

Bitter power struggle with greedy giants

CAROLINE MARCUS *The Sunday Telegraph* June 10, 2012 12:00AM

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Tom Taylor at his Kiama property, was billed incorrectly on his electricity bill. Picture: Rohan Kelly Source: The Sunday Telegraph

A CUSTOMER was charged more than \$3000 for his quarterly energy bill after his meter was grossly misread by Integral/Origin.

The incident is one of several examples of disputes between the power company and consumers to come to light since *The Sunday Telegraph* revealed last week the provider had threatened to disconnect power to an elderly man who relied on it for life support.

Tom Taylor, a 68-year-old mortgage broker from **Kiama** on the south coast, received a bill last month for \$3101.67, the equivalent of almost two years' worth of his average bill.

He is still waiting for his bill to be readjusted, after the provider admitted they had made a mistake.

In another incident, 23-year-old schoolteacher Quyen Nguyen's family were shocked to receive a letter from Integral/Origin - their provider of more than 10 years - informing them that no electricity supplier had been allocated to their **Canley Vale** home in **Sydney's** west.

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"We had no idea who the hell was supplying our electricity," she said.

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POWER provider has been branded "heartless and greedy" after an 85-year-old on life-support was told his power would be cut off.

The family tried to reconnect with Integral and Ms Nguyen says she was told over the phone the account had indeed been reactivated.

A few weeks later, their supply was cut.

Finally, Ms Nguyen was told the provider had made a mistake by replacing their details with someone else's and the family were sent a bill of \$1885 for the nine-month period. When Ms Nguyen requested an extension on the payment, she says she was "bullied" and threatened that debt collectors would come after her family. She eventually paid off the bill but enlisted Handle My Complaint to help her negotiate for compensation for lost wages and power supply.

After failing to respond on a number of occasions, Integral/Origin last week agreed to pay Ms Nguyen \$600 in compensation after *The Sunday Telegraph* became involved.

The chief executive of Handle My Complaint, Jo Ucakalo, said: "As customers, we need to support companies who do the right thing by their customers."

Alan Lee, a 62-year-old retiree, took his dispute with Integral/Origin to the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) when a bill received in April last year showed a four-fold increase after he had installed solar power at his **Blacktown** home.

Mr Lee is now appealing EWON's finding that his supplier charged him correctly.

An Integral/Origin spokesman told *The Sunday Telegraph* Ms Nguyen's matter had been resolved, while the company would send a new account to Mr Taylor next week. He said Mr Lee's involved a "number of complexities" and the company would continue to work with him to come to an agreement.

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