



Gippsland
Water

Community Report 2023

August 2023



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Our Community Report provides an annual snapshot of our performance over the last year against some of the key promises and commitments we made in our 2018 Price Submission.

It's an opportunity for us to tell our story. It includes examples and commentary of where we think we have - or haven't - achieved what we set out to deliver.

This is our honest assessment.

Have your say

We're keen to know what you think of our performance too. If you can spare a few minutes, please share your thoughts with us.

Your feedback will be anonymous, confidential and valued by our team.

[Have your say on our community report](#)

Do our job well

We promised to ensure our water quality always meets the Safe Drinking Water Act. We also promised to ensure sewer spills within a house caused by us would be contained within an hour, and planned interruptions would be carried out within the time we said.

All of the water we supplied met the standards of the Safe Drinking Water Act. This was confirmed by our weekly water testing and independent sample testing.

We didn't cause any sewer spills within a house this year as a result of our preventative maintenance program.

Case study: Preparing for future growth



We completed a series of upgrades, renewals and new asset projects to strengthen our network for the future.

Some of the major projects we finished or progressed this year included:

- Completing performance optimisation of our new Drouin wastewater treatment plant, which will cater to the town's growing population.
- Completing construction of a new water pipeline in Warragul to support development and increase the volume and security of water supplies for Drouin.
- Replacing the cover and liner at our Sanders water basin in Churchill to provide protection and water security for at least the next 25 years.
- Completing an upgrade to the existing sewer pump station in Dawson Street Sale to cater for growth and to continue to meet safety and environmental standards.
- Constructing a new treated water basin at the Moe water treatment plant to ensure a reliable drinking water supply for the Moe region.
- Building a pipeline to connect Coongulla and Glenmaggie to Heyfield's more reliable water supply.
- Installing a 1,280 kilowatt solar panel system at our Gippsland Water Factory.
- Replacing 1.8km of water mains and 4.4km of sewer mains across our service area.
- Engaging the community to get an understanding of sentiment about the idea of making land available in Dutton Downs for a wind farm.

Case study: Delivering value through new local maintenance contract



After a competitive tender process, we engaged a new locally owned and operated maintenance service provider, O&M.

The new provider offers value for money and supports local procurement and employment.

The work they do is crucial to our business, completing important mechanical and electrical works.

The process was comprehensive, adding improvements to the way we work and ensuring we continue to provide the best value for money for our customers.

The new contract with O&M started on 1 July 2023.

Be easy to deal with

We promised we'd be easy to deal with and resolve 88% of all customer enquiries at the first point of contact.

We exceeded our target of 95% of all enquiries to our call centre being resolved at first point of contact.

We promised that no more than 0.03 complaints per 1,000 customers would be investigated by the Energy and Water Ombudsman. We achieved this target with just two complaints investigated – one due to a wet weather event and one due to a water drainage issue.

Case study: New Price Submission success



We finalised our Price Submission 2023-28, which sets our direction for the next five years.

Our focus was ensuring affordability and fairness and making sure that what we do reflects customer priorities, issues and concerns.

We'll deliver initiatives over the next five years that will improve our network and customer service, and contribute positively to our community. These include:

- \$268 million for capital investments to meet higher demand and higher service levels
- \$10.5 million for energy projects to increase system resilience, boost renewable energy generation and reduce long-term energy costs
- \$100,000 per year in programs that support the wellbeing of our community support, including more public drinking fountains
- An app to provide greater flexibility in managing bill payments and the ability to monitor water usage
- Faster response to sewer blockages
- Annual education and awareness campaigns that focus on water conservation, sustainability, wellbeing and customer support
- More customer care resources, including employing and upskilling more staff to reach out early and provide tailored support for those doing it tough
- Increased investment in Aboriginal employment and cultural recognition initiatives
- SMS notifications for unplanned service interruptions and a live outage tracker

Be affordable and fair

We promised to be affordable, fair and maintain services to customers who are experiencing hardship.

We are delivering on our promise to keep prices stable. Despite costs increasing beyond our control such as interest rates, electricity and chemical, we delivered an average bill that is 3.3% lower than the inflation rate.

Our customer care team continued to focus on reaching out to customers that have recently stopped paying by instalments to discuss the financial support options that best support their needs.

Case study: Supporting customers experiencing financial difficulty



We know that some of our customers have been feeling the pressure from the increased cost of living. We continued to ensure anyone having difficulty paying their bills receives the support from us that they need.

Our team proactively reached out to customers experiencing financial difficulties to let them know about the options available to assist them.

We also helped our customers apply for assistance through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's Utility Relief Grant program. 1,303 applications and \$410,953.11 of funding was approved to help customers pay their water bills.

Prepare and protect

We promised to prepare for future growth and protect the environment.

We reused all biosolids delivered to our organics recycling business. We met our 95% water supply reliability target and achieved our emissions target of no more than 36.7 tonnes (000's) total CO2 equivalent emissions.

Case study: New Tarago water allocation



We secured a new entitlement from the Tarago Reservoir to secure Warragul and Drouin's water supply for the medium-term future.

The 3.33 gigalitre entitlement gives much-needed certainty for the two rapidly growing towns, particularly with warmer and drier conditions expected.

Both Warragul and Drouin were facing a short-term water availability shortfall and this means we can continue to provide safe and reliable reticulated water for decades to come.

The new water entitlement is also critical for supporting growth and investment in the local economy.

Case study: Update on net-zero by 2030



We committed to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and developed detailed plans for achieving this. We also promised that by 2025, all our operations will be 100% powered by renewable energy technologies, including solar, hydroelectricity and biogas.

We've made great progress this year.

We switched on more than 2000 solar panels at our Gippsland Water Factory. At its peak capacity, the 1,280 kilowatt system will be able to completely power the water factory.

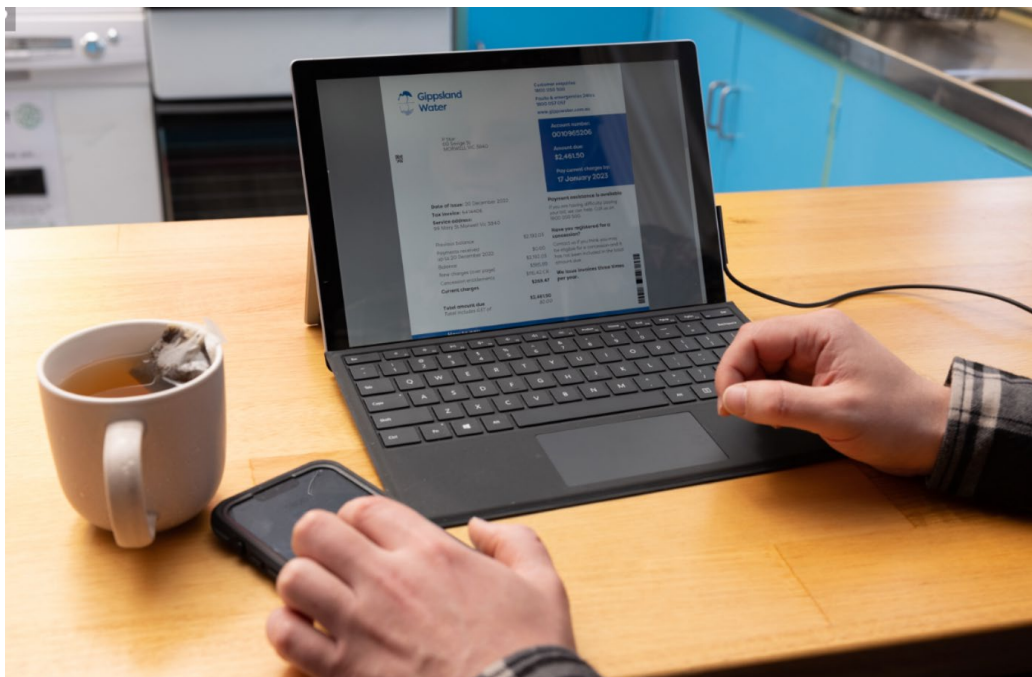
We also finished construction of a floating solar array at the Drouin wastewater treatment plant. The innovative 350 kilowatt floating solar system is made up of 644 panels. When it's turned on later in 2023, at its peak capacity it'll generate enough power to fully power the plant.

Be involved

We promised to spend at least \$30,000 per year on community benefit programs.

We exceeded this promise by working with local councils to install eight drinking water fountains in our service area. We also supplied in-kind support by donating reusable drink bottles to schools and community groups for events.

Case study: Customer Sounding Board put to the test



We set up a Customer Sounding Board of over 450 customers and community members who share their views to help guide our decision-making. Members of our sounding board receive invitations to participate in engagement activities, such as focus groups and surveys.

This year, the Customer Sounding Board has been influencing the design and build of our new website, with 300 members randomly selected to participate in user-testing. Another 100 members also tested different homepage designs. Their feedback has helped make sure our new website will be optimised so that customers can find what they need easily.

The participants for the Dutson Downs windfarm focus groups were also drawn from our customer sounding board, with 24 members with diverse demographics and from locations across our service area involved. All Customer Sounding Board members were also invited to complete a survey on the same topic.

Case study: Ongoing role for Customer Reference Group



This year, we gave our Customer Reference Group an ongoing role in our customer engagement. Originally set up to assist with our 2022 Urban Water Strategy and 2023 Price Submission, the Customer Reference Group makes sure customer expectations are understood and reflected in our plans for the future.

Made up of diverse members from our community, each member of the group contributes their insight and experience.

We look forward to working collaboratively with the group into the future and will be recruiting for some new members in August 2023.

Case study: Helping our community thrive



Through our Community Investment Program, we support initiatives that benefit the communities across our region.

This year, a highlight was our participation in the Morwell Neighbourhood House People's Kitchen Foodbank Giving Initiative. Through this program, our team members spend a day in the kitchen whipping up tasty, nutritious meals for the local community Foodbank. The People's Kitchen tackles food security head-on and delivers an inclusive approach to addressing food security, as well as health and wellbeing issues for the local community.

We also supported a number of other community groups, charity organisations, community events and sporting groups including the Traralgon and Moe Rotary Clubs, the Gippsland Festival of Big Ideas and the Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network.

Other achievements

We invested more than \$51.5 million into capital works projects to strengthen and upgrade our network.

We supported growth in our region by connecting 836 new households to our water services and 799 households to our wastewater services.

Investing in our network

We completed seven of our top 10 capital works projects that were scheduled for completion this five-year pricing period. We made scheduling changes to the others to achieve better outcomes for our customers, or to enable other more time critical projects to be brought forward.

Case study: Giving local students a study boost



This year, we awarded two Federation University Gippsland students scholarships. Chloe Bethune, who is studying a Bachelor of Education Studies, was the inaugural recipient of Gippsland Water's Indigenous Scholarship. Chloe is a proud Watjarri Mardu woman who loves community work and volunteering.

Ella Fothergill, a Traralgon local and former Lavalla Catholic College student, received the Gippsland Water Women in STEM Scholarship to support her Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) studies.

Both women will receive \$3,000 per year for the three years of their courses and have the opportunity to gain hands-on industry experience working in our vacation program.

Case study: Growing Gippsland Regional Organics



We secured funding to complete a major expansion of Gippsland Regional Organics.

The expansion will mean we can recycle more organic materials and manufacture more certified compost products.

The project includes additional processing areas, water and power infrastructure, and new processing equipment. We expect it to be complete by December 2024.

The expansion is co-funded by us and the state and federal governments. We have been awarded \$4.788 million from the Victorian Government under the state's Circular Economy Organics Sector Transformation Fund and the Australian Government under the Food Waste for Healthy Soils Fund for Gippsland Regional Organics Process Expansion Project.

Areas for improvement

We narrowly missed our target to have no planned interruptions going over advised times, with six taking longer than expected. These works were completed to a high standard and the delays were due to either unexpected complexity and the scope of works increasing, delays in materials arriving, or delays in developer works.

Three planned interruptions missed our target to provide five days' notice ahead of works taking place. The 58 customers affected received a \$50 credit on their bill. We've made improvements to reduce the likelihood of this happening again.

In March 2023, the Safe Drinking Water Act audit found two minor non-compliances in relation to our sampling program. These non-compliances were administrative. All of the water we supplied our customers met the standards of the Safe Drinking Water Act. We've put improvements in place to prevent future administrative non-compliances.

We didn't meet our targets for customers in hardship on payment plans. The proportion of hardship customers paying by instalments has decreased.

Cost of living pressures are being felt by the community, and some customers are struggling to commit to payment plans. We're continuing to reach out to customers in need of assistance and we plan to expand our customer care team to provide further support.



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