

EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE REPORT

Q1 2026 (1 JANUARY 2026 – 31 MARCH 2026)



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1. EASTLINK CUSTOMER ADVOCATE'S MESSAGE

20 April 2026

This report covers the Q1 2026 quarterly period (1 January 2026 – 31 March 2026).

For the seventh consecutive quarter, the number of cases raised in Q1 2026 (36 cases) remains lower than the nominal case rate (50-60 cases per quarter).

The majority of cases raised during Q1 2026 related to toll invoices (64%). This is similar to most quarters. There is nothing unusual about the mix of cases in Q1 2026.

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q1 2026 (2.8 calendar days) was similar to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days)

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q1 2026 (\$724) was 39% less than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$1,185). (However, the longer term average was magnified by a single case in Q4 2025, in which a refund of \$2,472 was provided to the customer's account. Excluding Q4 2025, the longer term average was \$902.)

The following hardship assistance data is sourced from EastLink's hardship team:

- > The number of payment plans created during Q1 2026 (1,403 plans created) was 24% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,131 plans created).
- > The average value of payment plans created during Q1 2026 (\$301) was similar to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$308).
- > The number of fines withdrawn by EastLink due to hardship during Q1 2026 (2,866 fines withdrawn) was 72% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,671 fines withdrawn). There has now been quarter on quarter growth in this metric since Q4 2024. This is attributed to increasing awareness in the community that EastLink can request withdrawal of EastLink fines for people experiencing hardship.
- > The number of people assisted with fines withdrawn during Q1 2026 (139 people assisted) was 42% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (98 people assisted).
- > The average number of fines withdrawn per person during Q1 2026 (21 fines withdrawn per person) was 31% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (16 fines withdrawn per person), and the second-equal highest number on record.

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 (excluding 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.

EastLink has been engaging with community legal centres on a revised hardship policy. We plan to publish the new hardship policy in Q2 2026, and I will provide more information about it in my next quarterly report.

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

During Q1 2026, the majority of cases related to toll invoices (64%).

Table 1: ECA cases raised

ECA CASES RAISED	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Q1 2026
Toll invoice	10	6	7	23
Account charge	1	1	0	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	0	1	5	6
Account communications	1	0	0	1
Tolls	1	0	0	1
Tolling class	0	0	1	1
Third party scam	1	0	0	1
Infringements (fines)	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	15	8	13	36

2.2 CASES CLOSED

All of the cases raised during Q1 2026 have been closed. The last of these cases to close was received on 27/3/2026. Following investigation, the customer's complaint was partially upheld, the customer's account was credited with a part of the disputed amount as a gesture of goodwill (although EastLink was not at fault), and the case was closed on 2/4/2026. The customer was notified on 7/4/2026 (immediately following the Easter long weekend 3/4/2026-6/4/2026).

Table 2: ECA cases closed

ECA CASES CLOSED	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Q1 2026
Q1 2026 cases closed (as at date of report)	15	8	13	36
Q1 2026 cases still open (as at date of report)	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15	8	13	36

2.3 CASE FINDINGS

In 14% of cases during Q1 2026, although EastLink was not at fault and there was no valid complaint, the ECA arranged for EastLink's customer service team to assist the customer with their predicament via expedited service.

11% of cases in the quarter were fully upheld, and a further 36% of cases were partially upheld.

In 25% of cases the complaint was rejected with no practical customer service assistance identifiable.

Three customers were referred to another tollway operator or other body. Two customers did not provide sufficient details to allow their case to be investigated, despite the information being requested and reminders being sent.

Table 3: ECA case findings

ECA CASE FINDINGS	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Q1 2026
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	2	1	2	5
Complaint upheld	3	1	0	4
Complaint partially upheld	2	4	7	13
Complaint rejected	4	1	4	9
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	2	1	0	3
Insufficient details provided	2	0	0	2
TOTAL	15	8	13	36

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 usually 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	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Q1 2026
Refunds & credits awarded	\$119	\$414	\$191	\$724

2.4 ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE CASES

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q1 2026 was 2.8 calendar days. This elapsed time metric (calendar days) includes days on weekends and public holidays, and is synonymous with customer wait time.

One case in Q1 2026 took a relatively long time to close (14 calendar days):

- > This was a case involving a taxi driver with a tag issued by another tollway operator. The delay was due to waiting to receive information that had been requested from the other tollway operator. See *Section 5.5 Customer E (taxi tag failed)* for more details.

Excluding this one case, the average time to close ECA cases during Q1 2026 would fall to 2.5 calendar days.

Table 5: Elapsed time to close ECA cases

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Mar 2026	Q1 2026
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	1.1	3.4	4.5	2.8

Case Study – scam email

The customer – an EastLink account holder – complained about a threatening email received from another tollway operator.

The Customer Advocate examined the email and assessed it as a scam based on a number of indicators.

The customer was informed: it’s a scam, do not click the link, do not reply to the email, and delete the email.

The customer was also provided with a screenshot of the other tollway operator’s website, which confirmed that there were no outstanding debts for the customer’s vehicle.

3. CUSTOMER ADVOCATE CASE TRENDS

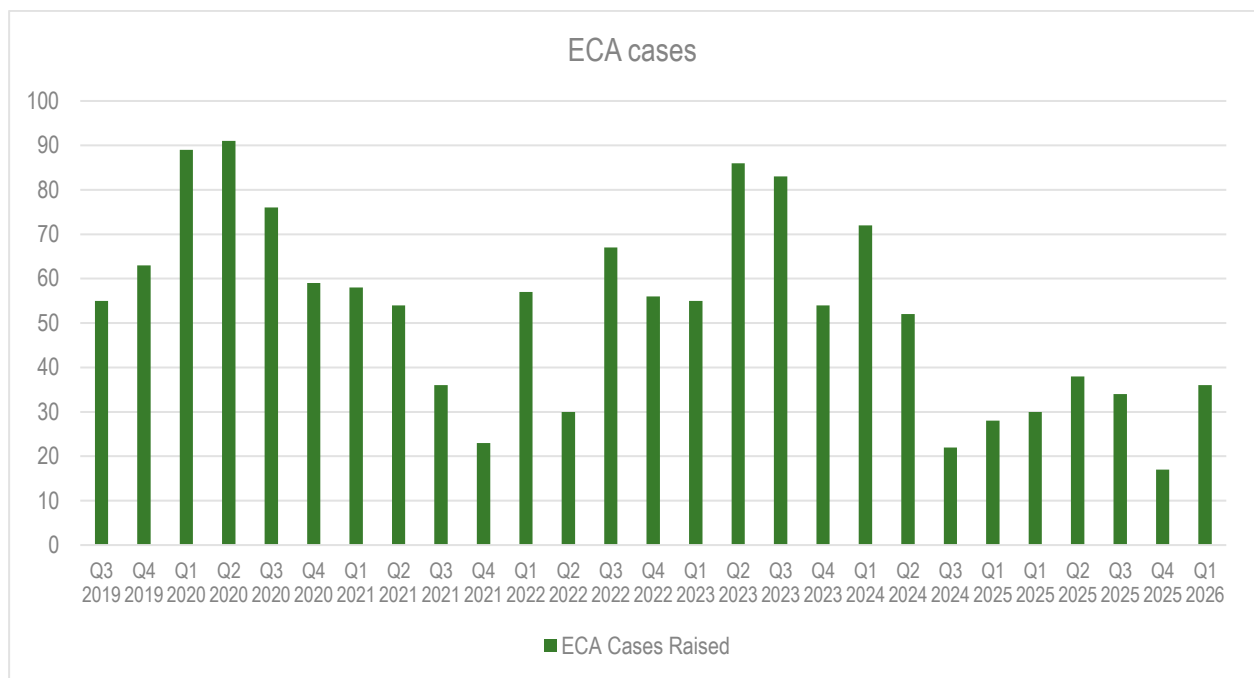
3.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

Chart 1 shows the number of cases raised in each quarter since the commencement of the ECA 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. More recent waves in the middle quarters of 2023 and in Q1 2024 are attributed to increases in cost of living pressures. The chart also indicates that the nominal case rate is in the 50 to 60 cases per quarter range.

For the seventh consecutive quarter, the number of cases raised in Q1 2026 (36 cases) remains lower than the nominal case rate (50-60 cases per quarter).

Chart 1: ECA cases trend



The majority of cases raised during Q1 2026 related to toll invoices (64%) – see Table 6. This is similar to most quarters (Q4 2025 being a lone outlier). There is nothing unusual about the mix of cases raised in Q1 2026.

Table 6: ECA cases trend

ECA CASES	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Toll invoice	15	10	18	22	19	20	3	23
Toll invoice communications	1	1	0	1	3	2	0	0
Toll invoice payment	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Account notice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account charge	2	4	3	1	3	3	1	2
Account charge for a sold vehicle	6	2	1	1	1	2	1	6
Account charge for stolen plates/vehicle	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Account charge for an LPN error	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

ECA CASES	2024			2025			2026	
Account communications	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Account suspension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Account closure	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Deceased account	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tags	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
Tolls	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tolling class	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Trip pass	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Debt recovery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer service	12	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Payment options	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Website	2	1	1	2	1	0	1	0
Hardship assistance	3	1	1	0	3	2	0	0
Payment plan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Third party scam	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Infringements (fines)	2	0	0	1	3	2	2	1
Incident response	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Debris damage	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Abandoned vehicle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Road maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signage	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Litter	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Noise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Speed limit	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Graffiti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Landscaping, public artworks	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
EastLink Trail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wildlife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Privacy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown (withdrawn, insufficient details)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police enquiry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CCTV request	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insurance claim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	52	22	28	30	38	34	17	36

As outlined earlier in Section 3.1, for the seventh consecutive quarter, the number of cases in Q1 2026 (36 cases) remains lower than the nominal case rate (50-60 cases per quarter).

The distribution of these cases across each category of case findings does not indicate anything out of the ordinary – Table 7.

Table 7: ECA case findings trend

ECA CASE FINDINGS	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Service expedited (no valid complaint)	27	8	12	10	11	4	6	5
Complaint upheld	7	6	7	8	7	4	3	4
Complaint partially upheld	9	4	3	8	4	11	2	13
Complaint rejected	6	4	5	4	13	15	5	9
Referred to another tollway operator etc.	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
Insufficient details provided	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	52	22	28	30	38	34	17	36

The total amount of refunds and credits during Q1 2026 (\$724) was 39% less than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$1,185) – see Table 8. (However, the longer term average was magnified by a single case in Q4 2025, in which a refund of \$2,472 was provided to the customer’s account. Excluding Q4 2025, the longer term average was \$902.)

The mean average refund/credit per case during Q1 2026 (\$20) less than half the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$48). (Excluding Q4 2025, the longer term average was \$28.)

Table 8: ECA case findings – refunds & credits trend

ECA CASES – REFUNDS & CREDITS	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Refunds & credits awarded	\$1,492	\$905	\$1,035	\$1,085	\$527	\$367	\$2,883	\$724
Mean average per case (all cases)	\$29	\$41	\$37	\$36	\$14	\$11	\$170	\$20

The average elapsed time to close ECA cases during Q1 2026 (2.8 calendar days) was similar to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (2.7 calendar days) – see Table 9.

Table 9: Elapsed time to close ECA cases trend

ELAPSED TIME TO CLOSE ECA CASES	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Average time to close cases (calendar days)	2.1	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.7	3.8	2.8

4. HARDSHIP ASSISTANCE

This section includes hardship assistance data that is sourced from EastLink's hardship team, who administer EastLink's hardship assistance programs.

4.1 PAYMENT PLANS

The number of payment plans created during Q1 2026 (1,403 plans created) was 24% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,131 plans created) – see Table 10.

The average value of payment plans created during Q1 2026 (\$301) was similar to the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (\$308).

Table 10: Payment plans created

PAYMENT PLANS CREATED	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Payment plans created	1,169	1,107	1,076	1,216	1,346	1,373	629	1,403
Total value of plans created	\$310,302	\$367,300	\$325,471	\$417,163	\$367,104	\$428,079	\$208,155	\$421,918
Average value of plan created	\$265	\$332	\$302	\$343	\$273	\$312	\$331	\$301

4.2 FINES WITHDRAWN DUE TO FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Fines for unpaid EastLink tolls are issued by Victoria Police and administered by Fines Victoria.

For a single vehicle, a maximum of one EastLink fine can be issued per seven-day consecutive period.

In cases of financial hardship and family violence, EastLink can request withdrawal of EastLink fines.

The number of fines withdrawn by EastLink due to hardship during Q1 2026 (2,866 fines withdrawn) was 72% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (1,671 fines withdrawn). There has now been quarter on quarter growth in this metric since Q4 2024 – see Table 11. This is attributed to increasing awareness in the community that EastLink can request withdrawal of EastLink fines for people experiencing hardship.

The number of people assisted with fines withdrawn during Q1 2026 (139 people assisted) was 42% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (98 people assisted).

The average number of fines withdrawn per person during Q1 2026 (21 fines withdrawn per person) was 31% higher than the longer term average over the preceding seven quarters (16 fines withdrawn per person), and the second-equal highest number on record.

Table 11: EastLink fines withdrawn due to hardship

FINES WITHDRAWN DUE TO HARDSHIP	2024			2025				2026
	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Fines withdrawn	963	3,813	825	935	1,424	1,827	1,908	2,866
People assisted	91	132	59	81	106	124	92	139
Average fines withdrawn per person	11	29	14	12	13	15	21	21

5. 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.

5.1 CUSTOMER A (TOLL INVOICE LATE POSTAL DELIVERY)

Customer A complained that they received an EastLink toll invoice after its Due Date, which led to an EastLink overdue notice being issued (with a higher toll invoice fee). Investigation revealed that the problem was within the postal delivery service. The additional amount of the overdue notice compared with the original toll invoice was waived. A tolling account or buying EastLink trip passes was recommended to Customer A as a way to avoid unexpected postal delays in future.

5.2 CUSTOMER B (OTHER TOLLWAY INVOICE PAID, EASTLINK INVOICE NOT PAID)

Customer B's vehicle travelled on a tollway operated by another tollway operator, and then almost immediately on EastLink. A toll invoice was issued by the other tollway operator, and paid by Customer B. An EastLink toll invoice was issued, but not paid by Customer B. This led to an EastLink overdue notice being issued to Customer B. EastLink toll invoices and overdue notices include a map showing the location of EastLink and its toll points, as a reference for the trips listed. The trips listed in toll invoices issued by all tollway operators include date, time and toll zone locations. Customer B complained that they had already paid. It was explained to Customer B about the two tollways with different ownership, and that the EastLink overdue notice is payable. A tolling account was recommended to Customer B to avoid invoice fees in future. It was explained that only one tolling account is needed for all tollways.

5.3 CUSTOMER C (TOLLING ACCOUNT TEMPORARILY STOPPED WORKING)

Customer C complained about an EastLink toll invoice being issued while they had a valid tolling account issued by another tollway operator. Customer C now has an EastLink account and has closed the account with the other tollway operator. Investigation revealed 27 EastLink trips over a six week period were charged successfully to the tolling account. However, for three consecutive days within that six week period, 13 EastLink trips were rejected by the other tollway operator, which resulted in one EastLink toll invoice being issued. The other tollway operator informed EastLink that there had been a system error with the account. The other tollway operator offered to pay an amount equivalent to the amount of the EastLink toll invoice. EastLink credited that payment from the other tollway operator to Customer C's EastLink account, and with Customer C's agreement, charged the EastLink toll invoice to the EastLink account.

5.4 CUSTOMER D (ACCOUNTS ISSUED BY OTHER TOLLWAYS DON'T BACKDATE FOR EASTLINK)

Customer D added two vehicles to their interstate tolling account 2-3 days after both of those vehicles travelled on EastLink. EastLink issued two toll invoices – one for each vehicle's travel. It was explained to Customer D that there was no error by EastLink, as other tollway operators don't backdate coverage for EastLink travel when adding vehicles to their accounts. Both invoices are payable. The due date for both invoices was extended to provide assistance. Customer D should contact the interstate tollway operator for any enquiry about the status, operation, terms and conditions that apply to the interstate tolling account.

5.5 CUSTOMER E (TAXI TAG FAILED)

Customer E's tag – issued by another tollway operator – failed. Customer E's taxi was not linked to any tolling account. This led to three EastLink toll invoices being issued. Customer E paid the first two EastLink toll invoices and then complained about the third EastLink toll invoice. Investigation with the other tollway operator revealed that under their taxi driver account terms and conditions, taxi drivers are not required to have their vehicle linked to their tolling account (to accommodate regular changing of taxis, e.g. every shift). Also, it was confirmed that Customer E's tag had failed and a replacement tag had already been issued and was now in active use. The outstanding EastLink toll invoice was cancelled, and the additional fees on the two paid invoices was refunded.

For further information:

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