

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q2 2023 (1 APRIL 2023 – 30 JUNE 2023)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

2 August 2023

This report covers the Q2 2023 quarterly period (1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023).

The number of cases raised in Q2 2023 (86 cases) is well above the nominal range (50 to 60 cases per quarter), and is the third highest number of cases in any quarter to date. This is attributed to significantly increased financial uncertainty and cost of living pressures associated with higher inflation, higher mortgage rates and increased power prices increasing cost of living pressures on households and small businesses.

Despite the relatively large number of ECA cases this quarter, the elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q2 2023 (3.0 calendar days) was only slightly higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days).

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q2 2023 (\$736) was almost identical to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$731).

More than half of the cases raised during Q2 2023 related to the following:

- > toll invoices (44%) – which is a slightly higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (41%)
- > debt recovery, hardship assistance, infringements (14%) – which is a slightly higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (13%).

Protection of customer data continues to be of critical importance.

As reported previously, during Q3 2022 EastLink completed software development for some changes to the EastLink website that enhanced the security of customer data and transactions. For example, six digit PIN codes were replaced by passwords to login to EastLink accounts at the EastLink website.

EastLink has now completed development and is currently testing two-factor authentication for account login, which will further strengthen customer data security. This will apply to all EastLink accounts.

When it launches in late September 2023, customers will need to use one of the following methods for two-factor authentication when logging in to their EastLink account:

- > one-time passcode sent in an SMS text message to the mobile phone listed on the EastLink account
- > Microsoft Authenticator
- > Google Authenticator.

Further information about this change has been published on the EastLink website as part of a customer awareness campaign: <https://www.eastlink.com.au/news-media/16-alerts/670-eastlink-to-introduce-two-factor-authentication-for-account-login>

If you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking assistance in relation to any EastLink debt, please email hardship@connecteast.com.au or phone EastLink's customer services team in Melbourne on (03) 9955 1400 during business hours Monday to Friday (closed public holidays).

For more information about EastLink's hardship policy (which outlines available options and how to request hardship assistance), visit www.eastlink.com.au/hardship.

For more information about the role of the EastLink Customer Advocate, visit www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate.

Doug Spencer-Roy
EastLink Customer Advocate



2. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASES DURING THE QUARTER

2.1 CASES RAISED

More than half of the cases raised during Q2 2023 related to the following:

- > toll invoices (44%)
- > debt recovery, hardship assistance, infringements (14%).

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Q2 2023
Toll invoice	11	10	14	35
Toll invoice communications	2	0	0	2
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	1
Account payment	2	0	0	2
Account charge	2	1	3	6
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	0	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	1	2	0	3
Account closure	2	1	1	4
Tags	1	0	0	1
Tolls	0	0	2	2
Trip pass	0	1	0	1
Debt recovery	0	1	0	1
Customer service	1	7	3	11
Hardship assistance	6	1	0	7
Infringements (fines)	1	0	3	4
Signage	1	0	0	1
Litter	0	0	1	1
CCTV request	1	1	0	2
Insurance claim	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	31	27	28	86

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q2 2023 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Q2 2023
Q2 2023 cases closed (as at date of report)	31	27	28	86
Q2 2023 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	31	27	28	86

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 52% of cases although EastLink was not at fault and there was no valid complaint, the EastLink Customer Advocate arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament via expedited service.

19% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 10% of cases were partially upheld.

In 12% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

In 7% of cases the customer was referred to another tollway operator or other body.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Q2 2023
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	18	15	12	45
Complaint upheld	4	6	6	16
Complaint partially upheld	4	2	3	9
Complaint rejected	3	3	4	10
Complaint referred to another tollway operator etc.	2	1	3	6
TOTAL	31	27	28	86

Most cases involved complaints about modest sums – in particular, the fee component of a toll invoice but not the toll component, or the image processing fee component but not the toll component. In general, it is not the trip or toll that is disputed, but whether the trip is able to be charged to a valid account or pass, or if the trip is subject to additional fees such as the toll invoice fee or image processing fee.

This means that the refunds and credits awarded can vary significantly from month to month, depending on whether there are any of the more unusual, higher value cases during the month, and whether those complaints are upheld or rejected.

Table 4: ECA case findings – refunds & credits

ECA CASE FINDINGS – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Q2 2023
Refunds & credits awarded	\$320	\$170	\$246	\$736

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 3.0 calendar days. This elapsed time metric (calendar days) includes days on weekends and public holidays, and is synonymous with customer wait time.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Q2 2023
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	3.9	1.7	3.2	3.0

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

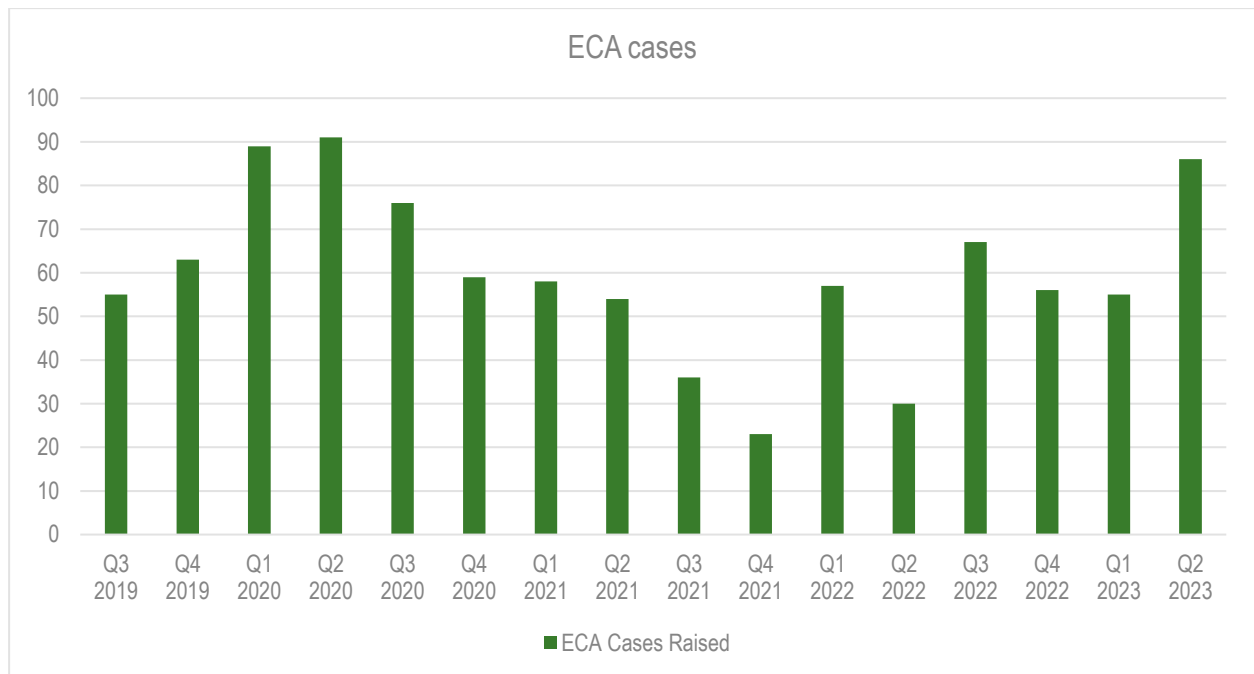
3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

Chart 1 shows the number of cases raised in each quarter since the commencement of the EastLink Customer Advocate role at the start of Q3 2019.

The chart shows a wave of additional cases during the first half of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic first emerged and impacted the economy. It also indicates that the nominal case rate is in the 50 to 60 cases per quarter range.

The number of cases raised in Q2 2023 (86 cases) is well above the nominal range, and is the third highest number of cases in any quarter to date. This is attributed to significantly increased financial uncertainty and cost of living pressures associated with higher inflation, higher mortgage rates and increased power prices increasing cost of living pressures on households and small businesses.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



44% of the cases raised during Q2 2023 related to toll invoices, which is a slightly higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (41%) – see Table 6.

8% of the cases were raised in relation to hardship assistance, which is close to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (7%) and a significant decrease compared to the previous quarter Q1 2023 (16%).

5% of the cases were raised in relation to infringements (fines), which is the same as the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (5%).

Unlike the three previous quarters, none of the cases were raised in relation to online scams. This indicating that the prevalence of the existing tolling scams has passed and scammers have moved on to new topics, or awareness of the existing tolling scams has reached sufficient levels to reduce the impact.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2021		2022				2023	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Toll invoice	16	10	20	15	31	18	15	35

ECA CASES	2021		2022				2023	
Toll invoice communications	3	0	2	0	0	0	1	2
Toll invoice payment	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
Account notice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account payment	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Account charge	1	1	4	4	6	5	2	6
Account charge for a sold vehicle	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	3
Account charge for an LPN error	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	1	0	1	0	0	1	5	4
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	2	0	0	0	2	0	2	1
Tolls	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tolling class	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Trip pass	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1
Rental vehicle toll payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debt recovery	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1
Customer service	5	4	17	4	10	9	6	11
Payment options	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Website	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hardship assistance	1	0	2	4	4	4	9	7
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	0	0	0	0	6	7	5	0
Infringements (fines)	2	1	0	1	2	6	3	4
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Litter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Noise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Speed limit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Graffiti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landscaping	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Privacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problem with another tollway operator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Police enquiry	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
CCTV request	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Insurance claim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	36	23	57	30	67	56	55	86

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q1 2023 (86 cases) was well above the nominal range (50-60 cases).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q1 2023 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7 (overleaf).

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2021		2022				2023	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	14	7	24	12	32	28	26	45
Complaint upheld	10	5	17	9	14	9	9	16
Complaint partially upheld	1	6	5	3	13	8	7	9
Complaint rejected	8	5	11	4	8	7	12	10
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	6
Insufficient details provided	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
TOTAL	36	23	57	30	67	56	55	86

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q2 2023 (\$736) was almost identical to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$731) – see Table 8.

This re-confirms that the unusually very low amount for the earlier quarter Q4 2022 (\$264) was simply a statistical outlier.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2021		2022				2023	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Refunds & credits awarded	\$647	\$781	\$690	\$511	\$1,088	\$264	\$1,133	\$736

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q2 2023 (3.0 calendar days) was slightly higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days) – see Table 9.

Eight cases in Q2 2023 took a relatively long time to close (32, 16, 14, 14, 13, 13, 12 and 11 calendar days respectively):

- > In four of these eight cases, the delay (32, 16, 14, and 12 calendar days) was attributed to waiting for a third party tollway operator to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.
- > In two of these eight cases, the delay (13 and 13 calendar days) was attributed to waiting for a vehicle registration authority to provide information to assist with investigation of the case.

Excluding these eight cases, the average time to close the remaining 78 cases during Q2 2023 was just 1.7 calendar days.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2021		2022				2023	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	1.9	2.8	2.3	3.5	3.7	2.4	2.3	3.0

4. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE EXAMPLES

This section only shows a very brief summary of each case example. The detailed circumstances of every case are unique, so these case examples should not be read as precedents for other cases.

4.1 CUSTOMER A (EASTLINK PROVIDED WITH OUT OF DATE VEHICLE OWNER DETAILS)

Customer A sold their vehicle. The vehicle subsequently used EastLink without an arrangement to pay the toll. However the registration authority provided EastLink with Customer A's details, not the new owner's details. Customer A provided a copy of the vehicle transfer form with their complaint, which showed the vehicle sale on the same date as the EastLink trip and also included the new owner's details. Customer A's toll invoice was cancelled. The travel was nominated to the new owner.

4.2 CUSTOMER B (EASTLINK NOT NOTIFIED ABOUT LOST TAGS)

Nearly two years ago, Customer B removed two vehicles from their EastLink account but did not return the EastLink tags or notify EastLink that the tags were lost. Recent trips by one of those tags resulted in unexpected charges to the EastLink account and the EastLink account being suspended. During a call with EastLink's customer service team the two tags were marked as 'lost' (stopping further charges on Customer B's account), however the need to pay the recent account charges was disputed and the account remained suspended. Customer B complained to the EastLink Customer Advocate that the disputed account charges were not refunded. Although there was no error by EastLink, Customer B had contacted EastLink relatively soon after discovering the problem, so 50% of the disputed charges were credited to the EastLink account. Customer B was also advised how to reactivate the account.

4.3 CUSTOMER C (SUSPENSION OF ACCOUNT ISSUED BY ANOTHER TOLLWAY OPERATOR)

Customer C complained that EastLink had not informed the customer that their tolling account was suspended, resulting in EastLink toll invoices being issued for travel over a one month period. Investigation revealed that the customer has an account issued by another tollway operator. Upon request, the other tollway operator confirmed to EastLink that the account was definitely suspended throughout this period. Customer C was advised that EastLink is unable to provide customer service in relation to an account issued by another tollway operator, and cannot be responsible for providing account notices to holders of accounts issued by another tollway operator. Customer C should have responded to the numerous EastLink toll invoices, overdue notices and electronic reminders that had been sent (no payments or contacts were received by EastLink). There was no error by EastLink. The outstanding amounts remain payable to EastLink. Customer C should contact the other tollway operator in relation to their tolling account. Customer C should contact Fines Victoria in relation to any infringement penalty notices issued by Victoria Police / Fines Victoria.

4.4 CUSTOMER D (TRIP PASS PURCHASED TOO LATE FOR INTERSTATE VEHICLE)

Customer D purchased an EastLink trip pass for an interstate vehicle. However the trip pass was purchased five days after travel instead of within the required three days. The EastLink toll invoice and overdue notice were issued correctly (to the interstate home address of Customer D). Although there was no error by EastLink, the purchase of the trip pass indicates Customer D's willingness and intent to pay for the trip. The overdue notice was cancelled as well as the unused trip pass. The net effect is that Customer D has made one trip and paid for one trip pass.

4.5 CUSTOMER E (MISTAKE MADE WHEN PURCHASING TRIP PASS)

Customer E purchased an EastLink trip pass following their travel. Customer E complained about being sent an EastLink toll invoice when an EastLink trip pass had been purchased. Investigation revealed that Customer E had made an error when buying the trip pass at the EastLink website ('0' in the licence plate number instead of the correct 'O'). The complaint indicates that Customer E genuinely believed that their vehicle has a '0' in the licence plate number. Although there was no error by EastLink, the purchase of the trip pass indicates Customer E's willingness and intent to pay for the trip. The toll invoice was cancelled as well as the unused trip pass. A clear explanation of the licence plate number error was provided, as well as a copy of the vehicle search results on the registration authority's public website. The net effect is that Customer E has made one trip and paid for one trip pass. Furthermore, Customer E now knows the correct licence plate number of their vehicle.

For further information:

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