

# Customer Charter

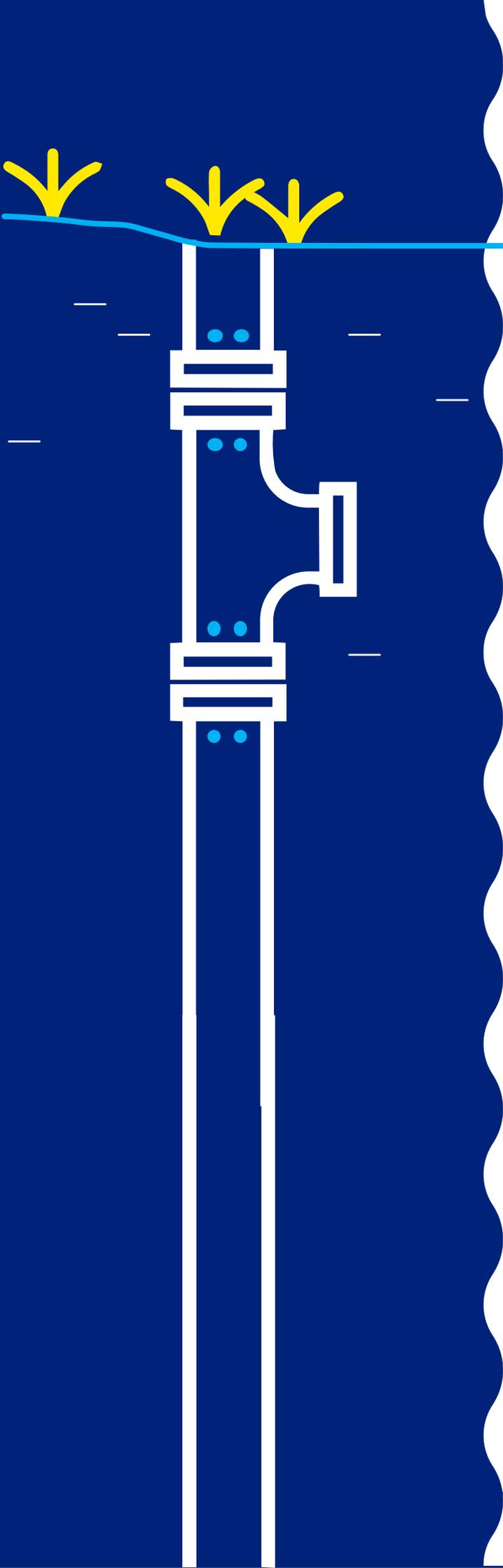


## **Aboriginal acknowledgement**

South East Water proudly acknowledges the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we operate, and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge their songlines, cultural lore and continuing connection to the land and water.

We recognise and value their rich cultural heritage and continued contributions of Aboriginal people and communities to our society in Victoria.



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Your rights as a customer</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Quality of service</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Creating a sustainable future</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Charges and billing</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Reading your water meter</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Entry to your property</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Responsibilities for maintenance</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Enquiries, complaints and disputes</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Information and privacy</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix A: Our service commitments</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Approved service standards</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Glossary of terms</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>South East Water's contact details</b>	<b>46</b>

Customer charter approved: 11 August 2023

# Introduction

## About South East Water

We support healthy and liveable communities by delivering water, sewerage and recycled water services to 1.77 million people who rely on us every day and every night.

Our service area covers the lands and waters of the Bunurong people, some of the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people to our north and an area in our far north east around Longwarry that currently has no Registered Aboriginal Party.

The area borders more than 270 km of coastline and covers a land area of 3,640 km<sup>2</sup> from Port Melbourne to Portsea and approximately 30 km east of Pakenham.

Each year we deliver 142 billion litres of drinking water and collect and treat more than 136 billion litres of wastewater (waste from the toilet, shower, laundry and kitchen in homes and from businesses) at our local water recycling plants and at Melbourne Water's Eastern and Western treatment plants.

To deliver for our customers, we manage more than 27,000 km of pipeline. We own, operate and maintain \$4.9 billion of assets including water, recycled water and sewerage networks.

From our water recycling plants, we produce around 2.8 billion litres of recycled water used for residences, businesses, agriculture and open spaces. We also recycle biosolids for soil improvement and generate renewable energy from biogas and solar.

As one of Melbourne's 3 government-owned metropolitan water retailers, we're a corporation established under the *Water Act 1989*. Our activities are governed by this Act and the Statement of Obligations issued by the Minister for Water under Section 41 of the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

## What's the Customer Charter?

This Customer Charter outlines your rights and responsibilities as a South East Water customer. It also sets out South East Water's rights and responsibilities as your water, recycled water and sewerage provider.

This charter is based on the Essential Services Commission (ESC's) [Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service](#). The ESC is responsible for reviewing and assessing compliance of our charter against the Water Industry Standard and our approved service standards, as outlined in our [Price Submission](#).

We're committed to being transparent about the regulations that govern our operations. As part of this commitment, we can provide you with a copy of any

regulations that apply to us, except for primary legislation (e.g. the *Water Act 1989*). All you need to do is ask us for these.

# Your rights as a customer

## Your rights to water supply and sewerage services

If you're connected to one of our services (drinking water, recycled water or sewerage), we'll provide those services in accordance with this charter.

[PropertyConnect](#) is an online self-service hub where you can request our services and lodge an application to connect to our water, sewerage or recycled water assets. You can register for [PropertyConnect](#) any time on our [website](#).

Where you request connection to one of our services, in most cases we'll approve the connection within 10 business days, provided that:

- the service is available to your property
- you have paid, or agreed to pay, all applicable connection fees
- you meet our terms and conditions to connect to the network.

For more complex applications such as multi-storey or commercial properties, the connection time may take longer. More information can be found on our [website](#).

We aim to achieve similar connection times for our recycled water service. However, this timeframe may vary as we'll need to visit your property to make sure the plumbing is set up correctly.

## Extended private water supply works

Some customers have an extended private water supply. This happens if our water or sewer pipe doesn't front or pass through your property, which means you're connected to our water or sewer pipes through a privately owned pipe. If you receive your service via a privately owned pipe, we provide your service to the point where it connects with the private pipe. The owners of the private pipe are responsible for the installation, maintenance and repair of private water supply works and private extensions.

Please note we can't guarantee the water quality, pressure or reliability to private extension customers beyond the point where water leaves our supply pipes. If you're not satisfied with the quality of your water, please contact us and we'll investigate for you.

## Separate written agreements

We supply some services under a separate written agreement with you (such as trade waste, private extension supplies and recycled water). These types of agreements are often different to and will override the terms mentioned in this charter.

## Communicating with us your way

If you have a preferred way of communicating with us, let us know. We'll communicate with you that way wherever it's reasonable to do so. This means if you prefer a letter to an email, we'll do our best to contact you this way when we can.

We'll also do our best to meet any specific communication needs you may have on a case-by-case basis. We're also happy to work with your nominated support person or authorised representative.

For hearing and speech impaired services, TTY users can call [13 18 77](tel:131877) (and ask for 13 18 51).

If you need an interpreter service for any language, you can call [03 9209 0130](tel:0392090130).

## Identifying your needs

If you're a residential customer and we identify you are experiencing payment difficulties, need specific information or need some help to understand or pay your bill, we'll proactively engage with you. The information and support we provide may include, but is not limited to:

- your obligations as a South East Water customer
- interruptions to service and assistance options available
- sustainable water use
- your communication needs
- your water usage and billing history
- support you may need if you are experiencing payment difficulties, including details of our [Customer Support Policy](#) and concessions you may be entitled to
- family violence support.

# Quality of service

## Our services

This section details the key service standards we aim to deliver to our customers. We aim to meet or exceed your expectations in relation to the range of services we provide. A more comprehensive list of service standards the ESC provides is included in Appendix A.

## Drinking water

As our customer, you can expect a drinking water supply that meets the requirements outlined in the *Safe Drinking Water Regulations 2015*. This means you can expect your water to be clear and free from objectionable taste and odour. To make sure we achieve this, we carefully monitor water quality and take action to fix any problems. We also publish the results of our water quality monitoring in our *Annual Drinking Water Quality Report* which is available on our [website](#).

If the water pipes in your property boundary are in poor condition or the service is provided via a private extension, we can't guarantee the quality of the water from beyond the point where it leaves our pipes.

For example, some water pipes in poor condition can have copper corrosion. This worldwide problem affects a small number of customers and often leads to the water being a blue / green colour through your internal taps. This water may contain copper at concentrations above the current health guidelines.

If you suspect your property has blue/green water, please contact us any time on [13 28 12](tel:132812).

## Flow rates (pressure)

The flow rate is how fast the water will be delivered to your property from our pipes. We make sure the flow rate for your drinking water and recycled water service meets minimum standards. The minimum flow rate for a standard 20 mm service pipe is 20 litres per minute to the property boundary. However, this may not be possible if:

- your water pipes are undersized or in poor condition
- the service is provided via a private extension or maintained private extension
- there's a drought
- there's an emergency or local water shortage due to peak summer demand
- there's a planned or unplanned interruption to your water supply
- recycled water is reduced due to a shortage
- we restrict your recycled water due to you using it for prohibited purposes

- your supply is restricted or disconnected in accordance with the law.

We measure the flow rate at the water meter or, where there's no water meter installed, at the tap at your property boundary. If you believe that your service isn't meeting minimum flow rates, you can ask us to do a test. If the test demonstrates that we're not complying, we'll fix the problem as soon as possible and pay for the cost of the test. If the test demonstrates that we're complying, then we may charge you for the cost of the test.

Pipe size	20 mm	25 mm	32 mm	40 mm	50 mm
Flow rate (L/m)	20	35	60	90	160

If you're a residential customer, you can get an indication of your flow rate by testing at the tap nearest to your meter (a 5 litre bucket should fill in 15 seconds on a 20 mm pipe). This is provided that the tap and the pipework leading to the tap are in reasonable condition (free from corrosion and obstructions) and properly maintained.

## Recycled water

Recycled water comes from a water recycling plant. We deliver recycled water to some houses by a purple-coloured pipe to avoid confusion with drinking water pipes. Taps are signed 'Recycled water, do not drink'.

Customers who receive recycled water will receive a recycled water supply that will meet all applicable requirements of health and environmental regulations, including those set by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) – which can be found in the guidelines on its [website](#).

## Sewerage services

Sewage collection and treatment is important for the protection of public health and our environment. If you're connected to our sewerage system, we'll supply you with sewerage services (the safe removal of wastewater from your property) and take all reasonable care in operating our sewerage system to avoid blockages, spills and odours.

## Sewer blockages

The first sign of a sewer blockage affecting your property usually occurs when a toilet becomes slow to drain away; there's gurgling from other internal fittings; or there's some form of spillage from a surface fitting that's close to your house, like a gully trap, overflow relief gully or waste grate. Find out more about sewerage and surface fittings on our [website](#).

If you're experiencing a sewer blockage, please contact our 24-hour Faults and Emergencies team on [13 28 12](#) for further advice.

## Trade waste services

Liquid waste that comes from factories, laboratories and commercial businesses to the sewers is known as trade waste. If you run a business that wants to release trade waste into our sewers, your business will need a trade waste consent with us before you can do this. This consent protects health and safety, our sewers, the operation of our water recycling plants, the environment and the recycling of sewage and biosolids.

More details about requirements for entering into a trade waste consent and trade waste standards can be found in our [Trade Waste Customer Charter](#).

## Interruption to service

We understand that it can be both inconvenient and frustrating if the water is turned off or wastewater isn't draining from your property. We aim to provide you with access to water and sewerage services all day, every day, and we do everything we can to minimise the number of interruptions to our supply system and quickly attend to any emergency. To limit the impact of any unplanned water or sewer outages, we provide a 24-hour emergency service.

Any works we undertake are in accordance with safety standards set by our Occupational Health and Safety system (certified against ISO 45001), VicRoads, or any other relevant health or safety authority.

As your water and sewerage service provider, we aim to:

- restore your drinking or recycled water service within 5 hours if there's an unplanned interruption to your supply
- minimise the number of sewer blockages you experience to no more than 2 in any 12-month period
- clear a blockage in our sewer which is affecting your ability to use the service, within 4 hours
- contain a sewer spill caused by our assets on your property within 5 hours.

If you experience a sewer spill caused by our assets, we'll minimise any damages or inconvenience to you as much as possible. We'll also clean and disinfect the affected area as quickly as possible.

## Unplanned interruptions

If there's an unplanned interruption to your drinking or recycled water supply, we'll make sure information is available online or over the phone no more than 30 minutes after we've been notified about the issue. You can get access to this information on our [website](#) or by calling our 24-hour Faults and Emergencies team on [13 28 12](#).

## **Planned interruptions**

Sometimes we may need to turn off your water supply or sewerage services to do planned maintenance or upgrades. If we need to turn off your supply, we'll let you know the time and duration of the planned interruption at least 2 business days in advance. Where possible, we'll do this by sending an SMS to your registered mobile number, and by email or mail if preferred.

## **Temporary water supply**

If we need to turn off your water supply temporarily due to an interruption, we'll provide access to an emergency water supply for drinking purposes.

## **Special needs**

If you need water for a life support machine (such as for haemodialysis) that may be affected by planned or unplanned outages, it's important to register this requirement with us. We'll also work to proactively identify if you have these needs.

If you have other special needs that may be affected by planned or unplanned outages, please let us know and we'll consider these requests on a case-by-case basis.

Once you've registered with us, and we've assessed your application we'll provide you with a free allowance of 42,000 litres of water every billing quarter. We'll also contact you at least 4 business days before any planned interruptions to your water supply and contact you as soon as possible after an unplanned interruption to your drinking water supply.

We'll always try to minimise inconvenience to customers that have special needs. Registering your special need with us and letting us know if your circumstances change helps us to deliver this commitment.

# Creating a sustainable future

## Sustainable water use

If we all use water wisely, we can help to secure water supplies and create greener and more liveable communities now and into the future.

Reducing your water usage can also help to reduce your bill. The more water you use, the higher your bill is likely to be. This is because your water bill is partly based on how much water you've used and sent back into the pipe network down the drain or toilet.

Sometimes we (and the Victorian Government) offer programs to encourage you to save water, such as rebates on the purchase of water saving devices. For details on current programs, please contact us or visit our [website](#).

You're allowed to:

- collect and use rainwater for your own use
- install a composting toilet which doesn't require connection to our water or sewerage systems
- divert domestic grey water for non-drinking purposes, such as watering your garden.

Please take into account health and environmental considerations before installing these systems. You might also need local council or other approvals before you take these actions. These systems must not allow cross-contamination of the drinking water supply.

## Current Water Use Rules

Current Water Use Rules are in place across metropolitan Melbourne. They are a set of common-sense measures, designed to prevent wasting our drinking water. These include measures such as not using watering systems during the hottest part of the day or hosing down paved areas. Find out more on our [website](#).

## Water restrictions in drought or emergency

In addition to the Current Water Use Rules, we may restrict or prohibit water usage if there's a drought or emergency. Any restriction or prohibition of water will be in accordance with our *Drought Response Plan* or *Emergency Management Plan*, approved by the Minister for Water. Breaches of water restrictions can lead to prosecution, fines and restriction of your water supply.

An up-to-date copy of any approved *Drought Preparedness Plan* or *Emergency Management Plan* is on our [website](#).

## Recycled water

If we supply your property with both drinking water and recycled water, then your property has a dual water supply system. This means that one pipe entering the property delivers water for drinking, bathing and washing purposes and a second, purple-coloured pipe delivers recycled water for clothes washing, toilet flushing and external garden use. Both pipes will have had a full system integrity check when the recycled water was first supplied, to make sure there's no cross-connections between the drinking water and recycled water pipes.

If we supply recycled water to your property, you must comply with the permitted uses for this type of water and inform all users and visitors what recycled water can't be used for. This helps make sure your safety and the safety of your visitors. We'll keep you regularly informed about the permitted uses of recycled water and let you know if there's any changes to this. You can check what you can and can't use recycled water for on our [website](#).

We've outlined our requirements for installing recycled water on the [Recycled water connections](#) page on our website. We also have a [Connecting to Recycled Water Guide](#) that supports the industry requirements outlined in the Australian Standard for Water Services and the Plumbing Industry Commission's Recycled Water Plumbing Guide.

We reserve the right to restrict your supply of recycled water or stop you using recycled water if you don't comply with the permitted uses. We may also refuse to provide a recycled water service to a customer if they have not entered into a recycled water agreement with South East Water, or if the customer has not received consent from South East Water.

When entering a recycled water agreement or obtaining consent from South East Water, we will advise customers of the necessary standards and requirements to be met.

## Plumbing works

By law, only a licensed or registered plumber can conduct plumbing work on your property. All plumbing work must meet the [Victorian Plumbing Regulations 2018](#) and the [National Construction Code 2022 \(Plumbing Code of Australia\)](#).

We also recommend completing a cross-connection check after any plumbing works a plumber has done on your property, to make sure recycled water pipes and drinking water pipes aren't cross-connected on your property.

If you're a new recycled water customer, we'll send you copies of the permitted uses and cross-connection instructions within 5 days of becoming a customer.

## Charges and billing

If you're a residential customer, you can contact us by email or set up an online account to:

- pay and view your bills
- set up direct debit, monthly or fortnightly payments
- switch from paper to electronic bills.

You can register at [mySouthEastWater](#), or send us an [email](#). You can call our Accounts team on [13 18 51](#) and find our other contact details on our [website](#).

## Drinking water and sewerage charges

Your water bill usually has 2 main types of charges:

1. a service charge, which is a fixed fee for accessing our water and sewerage infrastructure
2. a usage charge for how much water you use and, where applicable, how much sewage is carried away from your property.

We'll list other relevant charges separately on your bill. We only read cold water meters and not hot water meters.

We read your water meter to find out how much water you use each quarter. We use this information to charge for both water usage and sewage disposal.

By law, the owner of a residential property is responsible for any service charges. The person (or people) who lives at a residential property is responsible for any usage charges, as long as there's an individual water meter on the property, and we have been given the personal details needed to create an account for them. These details include, but aren't limited to, their full name, phone number, date of birth and some identification such as a driver's license. If an owner and/or their authorised representative (such as a property manager) don't provide the renter's details, the owner will be responsible for all usage charges incurred during the relevant period.

For non-residential properties, by law, the property owner is responsible for all water and sewerage service charges and usage charges. We understand that as part of your lease agreement you may have an arrangement in place with your renter regarding payment of these charges. If you need us to change the mailing address of this account (e.g. amending to 'care of' your renter), please tell us in writing. You can do this by [emailing](#) or sending a letter to: South East Water, PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198.

We directly bill renters of non-residential properties for trade waste charges in line with their trade waste consent.

## Recycled water charges

Like drinking water, service and usage charges also apply for recycled water. In some cases, we'll bill these charges to you directly, and in other cases we'll bill your owner's corporation. Billing will happen 4 times a year, unless we agree otherwise, and usage charges will be based on how much recycled water you've used.

## Fire service charges

We bill a fire service charge for each connection to the water main that supplies water to a sprinkler system or fire service within a property.

## Extended private water supply fees

We'll charge properties supplied with water as part of extended private water supply works a water service charge at the same rate as properties connected to the water supply. The details of these charges are available on our [website](#).

## When you'll be billed

We'll bill you once every 3 months for water, sewerage, trade waste, recycled water, Melbourne Water's drainage rates (where relevant) and the Parks Charge. We may bill more frequently where other agreements are in place.

We collect the Waterways and Drainage charge on behalf of Melbourne Water to help protect our rivers and creeks and improve drainage and flood management.

If you're a property owner, we collect the Parks Charge on behalf of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to help maintain and improve some of Victoria's parks, trails and other facilities, including our zoos, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance.

If you're a non-residential customer using significant volumes of drinking water or recycled water, or discharging large volumes of trade waste or sewage, you may be billed monthly for usage charges.

## How we'll send your bill

Depending on your preference, we'll send a bill to you either:

- by email to your nominated email address
- by mail, at the postal address you nominate
- via your agent at the postal address you nominate, where you have asked us to do so

- via any person authorised to act on your behalf at the postal or email address you nominate.

If you don't nominate an address, we'll send the bill to the property address where the charges are for, or to your last known postal or email address.

## **What you'll see on your water and sewerage bill**

Your water and sewerage bill will include the following information:

- the date the bill was issued
- your postal address, account number and the address of the property for the charges incurred
- the date the water meter at the property was read, or if an estimate was made instead, a clear statement that an estimate was made
- your water usage
- a graph showing your previous 12 months usage
- a comparison of your usage for the same period of the previous year
- the amount you need to pay, the total of any payments you have made since the last bill and any outstanding credit or money owing from previous bills
- all charges and rates you need to pay, including those collected on behalf of Melbourne Water and DEECA
- any interest on money owing from previous bills, which will be separately itemised on your bill
- the date you need to pay your bill by
- the ways you can pay
- information about how we can help if you're finding it hard to pay
- our contact details
- information about our interpreter service
- information about available concessions and any concession you could be eligible for
- the average daily rate of water or recycled water used for the current billing period; and
- if we are charging you interest on money owing from a previous bill, the rate of interest and what future date the interest will be applied from.

## **What you'll see on your water and sewerage eBill**

If you have chosen to have your bill sent by email, your eBill will include the following information:

- a link to download your full bill, or instructions on how to access your full bill
- your water usage for the billing period
- the amount you need to pay
- the date you need to pay by
- the ways you can pay
- information about how we can help if you're finding it hard to pay; and
- information about our [Customer Support Policy](#).

## **Paying your water and sewerage bill**

You're required to pay your water and sewerage bill by the due date shown on your bill. This will be at least 14 days after the date the bill was issued. A payment reminder notice will be sent if your bill remains unpaid 2 business days after it's due.

If the bill remains unpaid for 7 business days after the reminder notice, and we've not heard from you, we will try to get in touch with you in the way we explain in the section of this Charter [How we try to contact you](#).

Payment methods include:

- electronic funds transfer (EFT)
- direct debit
- BPAY
- credit card
- in person at any Australia Post office
- phone – call 24/7 on [1300 659 658](#) to pay by Visa or Mastercard
- Centrepay (contact [Centrelink](#) to set this up)
- in advance
- by mail.

For the latest payment methods, please refer to your bill or visit [Pay your bill](#).

## **Bill history**

Upon request, we can provide you with your water bill history up to 7 years. There will be an administration charge for providing information more than 7 years old.

We may refuse to provide a customer with their account and usage history where this would go against the information handling procedures set out in our family violence policy and the refusal is not in breach of the law.

## Rebates

Not-for-profit organisations may be eligible for a rebate on drinking and recycled water and sewerage service charges (but not usage charges) if the property is mostly used for:

- education purposes
- hospitals and nursing care
- religious worship
- outdoor sporting and recreational activity
- charity.

## Concessions

If you're a residential customer and hold an eligible concession card, you may be eligible for government funded concessions on some of your charges on your principal place of residence. This means you may receive a discount on your water bill.

## Payment assistance

Anyone can experience financial pressures from time to time and staying on top of household bills isn't always easy.

We offer a range of support options to help you manage these costs. Whether you're after greater flexibility with your payments, information about sustainable water use or looking for a bit more help, we're here to assist if (and when) you need it.

If you're finding it hard to pay your water and sewerage bill, please let us know as soon as you can. The earlier you let us know, the sooner we can help.

## Get greater flexibility with your bill payments

If you request a payment plan whilst talking to our Customer Contact team we'll usually confirm if you can pay this way straight away. If we can't confirm straight away, we'll acknowledge your request within 3 business days, and respond to your request within 5 business days in writing, showing:

- how we've calculated your plan
- the total number of payments you need to make
- the length of time over which you'll need to make the payments
- when you need to make each payment
- how much each payment must be.

If you'd like to arrange a flexible payment plan or change an existing payment plan due to a change in circumstances (eligibility subject to our [Customer Support Policy](#)), please contact us.

We may not offer you a flexible payment plan if you've had 2 payment plans cancelled due to non-payment in the last 12 months. If this happens, we'll offer you a flexible payment plan if you can provide reasonable assurance to us that you'll be able to meet the new arrangement. If you receive Centrelink benefits, you can have your bill payments automatically deducted through Centrepay (contact [Centrelink](#) to set this up).

## **Access support through South East Water Customer Care**

We have a specialist team to help our residential and small business customers who are experiencing financial difficulty. We can provide practical support options or connect you to free and confidential financial counselling services.

Our support options may include but are not limited to:

- waiving any or all fees
- waiving any interest accrued
- pausing the accrual of interest
- doing regular meter readings and frequently reporting to customers on consumption
- pausing our collection of overdue amounts to allow for a usage only payment plan for an agreed period of time
- a payment matching arrangement
- waiving a debt.

We can also discuss our plumbing assistance program with you. If you're eligible, this program provides you with free access to plumbing services – helping you to save water and reduce your water and sewerage bills.

For more details on our Customer Care call [13 18 51](tel:131851) or visit our [website](#).

## **Family violence**

Family violence impacts all areas of our community. We recognise the role we can play in providing account solutions and/or support services for customers that doesn't limit their access to an essential service.

We also acknowledge that we're not experts and will engage with community partners to provide independent expert advice on our support for customers. We can also refer you to specialist agencies if you need more assistance.

Our [Family Violence Support Policy](#) details the options, initiatives and support we can offer you if you're experiencing family violence.

If a customer identifies as being impacted by family violence, we won't:

- take any actions on your account regarding your bill payments, including any third-party collections activity
- restrict your water supply
- share any information you give us with anyone else, even if their name is on the account.

The customer will have full access to all financial support options available, which may include:

- flexible payment plans
- more time to pay
- debt waivers
- government grants
- financial counselling.

For joint accounts, we won't take any actions on the customer that has experienced or been impacted by family violence.

Any customer identified as experiencing or being impacted by family violence will have their information and account details handled in a way that maintains and protects privacy and confidentiality, including any personal information or account requests, and they will only need to explain their situation once.

Our Customer Care team will handle each case individually and will always prioritise the customer's safety and privacy. All customers, including those with joint accounts, will have their circumstances reviewed and together, we'll reach an outcome based on the safety and privacy of both parties.

## **Customer assistance and support**

Our [Customer Support Policy](#) outlines our approach to managing your account if you're experiencing vulnerability through financial hardship and your rights as someone who's experiencing vulnerability through financial hardship.

Our policy applies to both residential and small business customers. Through this we'll:

- aim to proactively identify if you're experiencing payment difficulties
- have internal responsibilities for the management, development, communication and monitoring of the policy, including how and when we'll review the policy
- have team training about our internal policies and procedures, designed to make sure we treat customers experiencing payment difficulties with sensitivity and respect
- advise customers experiencing payment difficulties when they'll be exempt from restriction of supply, legal action and recovery costs, including waivers of interest on debt, both before and while they are receiving assistance under the policy
- advise when we'll suspend or waive interest payments on money owing
- advise when we'll suspend the sale of debt
- offer available payment assistance options, including flexible payment plans
- offer information about our complaints process, including details about lodging a complaint with the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria), or other relevant external dispute resolution schemes if you're unhappy with your claim for support
- advise the circumstances when the policy will stop applying to customers.

For details please contact us or visit our [website](#).

## Payment difficulties

Any customers experiencing difficulties paying their bill have the right to:

- be treated sensitively on a case-by-case basis and have your circumstances kept confidential
- receive information about alternative payment options, our [Customer Support Policy](#) and Victorian Government concessions including the Utility Relief Grant Scheme (URGS). Unless requested otherwise, we can provide URGS application assistance by completing the online application over the phone and lodging the form online on your behalf.
- nominate an amount you can afford to pay on an agreed payment plan or extend the due date for some or all of an amount owed
- choose from various payment methods offered by us and receive written confirmation of the agreed payment arrangement within 10 business days of the reaching an agreement
- more frequent billing or payment options if agreed by us
- a flexible payment plan in accordance with our [Customer Support Policy](#) that can be modified at your request, to accommodate changes to your circumstances

- receive information about free and independent financial counselling services from an accredited financial counsellor
- receive a language interpreter service at no cost
- be shielded from legal action and additional debt recovery costs and interest on overdue amounts while you continue to make payments according to an agreed schedule
- redirection of a bill to another person for payment if the person agrees in writing
- not have your water supply restricted if you have agreed to a payment arrangement
- have access to water efficiency information to help you use less water.

## **Final water bills**

If you're an owner moving out of your property, we'll send you a final bill for any outstanding amounts that weren't part of your property settlement adjustment.

If you're a renter moving out of a property, we'll need you to give us at least 2 business days' notice so we can read the water meter. You'll also need to provide your new address so we can send your final water bill. If you don't tell us that you're leaving your property, you'll be responsible for usage charges until the date the water meter is next read even though you may have already vacated the property.

You can transfer any unpaid debt on a water and sewerage account for properties you previously lived in within our service area to any new account you have with us.

If we supply your property with recycled water, you'll need to give us at least 5 business days' notice when you're moving in or out. We ask this so we can provide the next resident with the necessary information kit about recycled water and how to use it.

## **Overdue account notices**

We'll send a reminder letter or email if you haven't paid your water and sewerage bill by its due date. We encourage you to contact us on [13 18 51](tel:131851) before the due date if you know you can't pay your bill on time or if you need some more support to pay. Reminder notices will include:

- the date of issue
- the overdue amount
- an explanation of the notice and why it is being issued
- the date payment is due, which is not earlier than 6 business days from the date of issue
- payment options

- information regarding payment difficulty assistance
- a warning of further actions we may take, including referral of any outstanding amount to external collection agency
- our contact details.

## Final notices

We'll send you a final notice at least 15 business days before we take action if you haven't paid your bill or contacted us to arrange an extension or set up a payment plan. For example, we may restrict your water supply or start legal proceedings. The final notice will include:

- our contact details
- the date of issue
- the amount owing
- the final date for payment, which will be at least 7 business days after the date of the notice
- that customer support is available, including any concessions and government assistance you may be entitled to
- details of the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)
- the date from which interest (if any) may be applied on outstanding amounts and the percentage of the interest rate we may apply
- confirmation that we might be able to recover outstanding amounts at the time of any sale if you are the property owner
- what you need to do avoid legal proceedings or having your water supply restricted, including the additional costs you may incur to restore your supply.

We publish a schedule of approved fees and charges on our website at [Prices and charges](#) and [Prices and charges for business](#). You can also ask us to send you a copy.

## Dishonoured payments

If your bank charges us because you don't have enough money in your bank account when paying by direct debit or if your cheque is dishonoured, we may pass these costs onto you on your next bill.

We won't ask you to pay for this cost if you are an eligible concession card holder or if you are experiencing payment difficulties and receiving support under our [Customer Support Policy](#).

## Undercharging and estimated bills

If we've undercharged you due to underestimating your bill, we may add the difference to your next bill. We'll list this amount separately and we'll provide you with an explanation.

We only ask you to pay the difference for a period of up to 4 months before we notify you that you've been undercharged. Upon request, we can give you up to 4 months to pay in instalments, or you can request a flexible payment plan under our [Customer Support Policy](#).

We won't charge you interest on an amount we have undercharged.

This doesn't apply to cases of illegal use. If we find you've been undercharged as a result of illegal water use, we can estimate the amount owed in line with the *Water Act 1989*.

## Overcharging

If we've overcharged you, we'll notify you within 10 business days from when we find the error and we'll refund or credit the amount on your water and sewerage account, according to your preference. If you have any overdue water and sewerage charges, we'll apply the credit to your bill(s).

## Information about price changes

We'll notify you as soon as possible of any changes to any prices. You'll receive this information with your first bill after a price change. Sometimes a price change might happen during your billing period. If this happens, we may need to calculate a new pro-rata rate so that we only charge you the new rate for the part of the billing period when the new prices apply. We publish a schedule of approved fees and charges on our website at [Prices and charges](#) and [Prices and charges for business](#). You can also ask us to send you a copy.

## Actions if you don't pay your bill

We'll make all reasonable efforts to help you pay your water and sewerage bill. However, if you haven't paid or agreed to pay by at least 28 business days from the time we first sent you the bill, we may take legal action or restrict your drinking and recycled water supply.

If we restrict your water supply this means that you'll have access to a limited amount of water on your property each day. It doesn't mean you lose all access to your water supply.

There may be some additional costs to you if we need to take legal action or restrict your water use.

If you're experiencing payment difficulties, please advise us and we can work with you to provide additional support.

We won't take legal action or restrict the water supply of customers who advise us they are experiencing family violence or receiving support through our [Customer Support Policy](#).

## Limits on legal action and restriction

We'll only restrict your water supply or take action for non-payment as a last resort.

We won't take legal action and restrict your drinking or recycled water supply:

- if the amount owed is less than \$300
- without trying to contact you multiple times (see [How we try to contact you](#)) about the non-payment both over the phone and in writing, over a 90-day period
- without having sent information warning you that we may restrict your water supply or take legal action, and the associated costs that you may need to pay, including the cost of removing a restriction device
- without having sent a final notice (refer to [final notices](#)) at least 15 business days prior and attempting to contact you after sending the final notice
- without having sent information about our [Customer Support Policy](#) programs that are available to you if you're having difficulty paying (including flexible payment plans); or giving you a chance to receive a concession or relief grant
- without giving you an opportunity to take up a flexible payment plan or to comply with an existing flexible payment plan
- if you're currently receiving assistance for payment difficulties through our [Customer Support Policy](#) or a concession or relief grant
- without telling you that assistance is available, including information about the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)
- if you're eligible for and have lodged an application for a concession card and we're processing your application
- if you've made an application for a Utility Relief Grant Scheme and we're processing your application
- if you have an unresolved complaint with us about the amount owing
- if you're a residential renter and
  - your rental provider owes the amount unpaid; or
  - you have a claim against the rental provider in respect of a water and sewerage bill pending at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

This doesn't restrict our right to pursue a debt owed to us by a person who is no longer a customer.

## How we try to contact you

If you don't make agreed payments or communicate with South East Water, or the agencies who work on our behalf, we'll try to get in touch with you multiple times before starting the debt recovery process; this includes:

- sending a final notice, and
- attempting to reach you for a conversation by either calling you (inside or outside of business hours) or visiting the address to where the water service is provided.

If we can't reach you for a conversation, we'll make at least 3 more attempts to contact you, using at least 2 of the below methods:

- by phone (inside and outside business hours)
- a visit to the address where the water service is provided
- by mail
- through emails; or
- SMS messages.

## Additional limits on restriction

We also won't restrict your drinking or recycled water supply:

- on a Friday, a weekend, a public holiday, the day before a public holiday, after 3.00 pm; or on a day of Total Fire Ban declared by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in the area in which the property is located
- if you're registered as a life support or special needs customer (for example, you need water for a life-support machine) if we believe that the restriction will cause a health hazard.

## Interest on overdue amounts

We may charge you interest once an amount is overdue. If you're a residential customer, we won't charge you interest if:

- you have an eligible concession card
- you're on an approved flexible payment plan
- you're experiencing payment difficulties and receiving support through our [Customer Support Policy](#).

We may start charging you interest if your circumstances change.

The maximum rate of interest we charge on owing amounts will be in line with the maximum rate set by the ESC. Interest starts building up on the day the amount is due and ends on the date all owing amounts you pay in full, both days inclusive.

## **Charges over property**

Property based charges (lien) applies for all our services provided to a property owner (both residential and non-residential). This includes charges for services for drinking water, sewerage, recycled water, fire services and any usage charges.

When there's lien debt on a property, this debt stays with the property upon change in ownership. This is provided under Section 274(4A) of the *Water Act 1989* and within the Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service (clause 15.7). This means that if a property is sold, any unpaid charges will become the responsibility of the new owner once the property settlement is reached.

You can access an information statement about property financial information through [PropertyConnect](#).

## **Minimum flow rate during restriction**

When we need to restrict your water supply, we'll reduce the supply of water to no less than 2 litres per minute at the tap nearest to the water meter. If the restriction is likely to cause a health hazard, please contact us on [13 18 51](tel:131851).

Please note it's an offence under the *Water Act 1989* to tamper with a restrictive device legally installed by South East Water.

## **Restoring supply**

When the reason for your restriction or disconnection no longer exists (for example, you pay your water bill or make alternative payment arrangements with us), or we accept your written commitment to achieve compliance with your plumbing, we'll restore or reconnect your drinking and/or recycled water supply after you pay the relevant fee.

We'll do so within 24 hours (and sometimes on the same day if you take the required action before 3 pm). More information on the relevant fees can be found on our [website](#).

# Reading your water meter

## Why you have a meter

Our drinking water and sewerage usage charges are based on how much water you use and then send back into our network via the drain or the toilet.

We calculate your bill by reading the water meter on your property.

If the meter is faulty, registers incorrectly or is removed from a property for service, we may estimate how much water you've used. If we find out later that this estimate is incorrect, we'll adjust your account and your bill accordingly.

We do our best to make sure you have an actual meter reading at least once every 12 months and try our best to take an actual reading every billing cycle.

If we can't easily access your meter, we may ask you to make it accessible. Otherwise, we'll estimate your meter reading.

If you receive recycled water at your property, you'll have a separate, purple water meter for this water source. We'll calculate your recycled water usage by reading the purple water meter.

## Testing your meter

If you think your meter isn't working properly, you can ask us to test it for a testing fee. If the test shows the meter isn't meeting the accuracy standards, we'll replace it and refund the cost of the test. We'll also refund or credit any amount we overcharged you.

We'll notify you of the results of the test within 5 business days of completing the test.

## Special meter readings

If you require a special meter read outside of our usual meter read cycle, this may incur a fee. We won't charge you a special meter read fee if:

- you send your meter reading to us yourself
- your property has a digital meter
- you are receiving assistance under our [Customer Support Policy](#).

We can use a special meter read to calculate your outstanding charges outside of your usual billing cycle. In most cases this will be when you're moving out of your property, but you can request this at any time. If we base these charges on an estimated reading, we won't charge you.

## Access to your meter

If we can't easily access your water meter, we may ask you to make it accessible for reading and maintenance.

If we can't read your meter, because of where it's located for example, we may ask you to read the meter on our behalf. If your meter is difficult to access, we can install a remote reading device so we can read your meter without entering your property. We'll charge a fee to install the remote device.

However, we may still need to have access to the meter occasionally, to read it or exchange it. This includes exchanges on properties with a galvanised wrought iron water service.

## Sending your meter reading to us

If you've received a bill based on an estimated meter read, you can send us your meter reading yourself. We'll then send you an adjusted bill at no extra cost.

If you need to send us your meter reading, you can either:

- SMS your reading to [0429 883 489](tel:0429883489)
- call [1800 802 677](tel:1800802677)
- send your reply-paid meter reading card in the mail
- [email](#) a photo of your water meter reading
- go to the enquiries page in [mySouthEastWater](#) and select submit meter read.

Learn how to read your meter on our [website](#).

## Digital meters

Digital meters are a technology upgrade to the existing mechanical meters that have been used to bill customers for decades. New digital meters serve the same key purpose as existing meters, which is to measure water how much water you use and create a bill for these services.

In addition to measuring how much water you use, the technology in digital meters allows us to collect usage, network and performance data which we use to:

- detect leaks and identify unusual usage patterns sooner;
- make sure your meter is working properly; and
- monitor what's happening in the network, including water temperature, water pressure, signal strength and tamper alarms, so that we can operate our assets more efficiently and sustainably.

The data we collect from digital meters may be shared with property owners, occupiers and contractors or third parties for these purposes (including, for example, to perform network analytics, research and other water or resource saving activities).

Sometimes the data we collect from digital meters contains information about an individual. When it does, we treat the data as personal information and handle it in line with our Privacy Charter. For further information, please visit our [website](#).

More information about digital meters can be found on our [website](#).

## **Meter security**

If your meter is stolen, you should contact us within 2 business days, as well as the local police, to report the theft. We may ask the property owner to pay some of the costs to replace the stolen meter. For new developments that are under construction, the applicant (if not the owner but the owner's agent), accepts responsibility on behalf of the owner, for costs associated with stolen meters.

## **Keys**

In some cases, we may need to hold onto a key to your property so we can access your meter. If so, we'll keep these keys safe and give them back to you when you notify us that you're vacating the property or when we no longer need access. Only authorised representatives of South East Water will have access to these keys.

## Entry to your property

Our employees and people we authorise have a right to enter onto your external property for a few reasons, such as reading your water meter, to do works, and to find out if laws related to water are being followed. If we need to enter onto your land, we'll work with you to cause as little harm and inconvenience as possible. We'll do our best to leave your property as we found it and we won't stay longer than we need to.

When entering onto your property, our employees and people authorised by us always need to carry and display current identification.

Our employees and people we authorise don't need to give you notice to enter onto your property to read a water meter; carry out a trade waste inspection; respond to emergency works; with a warrant issued by a magistrate; or to find out whether water rules are being followed.

Except in those circumstances, we'll give you least 7 days' notice of our plan to enter onto your property to do any works, or to do an inspection or test unless you agree to a shorter period.

In most cases, we won't enter onto a residential property before 7.30 am or after 6 pm without your consent. However, for trade waste inspections we can enter onto a property at any reasonable time, or in an emergency, at any time.

If an employee or person authorised by us enters onto your property when no one is home (except for the purposes of reading an easily accessible meter), the person will leave a notice with their identity and the date, time and purpose of entry onto your land.

We ask you to tell our employees and people authorised by us of anything on your property that could be dangerous to them, such as a guard dog.

## South East Water's authority

By law we can ask you, as a property owner, to fix faults in your plumbing, remove trees and contribute to the cost of our works, for example when redeveloping a property. We'll use these powers permitted to us by law under the *Water Act 1989*, relevant legislation and in accordance with the Essential Service Commission's *Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service*.

You can't connect to, alter or remove any works connected to our system without our consent. If you plan to add or remove sewerage and water fixtures or start any building work which may block access to our assets (and you haven't got our consent for the work first) you may be breaking the law.

## **Penalty infringement notices**

We can issue on-the-spot fines of more than \$500 if someone breaches the [Permanent Water Use Rules](#) or water restrictions.

## **Prosecution**

If a customer is prosecuted for a breach of the [Permanent Water Use Rules](#), they may be fined over \$9,000 and/or imprisoned for up to 6 months.

## **Restriction of your supply**

We may restrict your water supply if you breach the [Permanent Water Use Rules](#) (and you may need to pay a fee to remove a restricting device). For more information, please see our Prices and Charges Manual on our [website](#).

# Responsibilities for maintenance

## Water supply

In general, we're responsible for maintaining the water pipes up to and including your property meter. Where there's no meter, we're responsible to the property connection point where a stop valve or tap controls the flow of water to your private extension.

Where the primary meter or part of the property service pipe (other than a fire service) is within or beneath the walls of a structure built on a serviced property, an additional stop valve must be installed external to the property within 300 mm of the property boundary (unless otherwise approved by us).

For example, if you've built a retaining wall over your water meter or part of one of our pipes, you'll need to have an additional stop valve installed by a licensed plumber.

Access for control of the valve should be secured by placing a casing pipe and approved valve cover over the stop valve in line with our requirements and those of any other relevant authority. You can speak to your licensed plumber about these requirements.

## Sewerage services

If you're a property owner, you're responsible for maintaining all sanitary drains up to where our sewer pipe meets the pipes within your property. This point is called a property connection branch. In accordance with the [Water \(Estimation Supply and Sewerage\) Regulations 2014](#) existing property connection branches may be longer, depending on the circumstances of your property and we may not be responsible for works associated with the extra length. Where an existing property connection branch is now the responsibility of the property owner, plumbers need to take care to make sure ground water or materials that don't belong in the sewer don't enter into our sewerage system. Plumbers must make sure all existing drains comply with the provisions of AS/NZ3500.2.

Please note that you'll need permission to build over or next to any South East Water pipes or assets. Guidelines can be found on our [website](#).

To find out where your property connection branch is located, please contact us. For a small fee, we can also give you a copy of your property service plan.

The property owner is responsible for maintaining and repairing the sewerage pipes, drains and fixtures within the property, so they work efficiently and hygienically. To do this, you'll need to keep any inspection shaft, grate, vent or grease trap connected to these pipes clean, clear and accessible at all times. If you know or suspect that any stormwater on your property is connected to the sewerage system, you'll need to hire a licensed plumber to fix it.

Slightly different rules apply to combined drains and pressure sewer systems. Further information is available in the Sewer Servicing Guidelines on our [website](#).

## **Victorian Building Authority Certificate of Compliance**

If your property's sanitary drain needs maintenance or repairs and is covered by a Victorian Building Authority Certificate of Compliance, please contact the licensed plumber who issued the certificate in the first instance. For more information, please contact the [Victorian Building Authority](#).

## **When a sewer pipe is outside the property boundary**

If you plan to build close to or on the building line, you'll need to make sure you meet the build over guidelines. To meet our build over requirements, where a sewer pipe is located outside your property's boundary within government land, we may choose to end the property connection branch outside of the property boundary.

Private sanitary drains aren't permitted within the boundary of a neighbouring property's curtilage.

If your property connection branch ends outside your property boundary, the owner must get permission(s) from us and any other relevant government authorities prior to the work(s) commencing.

If you're installing a new sanitary drain, you need to make sure the pipe laid meets the road owner's requirements (such as VicRoads or the local council). If you're the developer, plumber and/or owner of the property, it's your responsibility to make sure sanitary drains laid meet these requirements.

The pipes and infrastructure we own ends one metre from the building, foundations or building overhang where an existing and/or proposed structure is:

- located on or near your property's boundary; and
- the sewer pipe is located outside your property's boundary and within government land.

More information can be found in our Sewer Servicing Guidelines on our [website](#).

## **Combined drains**

In accordance with the *Water (Estimation Supply and Sewerage) Regulations 2014*, the responsibility of maintenance and repair of the property connection branch depends on the location of the lot of land.

## **Pressure sewer system**

If you have a pressure sewer system on your property, we own and are responsible for maintaining the pump unit and all pipes and equipment from the unit to our sewer. You're responsible for maintaining all sewerage pipes and fixtures on your property beyond the unit.

You also need to maintain the power supply, the independent circuit-breaker and the power cable to the pump control panel on your property and to pay electricity charges for operating the pump.

## **Owners' corporations and multi-unit developments**

We aren't responsible for any shared private water and sewer pipes in an owners' corporation, multi-unit development or any other property sharing a private pipe. It's the responsibility of the owners' corporation or individual owners of the development to maintain any such shared private mains. However, we maintain any water meters purchased from us.

## Enquiries, complaints and disputes

We're dedicated to providing excellent customer service. Our team is here to help with account related matters, including but not limited to account information, bill payment options, concession entitlements, support programs for customers who are experiencing payment difficulties, our complaints handling procedures and information about the Energy & Water Ombudsman (Victoria).

By bringing your concerns or problems to our team at an early stage, you can help us to understand if things go wrong and how we can improve both our services and our policies. Our aim is to resolve the problem in the beginning and make sure you're satisfied with the outcome. You can lodge an enquiry or complaint by contacting us on [13 18 51](tel:131851) or on our [website](#).

Sometimes we may charge a fee to cover administrative and processing costs for some more detailed requests for information (such as historical account details from more than 7 years ago). Otherwise, it doesn't cost you anything to contact us for information or advice.

For more information, we publish a schedule of approved fees and charges on our website at [Prices and charges](#) and [Prices and charges for business](#).

### Resolving your problem

If you're ever dissatisfied about any interactions with us, often all it takes to find a solution is to talk with one of our customer service officers. We're ready to listen to your concerns and aim to resolve your problem the first time you contact us.

We'll respond within 10 business days to any complaint lodged with us. If the case is complex and we can't deal with the enquiry within 10 business days, we'll reach out to you to tell you when you can expect a reply.

Where a complaint or enquiry is lodged and a decision is made, we'll provide reasons for the decision to you, including details of the legislative or policy basis for the reasons if appropriate. You can learn more about our complaints handling procedures on our [website](#) or by contacting us.

### How to take your matter further

If you're not satisfied with our response, you can request to speak with a manager. If you can't resolve the matter with us, you may contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman by phone on [1800 500 509](tel:1800500509) or by mail to GPO Box 469D, Melbourne 3001. Depending on the type of problem you may contact Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

## **Disputes about money**

We won't ask you to make a payment on your bill if you're waiting for a response to a complaint where you disagree with how much money you owe on your bill. We'll only ask for payment once it has been 10 business days since we've informed you of our decision about your complaint and you haven't taken further action. This further action could be asking for a review of the decision or lodging a claim with the Energy and Water Ombudsman or another external dispute resolution body. We also we won't consider your complaint resolved until any claim lodged with the Energy and Water Ombudsman or external dispute resolution body is resolved. You must, however, pay any other amount owing to us that doesn't directly relate to the dispute.

# Information and privacy

## Privacy

We appreciate the importance of protecting your personal information and recognise the trust placed in us when you supply your personal information to us. We're committed to protecting your personal information in accordance with our legal obligations, including the Information Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*.

Set out below is an outline of our privacy obligations and the practices we've adopted to comply with those obligations. For a comprehensive explanation of how we protect your personal information and comply with our privacy obligations, please visit our [privacy](#) page.

## How and why we collect personal information

We collect personal information so we can deliver water and sewerage services and perform our other functions and activities, including promoting, researching and improving those services.

When we collect personal information from you, we'll tell you what information we're collecting and why we're collecting it.

The types of personal information we collect depends on the circumstances in which that information is collected. Personal information that we may collect from you includes your name, other identifying information, contact details and concession details. If you don't provide us with the personal information that we request we may be unable to provide certain services to you.

We collect personal information from you in a number of ways, including in person, over the phone, internet and through digital meters. We only collect as much information as we need to do our job and, where possible, we try to collect personal information from you directly.

## How we protect, use or disclose personal information

We take reasonable steps to keep the personal information that we collect from you secure and confidential.

We use and disclose your personal information to conduct and improve our business activities. We generally use personal information for the reason for which we collected it. We'll only use or disclose your personal information for an unrelated or unexpected purpose with your consent or if we're allowed to do so under a relevant law (e.g. in an emergency situation).

We may provide your personal information to third parties for the purpose of delivering services to you directly (e.g. to a water and sewer system maintenance

contractor) or in connection with our broader functions and activities (e.g. to perform network analytics, research and other water or resource saving activities).

## **Accessing and updating your personal information**

We make every effort to keep any personal information that we hold about you up to date and accurate.

You may contact us at any time to request access to or to update to the personal information that we hold about you. Please note that, depending on your request, we may charge for the cost of processing your request, refuse your request and/or direct you to our freedom of information process.

## **More information**

For a detailed explanation of our privacy obligations and practices, please visit our [privacy](#) page.

## **Enquiries**

If you have any enquiries, please visit our [website](#) or contact us during business hours on 13 18 51. We'll respond as quickly as we can.

You can also make an enquiry by email to [support@sew.com.au](mailto:support@sew.com.au) or by writing to us at Enquiries, PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198.

If you request a written reply, we'll send you one within 10 business days. Otherwise, we'll call you about your enquiry within 10 business days.

# Appendix A: Our service commitments

## Guaranteed Service Levels

Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) payments are financial payments that we'll give to any customers in the form of a bill rebate if we don't meet our guaranteed service levels. This means that whenever we become aware that we've failed to meet a specific GSL, we'll automatically apply a rebate to your next water and sewerage bill. If you believe you're entitled to a rebate you can contact us on [13 18 51](tel:131851), or [email](#) us or write to us at Faults & Emergencies, PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198. You can find our contact details on our [website](#).

Under our GSLs, we'll give a \$60 rebate if:

- we don't give you a minimum of 2 business days' notice of any planned water supply interruption impacting your property
- we turn your water off for more than 5 hours
- you experience more than 5 unplanned disruptions to services (water, sewer and water quality) in any 12-month period impacting your property
- you experience more than 2 unplanned sewerage interruptions during any 12-month period at your property
- your sewerage service is interrupted for more than 4 hours. This doesn't include sewer service interruptions in your own pipework.

We'll give a \$500 rebate if:

- you're a residential customer and we take legal action or take steps to restrict your water supply before making reasonable endeavours (as defined by the ESC) to contact you
- we don't provide you with information about the help available to you if you're experiencing difficulties paying.

We'll give a \$1,000 rebate if:

- we don't contain a sewer spill on your property within 5 hours of being notified.

We'll give a \$1,500 rebate if:

- there's a water spill in your house caused by our infrastructure.

We'll give a \$3,000 rebate if:

- there's a sewer spill inside your house caused by our infrastructure.

In the event of water quality incidents and where a water quality advisory is issued, we will donate an amount listed below to our community grants program:

- \$5,000 for small, localised events impacting less than 50 customers, and
- \$10,000 per impacted postcode for more widespread events impacting 50 or more customers.

We will include criteria to prioritise community groups affected, or who provided customer support, when water quality incidents occur into the grant application process.

We also offer a quick and easy bottled water refund process for customers impacted by these events via the South East Water website.

Please note that GSL payments don't apply to the recycled water supply or water services supplied by a private extension.

Where we don't meet a GSL because of an event caused by, or is the responsibility of, the customer concerned or a third party, we won't provide a GSL rebate.

## Approved service standards

In line with the ESC's *Water Industry Standard — Urban Customer Service*, Table 2 outlines the service standards relating to reliability and interruption response times associated with our water and sewer services.

**Table 2: Service standards for provision of water and sewer services**

Service Standards	2023-2028 Threshold
<b>Water</b>	
Minimum water pressure or flow rate a customer should receive (min/L)	20
Maximum unplanned water supply interruptions a customer should experience in any 12-month period (number)	5
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 1) (minutes)	36
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 2) (minutes)	92
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 3) (minutes)	317
Average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions (minutes)	88
Average duration of planned water supply interruptions (minutes)	179
<b>Sewerage</b>	
Maximum sewer blockages a customer should experience in any 12-month period (number)	2
Average time to attend sewer spills and blockages (minutes)	47
Average time to rectify sewer blockage (minutes)	137
Maximum time taken to contain a sewer spill (minutes)	300

## Glossary of terms

**Accessible stop valve:** a stop valve that is placed above or below ground within a stop valve cover approved by us.

**Curtilage:** the area of land between a building and the property boundary or fence.

**Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA):** the Victorian Government responsible for various matters related to the environment, energy and climate change. It succeeds the former Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

**eBill:** a bill that is delivered by email.

**Eligible concession card:** means a Pensioner Concession Card issued by [Centrelink](#) or the [Department of Veteran Affairs](#); a Centrelink Health Care Card; or a Department of Veteran Affairs Gold Card. (Cards marked as 'Dependent' are not eligible.)

**Essential Services Commission (ESC):** the independent economic regulator established by the State Government of Victoria to regulate prescribed essential utility services supplied by the electricity, gas, water, ports, grain handling, rail freight industries and aspects of the insurance industry.

**Hot water meter:** a meter that registers usage from a hot water service and are common in apartment buildings or unit blocks. These hot water meters are read and managed by gas or power companies.

**Maintained private extension:** a water pipe built by South East Water which allows small communities in remote areas (e.g Maryknoll) to have access to a limited supply of water at a lower cost through a maintained private extension program.

**Melbourne Water:** manages drainage services, the reservoirs and major sewage treatment works serving Melbourne. Provides wholesale water and sewerage services to metropolitan Melbourne water corporations.

**Non-residential customer:** the owner of a property used for non-residential purposes.

**Overflow relief gully:** a drain-like fitting located outside the home, designed to release any sewage overflow external of your home, in the event of a sewer blockage.

**Permitted uses:** required limits placed by us on relevant customers on how they can use of recycled water, to comply with health regulation and environmental regulation.

**Planned interruption:** an interruption, which is caused by us to do planned maintenance or to upgrade pipes.

**Pressure sewer system:** pressure sewer systems are used in situations where the normal gravity sewer system is more difficult to implement (for example, where the water table is high). This type of system involves a number of individual household pumps to move sewage through a pressure line to a water recycling plant.

**Private extension:** where a South East Water owned water pipe does not front or pass through a customer's property, the property owner (or a previous owner) may have connected to our pipe using their own pipework.

**Private fire service:** a system of works that starts from our water main and ends at an outlet on a serviced property. The outlet is specifically designed to supply water to the property for the main purpose of fighting fires, even if the system is also connected to other outlets that are used for other purposes.

**Private water supply works (internal property pipework):** in relation to a serviced property, this means the property service pipe (including any other fixtures or fittings other than a water meter) from the outlet of any fixtures installed on the serviced property to the property service pipes but does not include any extended private water supply pipes.

**Property connection branch:** a section of pipe owned and maintained by us that connects a customer's property to our sewer network.

**Property service pipe:** the water supply pipe connecting our water pipe to the outlet of any fixtures installed on a serviced property.

**Property service works (external works generally maintained by the water corporation except for private fire services and extended private water supply works):** the property service pipe (including any stop valves and any other fixtures or fittings other than a water meter) reaching from a water main of a water corporation to:

- the primary meter; or
- the property boundary (if the primary meter is more than 2 metres inside the property boundary); or
- the first accessible stop valve where:
  - the primary meter or part of the property service pipe is within or beneath the walls of a structure built on the serviced property; or
  - where there's no water meter.

**Recycled water:** water that's been collected from sewerage systems or industry processes and treated to a standard that is appropriate for its intended use (EPA, 2003).

**Private sanitary drain:** a line of pipes including all fittings that move sewage or trade waste from a serviced property to our sewer main. These pipes are separate to

roof stormwater downpipes and run-off from paved areas. The property owner is responsible for maintaining their sanitary drain.

**Stop valve (isolation):** a flow control fitting capable of regulating and shutting off the flow in a water main or property service pipe, and includes any fitting of a stop tap type, gate valve, ball valve or ferrule tap type.

**Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service:** established by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) and specifies minimum customer-related standards, procedures, policies and practices with which we must comply.

**Water recycling plant:** a structural plant that treats incoming sewage to a level or levels required to provide safe recycled water; for example, for irrigating crops, flushing toilets, etc. Includes producing biosolids suitable for reuse.

**Residential customer:** the owner or the person who lives in a house, apartment, unit or other type of dwelling.

**Sewage:** water and waste discharged from a property into our sewer by a drain or toilet.

**Sewerage system:** the pipes and pumping stations that carry sewage from your home to a water recycling plant.

**Small business customer:** a non-employing business or a business with less than 20 employees which has an active Australian Business Number (ABN).

**South East Water:** a water corporation wholly owned by the State Government of Victoria under the *Water Act 1989*.

**Trade waste:** liquid waste, as opposed to domestic sewage, which is generated by industrial, commercial, trade or manufacturing processes and is discharged to the sewer.

**TTY Service:** a facility to enable a deaf or hearing impaired person to communicate by telephone through the use of a telephone typewriter.

**Unplanned interruption:** an interruption which is caused by a fault in South East Water's system or a fault which is the maintenance responsibility of South East Water.

**Water main/pipe:** a pipe owned by a water corporation, including any stop valve and any fittings located at the connection between a water main and a property service pipe.

# South East Water's contact details

## Our headquarters

WatersEdge  
101 Wells Street  
Frankston Vic 3199

## Mailing address

South East Water  
PO Box 2268  
Seaford, Vic, 3198

## Online

Website: [southeastwater.com.au](http://southeastwater.com.au)

Email: [support@sew.com.au](mailto:support@sew.com.au)

If you're a residential customer you can contact us or manage your account online. Register at [mySouthEastWater](http://mySouthEastWater), live web chat (between 9 am to 6 pm) or send an email to [support@sew.com.au](mailto:support@sew.com.au)

## Phone numbers

General enquiries	<a href="tel:131694">13 16 94</a>
Faults and emergencies (24 hours, 7 days a week)	<a href="tel:132812">13 28 12</a>
Account enquiries (Monday to Friday 8 am to 6 pm)	<a href="tel:131851">13 18 51</a>
Hearing impaired service	<a href="tel:133677">13 36 77</a> (ask for 131 851)
Interpreter service	<a href="tel:0392090130">03 9209 0130</a>
Country and interstate callers	<a href="tel:0395523737">03 9552 3737</a>
Overseas billing enquiries	<a href="tel:61395523737">+613 9552 3737</a>

## Essential Services Commission

Phone: [03 9032 1300](tel:0390321300) or [1300 664 969](tel:1300664969)

Website: [esc.vic.gov.au](http://esc.vic.gov.au)

## Energy and Water Ombudsman (Vic)

GPO Box 469  
Melbourne Vic 3001  
PH: [1800 500 509](tel:1800500509)  
Web: [ewov.com.au](http://ewov.com.au)

## Large print copies

For large print copies of this charter, please contact us on [131 851](tel:131851).

# Healthy Water. For Life.

## How to get in touch

Email [support@sew.com.au](mailto:support@sew.com.au)

General account enquiries [13 18 51](tel:131851)

South East Water Customer Care [9552 3540](tel:95523540)

Hearing and speech impaired services

TTY [13 36 77](tel:133677) (ask for 13 18 51)

Interpreter service (all languages) [9209 0130](tel:92090130)

## Follow us

