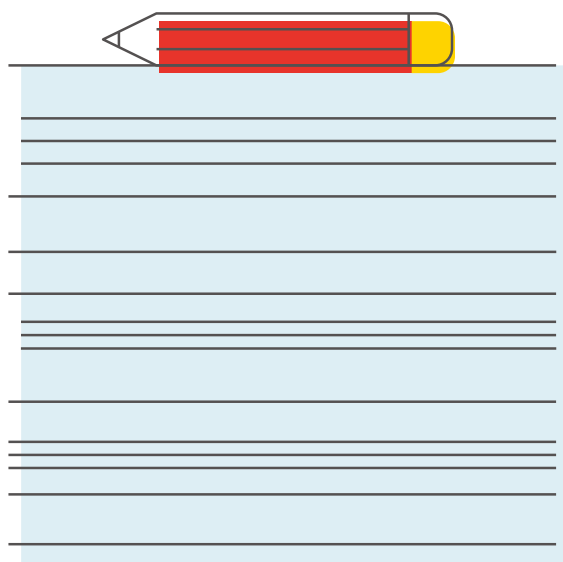
The year in numbers

We are hearing significantly more of your complaints

48%

increase in the number of complaints compared to last year

This is likely because of increased awareness due to our ongoing outreach work and our new customer relationship management (CRM) system, which allows us to better categorise complaints.



15,421

complaints and enquiries were received in 2023 to 2024

(15,177 in 2022 to 2023)

2,064

complaint summaries were produced on behalf of consumers in 2023–2024

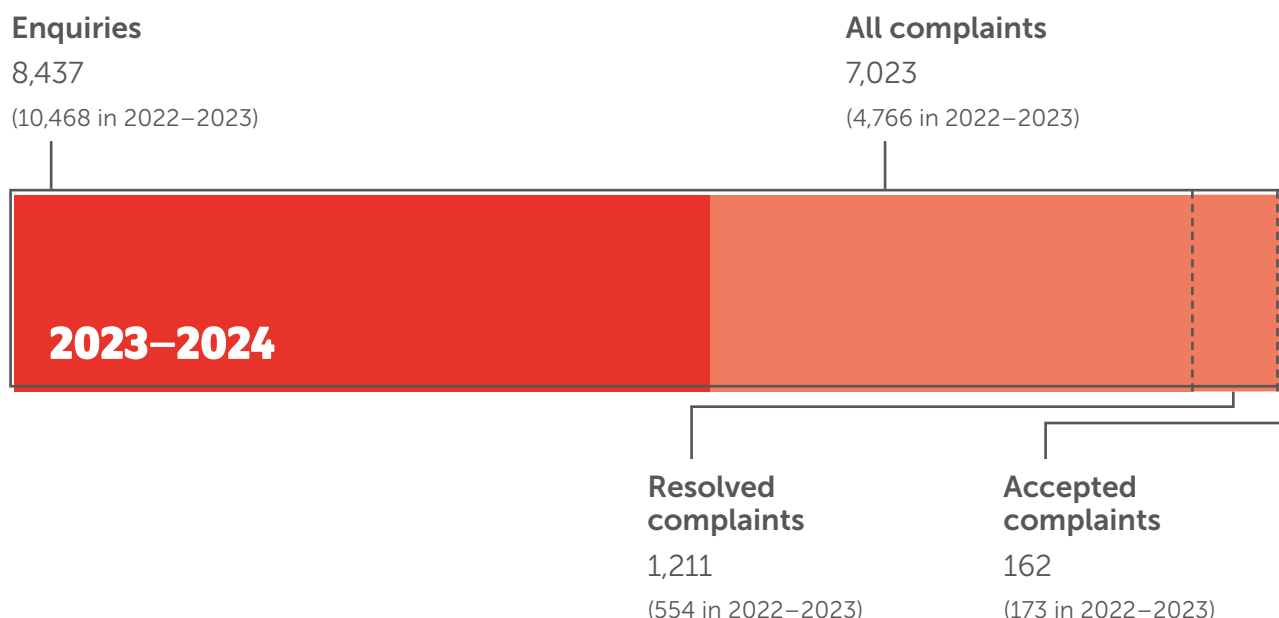
55%

increase on the previous year

Complaint summaries written

One of the main ways our First Contact Team assists in resolving complaints is by producing a complaints summary for consumers. This is a succinct written summary of their complaint and what they want to resolve it, drafted using our experience of resolving consumer complaints. In the past year we produced 2064 complaints summaries, a 55% increase on the previous year.

All schemes – Complaints and enquiries resolved



How do we categorise the work we do?



Enquiries – where a consumer is simply seeking information or assistance or has contacted us in error (thinking they were calling their provider).

Complaints – an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about a provider where a response or a resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. If the complaint is within 20 working days, we may carry out a three-way call or other dispute resolution method, provide a complaint summary or connect the consumer to their provider.

Deadlocked Complaints – a provider generally has 20 working days to resolve a complaint once it is referred to the provider by UDL. If we are advised the complaint is not resolved after this period, it is described as being at “deadlock”. At this stage we assess whether we have jurisdiction to accept it or whether there are grounds to take no further action perhaps because the provider has already made a fair and reasonable offer. A serious complaint such

as a potential disconnection may be able to be deadlocked without waiting for the 20-day period to expire. A provider is able to challenge jurisdiction when a complaint is at deadlock.

Resolved Deadlock Complaints – these are deadlocked complaints that have been resolved without being accepted. They can be closed for a number of reasons. An offer may have been made by the provider which the Commissioner decides is appropriate to provide a fair and reasonable outcome and a decision is issued to confirm this. The complaint may also be closed by agreement after UDL has facilitated a resolution.

Accepted Complaints – these are deadlocked complaints that are accepted as being within jurisdiction, suitable for investigation and are referred to the Conciliation and Investigation Team. If they cannot be resolved, the Commissioner will issue a decision.

Complaints and enquiries

UDL's operational work is largely undertaken by three teams:

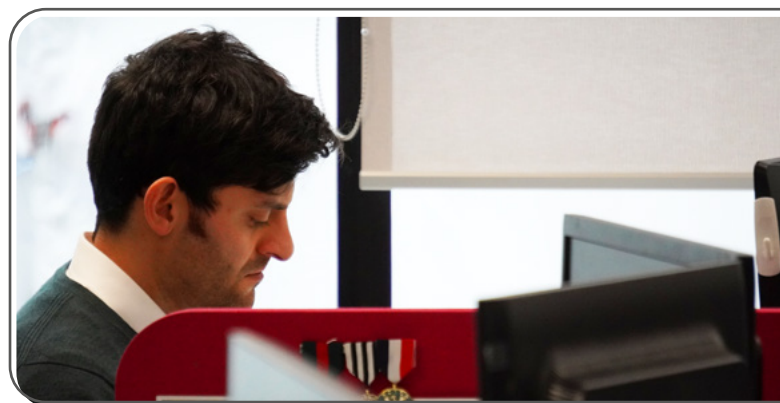
1. **First Contact** which receives all incoming complaints and enquiries, provides guidance and refers consumers to providers and other organisations as necessary. It also deals with urgent complaints, for example those involving disconnections, and produces complaint summaries.
2. **Early Resolution** was greatly enhanced in the year and this team works on resolving complaints after the provider has had an opportunity to resolve them (deadlocked cases). It applies dispute resolution techniques to resolve complaints by agreement but can also produce decisions and its aim is to resolve suitable complaints early and reduce the number that need to go to the Conciliation and Investigation Team
3. **Conciliation & Investigation** work with the complainant and the provider to resolve the complaints that have been accepted for consideration. Complaints reaching this stage are usually more complex and not suitable for early resolution.

Background

In 2021, the Electricity Authority (EA) introduced changes to increase UDL's profile on energy Retailer's bills collateral. This resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of enquiries and complaints that UDL received.

While the amount of contacts we received in the past year remained fairly consistent, we saw a **19% decrease** in enquiries received, and a **48% increase** in complaints received. This increase is significant and can be attributed to three factors:

1. our new customer relationship management system (CRM) is more accurate at tagging complaints and enquiries



2. our increased community engagement has raised awareness of UDL amongst communities and those who support consumers experiencing vulnerability and hardship
3. the impact of increasing financial hardship, causing more consumers to experience hardship and motivating them to apply more scrutiny to their bills and the services providers deliver.

As a dispute resolution service, we need to be nimble, empathetic, smart and resilient to help both providers and customers.

To respond to the challenges and increased demand on our services, we have realigned our organisation structure, and shifted resources to our First Contact and Early Resolution areas to focus on resolving complaints at the earliest stage. We have also made changes to our annual reporting.

For the first time, this year's report provides a breakdown of the complaints that have reached deadlock but were resolved by our Early Resolution Team without the need to be accepted. These are shown as 'Resolved Deadlocked Complaints' and the data shows the value our Early Resolution Team is providing to consumers and providers, by resolving complaints in a fast and effective manner.

As previously announced our telecommunications scheme operated on a pilot basis last year for Contact Energy. We have chosen not to provide detailed data in relation to the scheme for this reason also because it would be impossible to anonymise the data in the same way we do for our other schemes.

Enquiries – how we performed

8,424

enquiries were received

We received 8,424 enquiries, and our Early Resolution Team resolved 8,434. The small number of higher resolved figure includes the small number of enquiries resolved from the previous year.

Complaints – how we performed

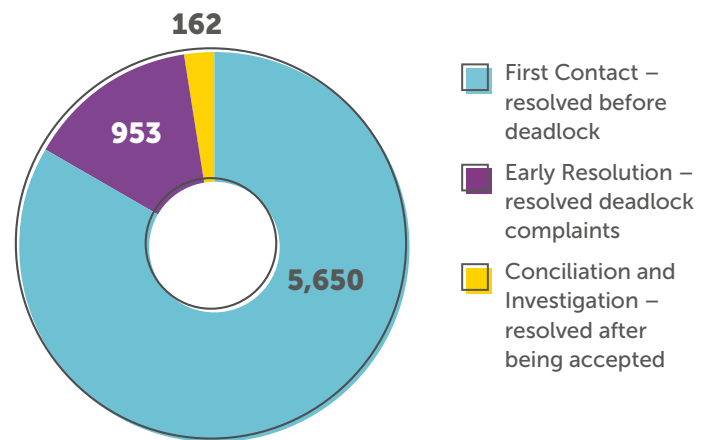
7,023

complaints and disputes were received

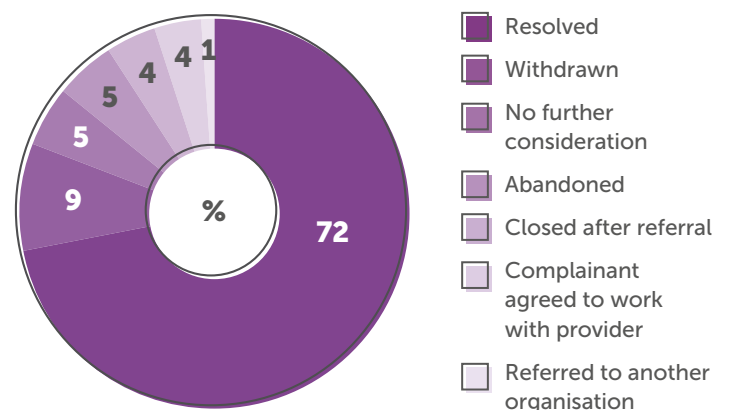
There was a **104% increase** in the amount of deadlocked complaints received. While we would normally expect to see a significant amount of these complaints being referred to the Conciliation and Investigation Team, the work undertaken by our Early Resolution Team meant there was only an **18% increase** in accepted cases referred to the Conciliation and Investigation Team from last year.

Of the 7,023 complaints and disputes we resolved:

1. **5,650** were resolved by our **First Contact Team** at the earliest stage.
2. **953** were resolved by our **Early Resolution Team** in an average of 23 days. These are resolved deadlocked complaints, as they are complaints the provider has already had an opportunity to resolve but has been unable to do so.
3. **162** were resolved by our **Conciliation and Investigation Team**. These are typically the more complex and entrenched complaints that require more investigation and often result in a decision by our Commissioner.



How we closed complaints 2023–2024



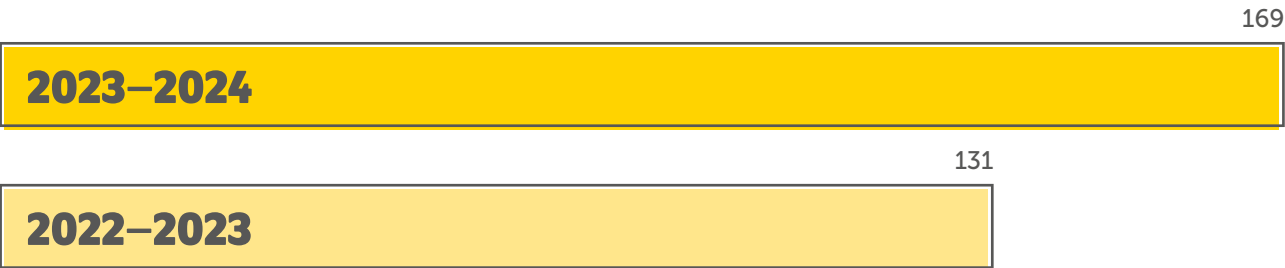
Resolved deadline complaints by Early Resolution Team 2023–2024

Below and over the following pages are tables for each Scheme comparing accepted complaints and disputes received and closed.

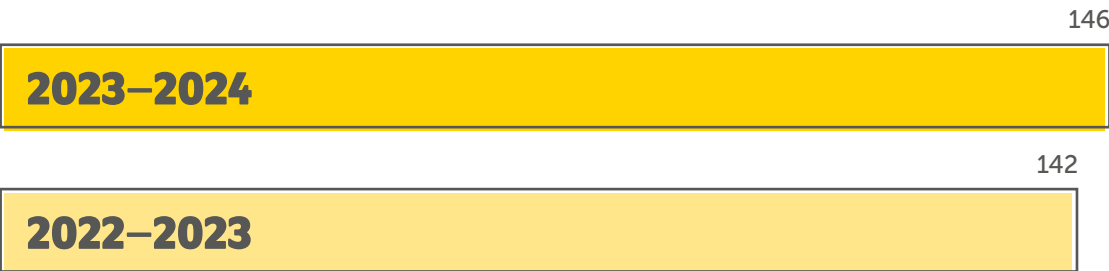
Energy (electricity and gas)



Received and closed accepted complaints



Received accepted complaints



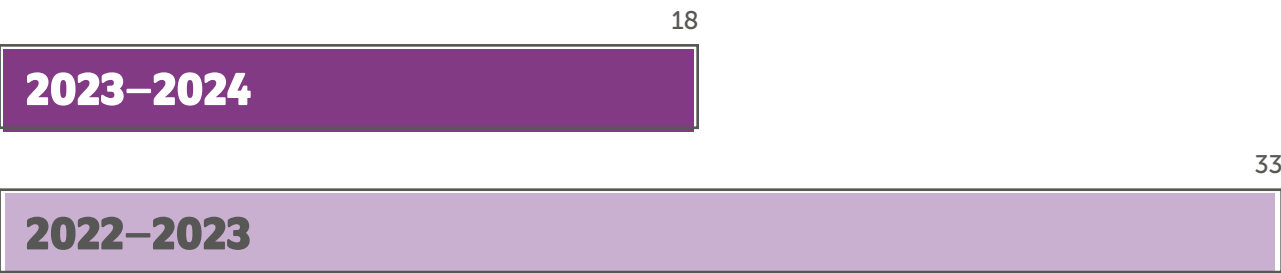
Closed accepted complaints

UDL operates the government mandated electricity and gas complaints schemes for all of new Zealand Aotearoa and has done so for more than 21 years. It accounts for more than 95% of the complaints we receive.

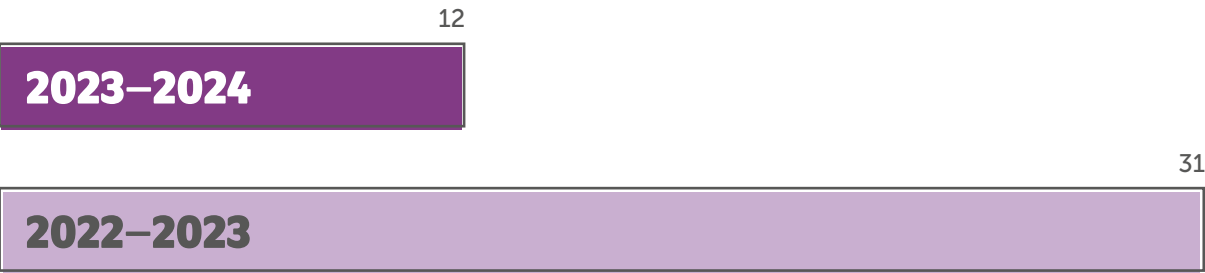
Broadband Shared Property Access Disputes Scheme



Received and closed disputes



Received accepted disputes



Closed accepted disputes

73

total disputes received
(81 in 2022-2023)

UDL has provided the BSPAD scheme since 2017. It was put in place to assist with the national roll out of fibre by allowing fibre to be installed on shared property if certain requirements were adhered to. The BSPAD scheme can be accessed if there is a dispute about the right to install.

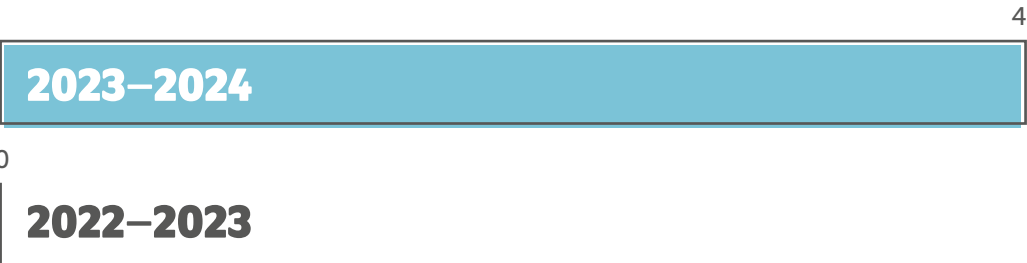
Water



Received and closed accepted complaints



Received accepted complaints



Closed accepted complaints

69

total complaints received
(29 in 2022–2023)

UDL operates three voluntarily water disputes schemes. We’ve operated voluntary water schemes since 2018, and they now cover over 2 million people throughout Aotearoa, spread over more than 500,000 households.

Review of Energy, BSPAD and Water schemes against their performance standards

The following performance standards apply to accepted complaints in our three main schemes: Energy, BSPAD and Water.

The reporting timeframes for accepted complaints are calculated from when a complaint reaches deadlock and is accepted until it is closed. UDL did not meet its timeliness targets for the closure of accepted cases in the reporting year. This will be an area of significant focus for the year ahead.

Deadlock cases that are not accepted are typically the complaints resolved by our Early Resolution Team (ERT). We are developing Service Level Agreements to support this work stream which will be reported on annually once approved by the UDL Board.

Time to close cases

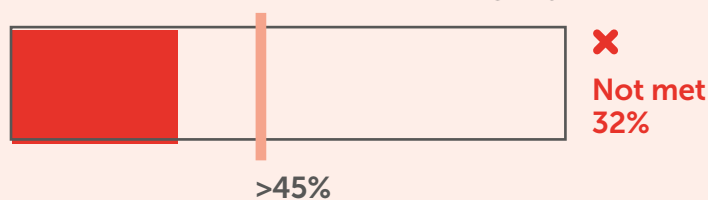
The performance standards of 45% and 75% respectively for time to close accepted cases were not met this year. At year end, 32% of cases were closed in under 30 working days, and 70% of cases were closed in under 90 working days.

The focus on closing long running cases has had an impact on our average days to close accepted complaints, as we closed a number of our oldest complaints during the year. The changes to our Early Resolution Team has also had an impact, as they are closing cases that may have (previously) been accepted and closed in a short timeframe.

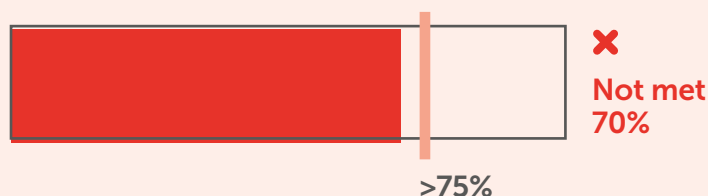
We have introduced a number of initiatives, including KPIs and measures to improve our decision making and reduce the time it takes to close accepted cases and expect these to make a difference.

Performance Standard A

>45% DL cases closed in 30 working days



>75% DL cases closed in 90 working days



80

days on average to close accepted complaints

Complainant satisfaction

We introduced feedback surveys in 2021. We had to pause these for a short period and redesign the process when implementing our new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in 2023. This means there is a short gap in our satisfaction data which runs from 12 May 2023 to 31 March 2024.

We survey complainants for different parts of our process with questions around effectiveness, ease of use, respect, understanding, and timeliness.

Our overall complainant satisfaction scored an average of 4.28 out of 5.

Our complainant satisfaction for the early resolution part of the process scored an average of 4.26 out of 5. Our complainant satisfaction for the conciliation part of the process scored an average of 4.56 out of 5.

Performance Standard B

Goal: Reaching an average of 4 out of 5



Provider satisfaction

Provider satisfaction is monitored in the same way as complainant satisfaction. We survey providers at the point where a complaint concluded throughout our process. From 12 May 2023 to 31 March 2024 our provider satisfaction scored an average of 4.11 out of 5.

Performance Standard C

Goal: Reaching an average of 4 out of 5



Awareness and accessibility

Our awareness and accessibility is 20% unprompted recognition in a general awareness survey.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) consumer awareness survey is carried out every two years. It was last carried out in 2022 and reported in 2023.

UDL scored 10% for prompted general awareness, this compares with 9% in 2020 and 8% in 2018, while lower than other like organisations it increased against the general trend. MBIE did not produce a figure for unprompted awareness of UDL or any other dispute resolution schemes.

We know that our awareness in increasing with our targeted work in community engagement across Aotearoa and we aim to keep increasing this awareness.

We are also exploring other options to assess our awareness and reach and in September 2023 a Consumer New Zealand Report for dispute resolution and telcos in general highlighted 13% prompted awareness so there is work to do in this space.

Performance Standard D

20% unprompted recognition in general awareness survey

Not conducted. See comments to the left.



Prompted general awareness

Compliance reporting – complete, accurate and on time

The UDL Board monitors provider compliance with the Scheme. UDL's annual self-review of compliance is scheduled to be completed in June 2024, the previous self-review of compliance was completed in June 2023.

Performance Standard E

Compliance reporting for the Energy Scheme is complete, accurate and on time. We are scheduled to complete the self-review exercise in June.

✓ Met

External review of cases

A selection of cases were reviewed by Professor Paterson as part of his independent review of our energy scheme and have been referenced in the independent report. Professor Paterson commented:

In my view, UDL's written decisions, explaining the reasons for a 'no further consideration' decision or a recommendation to uphold or reject a complaint (and, if the former, the basis for recommended compensation) are clear, logical, use plain English and are well written and presented. They compare favourably with decisions from other Ombudsman services known to me. The investment in training staff in decision writing is clearly paying dividends.

In more complex cases, I was impressed by the quality assurance provided by the Deputy Commissioner and noted extensive edits and comments on matters needing further Energy Scheme Independent Review 2023 explanation. These are the hallmarks of good quality decision writing in an Ombudsman's office.

Performance Standard F

Assess complaint handling as meeting requirements of natural justice and good complaint handling

Conducted as part of the Independent Review by Professor Ron Paterson

The impartiality and independence of UDL as decision maker was also clearly evident in the files I reviewed.

I detected no signs of UDL being "in the pockets of industry" or acting as "just a woolly consumer organisation always on the side of the consumer". Rather, I observed meticulous care to "walk the tightrope of independence."

Professor Paterson did raise issues with the timeliness of our decision making and the benefit of seeking an earlier senior review of files. These are matters we are focusing on in the year ahead.

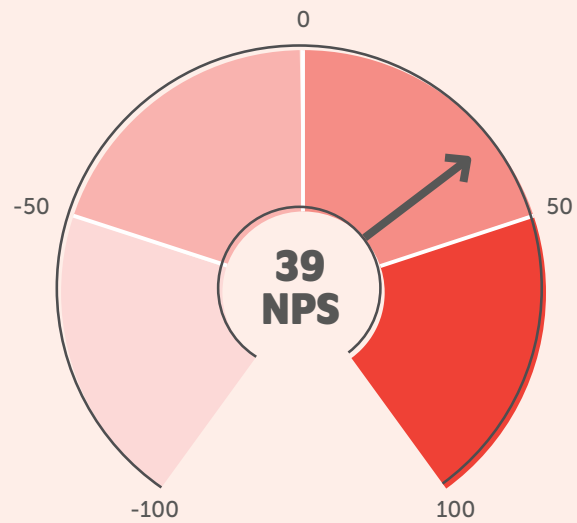
Other feedback scores

Net Promoter Score = GREAT

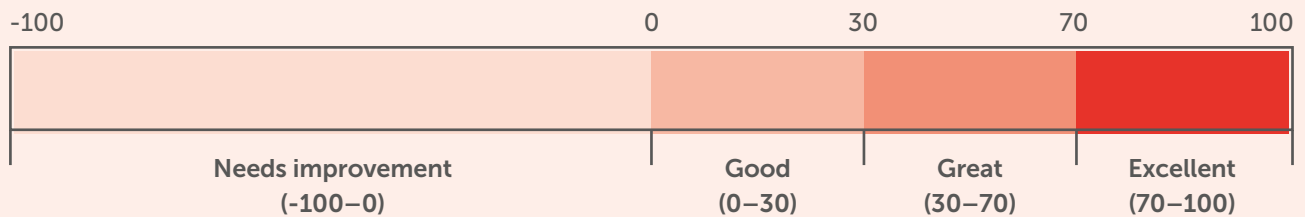
A Net Promoter Score (NPS) measures customer loyalty by looking at their likelihood of recommending a given service/company/business to a friend or colleague.

An NPS score is measured with a single-question survey and reported with a number ranging from -100 to +100, where a higher score is desirable.

Our Net Promoter Score (NPS) is **GREAT** with a score of **39**.



What is a good NPS score?



Our people

We are immensely proud of Team UDL. Here are some highlights from the year on supporting our people and developing the organisation, including the tools we rely on to deliver our services.



Organisational realignment

UDL realigned the organisation so that we can deliver the required level of service to our customers both providers and consumers. This has enabled us to focus more resources into our frontline operational areas.

Staff training and development

All operational staff undertake the Resolution Institute's five-day mediation training course, which covers the fundamentals of dispute resolution and prepares attendees for accreditation as mediators. Five UDL staff attended the course this year and we will support them to obtain accreditation as a mediator, which improves their ability to resolve complaints and restore trust between providers and consumers.

We are very proud to have a staff member achieve accreditation to provide tikanga based mediation through the Resolution Institute and the Tūhono Collective.

Our staff have also received specific technical training on energy, telecommunications and water.

Our Early Resolution Team Manager received training and support from the Australian Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) office as part of preparing for our new telecommunications scheme. This was possible due to the good working relationship between UDL and the TIO and it helped make sure staff were aware of potential technical issues presented by the new scheme.



Ali our accredited tikanga mediator

Our people continued...



Community engagement

Staff also benefit from joining our Community Engagement Officer Jessica Niemack when she meets with providers and consumers. This allows them to gain first-hand experience of the work undertaken by community support organisations and the issues that impact consumers and providers.

ERT Team leader Willow and Markus Frey Senior Manager Strategy and Innovation with I am Mangere's Yup Komal, HR Support.

Staff engagement

UDL has measures and tracks staff engagement annually using Gallup engagement surveys. We have done this since 2018. We have seen continued to improvement in our results and are currently in the 75–89th percentile in our category for similar organisations in New Zealand. This aligns with the findings of our five-year review which reported UDL as described by staff as ***“a place where people want to come to work, with lots of opportunities to grow – almost a family”***.

Official living wage employer

UDL was delighted to become an official living wage employer with Living Wage Aotearoa in early 2024.

We're committed to providing our staff with everything they need to sort consumer complaints, and ensuring our team is always compensated fairly for their amazing mahi.

Community engagement

This past year has seen us expand our community engagement building on the previous year and insights gleaned from our focus groups in 2023.

Our Community Engagement Officer has held fortnightly clinics where she engages directly with consumers, answers questions or asks people to bring in their utilities bill if they have a concern and talks them through it and connects them directly to UDL staff if they have an issue.

We began a regular clinic at The Pride Project Community House in Manurewa and then began a second clinic with I Am Māngere working with Navigators in both areas as well as open to the public to talk through any utilities concerns.



Jessica Niemack

Tautohetohe Whaipainga Kaitūtakinga UDL
Community Engagement Officer

We held roadshows and events in a number of locations covering Auckland, Matamata, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Waitara, Gisborne, Taupō, Rotorua and Turangi where our Community Engagement Officer was accompanied by staff from our Early Resolution Team/Conciliation and Investigation Team and/or our Māori Cultural Advisor.

We attended many events including Permobil's Eden Park event with Professor Ron Paterson dropping by, Bari Lane Expo, Waitara Night Markets and more. You can see highlights here. We also introduced Udee, our community mascot who is always happy to pose for a photo or be part of a roadtrip!

Our roadshows have been developed as part of our overall community engagement with the focus on reaching organisations that work with consumers with vulnerabilities incorporating our Māori engagement. The more who know about us the more people we can help. The first roadshow in April 2023 built a presence in Hamilton, Rotorua and New Plymouth and began building trust with those communities that we continue to build on.



Top left: On the road with Udee in November with the Waitara fire brigade.

Bottom left: Ali Cameron at the Tairāwhiti rural roadshow.

Without trust relationships cannot grow. To 'capture' how we build trust we have developed a community engagement framework that enables us to see at a glance how, when and with whom we are building relationships.

Our format for roadshow events and community engagement meetings is relatively simple: a short presentation followed by questions and discussion with collateral that tells our story and using our UDL car to expand our brand, or a simple stall. Events are often held at local community group offices such as CAB, Habitat for Humanity, local libraries, community projects and houses such as Bari Lane, The Pride Project and Community Law.



Top left: Jessica at the Bari Lane Expo in September.

Top right: Jessica with Petunia from the WISE Trust in May.

Bottom left: Jessica at an ACOFI event in 2023.

Bottom right: Doing the mahi for Bellyful in food preparation packs.

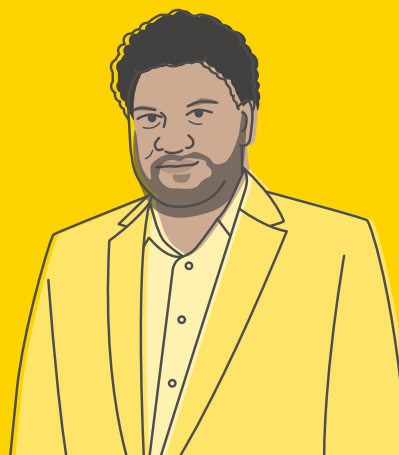
Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi strategy

Assisted by our Māori Cultural Advisor our Te Ao Māori capability and relationship building continues to grow. This includes:

- weekly Te Reo lessons
- translation of our website and information materials
- having staff available to provide tikanga accredited mediation
- building relationships with local iwi
- Te Tiriti workshops.

We regularly engage regularly with Ōrākei Marae, Te Tahawai Marae and other iwi community support organisations as part of our outreach work.

A key highlight was visiting Owae Marae in Waitara to celebrate the signing of Te Ruruku Pūtakerongo a collective redress package deal that will see Taranaki Maunga gain personhood as Te Kāhui Tupua, and a co-governance framework applied in management of the national park now known as Te Papakura o Taranaki. It was a significant day for Aotearoa, recognising the claim of Ngā Iwi o Taranaki, after a lengthy settlement process and our Māori Cultural Advisor, Selwyn Lackner-Priest, attended as part of his UDL role in addition to his separate role as part of the organising committee.



Selwyn Lackner-Priest

Pou Tikanga

UDL Māori Cultural Advisor



Jessica Niemack.



Selwyn Lackner-Priest.

Membership

Whakakati Prevent Mātauranga Educate Whakatatū Resolve

We continue to work with our members to enable sorting complaints earlier and faster using our platform of Whakakati Mātauranga Whakatatū.

This helps both the consumer and the member organisation.

We do this in a variety of ways through our mahi with webinars, our annual forum and face-to-face meetings.

Our annual forum is an opportunity for our members to learn from guest speakers and the UDL team taking away practical information they can use in the day-to-day mahi.

[View members](#)



Only positive – we had a complaint that went to UDL recently and the staff there were very helpful and great throughout the whole process.

369

members in 2023–2024

(374 in 2022–2023)



362

Energy

(368 in 2022–2023)



3

Broadband
Shared Property
Access Disputes

(3 in 2022–2023)



3

Water

(3 in 2022–2023)



1

Telco

The change in numbers can be attributed to our new customer relationship management system (CRM) and database 'cleanup' as well as a number of organisations who had amalgamated.

Annual Forum

Our 2024 forum was tailored for staff of our scheme members and was well attended with over 60 registrations from many different providers and community organisations. Topics were carefully selected to encourage learning and with tips that could be taken back, shared and used in day-to-day work. Topics covered – what makes a reasonable offer through to resilience in the modern world, the art of negotiation, billing issues, our new monthly provider reports and the proposed model electricity bill. There was plenty of discussion and the room was abuzz with conversation throughout the day.



Here is what people had to say:



I thoroughly enjoyed the day – the content and seminars were incredibly interesting!



What a brilliant forum UDL hosted last week!



Will definitely get others to attend next year – was fantastic. Thank you – loved it! Maybe shuffle tables for even more interaction.

Top left: Dr Lehan Stemmet's workshop on *Resilience in the Modern World*.

Middle left: Deep discussion during the day.

Bottom left: *One Bill for All?* panel (Paul Fuge, Powerswitch; Quentin Caddis, Nova Energy; Bridget Abernethy, ERANZ; Chloe Muhan, Flick; Jessica Wilson, Consumer Advocacy Council).

Webinars

Six webinars were held over the past 12 months which we also publish on our website:

- Internal presentation: *Case studies*
- Internal presentation: *High bills and back bills*
- Ron Beatty: *Disconnections*
- Riki Jamieson-Smyth: *Privacy in complaints handling*
- Tim Kerr: *Gas 101*
- Internal presentation: *Induction and our processes.*

We averaged over 100 registrations per webinar with the best performing the Disconnections webinar with 170 registrants and 110 viewers. We know anecdotally and from analytics that members and communities (such as Citizen Advice Bureaus (CABs)) use our webinars for training and reference purposes.

Registrants are sent a feedback form following each webinar, and we average 12 responses per webinar. Respondents are asked to rank how useful they found the webinar from 1–5, and if their expectations were met.

3.9



Average usefulness rating

3.7



Average expectations met rating

Our webinars provide information for support staff (Energy scheme members), staff from community organisations and individuals understand utilities dispute resolution and how UDL can help.

We hope to produce webinars specifically for CABs in the coming year.

Website

We continually review our website, making changes that are user-friendly. We continue our work to make the entire website available in Te Reo.

Analytics show that in the past 12 months (May 2023 to April 2024) there were 125,000 visits to the website by 61,000 individual users, with an engagement rate of 37%. Engagement rate is calculated by combining reactions, comments and shares. We have seen a 35% increase in visits from the same period last year. Of these users, 7,594 accessed the complaint form.

Our Google Business Profile had 5,278 views over the same period, directing 871 users to the website, and 444 calls were initiated through the profile.



Your website is very clear with beautiful graphics.

Consumer

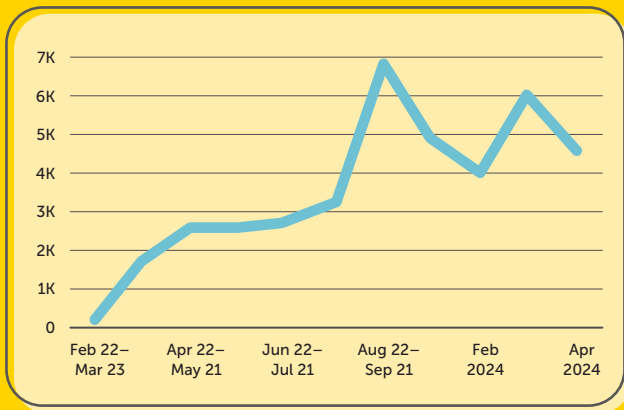


Social media

Following the introduction of a social media strategy in early 2023, UDL's social media channels continues to grow. We maintain a Facebook page and LinkedIn business page, averaging two posts on Facebook and one on LinkedIn every week.

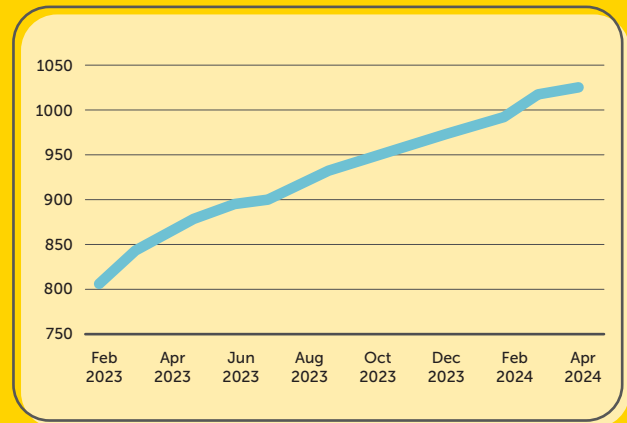
August 2023 was our highest performing month, with a total reach of 6,963 across platforms. This included a post that reached 4,578 accounts – the best reach in UDL history.

Our social media exposure is entirely organic, without the use of any paid advertising or post boosting.



UDL social media monthly reach

Our monthly reporting shows that, despite fluctuation, the trend is consistent growth in audience reached. In the month prior to our social media strategy, UDL reached 140 accounts across social media platforms, while in 2024 we have averaged 5,148 reach per month. This growth is reflected in our follower base, which increased by 211 since the implementation of the new strategy, to 1,112 total followers across platforms.



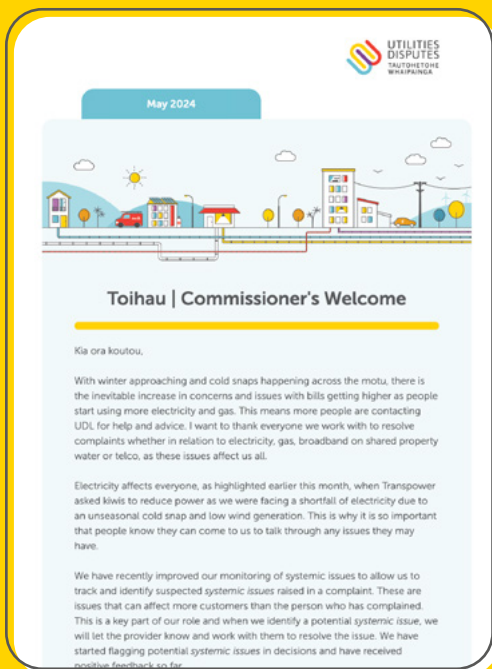
UDL total social media following

We have made significant strides in increasing our reach throughout 2023, peaking at a nearly 5,000% increase in monthly reach relative to pre-social media strategy months.

Newsletters

We published nine newsletters in the past 12 months.

Our newsletters are an opportunity to share engaging and informative content about UDL with members and community organisations, including updates to our processes, new schemes, and case studies. We also use this channel to further communicate our community engagement and Te Ao Māori journey and you can read more about that in this Report.



40%

In the past year over 40% of our 1,500 subscribers opened our newsletters, with our best performing newsletter in December 2023, which reached 842 unique accounts.

General provider feedback:



I think you do a good job, and the regular webinars are great.



Thank you and your team for all the help and support over the last year – in particular the Early Resolution Team who have assisted us in resolving complaints quickly.

Complainant feedback:



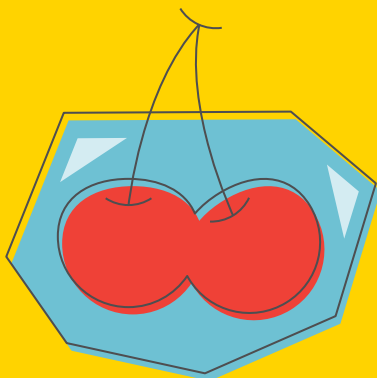
I am grateful for the Awhi you have given to get through this stressful situation. It is so good to have a company like you that can be the bridge between the power company and the people.



Thank you UDL for your involvement in this case. Your decision was “brilliantly written” and helped with the continuation of the dispute in the disputes tribunal.



The frosted crops



Mr Hudson relied on electricity to grow cherries at his farm.

In September a severe cold snap hit the farm and surrounding area. The cold temperatures caused a two-hour power outage, and the loss of his entire cherry crop valued at approximately \$45,000.

Mr Hudson believed the power outage could have been avoided, and the cherry crop saved, if his power distributor Local Electricity had properly maintained its network. Mr Hudson sought compensation from Local Electricity and complained to Utilities Disputes (UDL) when this was rejected.

UDL investigated Mr Hudson's complaint, including what caused the outage and damage to the cherry crop. UDL found:

- The outage occurred when a crossarm, part of the equipment used to supply power to the orchard, broke. The break happened as a result of ice building-up on a line connected to the crossarm.

- The ice built up after Mr Hudson's neighbours had sprayed water over their orchard to try to prevent frost damage to their crops. When the spray reached the cross arm, it froze bringing down the crossarm and line.
- Surrounding power lines were unaffected by the cold snap. Photos revealed Mr Hudson's power line, impacted by his neighbour's frost fighting efforts, was the only one with significant ice build-up.

As part of its investigation, UDL considered Local Electricity's obligations and whether it could have done more to prevent the outage and restore power.

When UDL reviewed Local Electricity's maintenance of the area it was confirmed it had recently inspected the crossarm and encountered no issues. A review of its general records also confirmed Local Electricity had done all it should to maintain the crossarm and electricity equipment it was responsible for.

UDL was also satisfied Local Electricity had restored electricity to the farm in an appropriate timeframe when the outage occurred.

The outage was not Local Electricity's fault and while it is responsible for the electricity network in the area, outages do occur from time to time due to incidents that are outside of Local Electricity's control. This was one of those occasions.

continued over the page...

The frosted crops continued...



While UDL had sympathy for Mr Hudson and the losses he suffered, it is important that business owners are aware outages can occur and take steps to limit or avoid the impact this can have on his business. Particularly if it can result in the loss of an entire crop. It would not have been unreasonable for Mr Hudson to have invested in a backup electricity source, such as a generator, which could have limited or avoided the loss of his cherry crop.

While UDL did not uphold Mr Hudson's complaint, Local Electricity did accept it could do more to warn local farms about the risk of spraying to fight frost. It therefore updated the warnings it provides for cold weather to hopefully avoid future outages in similar circumstances.

Hotel without heat



Alexander relied on LPG cannisters, replaced monthly, to power his hotel. The hotel was frequented by snowboarders and skiers visiting the local mountain, who relied on the hotel's heating to keep warm.

An issue with Alexander's bank account meant that his monthly payment to his provider, Giant Gas, failed to go through. As a result, his cannister was not replaced and his hotel lost its heating and hot water for a weekend before he could source a replacement.

Alexander complained that he was not warned about the payment failure or impending loss of power and said he would have fixed the payment beforehand if he had been told. He requested \$6,000 compensation for the reputational damage and resulting loss of future business.

Giant Gas rejected his request, so Alexander brought the complaint to Utilities Disputes (UDL).

UDL identified several key issues in the complaint.

- Did Giant Gas give sufficient notice of the non-payment?
- Did Giant Gas give sufficient notice that it would not supply him gas?
- Was the requested compensation fair and reasonable?

To assess the first two issues, UDL compared Giant Gas's communication following the non-payment to the standards required in their rules. UDL found that Alexander's payment went through a third-party service, and the non-payment and non-supply warnings were both sent back through this third party.

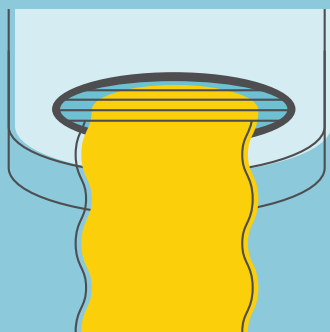
Because of an issue with this service, Alexander didn't receive any of these warnings. Giant Gas acknowledged this issue and made changes to their processes to ensure it wouldn't happen with other customers going forward.

Giant Gas offered \$2,000 compensation as a one-off goodwill payment, but also offered to reimburse the requested \$6,000 if Alexander could provide evidence proving this was the rate paid by the customers impacted by the loss of power.

Alexander provided bills from the weekend that supported the figure, which Giant Gas accepted. Once the payment was processed, the complaint was closed.



Overflow emergency



During the weekend Peter's property was flooded by raw sewage after blockage in a nearby wastewater pipe caused an overflow.

He told his local council, who then took several days to tell their contracted asset management company, Metro Water. In the meantime, Peter hired an emergency plumber to repair the fault.

Once Metro Water became aware of the issue, it disinfected the area at the back of Peter's property.

Peter complained to Metro Water about the blockage and damage to his property. Metro Water offered to reimburse the \$500 he paid to his plumber. Peter rejected the offer, requesting an extra \$2,000 compensation for property damage.

Metro Water rejected Peter's reimbursement request and advised him to contact his insurance company.

Peter, unhappy with this outcome, brought his complaint to Utilities Disputes (UDL).

UDL investigated Peter's complaint, focusing on Metro Water's response to the blockage.

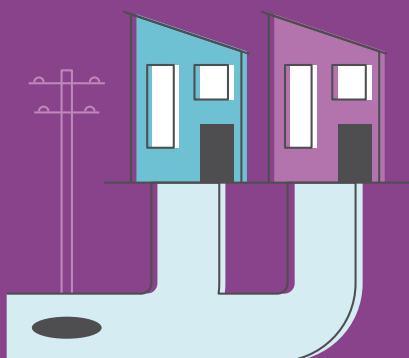
UDL's investigation confirmed the council did not inform Metro Water about the blockage until after the plumber had addressed the issue. Metro Water was therefore not responsible for the delay in repairing the fault.

UDL confirmed it was appropriate for Metro Water to reimburse Peter's plumber's costs. It was also confirmed Metro Water's decision to pay the plumbing and disinfect Peter's property was not an acceptance of liability.

UDL was ultimately satisfied Metro Water had acted within an appropriate timeframe and responded to the leak in a reasonable way and Peter's claim for additional compensation was declined.



The shared driveway



Mrs Park's neighbour wanted fibre connected. The fibre installer, Aunui, designed a plan to trench the cables through the properties front yard, gaining access through a driveway Mrs Park shared with her neighbour.

Aunui provided a copy of its plan for the installation to Mrs Park in advance of the fibre being installed as it was required to do under the terms of the Telecommunications Act 2001 (the Act).

After receiving the plan Mrs Park wrote to Aunui confirming she objected to the installation.

Mrs Park did not believe Aunui had any right to install the fibre on the driveway she shared with her neighbour. She also thought Aunui had incorrectly categorised the installation, and said it would cause significantly more

impact than planned. After some back and forth between Mrs Park and Aunui, the complaint was referred to Utilities Disputes (UDL).

The Act requires UDL to consider objections to fibre installation on shared driveways if they meet the established criteria. After reviewing Mrs Park's objection and the issues she had raised, UDL confirmed it would focus on the grounds:

- Whether Aunui's planned installation was making use of Mrs Park's private property – Mrs Park believed this was the case as it proposed using a duct she had paid for and which was located on her property.
- Whether Aunui's planned installation would have a materially negative impact on the value of Mrs Park's property – Mrs Park believed it this was the case as it would prevent the building of future structures.
- Whether Aunui's would cause material damage to Mrs Park's property; Mrs Park believed the proposed installation would cause ground instability and as a result cause more water to run into the stormwater which could contaminate local beaches.

Mrs Park also raised concerns over the volume, and potential interference to her own internet service that could occur during the installation. However, these issues fell outside the objections allowed by the Act and could not be considered.

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The shared driveway continued...



UDL considered each of these complaints, and came to the following conclusions:

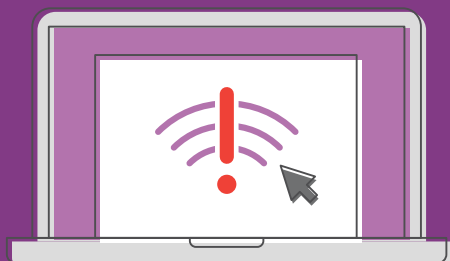
- Aunui's initial installation plan did encroach on Mrs Park's private property, which would have been grounds for cancellation. However, Aunui changed the plan when this was confirmed, and the final plan was within the shared property.
- UDL was not satisfied Mrs Park had provided any evidence to show she had actual plans to develop her property or that these would be impeded by the proposed installation. Nor was UDL satisfied the proposed installation methods would cause any material damage or have any material impact on her property's value.

UDL confirmed Mrs Park's concerns must be balanced against her neighbour's right to secure fibre. Without sufficient evidence to support her objections, she had failed to meet the grounds for successfully objecting under the Act.

Aunui was free to proceed with the installation. In order to reduce the impact of the installation on Mrs Park, it agreed to perform the installation on a day she chose to limit the any impact from the works.



Getting up to speed



Anahera was having issues with broadband cut-outs and slow speeds throughout her house.

She tried the recommended troubleshooting options to fix the issue, but it persisted. After a month of putting up with the issues, she complained to her provider.

Her provider said they would investigate the issues and contact Anahera shortly.

Anahera's provider acknowledged there were connection issues and offered to change her plan to a lower cost option. When the plan was not changed on her next bill, Anahera complained to UDL.

UDL went through all the issues with Anahera. It then produced a written complaint summary for Anahera, combining all the key complaint information in one succinct letter which it sent to her provider.

This gave the provider a clear idea of the key facts of the complaint and what Anahera wanted it to do to resolve the issues she was experiencing. This made it easier for Anahera and her provider to agree to a resolution.

Anahera's provider got in touch with her again and investigated her broadband issues in greater detail. It discovered Anahera's property was not connected to the fibre network, which was causing the speed issues and dropouts she was experiencing.

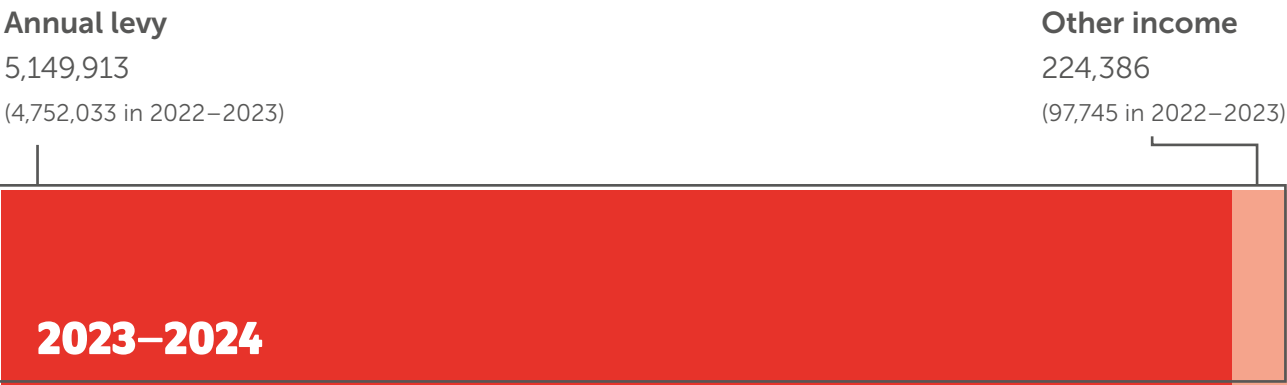
The provider also went through Anahera's bill and made the plan change it had agreed to.

Anahera was happy with the result and the support UDL provided to assist her, and her provider resolve their issues.

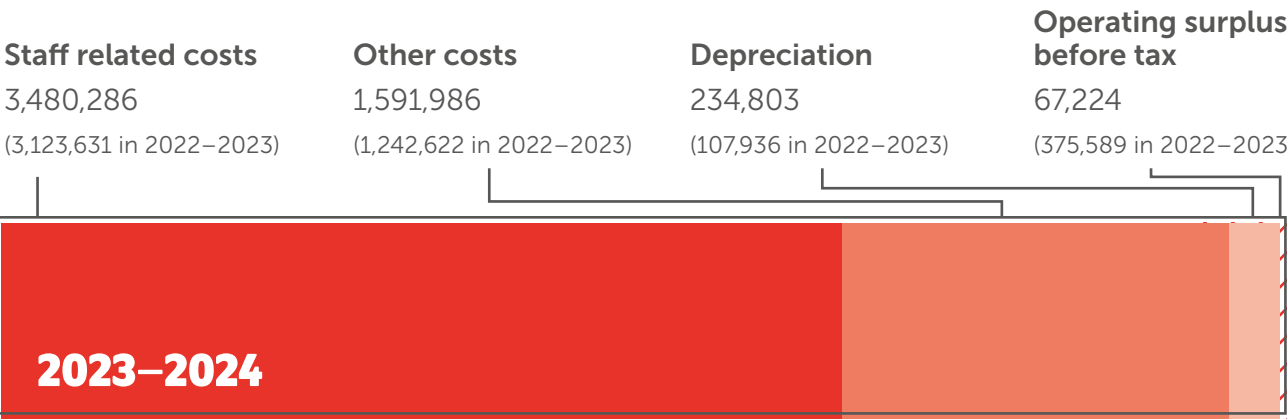
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Financial summary

All schemes



Total income
5,374,299
(4,849,778 in 2022–2023)



Total expenditure
5,307,075
(4,474,189 in 2022–2023)

Budget
5,041,336
(4,622,780 in 2022–2023)

Energy



Annual levy

4,825,385
(4,464,483 in 2022–2023)

Other income

210,250
(91,830 in 2022–2023)



Total income

5,035,635
(4,556,313 in 2022–2023)

Staff related costs

3,258,477
(2,940,350 in 2022–2023)

Other costs

1,490,524
(1,166,398 in 2022–2023)

Depreciation

220,035
(101,405 in 2022–2023)

Operating surplus before tax

66,599
(348,160 in 2022–2023)



Total expenditure

4,969,036
(4,208,153 in 2022–2023)

Budget

4,719,600
(4,324,046 in 2022–2023)

Broadband Shared Property Access Disputes Scheme



Annual levy

281,988

(275,000 in 2022–2023)

Other income

12,274

(5,656 in 2022–2023)

2023–2024

Total income

294,262

(280,656 in 2022–2023)

Staff related costs

192,738

(177,076 in 2022–2023)

Other costs

88,164

(71,644 in 2022–2023)

Depreciation

12,817

(6,246 in 2022–2023)

Operating surplus before tax

543

(25,690 in 2022–2023)

2023–2024

Total expenditure

293,719

(254,966 in 2022–2023)

Budget

287,527

(287,567 in 2022–2023)

Water

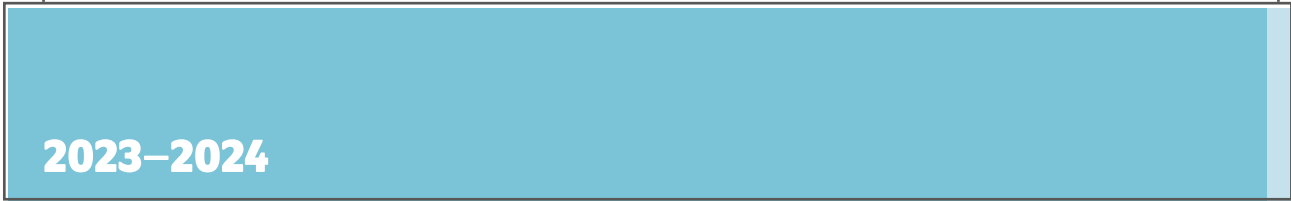


Annual levy

27,552
(12,550 in 2022–2023)

Other income

1,211
(259 in 2022–2023)



Total income

28,763
(12,809 in 2022–2023)

Staff related costs

18,828
(6,205 in 2022–2023)

Other costs

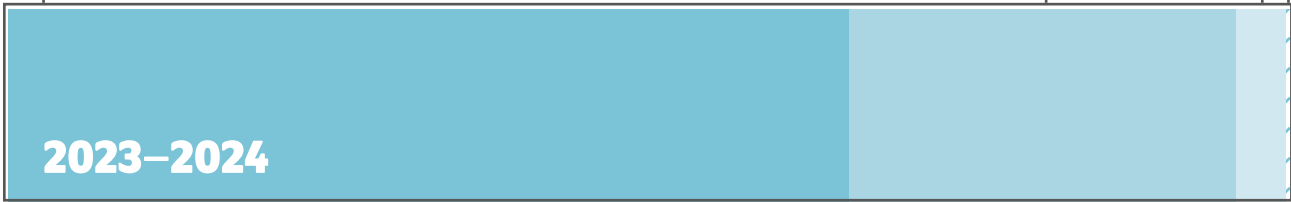
8,613
(4,580 in 2022–2023)

Depreciation

1,269
(285 in 2022–2023)

Operating surplus before tax

53
(1,739 in 2022–2023)



Total expenditure

28,710
(11,070 in 2022–2023)

Budget

34,209
(11,167 in 2022–2023)



UTILITIES
DISPUTES
TAUTOHETOHE
WHAIPAINGA