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# Spike in phone woes

## Customers engage lawyers to solve issues

**ANTHONY GALLOWAY**

QUEENSLANDERS unsure about where to take their phone and internet problems are turning to the community legal sector to complain.

According to a new report by the industry's Ombudsman revealed today, almost half of all community legal workers hear telecommunications complaints every week.

At the same time, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman has been forced to

increase staff by more than a third over the past two years to cope with the rising complaints.

Grievances about the National Broadband Network more than doubled in Queensland last year, while overall complaints rose by almost half.

"It's a wakeup call for the industry," said Ombudsman Judi Jones.

"We shouldn't need to continually employ more staff."

The release of today's report follows a News Corp revelation that Queensland is receiving one of the lowest rollouts of the superior all-fibre NBN.

The report surveyed 137 Queensland community legal sector workers and found:

- The majority said their clients didn't know how to complain about their phone and internet issues.
- Almost half of their clients said they experienced phone and internet service problems every week.
- The most common issue was increasing debt and an inability to pay for a service.

Ms Jones said it was crucial for people to try to resolve their issues with their service provider first.

"If the complaint is unresolved, they should then go to

the Ombudsman. We are free and accessible and our job is to take the place of consumers," she said.

There were 28,988 complaints to the Ombudsman in Queensland in 2016-17, an increase of 42.7 per cent on the previous year.

James Farrell, director of Community Legal Centres Queensland said everyone had a responsibility to support those in difficulty.

"Phones and the internet are central in our lives and the message from Queensland's Community Legal Sector Workers is don't feel you're on your own. In tough times, mounting problems have a domino effect, one problem leads to another, and on to another."

@editorial@cairnspost.com.au  
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