

TCO Review

1 July 2019 to 30 September 2019

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Interim Tolling Customer Ombudsman

INTRODUCTION

On 30 June 2019, the Tolling Customer Ombudsman, Mr. Michael Arnold, retired from the role and I have been undertaking the role in an interim capacity whilst a new governance and operational structure for the Tolling Customer Ombudsman (TCO) scheme is established.

Over this time, there have been significant changes in the way in which the TCO scheme is operated as we enhance the service offering to toll road operators and their customers. These include:

- earlier active intervention in complaints,
- an improved, full time telephony response capability,
- offices in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, and
- improved stakeholder engagement

In parallel, a new organization has been established, overseen by a Board of Directors (comprised of an independent chair, a director with expertise in consumer affairs, and a director with expertise in the toll road industry). A recruitment process is currently underway for a new ongoing Ombudsman.

The new organization, Tolling Customer Ombudsman Limited (TCOL) will operate the scheme using a clearer and simpler Terms of Reference to better explain the issues that the TCO can, and cannot, assist with.

These improvements to the TCO user experience will be rolled out by the end of 2019.

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

As part of a Queensland Government Parliamentary Inquiry in 2018, stakeholders provided feedback on the reporting of the TCO and noted that it lacked the level of detail that they would find useful.

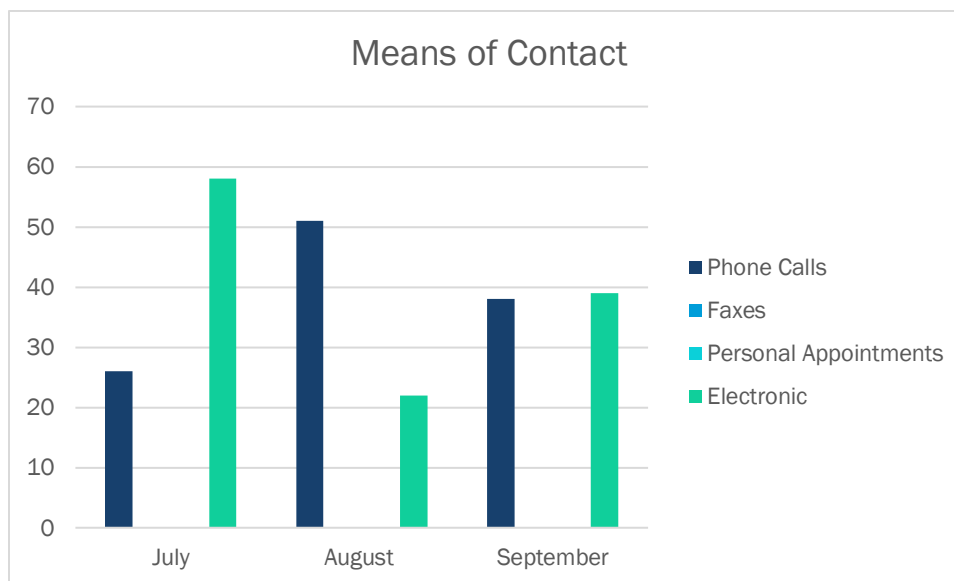
While the enhancements planned as part of the transition to the new TCO arrangements are not yet complete, I am anxious to move towards meeting this request in this report.

These reports are required to be made at least every six months, but I am hopeful that TCO will move to at least quarterly reporting and do so in greater detail about the benefits of the scheme for those that use our services.

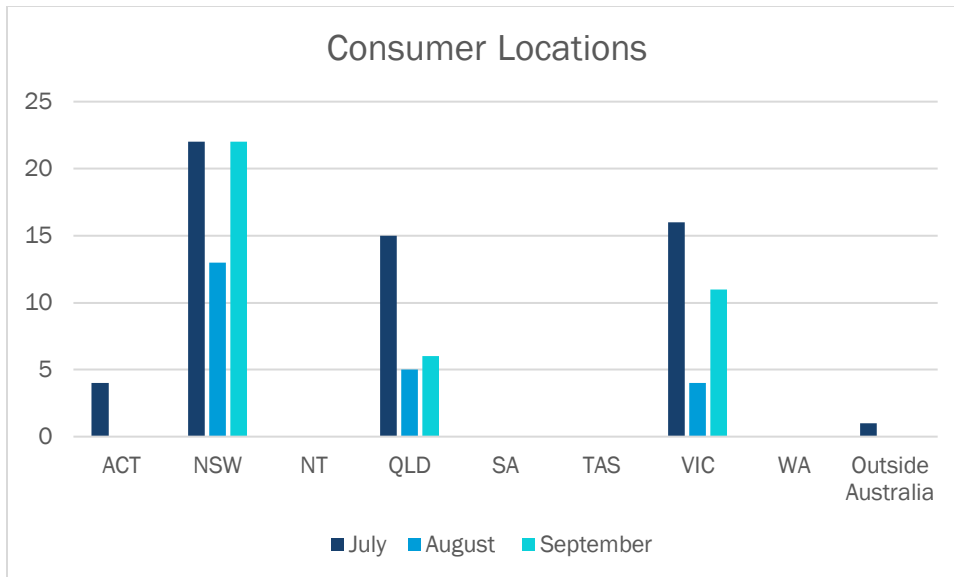
Consumer demographics

Overall, the predominant means of contacting TCO with a complaint is electronically, either through the online dispute form or via emailing the complaint form after downloading it from the TCO website www.tollingombudsman.com.au.

However, phone contact is important and calls to the 1800 number remain steady. The recent enhancement of a full-time office hours reception service is another response to recent constructive feedback. This enables better reporting on phone calls made to the TCO.

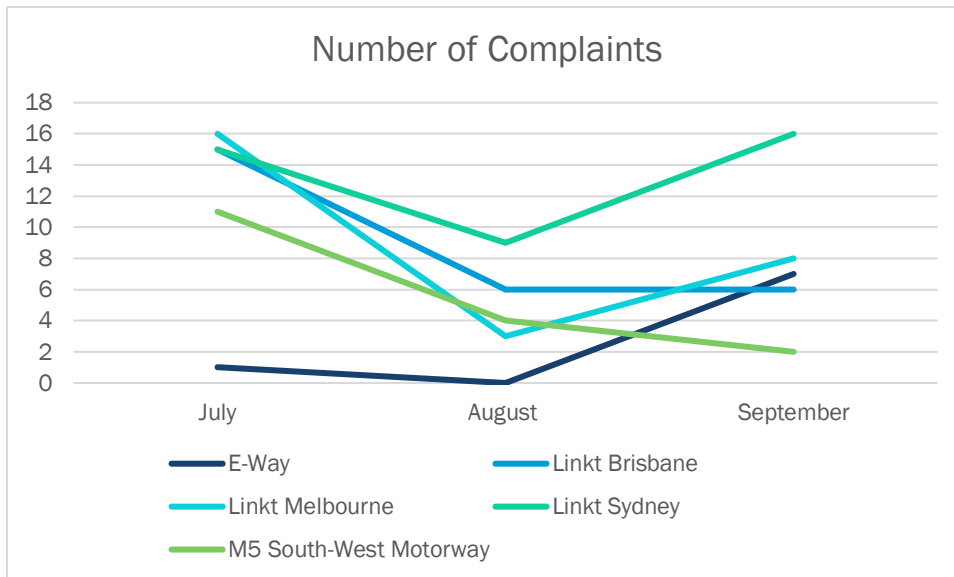


The TCO operates across three states in Australia – NSW, QLD and VIC. It is intuitive that Interlink Roads, which operates the E-way system and the M5 South-West Motorway in NSW would have predominantly NSW based consumers, but the geographic location of Transurban consumers who bring complaints to the TCO is more diverse.



Over the three months covered by this report, 119 complaints were received. New South Wales consumers represent approximately half of the TCO workload, with Victoria just over a quarter and Queensland consumers just under a quarter.

Complaint information

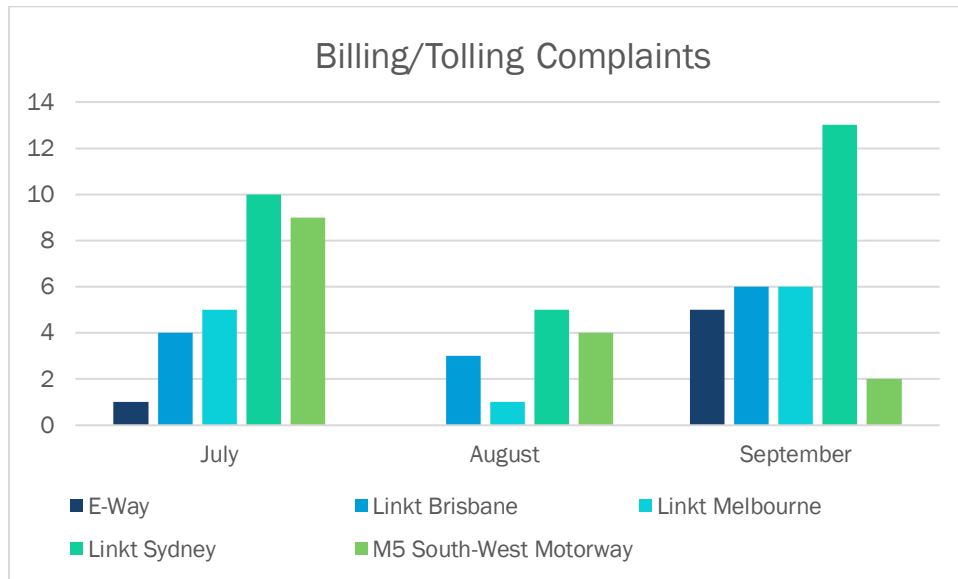


The time period for the purposes of this report is limited at the last 3 months and so long-term projections cannot be drawn just from this information. This will improve over time.

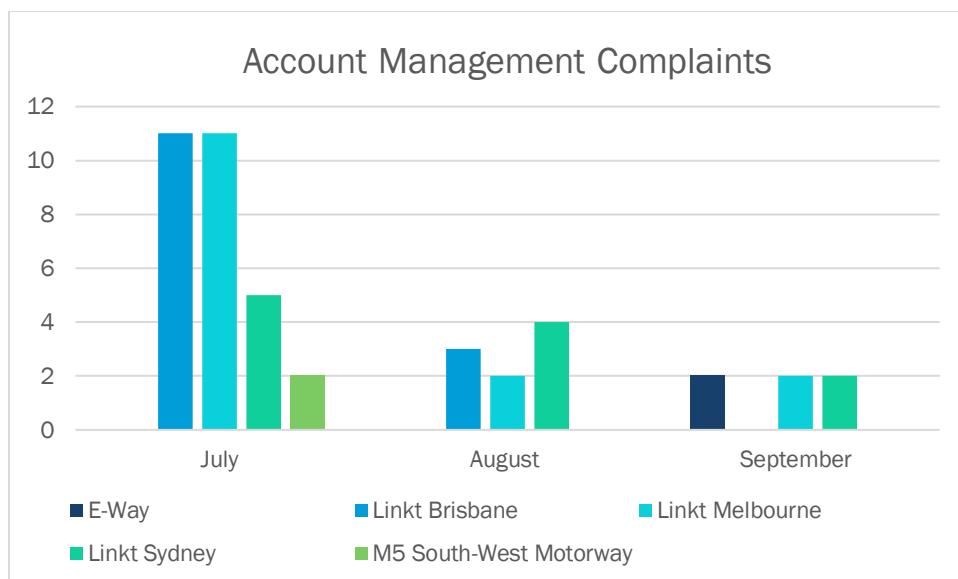
However, in this short period of time, the numbers for all toll road operators have increased, with the exception of Linkt Brisbane and M5 South-West Motorway which have declined. Given the small set of numbers for each, the graph makes things appear more volatile than they actually are. A longer-term data set is required.

Overall though, TCO normally averages 1,000 complaints per year for the two providers in the scheme and so would expect approximately 250 complaints per quarter. To receive less than half of this is a significant reduction on the number expected and both toll road operators should be commended on the continual improvements being made to their internal complaint resolution services.

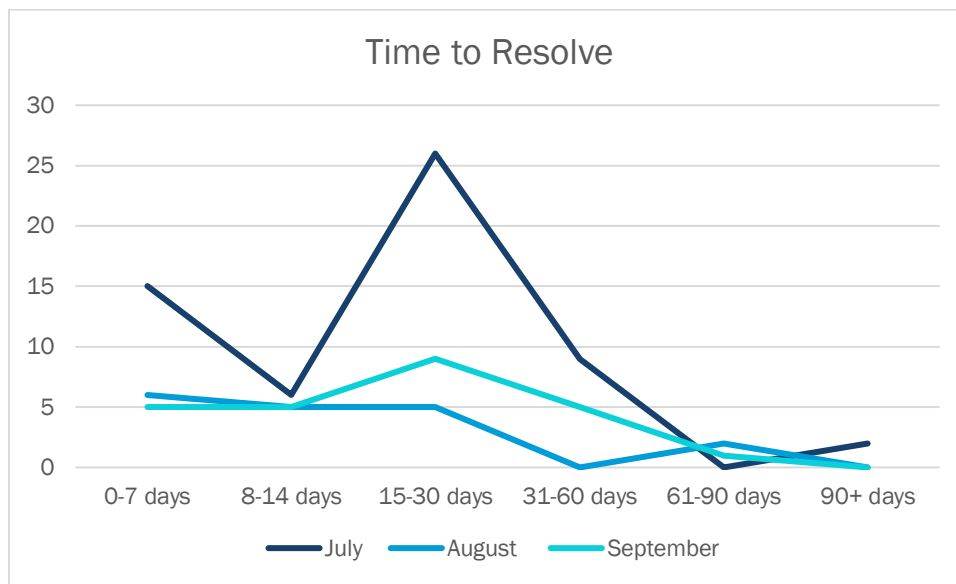
Irrespective of location, the nature of the complaints remains the same. The main issues relate to billing/tolling. This is often the application of administrative fees, or infringement fines, and whether these have been properly incurred.



The remainder (with one vehicle classification complaint as an exception) relate to issues with the way in which the account was managed.



Often, once lodged, the complaints handled by the TCO are quickly resolved in discussions with the toll road operator.

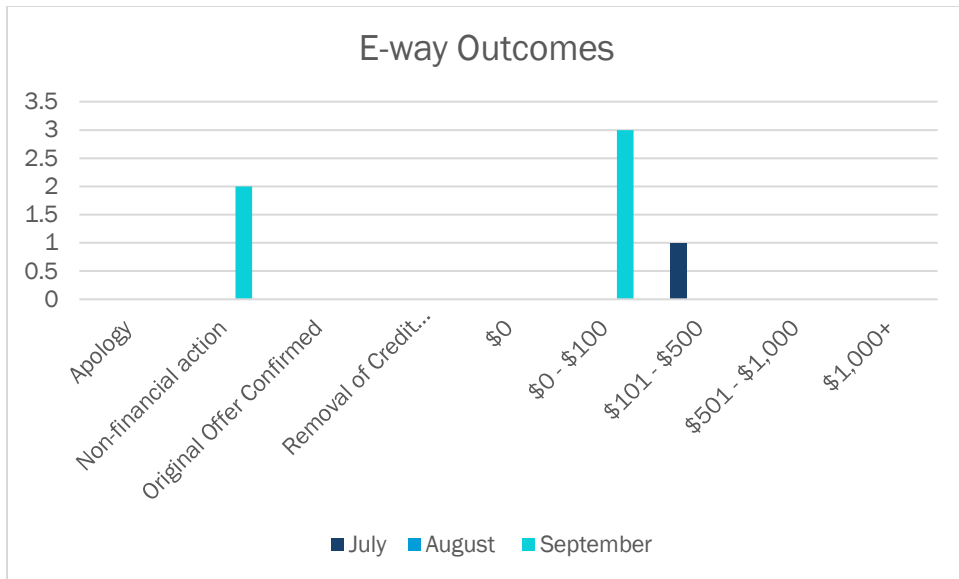


Of late though, particularly through late September and early October, there appears to have been a number of complaints which have taken longer than normal to resolve.

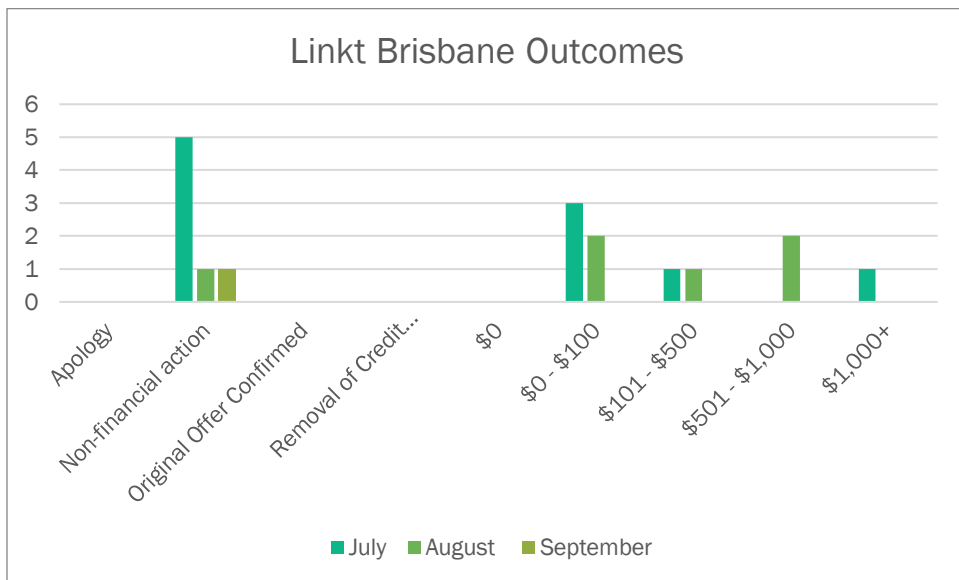
This is not necessarily the fault of the relevant toll road operator though, as the complexity of the complaints which do not resolve through the internal complaint resolution process appears to have increased. In addition, there have been several consumers during this time who have had an unreasonable expectation of what should be done to resolve their complaint and have not engaged in good faith with the TCO process.

Where a resolution is achieved, the outcome can range from non-financial actions (explanations, release of information, assistance with referrals, etc.) to an acceptance of an original offer to resolve, to a removal of a credit listing, to a financial benefit from waiver of an amount of debt or a payment.

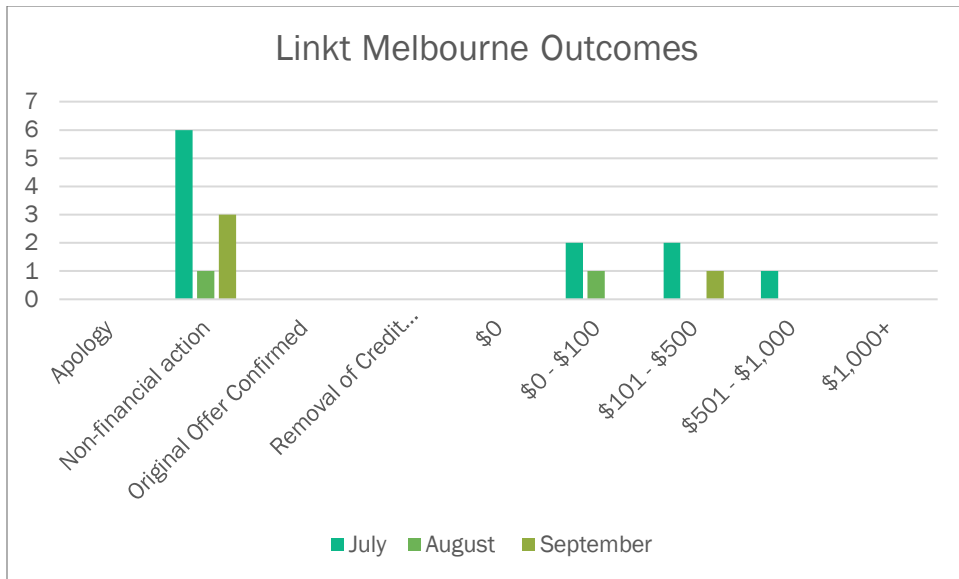
In some complaints, the financial benefit can be proportionally significant, but the instances of tens of thousands of dollars of debt are generally not able to be resolved through the TCO scheme as these levels of debt arise predominantly through the imposition of fines by state authorities which are outside of the TCO jurisdiction.



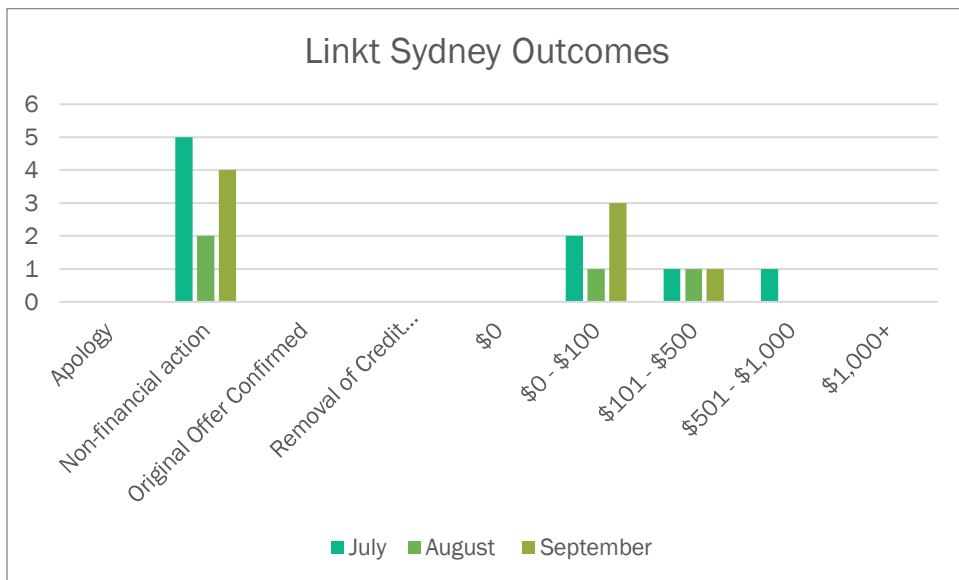
Due to the low numbers of complaints, data from E-way cannot be used to draw any conclusions at this stage.



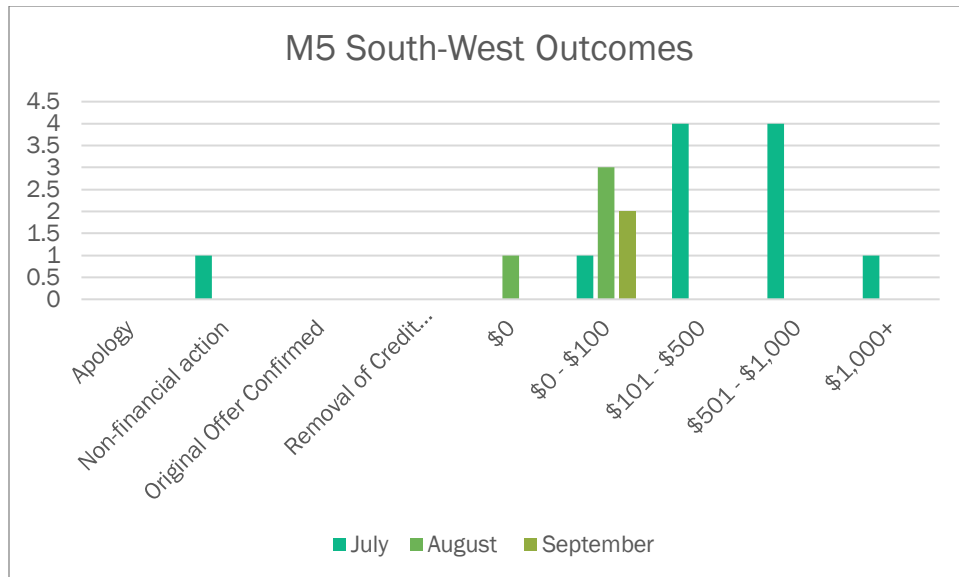
Due to the low numbers of complaints, data from Linkt Brisbane cannot be used to draw any conclusions at this stage.



Due to the low numbers of complaints, data from Linkt Melbourne cannot be used to draw any conclusions at this stage.



Due to the low numbers of complaints, data from Linkt Sydney cannot be used to draw any conclusions at this stage.



Due to the low numbers of complaints, data from M5 South-West Motorway cannot be used to draw any conclusions at this stage.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

One common theme in the complaints is that tolls and default notices are issued for debts which have been incurred a significant period of time before the complaint is raised.

Often, the consumer claims not to have received any correspondence about any non-payment and no contact is made with them. The explanation is frequently that multiple attempts were made through a variety of media (email, post, phone, SMS) but were unsuccessful. Outdated contact information could explain this, but once debt collectors are engaged it appears that the collection agency is quickly able to locate the consumer and make contact.

The underlying cause of why collection agencies are able to quickly locate, and make contact with, consumers when the toll road operators have not been able to for long periods of time is something that toll road operators may wish to investigate.

Earlier follow up and negotiation on the debt incurred will result in both a greater recovery rate and enhanced consumer satisfaction.

FUTURE REPORTING

This interim report is the first version of the enhanced reporting approach and this will become more sophisticated over time. Reporting will also not merely look at the particular quarter for the reporting period (although the commentary will focus on the most recent trends) but will build on the data above to provide trend analysis over the longer term.

APPENDIX 1: RAW DATA

TCO Contact Types	July	August	September
Phone Calls	26	51	38
Faxes	0	0	0
Personal Appointments	0	0	0
Electronic	58	22	39
TOTAL	84	73	77

TCO Consumer Locations	July	August	September
ACT	4	0	0
NSW	22	13	22
NT	0	0	0
QLD	15	5	6
SA	0	0	0
TAS	0	0	0
VIC	16	4	11
WA	0	0	0
Outside Australia	1	0	0

Complaint Numbers	July	August	September
E-Way	1	0	7
Linkt Brisbane	15	6	6
Linkt Melbourne	16	3	8
Linkt Sydney	15	9	16
M5 South-West Motorway	11	4	2
TOTAL	58	22	39

Time Taken to Resolve	July	August	September
0-7 days	15	6	5
8-14 days	6	5	5
15-30 days	26	5	9
31-60 days	9	0	5
61-90 days	0	2	1
90+ days	2	0	0

Account Management Complaints	July	August	September
E-Way	0	0	2
Linkt Brisbane	11	3	0
Linkt Melbourne	11	2	2

Linkt Sydney	5	4	2
M5 South-West Motorway	2	0	0
TOTAL	29	9	6

Billing / Tolling Complaints	July	August	September
E-Way	1	0	5
Linkt Brisbane	4	3	6
Linkt Melbourne	5	1	6
Linkt Sydney	10	5	13
M5 South-West Motorway	9	4	2
TOTAL	29	13	32

Vehicle Classification Complaints	July	August	September
E-Way	0	0	0
Linkt Brisbane	0	0	0
Linkt Melbourne	0	0	0
Linkt Sydney	0	0	1
M5 South-West Motorway	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	1

E-way Outcomes	July	August	September
Apology	0	0	0
Non-financial action	0	0	2
Original Offer Confirmed	0	0	0
Removal of Credit Listing	0	0	0
\$0	0	0	0
\$0 - \$100	0	0	3
\$101 - \$500	1	0	0
\$501 - \$1,000	0	0	0
\$1,000+	0	0	0

Linkt Brisbane Outcomes	July	August	September
Apology	0	0	0
Non-financial action	5	1	1
Original Offer Confirmed	0	0	0
Removal of Credit Listing	0	0	0
\$0	0	0	0
\$0 - \$100	3	2	0
\$101 - \$500	1	1	0
\$501 - \$1,000	0	2	0
\$1,000+	1	0	0

Linkt Melbourne Outcomes	July	August	September
Apology	0	0	0
Non-financial action	6	1	3
Original Offer Confirmed	0	0	0
Removal of Credit Listing	0	0	0

\$0	0	0	0
\$0 - \$100	2	1	0
\$101 - \$500	2	0	1
\$501 - \$1,000	1	0	0
\$1,000+	0	0	0
Linkt Sydney Outcomes	July	August	September
Apology	0	0	0
Non-financial action	5	2	4
Original Offer Confirmed	0	0	0
Removal of Credit Listing	0	0	0
\$0	0	0	0
\$0 - \$100	2	1	3
\$101 - \$500	1	1	1
\$501 - \$1,000	1	0	0
\$1,000+	0	0	0
M5 Outcomes	July	August	September
Apology	0	0	0
Non-financial action	1	0	0
Original Offer Confirmed	0	0	0
Removal of Credit Listing	0	0	0
\$0	0	1	0
\$0 - \$100	1	3	2
\$101 - \$500	4	0	0
\$501 - \$1,000	4	0	0
\$1,000+	1	0	0