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National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners

MANAGING PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT – CONSUMER PROTECTION

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ERB/NARUC Partnership
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HIGHLIGHTS OF PRESENTATION

- 1.0 Mandate to investigate complaints
- 2.0 Types of complaints
- 3.0 Lodging complaints
- 4.0 Complaints Procedure
- 5.0 Number of complaints received

HIGHLIGHTS OF PRESENTATION

- 6.0 Protection of consumers
- 7.0 Public involvement in consumer protection
- 8.0 Challenges of effective public involvement
- 9.0 Inter agency cooperation
- 10.0 List of Consumer interest groups

1.0 Mandate to investigate

The ERB is mandated by Section 6 of the Energy Regulation Act and Energy Regulation (Amendment) Act to:

- ❖ Receive and investigate complaints from consumers on price adjustments by any undertaking, and
- ❖ Receive and investigate complaints from consumers and licensed undertakings on services provided by the undertakings.

2.0 Types of complaints

- ❖ Billing and Payment Issues
 - ❖ Billing, disconnection, payment arrangements, service termination
- ❖ Quality of Service Issues
 - ❖ Meter testing, new service connection, outages, service appointments and damaged equipment.
- ❖ Quality of Product Issues
 - ❖ Fuel contamination

3.0 Lodging a complaint

- ❖ **A complaint may be made to the Board by any person, corporation, chamber of commerce, board of trade, or any industrial, commercial, agricultural or manufacturing society, or any political body or Local Authority by way of a complaint in writing (i.e. letter or e-mail) or oral (phone or walk-in).**
- ❖ **The said complaint must state the name and address of the consumer and outline the act or omission being complained of and the relief sought.**

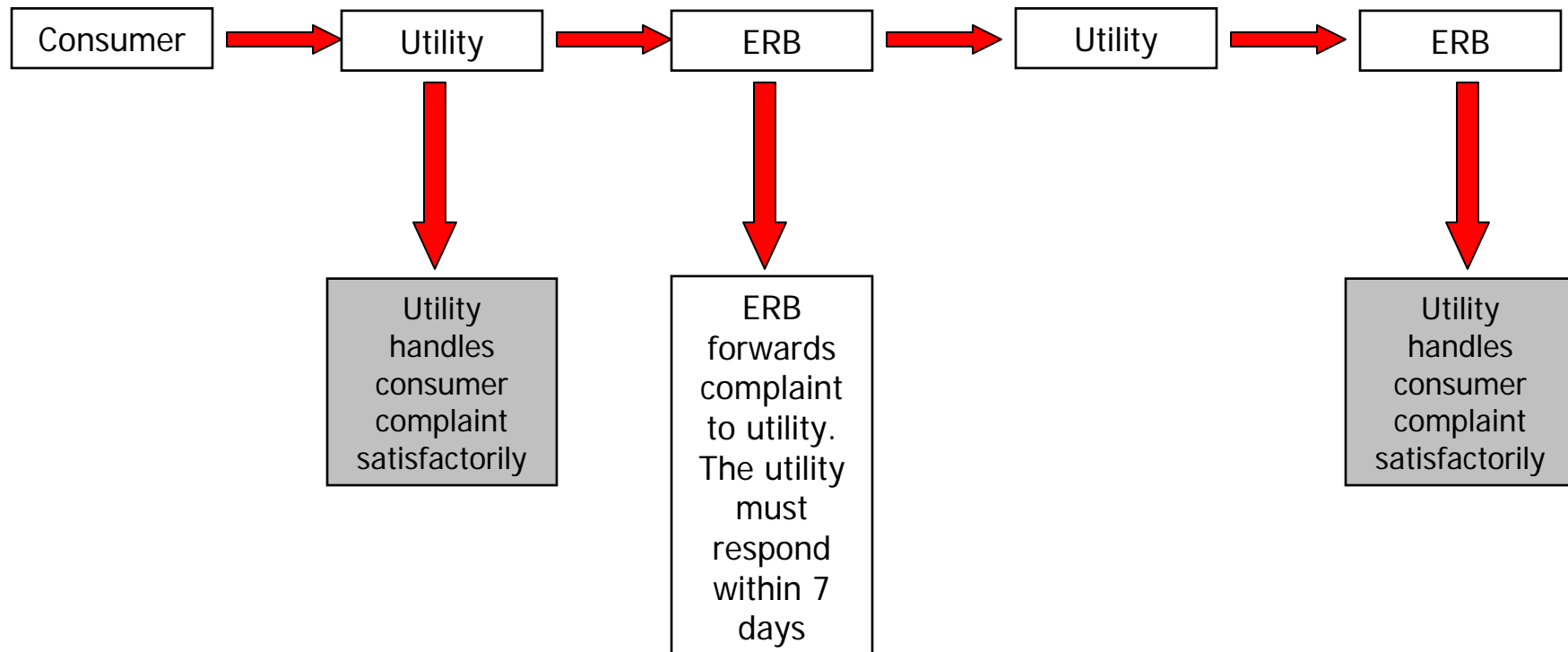
3.1 Lodging a complaint

- ❖ Upon filing of a complaint, the ERB informs the utility in writing;
- ❖ A record of all complaints is kept;
- ❖ ERB has developed contacts with ZESCO regional managers who are more responsive;
 - ❖ More effective than waiting for response to correspondence;
- ❖ Inspections are also carried out to further investigate complaints.

4.0 Complaints Procedure in brief

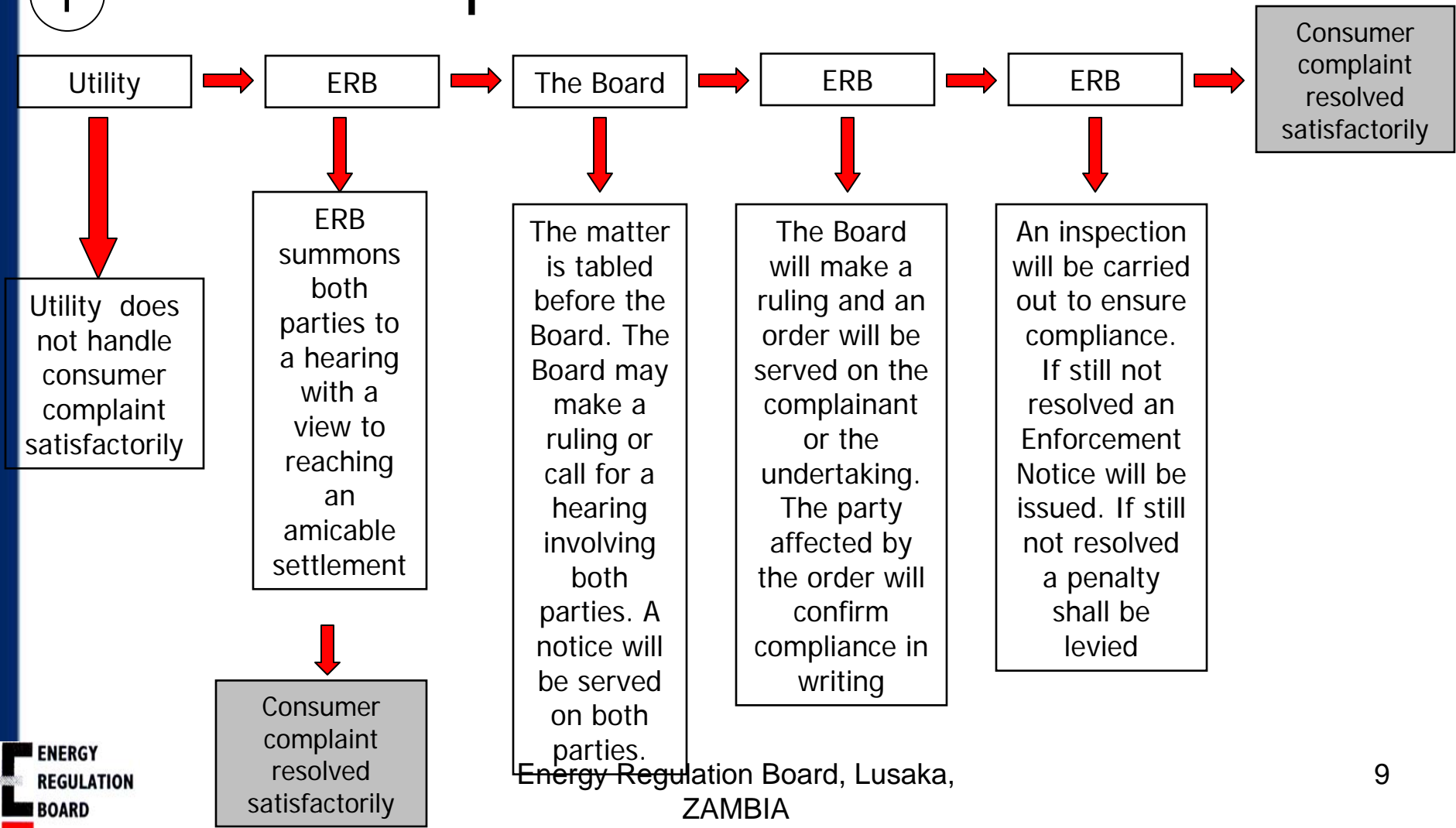
Any person may seek the ERB's intervention if they are dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint by the utility or consider the outcome inconclusive.

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4.1 Complaints Procedure in brief





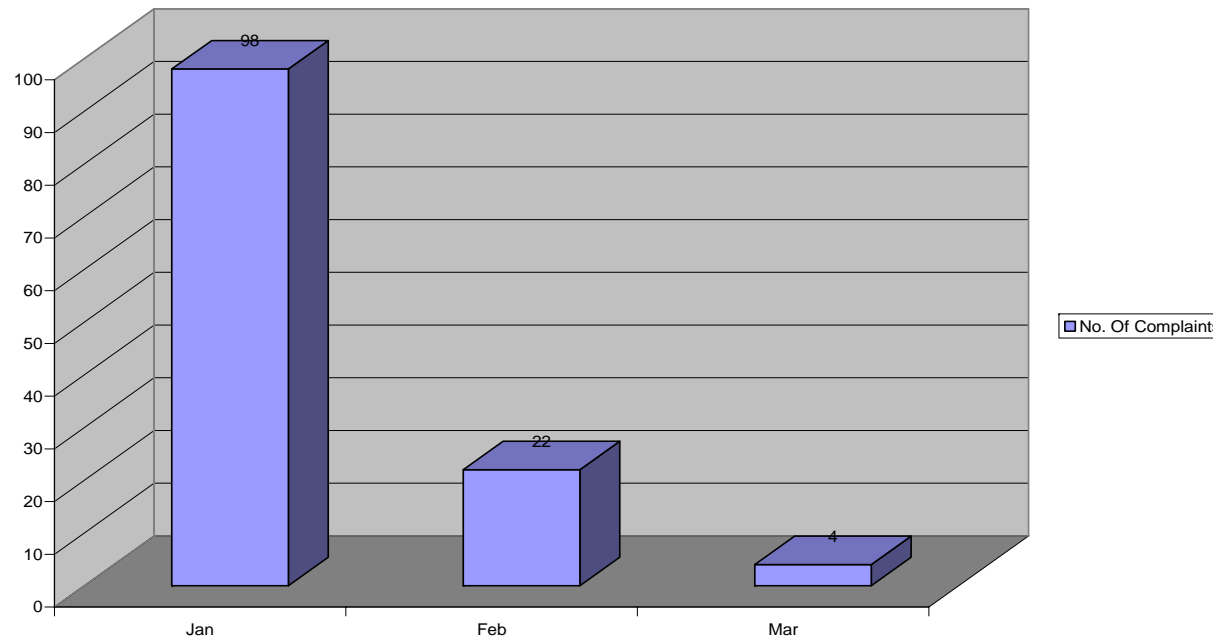
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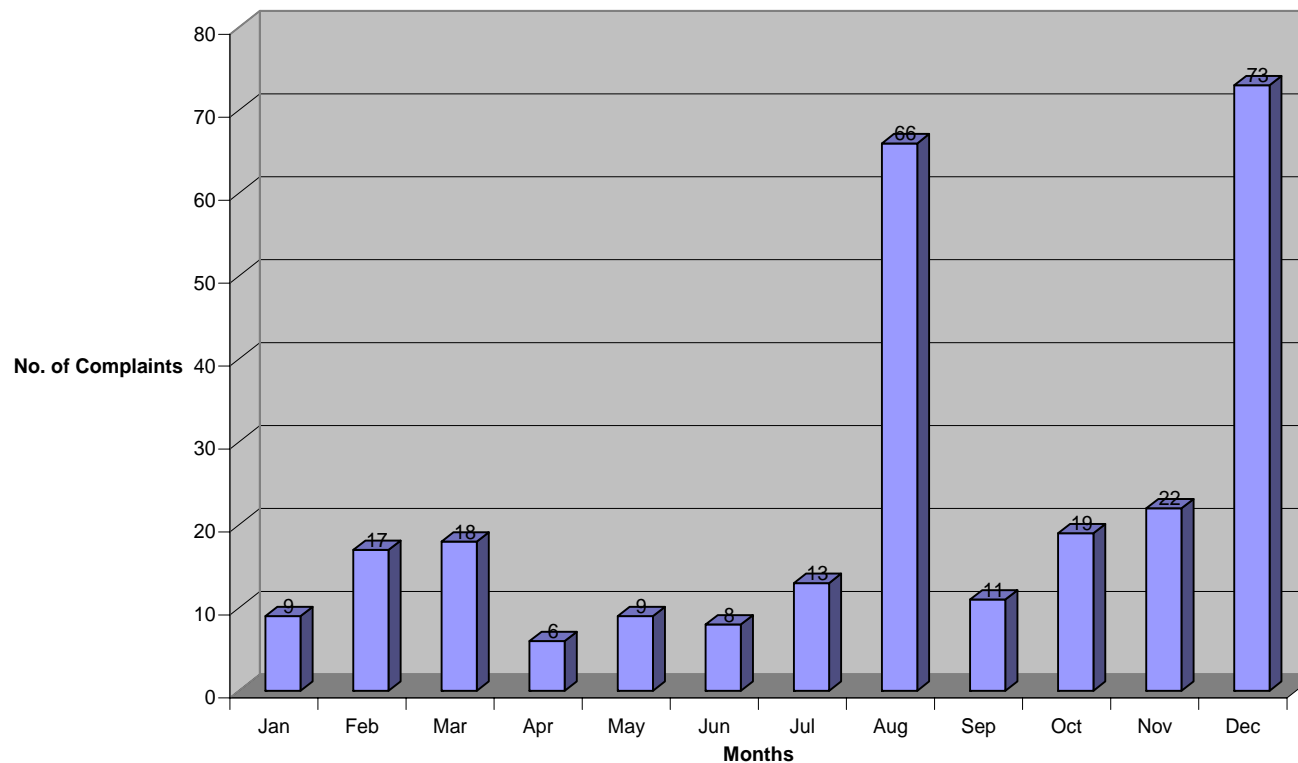
Complaints received: January 2006 to date

Graphical Representation of Complaints Received from January 2006 to March 9, 2006.



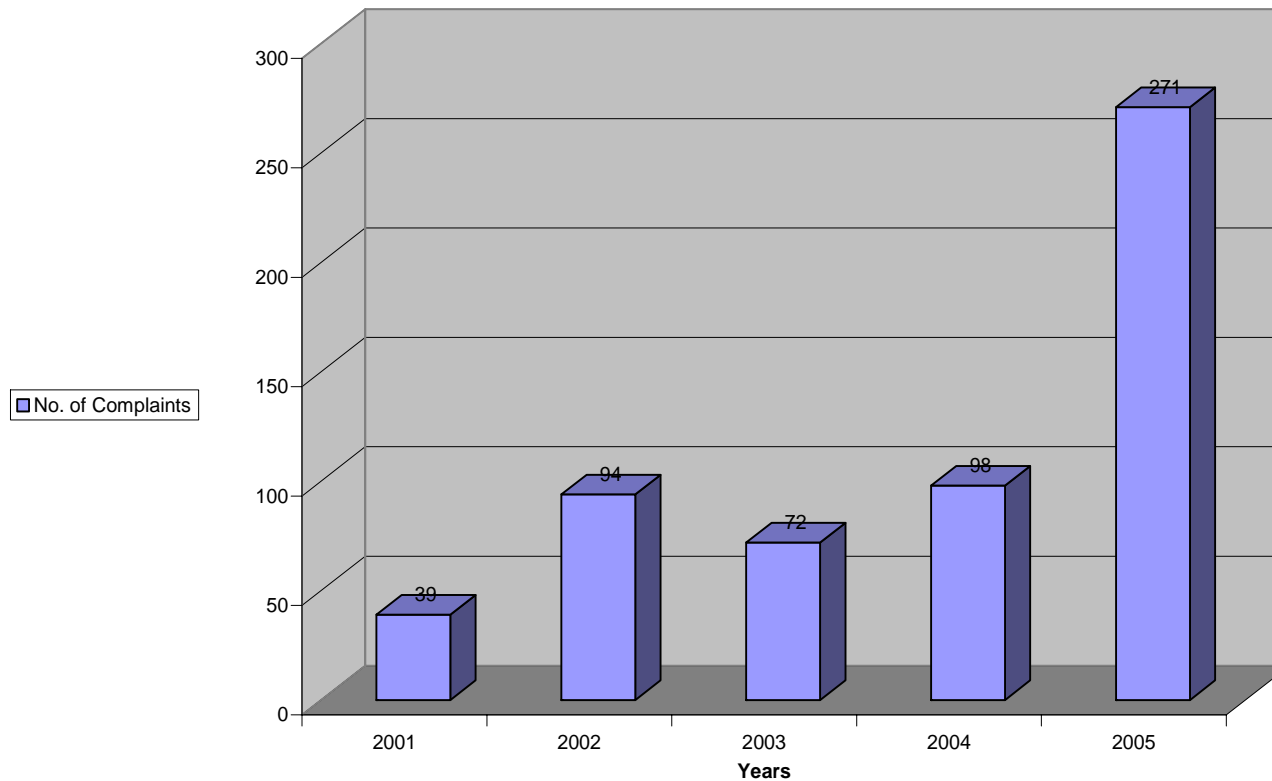
5.0 Complaints received in 2005

Graphical Representation of Consumer Complaints Received, January to December, 2005



5.1 Complaints received: 2001–2005

Graphical Representation of Energy Consumer Complaints Received by the ERB from January 2001 to December 2005



6.0 Protecting consumer interests

- ❖ Consumers are encouraged to first approach the undertakings or service providers;
- ❖ ERB receives all complaints however lodged;
- ❖ ERB investigates and follows through each complaint;
- ❖ Consumers are kept informed of the status of their complaint
 - ❖ By telephone or letter.

6.1 Protecting consumer interests

- ❖ ERB ensures service providers have complaints procedures in place
- ❖ Consumer Charter: clearly define the rights and obligations of consumers and service providers;
- ❖ Consumer outreach programmes; and
- ❖ Consumer watch groups.

7.0 Public involvement in consumer protection

❖ Consumer Watch Groups

- ❖ Combined efforts with the water and telecommunication regulators;
- ❖ Members to work on volunteer basis and expected to sign Memorandum of Understanding with the regulators.
- ❖ Link between consumers and service providers;
- ❖ Channel for consumer complaints (particularly unresolved complaints), queries and other concerns pertaining to the quality of services or goods;
- ❖ Watch group will help to monitor the performance of service providers;

7.1 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ Educate consumers of their rights and obligations;
 - ❖ Watch groups will help publicise the Electricity Consumer Charter through public meetings.
- ❖ Feedback from consumers will be analysed and when ever relevant, be utilised during the review of any guidelines and regulations with the view of according consumers an opportunity to play a role in the regulatory process;

7.2 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ Regulatory bodies will also be better-placed to expeditiously address pertinent issues arising from the watch groups' constant liaison with residents of a given locality;
- ❖ The groups will educate consumers on the role of the regulators; and
- ❖ Carry out consumer related outreach programmes;

7.3 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ Watch groups will be introduced to the various service providers through meetings;
- ❖ The public will also be made aware of the community representation and can lodge complaints directly to them.

7.4 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ Present to service providers unresolved complaints from consumers and ensure they are resolved;
- ❖ Submit monthly reports;
 - ❖ Tracking of consumer trends and complaints
- ❖ Sensitise consumers on their rights and obligations
 - ❖ E.g. role of the regulators, existence of the watch groups, proper use of energy, telecom and water services, vandalism and obligation to pay bills.

7.5 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ Regulators to provide logistical support
 - ❖ Provide support for outreach activities approved by the three regulators;
 - ❖ Provide publicity and awareness material e.g. brochures, community meetings, drama, magazines and posters;
 - ❖ Provide training on various aspects of consumer representation as needs are identified

7.6 Public involvement in consumer protection

- ❖ The first watch group to be set up in Lusaka and the project will be replicated in other parts of the country before year end.
- ❖ Overwhelming public response to the watch group concept and there are calls for the structures to be set up urgently, especially in rural areas.

8.0 Challenges of effective public involvement

- ❖ Equip the watch groups with necessary tools to effectively carry out their work;
- ❖ Get public to identify themselves with the watch groups in their communities;
 - ❖ Jolting a passive audience to take keen interest in matters that directly affect them... stand up for their rights;
- ❖ Acceptability of the watch groups by service providers;
 - ❖ Must ensure volunteers do not become overbearing;
 - ❖ Must be truly representative of consumer interests/not pursuing personal agendas.

9.0 Inter-agency cooperation

- ❖ The ERB is part of an inter-agency cooperation committee on Consumer Welfare that has been formed to ensure that consumers especially those in rural areas do not suffer unduly from market failures and lack of information.
- ❖ Initiative is a brainchild of the Zambia Competition Commission which invited various regulatory bodies in April 2005 to be part of the process.

9.1 Inter-agency cooperation cont'd

- ❖ Thinking is that a combination of a strong consumer enforcement that empowers and informs consumers, and regulatory regimes that are effective and enforceable, benefits consumers and markets;
- ❖ It has been recognised closer and more effective cooperation with other statutory bodies to effectively protect the welfare of consumers, is **necessary.**

9.2 Inter-agency cooperation cont'd

- ❖ Many consumer cases required the cooperation of other statutory bodies and therefore current enforcement mechanisms should be harmonised;
- ❖ The committee is exploring ways of adopting a concerted approach in dealing with consumer welfare issues;
- ❖ This proposed joint effort is likely to increase sensitisation of the problems consumers face;
- ❖ Joint outreach activities have been lined up.

9.3 Inter -cooperation cont'd

Other statutory bodies include:

- ❖ Communications Authority of Zambia;
- ❖ Food and Drugs Laboratory;
- ❖ Ministry of Commerce, Trade & Industry;
- ❖ National Water Supply & Sanitation Council;
- ❖ Weights and Measures Agency;
- ❖ Zambia Bureau of Standards; and
- ❖ Zambia Law Development Commission.

10.0 Consumer interest groups

- ❖ **Zambia Consumers Association (ZACA)**
- ❖ **Consumer Unity & Trust Society**
- ❖ **Zambia Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ZACCI)**
- ❖ **Zambia Association of Manufacturers (ZAM)**

11.0 Conclusion

- ❖ Watch groups are key to helping the ERB manage public involvement in consumer protection;
- ❖ Great opportunity exists for the ERB to assert itself as a protector of consumer interests; and
- ❖ With more public involvement, the ERB's role will be better understood.