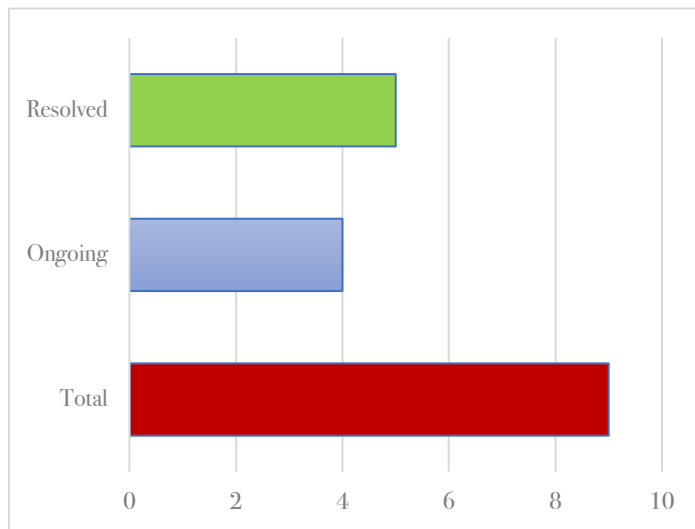


## Consumer Protection Statistics for November, 2022

### A. Complaints and Redressals

The Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) received nine complaints from consumers against various types of businesses during the month of November 2022; of which five have been resolved successfully or rectified as per OCP's directives. The remaining are still under the process of investigation and/ or mediation (Fig. 1), in addition to the two investigations and mediation of cases that were registered during October, 2022. All complaints, except for two were 'individual-complaints'. Individual complaints are those where aggrieved consumers seek compensation from businesses that allegedly wronged them.

*Fig. 1: Number of type of complaints received and resolved*



There were two major 'general-complaint'; one against a sawmill for selling briquettes that are underweight (actual weight below the weight for which consumers were being charged); and the other against meat shops pertaining to perceived unethical trade practice of limiting sale of fresh pork, so as to

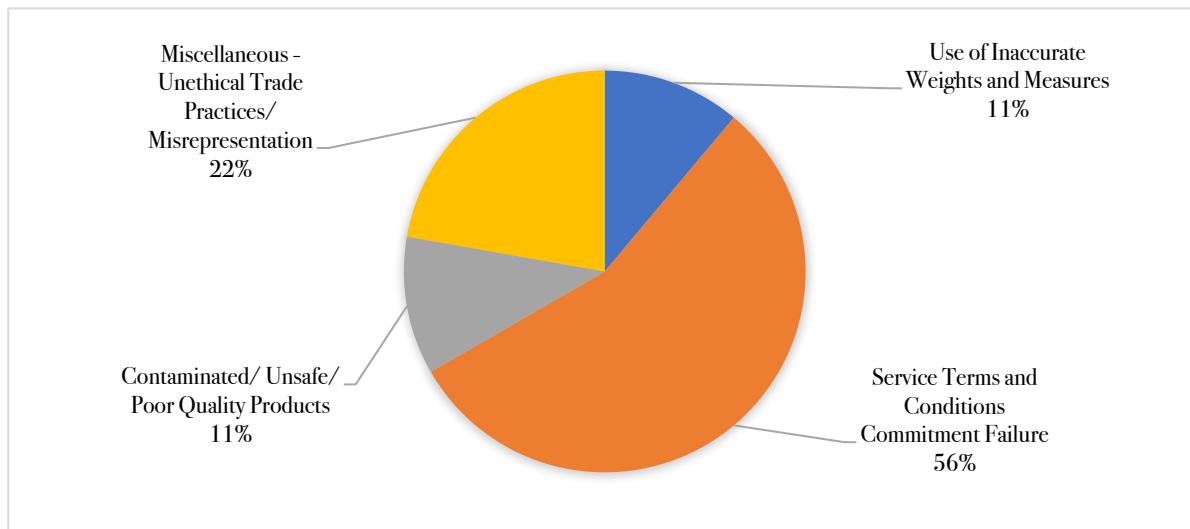
indirectly compel consumers to buy *sekam* (cold-dried pork slices), which are nor even properly 'dried' at a higher price.

Investigation revealed that the first allegation was valid and the sawmill was warned and the business was made to immediately make following changes:

- Goods to be re-weighed at the point of sale before the customer and charge price on ‘weight-basis’, and not by ‘bag-basis’;
- Digital Platform Weighing Scale that is calibrated by Bhutan Standards Bureau (BSB) to be used instead of their uncalibrated spring balance.

With regards to the second complaint, though there were risks of such practice, the allegation could not be verified categorically. However, all meat shops were reminded that practices that limit or compromise consumers’ choice can be construed unethical. The investigation, nonetheless revealed need for better regulatory interventions in the meat retailing sector, such as – (i) the need for a quality standard for *sekam*, and (ii) ensuring only goods meeting that standard be permitted for display and sale. The OCP shared these recommendations with relevant agencies such as BAFRA and the Department of Livestock.

*Fig. II. Number of businesses by nature of violations*



## B. Market Surveillance

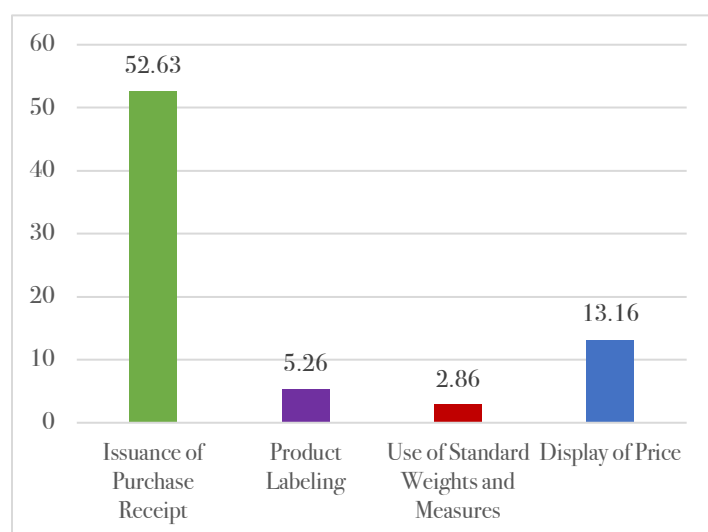
Proactive inspections are carried out on a regular basis covering different locations and different business sectors to ensure compliance to market regulatory requirements. Gasa, Punakha and Wangdue were the Dzonkhags of focus for the month of November, 2022. A

total of 109 business entities were inspected - comprising of 94 groceries, 5 POL and 10 meat shops (Tab. 1). It is mandatory for all businesses to clearly display price of goods and services, use accurate weights & measures, issue purchase receipts on demand and to correctly and adequately label all products. In addition, a sawmill and 16 meat shops within Thimphu City were also inspected following complaints of unethical business practice from consumers.

*Table 1: Number of business entities inspected during November*

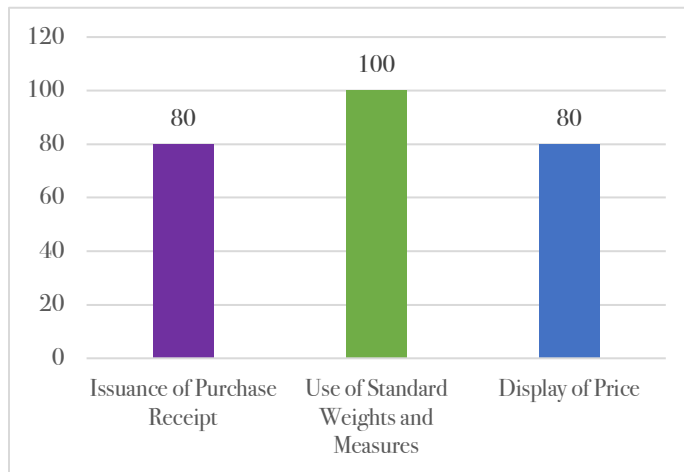
#	Dzongkhag	Market	Grocery	POL	Meat shop	Sawmill
1	Gasa	Damji & Gasa Throm	15	1	1	
2	Punakha	Serigang, Changyul, Punakha, Khuruthang, Thinleygang & Lobesa	61	3	9	
3.	Wangdue	Tikizampa, Chuzomsa & Nobding & Bajo	18	1		
4.	Thimphu	Thimthrom			16	1

*Fig. III: Compliance by groceries in Punakha, Gasa and Wangdue to standards*



While more than 50 percent of the groceries issue purchase receipts, compliance to labeling is low (Fig. III) and this is because groceries stock locally produced agricultural and livestock products, which are packaged in commonly available polyethylene or polypropylene bags without proper labels.

*Fig. IV: Compliance by meat shops in Punakha and Gasa to minimum standards*



Similarly, while all shops possess a weighing balance, this low compliance (Fig. III) is either because the weighing scales have never been calibrated by Bhutan Standards Bureau (BSB) or the calibration validity had expired.

Compliance by meat shops is fairly good, with all using calibrated weighing machines and 80 % of them displaying prices issuing purchase receipts (Fig. IV).

#### **A. Recommendations arising from the market inspection**

Following market surveillance and investigation to verify the veracity of complaints made, the OCP takes follow-up actions to correct business practices and help redress aggrieved consumers. Actions may include imposition of administrative penalties or serving written directions to businesses to correct faulty practices within a certain time period, mediation and dispute settlement between the parties and/ or litigation by the OCP in extreme cases.

The following recommendations are made following the November report:

- Direct all groceries to comply to product labeling. Labels must contain at least minimum information – net weight, price, source, date of packaging and expiry, using either using self-adhesive labels or using permanent marker pens,
- Direct all groceries to get their weighing scales calibrated by the BSB. Likewise request the BSB to provide support in getting them done, and
- Direct all meat shops to adhere to price display and issuance of purchase receipt strictly.