



Why don't consumers complain?

Insights from previous Consumer Experience and Consumer Confidence surveys

Summary

The Financial Markets Authority – Te Mana Tātai Hokohoko (FMA) believes it is important that financial service providers have effective complaints processes because it helps to ensure fair treatment, supports early resolution of issues, and strengthens trust in the financial system. Yet fewer than one-third of consumers are confident they know how to complain. Furthermore, 7% of consumers have wanted to complain but haven't – citing barriers such as doubts about the outcome, not knowing how, and perceptions of difficulty. Findings like these have led the FMA to make complaints a regulatory priority for 2025, with a goal of ensuring consumers know how to complain and that the process is accessible, fair, and effective. Achieving this means not only making it easy to complain but also understanding and addressing the reasons some consumers might not choose to complain at all.

Why has the FMA made understanding complaints a priority?

We believe that [*complaints are moments of truth*](#) – revealing not just what went wrong, but how well firms respond when it matters most. Our recent consumer confidence survey found that only 29% of New Zealanders are confident they know what steps to take if treated unfairly – while 40% lack confidence in what actions to take. These findings make complaints a key concern for the FMA, as noted in our recently published [Financial Conduct Report 2025 \(FCR '25\)](#):

“When consumers know how to complain, they not only protect their own interests but also drive improvements in financial services. Effective complaints processes and high consumer awareness of these builds trust and provides firms with opportunities to gain insights to improve processes and consumer outcomes.”

This research note sits alongside our information sheet providing practical guidance for firms. These are part of a broader programme of work focused on supporting firms to manage complaints well in practice.

Scope and approach

This research note examines how consumers experience the complaints process – who acts, who doesn't, and why. This topic was covered in our FCR '25, and this note is intended to supplement that in more detail.

The findings presented here draw on data from the 2024 Consumer Confidence survey (2,081 respondents) commissioned by the FMA and conducted by Fiftyfive5. We also present relevant data from the FMA's 2022 Consumer Experience Survey (2,509 respondents) (Financial Markets Authority, 2024; fiftyfive5 and Financial Markets Authority, 2022). Notes in the figures below refer to these data sources as "CCS 2024" and "CES 2022", respectively. The surveys covered:

- confidence in how to complain
- complaint behaviour and reasons for inaction
- demographic patterns (age, ethnicity, income, disability)
- satisfaction with outcomes

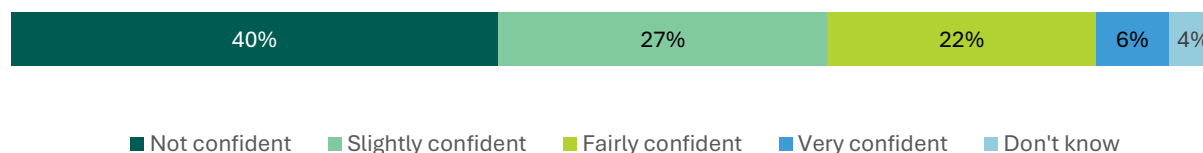
This survey-based note does not assess individual firms, nor draw on external datasets. As a result, the findings are intended to provide directional insights and should be interpreted with care, particularly where subgroup sizes are small.

Why is it an FMA priority that people know how to complain?

In short, **the pathway from confidence to action is not functioning as intended.**

- 29% of Kiwis say they're confident (22% fairly confident, 6% very confident)¹ they'd know how to complain (**Figure 1**), but only 5% actually have (**Figure 2**).
- Of those who said they would have liked to complain but did not, 29% said it was because they didn't know how (**Figure 3**).

Figure 1 – How confident are you that you know how to take action when treated unfairly by your financial service provider in New Zealand? n= 2081, CCS 2024



¹ Categories may not add to total due to rounding.

Figure 2 – Have you ever made a complaint about a financial service provider in New Zealand? n= 2509, CES 2022

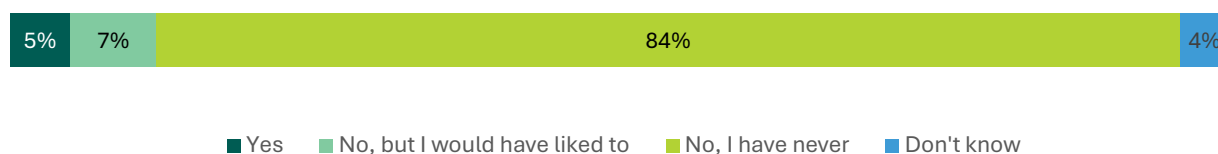
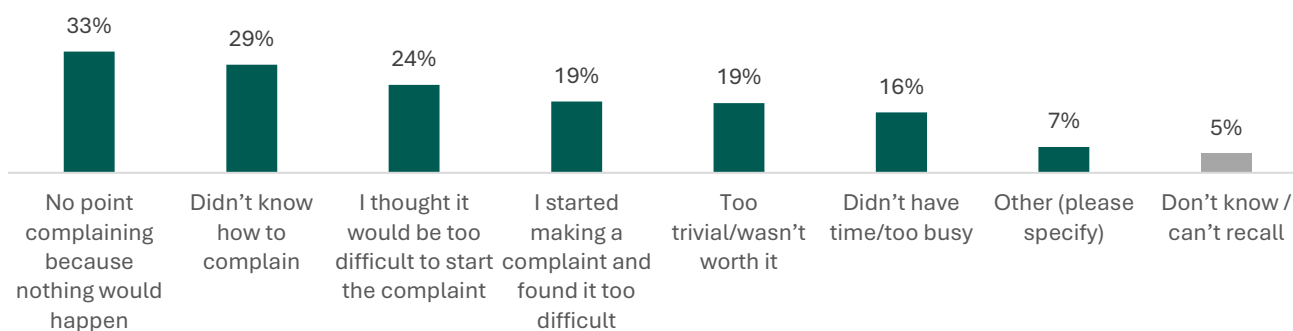


Figure 3 – You mentioned you would have liked to have made a complaint but didn't. Why didn't you make a complaint? n=178, CES 2022



What else do our surveys tell us about consumers' complaints experience?

We are interested in understanding where financial service providers complaints go, and what happens when they get there. There are several insights from our research that help build a picture of how consumers engage with complaints processes, and where gaps remain:

- Of those who wanted to complain but didn't, 33% thought there was no point complaining because nothing would happen (**Figure 3**)
- 57% of complainants were satisfied with the handling of their complaint, while 21% were dissatisfied (**Figure 4**)
- Almost one in three consumers (31%) felt that their complaints went unresolved (**Figure 5**)

Figure 4 – Overall, how satisfied were you with how your complaint was handled? n= 129, CES 2022

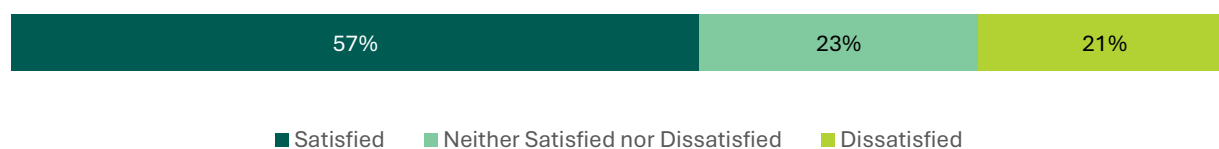


Figure 5 – Thinking about your most recent complaint about a financial service provider in New Zealand, was this issue resolved? n= 129, CES 2022



Who is finding it hardest to complain?

People aren't always opting out because they're unsure; sometimes it's about more than just confidence. In our data, the clearest evidence of this comes from two groups: Māori, and physically disabled New Zealanders.

The findings regarding the complaints experience of Māori are as follows:

- 36% of Māori say they are confident (23% fairly confident, 13% very confident) in knowing how to complain, compared to 28% of all New Zealanders (**Figure 6**)
- 13% of Māori say they chose not to complain despite wanting to, compared to 7% of all New Zealanders (**Figure 7**)

Figure 6 – How confident are you that you know how to take action when treated unfairly by your financial service provider in New Zealand? n= 2081, Māori = 320, CCS 2024

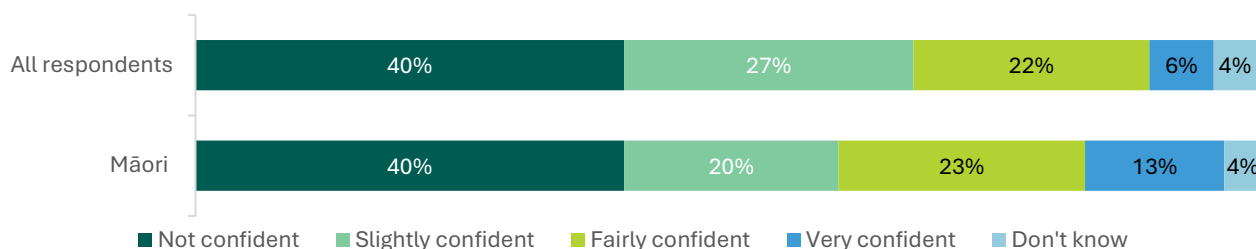
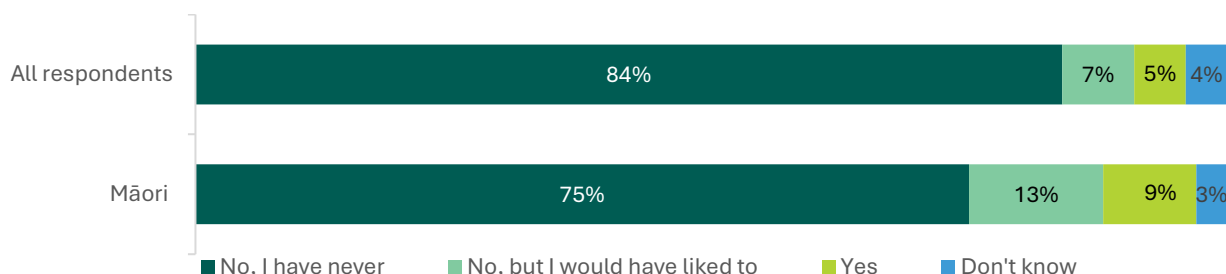


Figure 7 – Have you ever made a complaint about a financial service provider in New Zealand? n= 2509, Māori = 259, CES 2022



The findings regarding the complaints experience of physically disabled New Zealanders are as follows:

- 11% of those with physical disabilities wanted to complain but didn't (vs. 7% of all Kiwis) (**Figure 8**)
- Those who chose not to complain cited expected difficulty more than other Kiwis – however the sample was too small to confirm significance (**Figure 9**)

Figure 8 – Have you ever made a complaint about a financial service provider in New Zealand? (Physical disabilities) n= 2509, Physical disabilities = 279, CES 2022

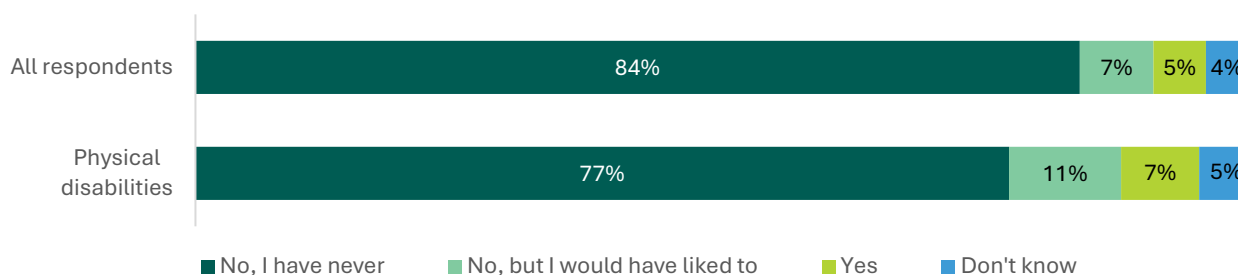


Figure 9 – You mentioned you would have liked to make a complaint but didn't. Why didn't you make a complaint? (Physical disabilities) n= 178, Physical disabilities = 28, CES 2022



Next steps

This research highlights potential underrepresentation and barriers in complaints processes, with early signals of demographic differences in how consumers engage. While small sample sizes limit definite conclusions, the findings suggest several possible areas for future focus by financial service providers – from consumer pain points and barriers, to demographic patterns and the visibility of complaints channels. These insights do not imply failure of financial service providers' complaints processes, but they do raise questions about whether current complaints systems work effectively for all consumers.

The accompanying information sheet sets out practical steps firms can take in response to these findings, building on consumers' experiences and supporting more accessible, fair, and effective complaints processes.

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