

Solar metering complaints

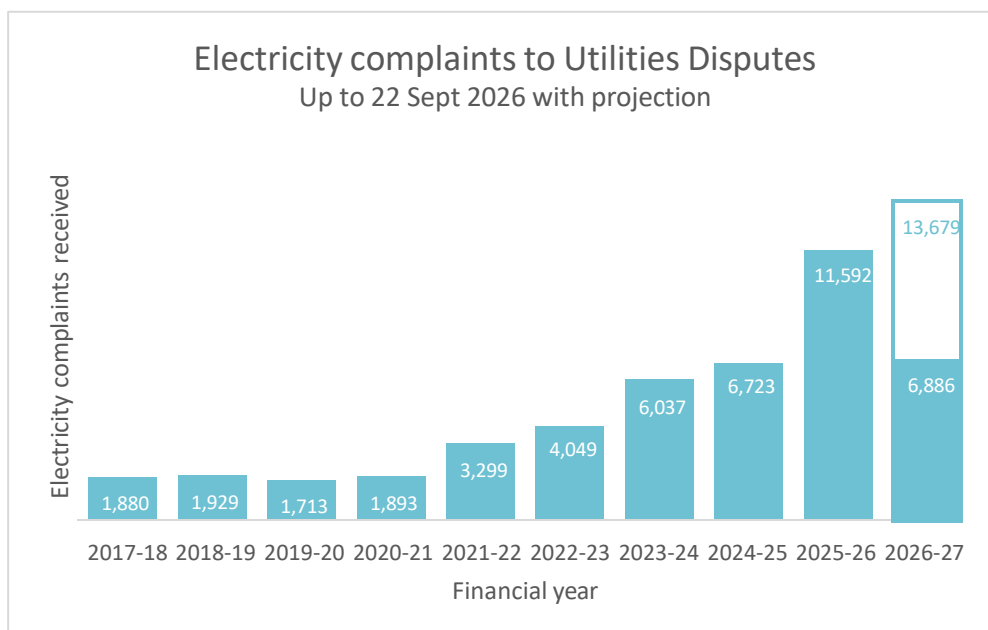
October 2026





Introduction

Utilities Disputes | Tautohetohe Whaipainga is New Zealand’s leading provider of independent dispute resolution services for consumers and providers of utilities. Utilities Disputes operates the mandated Energy Complaints Scheme (ECS) that covers both electricity and gas. The purpose of the ECS is to ensure that any person who has a complaint about a retailer or distributor has access to an independent process for resolving it.¹ The ECS in 2025-2026 received 11,592 complaints about electricity. We are currently receiving higher levels of complaints than at the same time last year.



Utilities Disputes is a not-for-profit company and there is no charge for a consumer to make a complaint.² We have a unique and broad view of the electricity market from a consumer perspective, as we hear complaints directly from consumers across most retailers and distributors. Because of our high-level oversight, we are well placed to identify systemic issues across the industry. The focus of this paper is on metering issues consumers encounter when installing distributed generation systems (most frequently solar). *Note - Names in case examples have been changed so as to be nonidentifiable.*

¹ For electricity see 95 & sch 4 cl 1 of the Electricity Industry Act 2010.

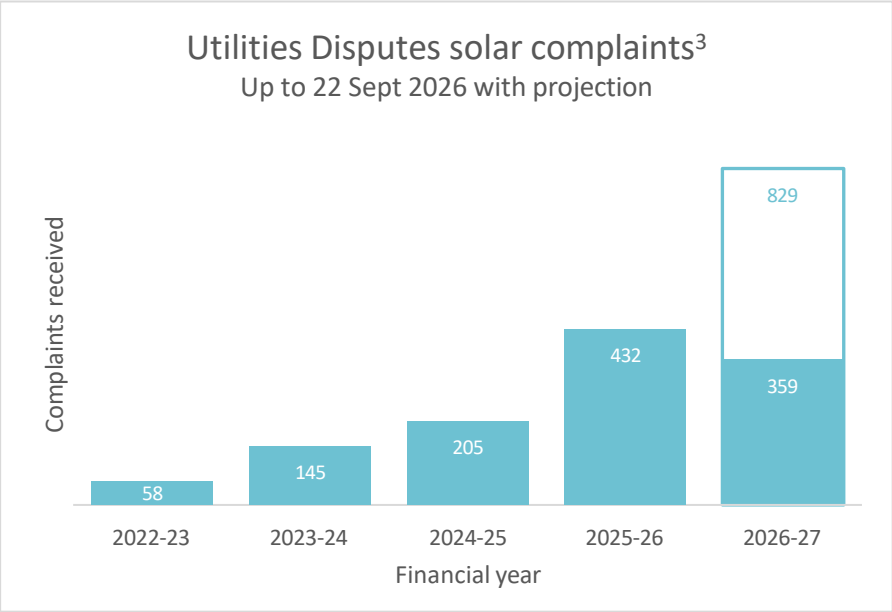
² We deliver dispute resolution schemes covering electricity, gas, water, and telecommunications. In telecommunications we offer the government mandated scheme for considering complaints about the laying of fibre on shared property and a voluntary telecommunications scheme which is not an industry dispute resolution scheme under part 7 of the Telecommunications Act 2001. We also offer a voluntary water complaints scheme.





Solar complaints

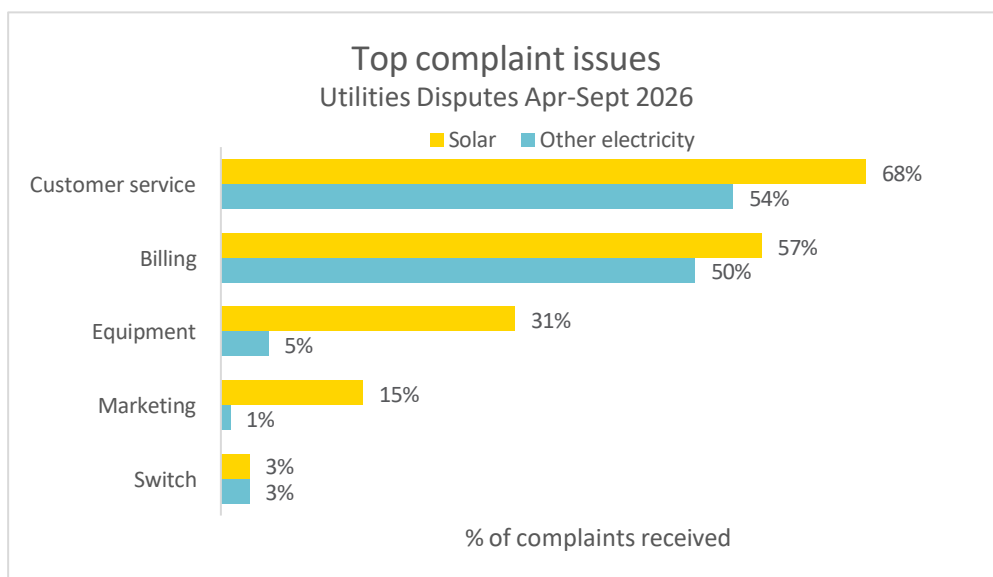
Solar is the main category of distributed generation technology that Utilities Disputes receives complaints about. Complaints to Utilities Disputes that raise a solar aspect have increased dramatically over the past few years, essentially doubling each year and increasing as a share of overall complaints. Last financial year they made up 3.7% of electricity complaints we received, this year they make up 5.2% so far.



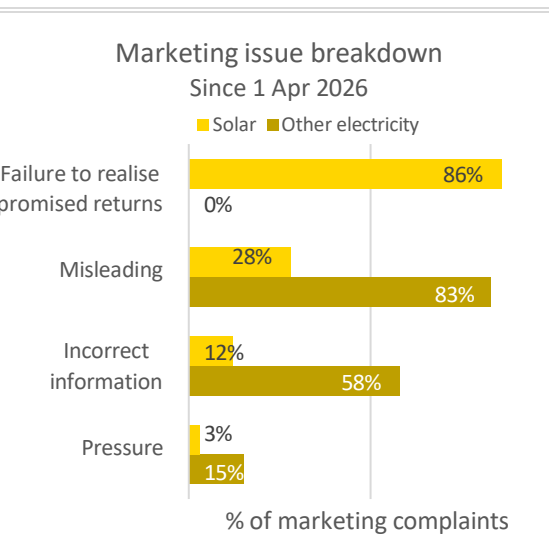
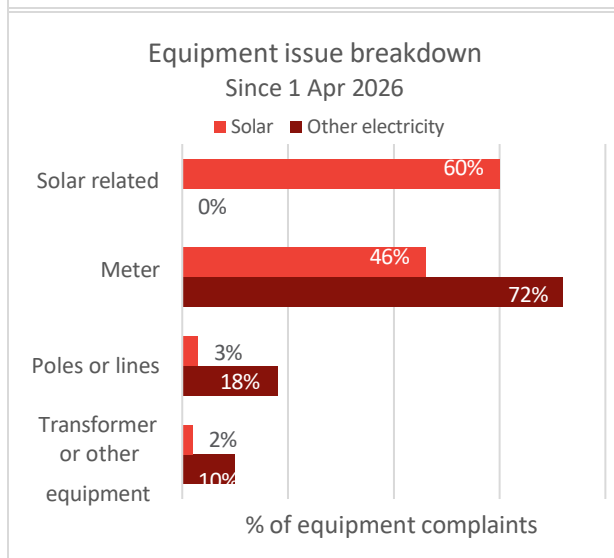
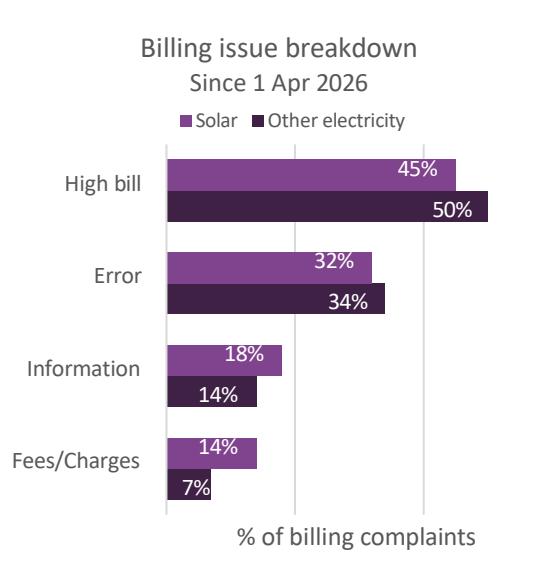
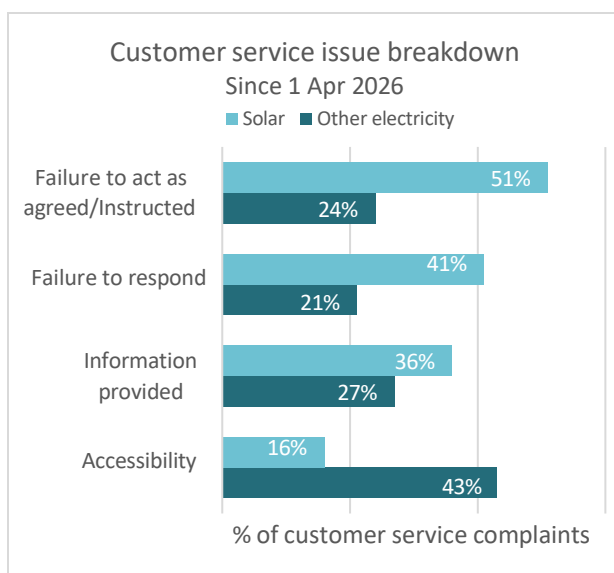
Solar complaints are more complex for Utilities Disputes to resolve. In the past 12 months, 18% of complaints reaching deadlock and 50% of complaints accepted for investigation had a solar aspect. The most frequent high-level issues raised by these complaints are shown below,⁴ including comparison to non-solar electricity complaints.

³ Complaints where a solar aspect has been raised
⁴ Complaints may be tagged with more than one issue





A further breakdown of the top categories:



The most frequent issue across all electricity complaints (including solar) is customer service, which includes topics such as delays, accessibility, provision of information, and complaint handling.

Solar complaints tend to be more technical and are more likely to have a range of complex issues in relation to equipment such as meters, inverters and panels.

We also see more issues around marketing with solar, especially where consumers are not necessarily aware of the key terms of what they have agreed to, the limitations of the system or how the promised savings have been calculated and what they need to do to achieve them.

Most of the solar complaints we hear about are for residential solar systems. Less than 5% of complaints we receive are about commercial or industrial installations.

Other distributed generation

Utilities Disputes receives very few complaints about other types of distributed energy systems. In the past year we received one complaint from a consumer with a residential wind turbine and a couple about non-solar related battery storage. The issues raised in these complaints are substantially similar to those in the solar complaints.

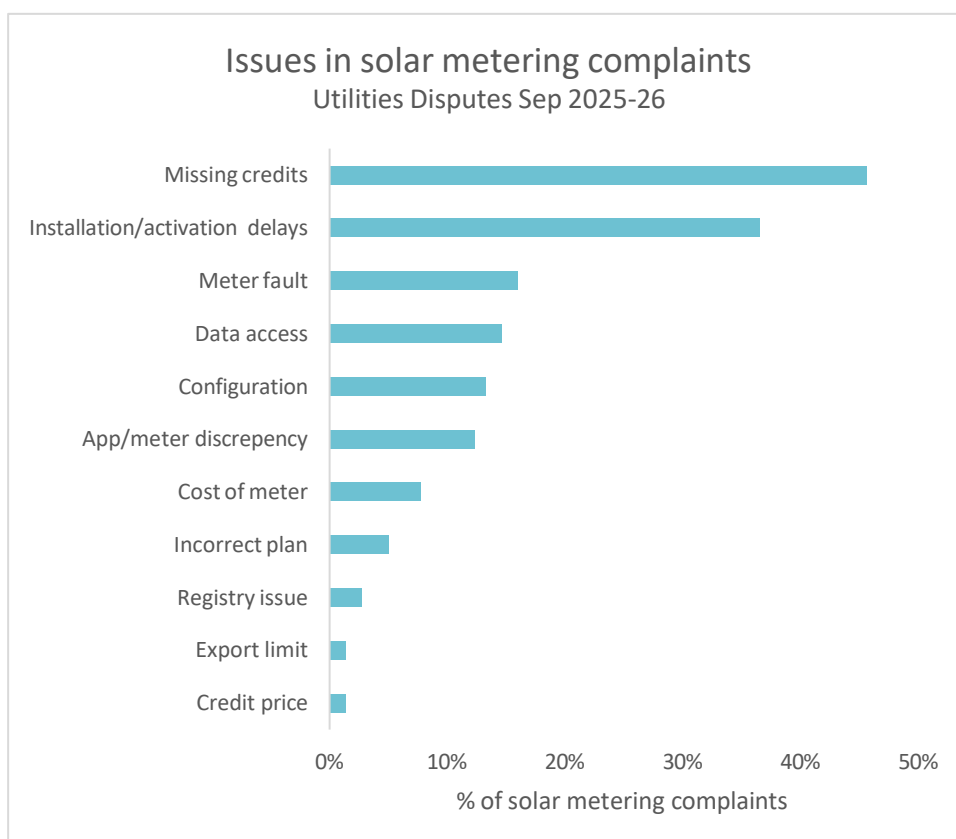




Meter issues

For this analysis, we have reviewed all complaints received in the past 12 months where the complaint involved metering for a solar setup. We identified 219 such complaints, which represents 33% of solar complaints received during that time.

The specific issues raised in these complaints are presented in this graph⁵ and then explained in further detail below.



⁵ Complaints may be tagged with more than one issue



Missing credits

The most common issue in solar metering complaints is that export credits listed on the bill are not the expected amount. In some cases they are missing entirely; in others they do not match the consumer's expectation. The reason for the discrepancy can be related to many of the other issue categories such as delays in activating the meter, a non-communicating meter, configuration issues, or being signed up on the wrong plan.

App/meter discrepancy

In the past 12 months, we received at least 27 complaints where the consumer reported a discrepancy between the data provided by their solar app and the amounts being listed on their bill. Because the third-party apps are usually proprietary software, it is often not possible to determine the reason for this discrepancy. However, some explanations we have found during our investigations are:

- Small discrepancies may be due to energy losses occurring between the inverter and the meter.
- Large discrepancies may be due to configuration differences such as the solar system only being connected to one channel when the residence has more than one.

Providers do not accept data from third-party apps to determine usage or generation and this can be a source of significant frustration to consumers, especially when export data is missing from metered records.

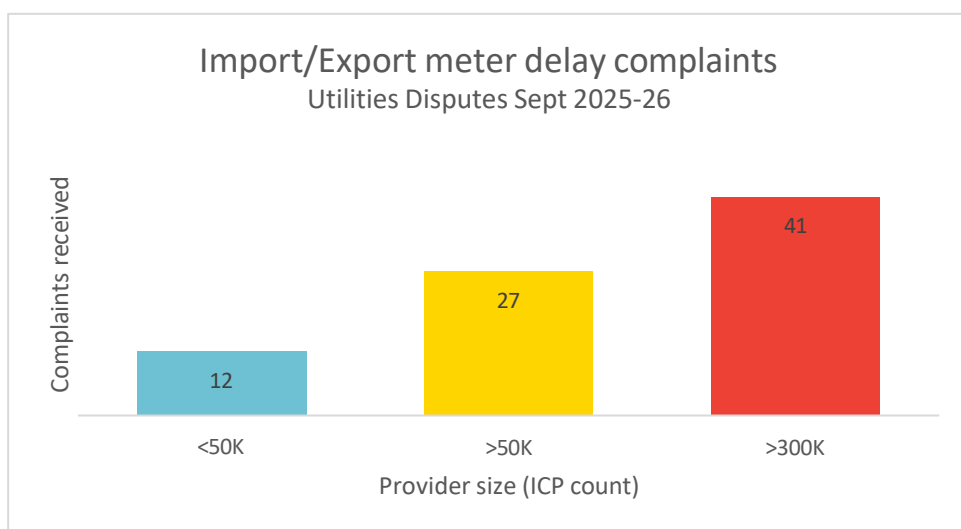
Case example

Mr. Smith said his inverter app showed zero consumption, but Retailer X kept billing him for consumption. When he raised the issue with Retailer X, they suggested getting the meter checked, which found no fault and a fee was applied. Mr. Smith then switched to Retailer Y. Retailer Y pointed out that his water heater was on a ripple relay circuit. Solar inverters are generally only connected to the main circuit, not a ripple relay, so the solar app did not have access to this usage data. Mr. Smith got his water heater changed to the main circuit and now his app data matches his billing. Mr. Smith complained that Retailer X did not do enough to investigate his concerns. To resolve the complaint, Retailer X waived the meter check fee.

Delays

In the past 12 months, we received 80 complaints about delays in installing or activating an import/export meter. Many consumers already have a meter with an export function, but this must be configured before they can start receiving export credits. The installation and configuration of import/export meters usually involves retailers, Metering Equipment Providers (MEPs) and contractor technicians. The retailer is ultimately responsible for coordinating the project and maintaining the relationship with the consumer, and while we do not have jurisdiction over MEPs or contractors, we can look at complaints where they are acting on behalf of the retailer or distributor.

The complaints we received about these delays were distributed widely across the industry with retailers of all sizes:



The reason for delays in installing or configuring a meter are not always revealed to the consumer or to Utilities Disputes. However, we recognised a few trends:

Communication

Communication is a critical issue in complaints. Many of the customers who complain to Utilities Disputes have followed up many times with retailers first.

In relation to solar we are often advised the customer has asked for an estimated installation date, only to have standard timeframes repeated to them, even if the standard timeframe has already passed. This may reflect limitations on information available to frontline customer service staff, and limited availability of escalation pathways.

Contractor availability

MEPs and contractors may experience high demand or regional differences in availability. For example, residences in remote locations often wait longer for a meter technician to travel to their area. When consumers complain that clear timeframes are not communicated to them by their retailer, we have anecdotally heard from retailers that they experienced communication issues in turn from MEPs. Retailers also rely on MEPs to finalise paperwork and registry updates once the

meter is installed which can be another source of admin delays. Retailers have discussed the friction with MEPs with Utilities Disputes, noting the lack of oversight or regulation, and in many areas these third parties operate a monopoly that leaves retailers with limited options for seeking more timely outcomes.

IT issues

In many of the complaints we receive, providers stated they had recently undergone an IT upgrade leading to delays as staff were learning the new software or it didn't have certain features functional. This is a challenging but foreseeable cause of delays that Utilities Disputes expects providers to mitigate with additional resourcing and backup or transitional systems.

Registry issues

In some of the delay complaints, the issue was that the residence was incorrectly classified on the Electricity Registry, for example as a commercial space rather than a residential one. This causes delay by requiring a further party, the distributor, to be involved because they need to validate and request a change of classification.

Switching

As a subset of registry-related issues, delay complaints sometimes involve an ill-timed switch request. It is reasonably common for consumers to want to switch to a new provider after they install solar, as a different retailer may offer a solar-specific or better tailored plan for their usage. There can be difficulties if the switch is requested before the new meter configuration is finalised in the Registry (something which is usually opaque to the consumer.) Utilities Disputes has seen several cases where a switch was rejected because of incorrect meter details and had to be re-lodged several times before all the details were correct.

Case example

Ms. Anderson requested an import/export meter be installed at her property, as she had recently installed solar. It took three months to install the meter due largely to MEP availability and administrative delays. A week after the meter was finally installed, Ms. Anderson tried to switch to a new retailer, unaware that the Registry had not yet been updated with her new meter details. It took a further three months to sort out the registry issues and successfully complete the switch.

Ms. Anderson waited a total of six months to start benefitting from her new solar setup. Utilities Disputes' Commissioner found that the retailer's follow-up with the MEPs, handling of the Registry updates, and communication with Ms. Anderson was inadequate. While the retailer had already offered compensation for the lost months of solar exports, the Commissioner recommended that they make an additional customer service payment to Ms. Anderson.

Meter faults

The most common reason for a reported meter fault is a non-communicating meter. Most retailers have automated systems that estimate usage when a meter is not communicating, with an eventual manual read and 'washup' bill issued. This issue is not unique to solar, but for solar consumers in particular it can be a shock to receive an estimated bill, as these may not take into account any export credits. Other types of meter fault are occasionally reported in complaints, however these are often found to be a configuration issue rather than the meter being truly faulty.

Data access

In the solar metering data analysed, there were 32 complaints from solar consumers who were having trouble accessing their data. This could be missing bills, incomplete information on bills or the account, or access to their half-hourly data. Solar consumers are much more likely than average to want access to their data because they want to tailor their solar setups and usage patterns to minimise their electricity bills.

Case example

Mr. Thomas installed solar on his property while with Retailer A. One month later, he requested to switch to Retailer B. He got a final bill from Retailer A but was unable to see his usage data in his new account with Retailer B. Retailer B did not send a bill for four months. The bill he did eventually receive from Retailer B did not contain any export credits and did not contain enough information to be able to check its accuracy. Mr. Thomas requested a complete record of his consumption data and a review of his bills for the past 4 months. To resolve the complaint, Retailer B located the missing data and recalculated the bills, as well as giving a full explanation and apology along with a customer service payment.

The Electricity Industry Participation Code (the Code) requires retailers to give consumers information about their own consumption of electricity upon request within five business days.⁶ The Electricity Authority prescribes the formats retailers must use to provide this information. Issues commonly raised about the prescribed process include:

- Time delays reduce the usefulness of the data when trying to optimise an automated setup
- Repeated requests are necessary to obtain an ongoing dataset
- The prescribed .csv file formats result in a 'raw' dataset that can be difficult to interpret without moderate technological skill.

Utilities Disputes and consumer electricity services (such as price comparison services) have continually raised consumer access to electricity usage data in a timely and comprehensible manner

⁶ Electricity Industry Participation Code 2010 11.32B. A summary of requirements is also found at https://www.ea.govt.nz/documents/221/Procedures_for_requests_for_consumer_consumption_information_eJUwEl4.pdf

as an ongoing issue. We do note that some retailers now offer consumers ongoing access to their half-hourly usage data via an app with only a few days' lag.

Other related issues

Cost of meter

In the past 12 months, we received 17 complaints about the fee being charged for an import/export meter. Many of these complainants noted they already had a smart meter that just needed to be remotely configured and there was no need to have a new one installed.

Export limit

In the past 12 months, we received three complaints from people who experienced difficulties increasing their export limit. A change to the Code in May 2026 requires distributors to allow up to 10kW export power unless certain conditions are met⁷. Two of the complaints we received were about export limits above the 10kW threshold. The other was in a category that is not yet covered by the Code change.

Credit pricing

In the past 12 months, we received three complaints about not receiving the advertised price for export credits.

⁷ Electricity Industry Participation Code 2010 6.3A.



