



## Paul Clitheroe

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# resolving financial complaints – the relatively easy way

Nearly every day of the week we deal with a wide range of financial products, provided by banks, insurers, super funds, stockbrokers and financial advisers. Most of the time things go smoothly, but the sheer scale of our dealings with financial products and services means that from time to time things go wrong. If you're not happy with a product or service you've received, there are avenues of action, and it helps to know who to turn to and what steps to take.

Nearly all organisations in the financial services industry are required by law to belong to an independent complaints scheme. There are a number of different schemes, each covering a particular type of service.

The Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) for instance deals with complaints about banking, life insurance and managed funds. The Superannuation Complaints Tribunal handles issues regarding your super, and the Credit Ombudsman addresses complaints about credit service providers like mortgage brokers.

These schemes offer valuable avenues of recourse for dissatisfied consumers. However before a complaint will be investigated, you first need to air your grievances with the company you've been dealing with. This gives the organisation an early chance to try to resolve the issue.

Any complaints should be put in writing, setting out the nature of the problem and providing personal reference details like your policy or account number. Find out the name of the person to send your complaint to, or address it to the most senior person in the organisation, such as the chief executive.

If you don't get a response within a fortnight, or if you're unhappy with the answer you receive, it can be tempting to ramp up your approach, even brandishing threats of "I'll see you in court!" But there's a far cheaper way to handle the matter than putting it in the hands of a lawyer, and that's by referring the problem to a complaints scheme.

These schemes are set up to provide impartial advice, and best of all it's a free service, so it shouldn't cost you a cent.

If you and the business involved can't reach an agreement with the help of the complaints scheme, the scheme itself will decide the final outcome.

If you're still not happy with this decision, you have the option of taking the matter to court. Bear in mind though, if you go to court first and lose, you can't then have the matter looked at by a complaints scheme.

If you're unsure which scheme is suitable for your particular problem, contact ASIC on 1300 300 630. You should also download a copy of ASIC's booklet 'You can complain' from [www.fido.gov.au](http://www.fido.gov.au). It's a handy reference guide that sets out the steps worth taking to have a problem resolved.

*Paul Clitheroe's 'Making Money' for the week beginning 29 June 2009*



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