

# EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q3 2022 (1 JULY 2022 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2022)



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## 1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

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9 November 2022

**This report covers the Q3 2022 quarterly period (1 July 2022 – 30 September 2022).**

Following a significant reduction in the case rate during Q2 2022 compared to the nominal case rate level (50 to 60 cases per quarter), Q3 2022 saw the case rate return to more normal levels with 67 cases raised during the quarter.

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q3 2022 (3.7 days) was higher than the longer term average (2.6 days).

One case in Q3 2022 took an extremely long time to close (52 days). This delay was due to a third party tollway operator's involvement in the resolution of the case. See section 4.5 for more details about this case.

Excluding this one case, the average time to close ECA cases during Q3 2022 would fall to 3.0 calendar days, which is significantly closer to the longer term average.

During Q3 2022, six cases (9% of the total) were raised in relation to online scams. This is the first time that cases have related to online scams.

The online scams involve large volumes of text messages about fictitious tolling debts being sent by cybercriminals to seemingly random Australian mobile phone numbers.

The scam messages aim to encourage recipients to visit scam phishing websites. The scam phishing websites seek to capture credit card details, which are then used by cybercriminals for large-value fraudulent transactions.

The scam messages and scam phishing websites use Australian tollway trademarks such as EastLink, Transurban, Linkt and E-toll. However, the scam messages are generic and do not include any personal information belonging to the recipient. This indicates that a scatter-gun approach is being used by the cybercriminals, and that the security of tolling customer data has not been compromised.

These tolling scams are a recent development that has attracted significant media attention across Australia.

EastLink has published information on its website [www.eastlink.com.au](http://www.eastlink.com.au) to help people identify whether a text message about EastLink is genuine or not. Transurban Linkt has also done this.

Protection of customer data is of critical importance.

During Q3 2022, EastLink completed software development for some changes to the EastLink website that have enhanced the security of customer data and transactions.

For example, six digit PIN codes have been replaced by passwords to login to EastLink accounts at the EastLink website.

The first time a customer login is made to an EastLink account at the EastLink website using a correct six digit PIN code, the website now requires the customer to immediately create a new password for the EastLink account. The new password will need to satisfy minimum criteria, such as a minimum length.

**If you are experiencing financial hardship and are seeking assistance in relation to any EastLink debt, please 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](http://www.eastlink.com.au/hardship).

For more information about the role of the EastLink Customer Advocate, visit [www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate](http://www.eastlink.com.au/customeradvocate).

**Doug Spencer-Roy**  
EastLink Customer Advocate



## 2. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASES DURING THE QUARTER

### 2.1 CASES RAISED

46% of the cases raised during Q3 2022 related to toll invoices.

Six cases (9% of the total) were raised in relation to online scams.

The online scams involve large volumes of text messages about fictitious tolling debts being sent by cybercriminals to seemingly random Australian mobile phone numbers. The scam messages aim to encourage recipients to visit scam phishing websites. The scam phishing websites seek to capture credit card details, which are then used by cybercriminals for large-value fraudulent transactions. These tolling scams are a recent development that has attracted significant media attention across Australia.

In four of these six cases, the recipient of the scam message was querying why they had received the message when they had not used EastLink.

In the other two cases, the recipient was aware that the message was a scam and was reporting it to EastLink.

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Q3 2022
Toll invoice	7	7	17	31
Account payment	0	1	0	1
Account charge	2	3	1	6
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	0	1
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	0	0	1	1
Tags	1	0	1	2
Debt recovery	0	1	0	1
Customer service	4	4	2	10
Hardship assistance	2	1	1	4
Scam	0	1	5	6
Infringements (fines)	0	2	0	2
Landscaping	0	1	0	1
Police enquiry	0	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>67</b>

### 2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q3 2022 have been closed.

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Q3 2022
Q3 2022 cases closed (as at date of report)	16	22	29	67
Q3 2022 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>67</b>

### 2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 48% 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.

21% of cases were fully upheld, and a further 19% of cases were partially upheld.

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

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Q3 2022
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	8	7	17	32
Complaint upheld	4	4	6	14
Complaint partially upheld	2	8	3	13
Complaint rejected	2	3	3	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>67</b>

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.

For example, one case raised in September 2022 resulted in a refund of \$460 being provided to one customer, which equates to 42% of the total refunds for the quarter. (In this particular case the refund was paid by another tollway operator – see section 4.5 for more information).

Table 4: ECA case findings – refunds &amp; credits

ECA CASE FINDINGS – REFUNDS & CREDITS	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Q3 2022
Refunds & credits awarded	\$136	\$282	\$670	\$1,088

## 2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during the quarter was 3.7 days. This elapsed time includes weekend days and public holidays.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Q3 2022
Average time to close cases (days)	1.6	2.6	5.7	3.7

### Case Study – motorist complaint about an EastLink website failure and querying outstanding debt

The motorist complained that the EastLink website had failed to process a toll invoice payment. The motorist also queried the legitimacy of other outstanding EastLink debt that was indicated by the EastLink website.

Investigation revealed that the motorist's vehicle had travelled on EastLink 32 times over nearly 3 months with no arrangement to pay the toll. Nine EastLink toll invoices had been issued to the motorist for this travel, and none had been paid. Four EastLink overdue notices had also been issued to the motorist for toll invoices that had passed their due dates.

EastLink's computer records indicated that the customer had recently attempted to pay one EastLink toll invoice, but the payment was rejected by the banking provider. This was not a failure of EastLink's website or systems.

There had been no error by EastLink.

Copies of outstanding EastLink toll invoices and overdue notices were provided to the motorist, along with information about the payment options.

The motorist was advised to contact their bank in the event of further debit/credit card payment failures.

To provide further assistance to the motorist, the payment due date for the outstanding debt was extended.

### 3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

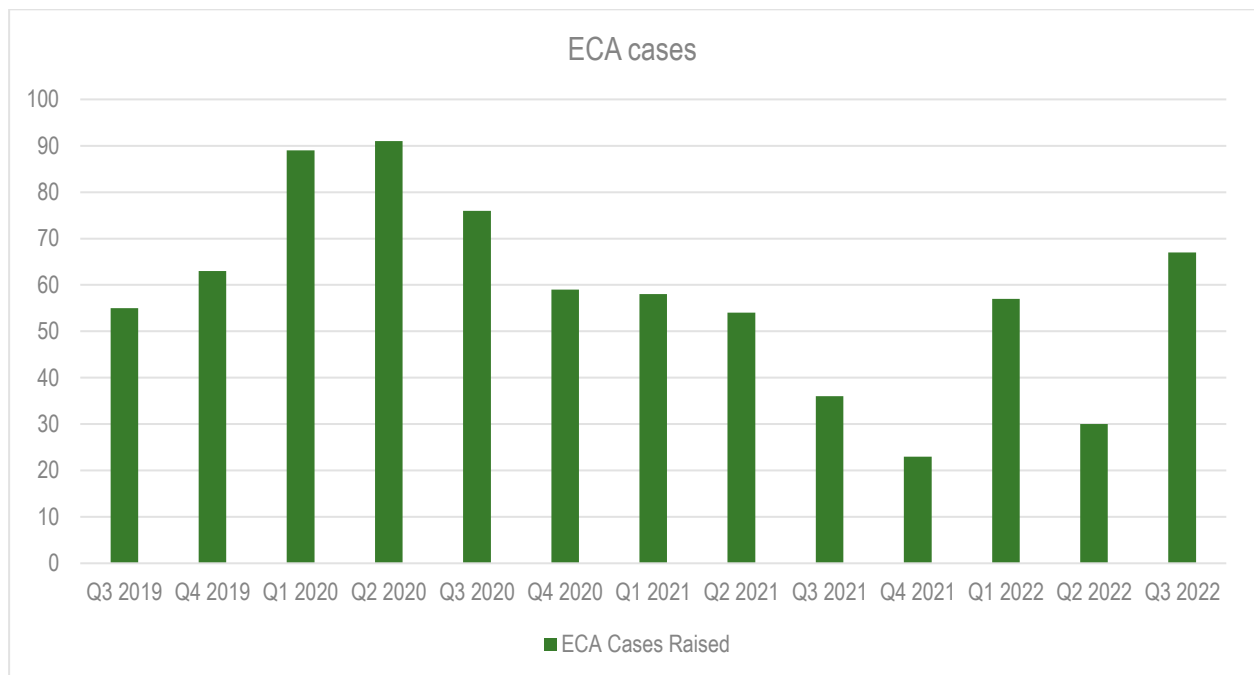
#### 3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

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 Q3 2022 (67 cases) is therefore slightly higher than the nominal range.

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



46% of the cases raised during Q3 2022 related to toll invoices, which is a slightly higher proportion than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (43%) – see Table 6.

Six cases (9% of the total) were raised in relation to online scams. This is the first time that cases have related to online scams. See Sections 1 and 2.1 for more information.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2020		2021				2022		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	
Toll invoice	18	19	23	16	10	20	15	31	
Toll invoice SMS/email message	1	2	1	3	0	2	0	0	
Toll invoice payment	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	
Account notice	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Account payment	4	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	
Account charge	3	3	7	1	1	4	4	6	
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	4	0	1	1	0	0	1	
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle etc	3	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	

ECA CASES	2020	2021				2022		
Account charge for an LPN error	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	0
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	2
Tolls	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tolling class	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trip pass	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
Rental vehicle toll payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debt recovery	1	2	2	0	0	2	0	1
Customer service	17	7	5	5	4	17	4	10
Payment options	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Website	3	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Hardship assistance	2	5	8	1	0	2	4	4
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Infringements (fines)	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	2
Incident response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Debris damage	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	0	1	0	0	1	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	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Police enquiry	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>67</b>

As outlined earlier in section 3.1, the number of cases in Q3 2022 (67 cases) was slightly higher than the nominal range (50 to 60 cases).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings was not particularly unusual in Q3 2022 compared to previous quarters – see Table 7 (overleaf).

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASES	2020	2021				2022		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	41	29	20	14	7	24	12	32
Complaint upheld	6	7	13	10	5	17	9	14
Complaint partially upheld	5	8	9	1	6	5	3	13
Complaint rejected	7	14	11	8	5	11	4	8
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Insufficient details provided	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>67</b>

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q3 2022 (\$1,088) was slightly lower than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$1,236) – see Table 8.

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds &amp; credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2020	2021				2022		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Refunds & credits awarded	\$1,131	\$2,789	\$2,103	\$647	\$781	\$690	\$511	\$1,088

The elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q3 2022 (3.7 days) was higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.6 days) – see Table 9.

One case in Q3 2022 took an extremely long time to close (52 days). This delay was due to a third party tollway operator's involvement in the resolution of the case. See section 4.5 for more details about this case.

Excluding this one case, the average time to close ECA cases during Q3 2022 would fall to 3.0 calendar days, which is significantly closer to the longer term average.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2020	2021				2022		
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
Average time to close cases (days)	2.5	2.8	2.1	1.9	2.8	2.3	3.5	3.7

## 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 (MINIMUM ANNUAL TAG USAGE FEE)

Customer A complained about a minimum annual tag usage fee that had been charged to their EastLink account for a light commercial vehicle tag having not been advised of this fee in advance. Customer A also wanted to close their EastLink account.

Investigation revealed a phone call in which Customer A ordered the new tag and the customer was informed of the minimum annual tag usage amount.

However, the call recording indicated that the customer service operator in this case could have better explained how the minimum annual tag usage fee is calculated as well as better explained the two options: order a tag and potentially be charged the minimum tag usage fee OR no tag and be charged image processing fees.



Customer A's account was credited with the minimum tag usage fee that had been charged (\$26.80), and Customer A was asked whether to proceed with the account closure process. Customer A replied that they wished to keep the EastLink account open.

#### **4.2 CUSTOMER B (ACCIDENTAL USE OF EASTLINK)**

Customer B complained that they had travelled on EastLink accidentally while following their GPS, and had exited EastLink at the first opportunity. Customer B complained they had received an SMS message requesting payment and warning about an infringement penalty notice, but had not received anything prior.

Investigation revealed that an EastLink toll invoice and an EastLink overdue notice had both been posted to Customer B.

The SMS message was only sent by EastLink after the due date of the overdue notice.

There was no error by EastLink.

Customer B was advised to contact VicRoads to ensure their postal address was up to date.

Customer B had paid in full when the SMS message was received.

This sort of complaint (accidental use, exited at first opportunity and a once off use of EastLink) to EastLink's customer service team would normally result in cancellation of the toll invoice as a gesture of goodwill.

In this case the customer had not contacted EastLink's customer service team. The \$15 payment was refunded in full.

#### **4.3 CUSTOMER C (TRIP PASS PURCHASE INCOMPLETE)**

Customer C complained that they were being double charged for trips on EastLink.

Investigation revealed that two trips had been made on EastLink but that an attempt to purchase two EastLink trip passes via the EastLink website was not successfully completed (payment was not received by EastLink, and no receipt was issued by EastLink). Later, Customer C made two further trips on EastLink and successfully purchased two EastLink trip passes – which were consumed by the first two trips.

An EastLink toll invoice was issued for the second two trips.

There was no error by EastLink.

However, the investigation indicated a history of regular trip passes purchased for and used by Customer C's vehicle.

The toll invoice fee for the two unpaid trips was waived, which reduced the amount payable for those two trips to very close to the cost of two trip passes.

It was also recommended that Customer C consider an EastLink account for future trips.

#### **4.4 CUSTOMER D (ERROR BY ANOTHER TOLLWAY OPERATOR)**

Customer D complained about EastLink toll invoices issued for travel by a vehicle that was linked to a tolling account issued by another tollway operator.

Investigation revealed that Customer D's tolling account was not suspended at the time of travel. However the other tollway operator advised that their error had resulted in Customer D's vehicle being temporarily not covered for travel on EastLink.

One EastLink overdue notice had been paid by the customer, and another EastLink overdue notice had not yet paid.

The other tollway operator credited Customer D's account with the fees for both EastLink overdue notices.

Customer D was advised that the second EastLink overdue notice remained payable to EastLink as the fees had been reimbursed to Customer D via the account credit from the other tollway operator.

#### **4.5 CUSTOMER E (ERROR BY ANOTHER TOLLWAY OPERATOR)**

Customer E complained about EastLink toll invoices issued for travel by a vehicle that was linked to a tolling account issued by another tollway operator.

Investigation revealed that the other tollway operator had made an error.

The error apparently related to recent EastLink toll invoices issued to Customer E, but not to older EastLink toll invoices issues to Customer E.

However, the other tollway operator was not able to identify the specific scope of the error – specifically which of the EastLink toll invoices had been caused by the other tollway operator’s error, and which had been caused by Customer E’s error.

After continuing to investigate for a relatively long time without resolution, the other tollway operator finally paid to EastLink a significant amount (\$460) covering all of Customer E’s EastLink debts.

In the meantime, Customer E had set up a payment plan with EastLink and had made the first two payments on the payment plan.

As the other tollway operator had subsequently made the full payment to EastLink, EastLink provided a refund to Customer E for the first two payments on the payment plan and cancelled the payment plan to ensure there was no double payment.

**For further information:**

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