

# **CONSUMER PROTECTIONS**

**Presentation to the ERB &  
NARUC partnership  
programme**

**Friday, February 25, 2005**

# STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

- Lodging complaints
- Tracking process
- Dispute resolution process
- Safeguarding & protecting consumer interests
- Outreach strategies

# Lodging complaints

- The ERB is mandated by the Energy Regulation Act Chapter 436 of the Laws of Zambia to receive and investigate complaints with regard to the price of services and the quality of services received from utilities.

# Lodging complaints

- Every complaint subjected to the ERB Complaints Procedure.
- Consumer Handling forms designed for channeling of complaints.
- Recording of the complaints.
- Opening of files – case records.


# Lodging complaints

- **Billing and payment issues:**
  - Billing
  - Disconnection
  - Payment arrangements
  - Deposits
  - Charges

# Lodging complaints cont'd

- **Quality of service:**
  - Metering
  - New service connection
  - Service outage
  - Damaged equipment
  - Service interruption
  - Customer service
  - Trouble report
- **Quality of product:**
  - Fuel contamination

# Lodging complaints cont'd

- Consumers to first approach the service provider when they have a complaint.
- Any person or consumer may seek the ERB's intervention if they are dissatisfied with a service provider.
- Complaint may be written or oral. 
- Full name and address of the complainant required.

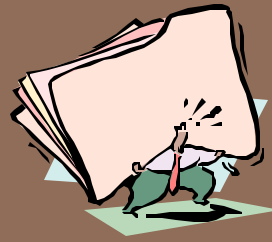
# Lodging complaints cont'd

- Utility or person being complained against
- Nature of complaint and any supporting documents.
- Nature of injustice or harm suffered.
- Relief sought by the complainant.
- Complaint forwarded to the service provider—regulator expects response within (7) days.
- Maintain contact with liaison person, customer service personnel and utility regional managers.



# Tracking consumer complaints

- A commitment to receive all complaints however lodged.



- A commitment to follow through each complaint
- A commitment to inform the complainant of the status of the complaint.
- A commitment to ensure service providers have procedures for dealing with consumer complaints.

# Tracking consumer complaints

- 95 complaints received in 2004:
  - 29 complaints related to billing and payment issues
  - 15 complaints related to damaged equipment
  - Majority of the complaints received from consumers in Lusaka (50)
  - Highest number of complaints received in November (16)

# Tracking consumer complaints

- Jan to Dec 2002 – 94
- Jan to Dec 2003 – 72
- Jan to Dec 2004 – 95
- Jan 2005 – 09
- Feb 2005 – 09

# Dispute resolution



- If complaint is not resolved in 7 days, parties are summoned to a meeting.
- If the complaint is unresolved after the meeting, a report with a full record of the proceedings and recommendations is made to the Board.
- Board will then consider the matter or hold a hearing for the affected parties.
- The Board will make a ruling based on the facts of the complaint and hearing submissions within 30 days.

# Dispute resolution cont'd

- An order is then served on the service provider complained against.
- The service provider must then submit a report to the Board to explain how compliance with the Order has been made.
- An inspection is carried out to ensure the service provider has complied with the Order.
- The Board will issue an Enforcement Notice if the service provider does not submit a report.
- If still no report is done after the enforcement, the Board penalises the service provider.

# Safeguarding consumer interests

- ERB, Communications Authority and National Water & Sanitation Council (NWASCO) will form joint consumer Councils or watch groups.
- Groups will cut across three sectors namely communications, energy and water.
- Will act as the regulators' link between consumers and service providers.
- Important contact point to channel consumer complaints, queries and other concerns pertaining to the quality of services or goods

# Safeguarding consumer interests

- Monitor the performance of service providers and follow up consumer concerns on the quality of service.
- Joint approach will have more impact.
- Existing water watch groups created by NWASCO will be transformed to represent the three sectors.

# Safeguarding consumer interests

- The first joint sector consumer watch groups will be launched in Lusaka before the programme is rolled out to other parts of the country.
- Training of the volunteers
- Signing of a joint MoU.



# Outreach strategies

- Community and public meetings
  - Provides fora for the regulator to obtain first hand information with regard to consumer concerns.
- Exhibitions
  - The ERB participates in two national exhibitions—Zambia International Trade Fair in Ndola and Zambia Agricultural & Commercial Show in Lusaka to reach out to the public and enhance its public image.
  - Last year's exhibitions focused mainly on consumer issues.
  - Response from show goers has been overwhelming and this has resulted in increased Media and public interest in the ERB's operations.
  - Excellent fora to directly interface with the public and other stakeholders.

# Outreach strategies

- Radio programmes
  - The ERB embarked on a weekly programme "Let's Talk Energy" on the national broadcaster on August 22, 2004.
  - The programme discusses various topics with special emphasis on consumer issues.
  - A Lusaka-based Media firm has been awarded a contract to produce, manage and provide programmes on 4 community radio stations namely Mano (Kasama), Lyambai (Mongu), Breeze (Chipata) and Mazabuka.
- Television programmes

# Outreach strategies

- Newspaper articles
  - The ERB publishes articles in a weekly column of the Sunday Times of Zambia (Energy Regulation Corner).
  - Various topics under discussion.
- Quarterly newsletter
  - An inhouse newsletter used to create more awareness about the ERB's activities and developments in the energy sector.

# Outreach strategies

- Brochures
  - Get to Know Us
  - Illegal Fuel Vending
  - Complaints Procedure
    - The 3 brochures have been translated into the 7 main local languages.
  - Organisation Profile
  - Distributed during exhibitions, inspections, front office, press briefings, workshops et cetera
  - Production of new brochures ongoing.
- Posters

# Future Outlook

- Creation of watch groups in several towns
  - Increased number of complaints
  - Increased consumer expectations
- Increased community outreach and education awareness campaigns
  - Public meetings
  - Exhibitions
  - Information dissemination
- Increased Media & general interest in ERB activities.