



MEDIA RELEASE

Hardship program helps customers

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Gippsland Water has encouraged customers who experience difficulties paying their water bills to contact the corporation.

According to managing director David Mawer, Gippsland Water has a Financial Hardship Program with a range of alternate payment options available to suit a customer's capacity to pay.

These include various instalment payment plans where customers can opt to pay their bills in smaller amounts more frequently.

“With the current economic crisis and charges for all utilities on the rise, Gippsland Water acknowledges some people may find it difficult to pay their water bills in full by the due date,” Mr Mawer said.

“The important message is, don't struggle in silence. If you are experiencing difficulties paying your water bill, please contact Gippsland Water on 1800 050 500 to discuss the options available and make an arrangement to address the issue.”

Gippsland Water can also offer referral to government assistance programs and non-cost independent financial counsellors.

Mr Mawer's comments come on the eve of Gippsland Water's second tariff increase under Water Plan 2008-2013, which was approved last year by independent regulator, the Essential Services Commission (ESC), after extensive community consultation and publicity.

Following approval by the ESC again in June this year, Gippsland Water's tariffs will increase by 26 per cent (including CPI) as of 1 July 2009.

For a typical household connected to both water and wastewater services, with average consumption of 210 kilolitres of water a year, the tariff rise means an increase to bills of \$227 a year, or roughly \$4.35 a week. This equates to about \$76 per water bill (there are three bills per year).

According to Mr Mawer, the tariff increases outlined in the Water Plan and announced last year, are a result of significant capital investment between 2008-2013 to improve water and wastewater service reliability, customer services and security of supply.

Drought, climate change, legislative requirements and the need to ensure security of water supply also contributed to increases in the fixed water and wastewater service charges.

Mr Mawer said customers would benefit from capital works projects and maintenance planned for the 2008-2013 period, which includes: mains, sewers, water treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants; plus conservation, recycling, augmentation and interconnection projects.

While the Gippsland Water Factory (GWF) is the major capital works project being undertaken during this timeframe, it is by no means the only project, according to Mr Mawer.

“It is important to note that the 2009-2010 tariffs are not increasing because of cost increases and time delays on the GWF project,” he said.

“Gippsland Water’s tariffs for the current year and the next four years were set in Water Plan 2008-2013 and will not be changed. Although the cost of GWF has increased, this will be absorbed into Gippsland Water’s existing budget for the 2008-2013 period. Customers can rest assured there will be no change to this approved tariff structure.”

For information on Gippsland Water’s Hardship Program and the payment assistance options available, contact Gippsland Water on freecall 1800 050 500.

Authorised:
David Mawer, Managing Director