



PLANNING *for the* FUTURE

People's Panel Background Report

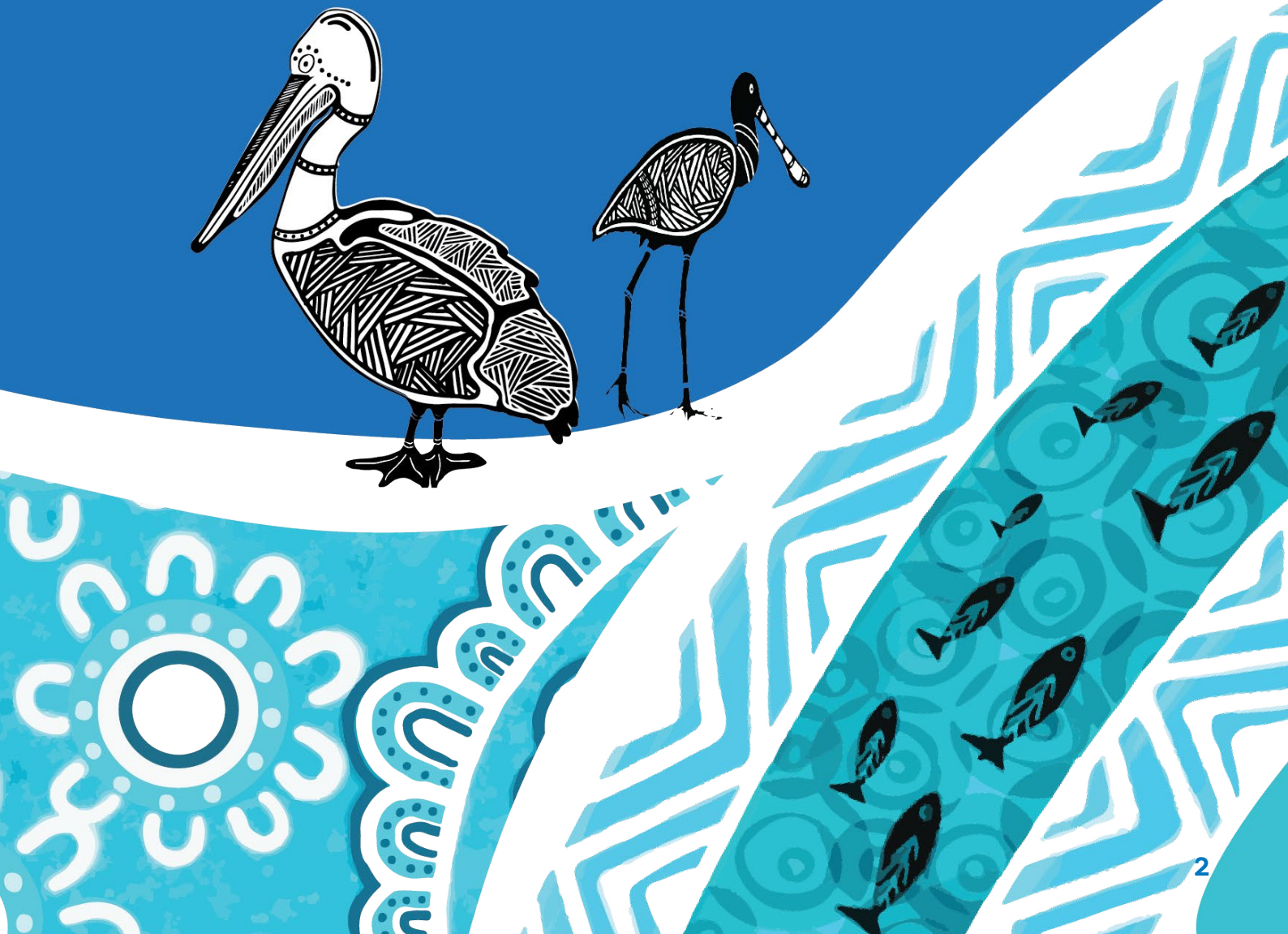


Gippsland
Water

Contents

Welcome and thank you	<u>4</u>
About this report	<u>5</u>
People’s Panel library	<u>6</u>
About us	<u>7</u>
Who does what in water	<u>19</u>
Planning for the future – why are we doing this now?	<u>22</u>
Our bills and prices	<u>24</u>
Healthy Country and protecting the environment	<u>31</u>
Our role in the community	<u>37</u>
What is happening around us and how we’re responding	<u>42</u>
The challenge ahead	<u>48</u>
Let’s focus on what we can change	<u>52</u>

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Gippsland Water areas, the Gunaikurnai and the Bunurong people, and recognise their strong cultural connection to the land and waterways.
We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present.



Welcome and thank you

Welcome and thank you for being a part of our Planning for the Future People's Panel.

Throughout this process, you'll have the opportunity to help us consider how we can balance the services our community needs, now and into the future, while keeping bills fair.

We've brought together a diverse group of customers to participate in this deliberative engagement. This process will allow you to hear evidence, ask questions, consider different perspectives and provide informed recommendations about what matters most to our customers.

The recommendations you develop together will be carefully considered by our Board and play an important role in informing decisions before our 2028-33 Price Submission is submitted to the Essential Services Commission.

We've been engaging with our broader customer base and stakeholders, through surveys, community pop ups, Sounding Board sessions, interviews and meetings.

Sarah Cumming
Managing Director

We've also worked closely with our Customer Reference Group, who play an important role in this process and helped shape our engagement approach.

The People's Panel builds on this broader engagement by providing the opportunity to explore these issues in greater depth and help identify the priorities that matter most to our customers and community.

Again, thank you for sharing your time, experience and views in our People's Panel. Your contribution is invaluable and plays an important role in helping shape our future.



Tom Mollenkopf AO
Chair of the Board

About this report



How to read this report

You/your refers to People's Panel members

We/our refers to Gippsland Water

Customers refer to Gippsland Water's customers

QR codes and links will take you to additional information, including videos and website content.

This is a resource for our People's Panel. It provides information about us – what we do, and the challenges we're facing.

The aim of this report is to equip you with background information that provides context for the panel's work.

From Day 2, you'll also have access to an Issues Report, which goes into detail about the key issues the panel will explore, and an Engagement Report, which shares what we have learned so far from our customers, community and stakeholders.

If any information in this report is unclear, please let a member of our team know and we will help explain it. Throughout the panel process, you can also request more information for the panel to consider as part of its deliberations.

People's Panel library

The following resources will be available for you in our People's Panel library, which will be on site during in-person panel days.

You can also download them from our [People's Panel library](#) on our website.

- Planning for the future: working together to plan our services – our engagement plan
- People's Panel Handbook (this document)
- Background Report
- Engagement Report – what we have heard so far (available from Day 2 onwards)
- Issues Report – detailed information on the key topics to be explored by the panel (available from Day 2 onwards)
- 2025/26 Community Report – the latest report on our progress to deliver the commitments we made in our 2023 Price Submission.



Scan the QR code or visit www.gippswater.com.au/PP-library



About us

Who we are and what we do

We are Gippsland Water. We are also known officially as the Central Gippsland Region Water Corporation.

We supply essential water and wastewater services. We're also the state's major industrial water and wastewater service provider and have supported major industry for decades.

Our customers include households, businesses and major industries.

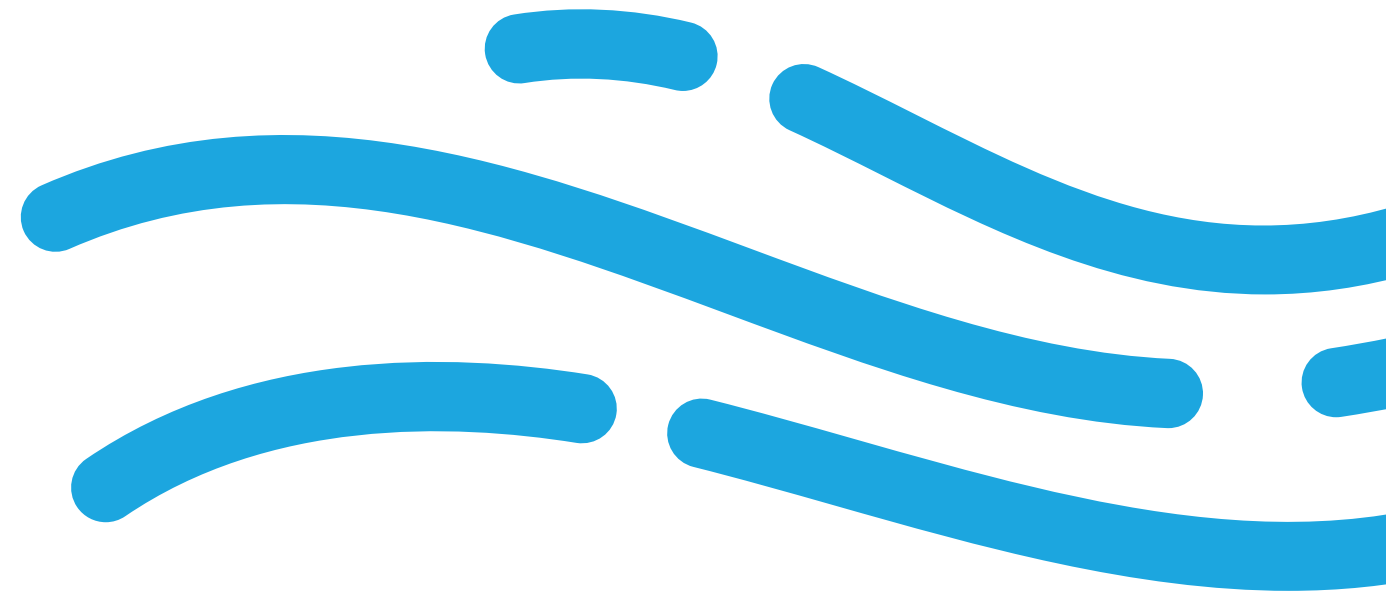
Through our investments and infrastructure, local employment and community support programs, we are an essential part of Gippsland.

How we are governed

We are a regional Victorian water corporation established under the *Water Act 1989* (Vic) and constituted on 21 December 1994. We are responsible to the Minister for Water, the Hon Michaela Settle MP.

We operate under a Board of Directors appointed by our shareholder, the Victorian State Government.

We're regulated by the Essential Services Commission (ESC), the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Department of Health (DoH) and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA).



Our service area

Our service area covers over 5,000 square kilometers, from Drouin in the west to Loch Sport in the east. Our service area includes towns in Baw Baw Shire, Latrobe City Council and Wellington Shire. We also serve Mirboo North, in South Gippsland Shire.

We supply water and wastewater services to more than 80,000 households and businesses in a population of more than 168,000.

Serving population
of est.

168,000

Service area
covers

5,000²kms



We deliver water to over **80,000** households and businesses, and wastewater services to **70,700** households and businesses, across **43** towns and communities.

We manage a **\$2.3 billion** network that provides water and wastewater services across our region.

Moondarra Reservoir is our biggest asset. It supplies around 50,500ML (50.5 billion litres) of water from the Tyers River to the Latrobe Valley each year.



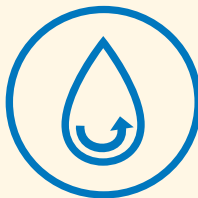
MORE THAN
2,300km
of water
mains,
**50 TREATED
WATER
STORAGES**
and 45 pump
stations



MORE THAN
1,900km
of sewer
mains,
and 200
sewer pump
stations



15
water
TREATMENT
plants



14
WASTEWATER
TREATMENT
plants including
the Gippsland
Water Factory



2
OCEAN
OUTFALLS
McGaurans
Beach and
Delray Beach



100K
CUSTOMERS
in a
population of
168,000+

Water supply and treatment

We supply clean, safe drinking water to around 80,000 properties. We take water from aquifers (ground water), rivers, creeks and reservoirs before treating it at one of our 15 water treatment plants.

The water is independently tested at the treatment plant, in our water mains, and at different points in towns to ensure it meets the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act 2003 throughout its journey to your home.

Wastewater treatment

We treat wastewater, also known as sewage, from around 71,000 properties. It travels from homes and businesses along sewer mains to one of our 14 wastewater treatment plants. At the treatment plant it is screened, treated, filtered and disinfected before being released.

We also test wastewater once it has been through the treatment process. It must meet standards set by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) before it is recycled for irrigation or released into waterways.

We are the only Victorian water corporation with a specific function outlined in the Water Act 1989 (Vic) to receive waste from both within and outside our sewerage districts for treatment or disposal. This function extends beyond sewage and trade waste to include a range of materials that may pose risks to human health, the environment, or water quality. This unique legislative responsibility reflects our important role in supporting major industry, protecting public health and delivering safe and sustainable waste management services.

The Gippy Tap story



Watch our video

See how we treat your water before it comes to your tap.



Gippsland Water Factory – virtual tour



Watch our video

Learn about the wastewater treatment process in our virtual tour of the Gippsland Water Factory.



Our water and sewerage systems

We have a \$2.3 billion network of assets that make delivering our water and wastewater services possible. We own and manager Moondarra Reservoir and our assets include water and sewer mains, pipes, water storages, treatment plants, and pump stations.

Where your water comes from depends on where you live.

We get water from reservoirs, lakes and streams – even underground aquifers.

All our water is treated at our water treatment plants to make sure it's safe to drink before it travels through our large network of underground pipes to the taps in homes and workplaces.

What happens with wastewater (sewage) also depends on where you live.

Domestic wastewater is water from toilets, baths, showers, sinks, washing machines and dishwashers. It includes things like food scraps, human waste and detergents.

Industrial wastewater is any liquid waste generated by a business. This wastewater can include fats, oils, grease, process waste waters and food preparation waste.

After we have treated wastewater, we return it safely back to the environment (this may be into creeks, streams or the ocean), or recycle and reuse it for irrigation of fodder (animal) crops or watering local sporting fields.

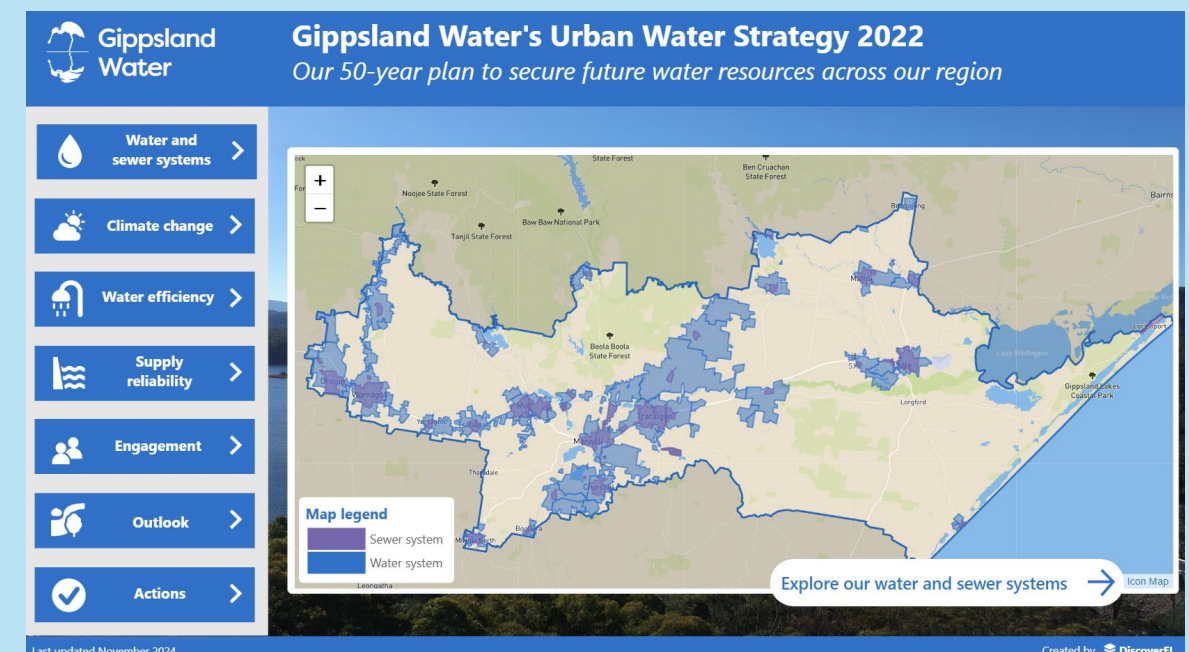
The quality of treated wastewater and recycled water is carefully monitored to protect human health, local wildlife and the long-term health of waterways and the environment. As well as to ensure compliance with Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) guidelines.

Explore our water and wastewater networks

You can explore our network of water and sewer systems using the [interactive map](#) we developed for our last Urban Water Strategy.

You can also learn about the actions we're taking to secure water for our region in this 50-year plan.

Scan the QR code or visit www.gippswater.com.au/interactive-map



Planning for growth and long-term future

An important part of our job is to ensure there are sustainable and secure water supplies – today and into the future.

We do short, medium and long-term planning to optimise the water and wastewater systems for current and future demands.

Climate change is a key factor in our planning. We consider how it affects water availability and demand, sewer network flows and how things like flash floods, bushfires and soil movement affect our services and assets.

We build assets for longevity and population growth. We're responsible for their whole lifecycle, from design through to construction, upgrades, renewal and replacement.

We have plans that detail when we expect each of our assets to need upgrades or replacement. These are informed by growth forecasts, climate forecasts, hydraulic models and condition monitoring that predict asset failure, rates of failure or increased maintenance.

We balance the cost of increased maintenance with the cost of replacing assets to get the best value for money for our asset investments and ultimately for our customers.

We prioritise investment where it is needed most. Our capital investment plan is a critical part of our Price Submission and is balanced with our customers capacity to pay. In growth areas, we require developers to pay their fair share, which enhances our capability to remain sustainable in the long term under extreme growth pressures.

Supporting major industry

We are the state's major industrial water and wastewater service provider.

For decades, we have supported the state's biggest water consumers in critical industries like power generation, paper mill production and food manufacturing.

Our systems were uniquely designed to supply large volumes of water to these historic and current water users. As the Latrobe Valley economy transitions, the demands on our water supply systems will continue to change significantly.

Recent and future closures of the region's power stations and other major industries will provide an opportunity for new water-reliant industries to be established.

Facilitating regional growth

We play an important role in supporting regional growth and helping more people and businesses call Gippsland home.

We provide planning advice, support the design and construction of water and sewer infrastructure and connect new residential, commercial and industrial developments to our services.

We work closely with local councils, developers, consultants and applicants to ensure new development proceed and meet statutory requirements.

We also work directly with developers to ensure the timely delivery of infrastructure required for new housing.

This includes facilitating discussions between stakeholders to identify efficient servicing solutions and supporting the delivery of infrastructure that provides long-term benefits for growing communities.

Price Submission Capital Expenditure

For the upcoming five-year Price Submission we are currently forecasting about \$500M in capital expenditure for renewal of existing assets and new assets to support growth and compliance.

This will be made up of large projects (called our Top 10 projects), renewal programs and minor projects.

Our largest top 10 project is expected to be an upgrade to the Warragul wastewater treatment plant.

Learn about our major projects

Our major projects help deliver water security, minimise disruption to service and allow for future growth in Gippsland.

Examples of major projects include major upgrades to infrastructure, such as waste water treatment plants, new treated water storages, or extending pipes or water mains to new developments.

Find out how we're investing in infrastructure in our region:
www.gippswater.com.au/major-projects

Our commercial businesses

We have two commercial businesses: Gippsland Regional Organics and Gippsland Regional Agribusiness.

These businesses provide benefits for our customers, the region and the state.

They help keep our costs down, therefore reduce the costs we need to recover through customer bills.

Gippsland Regional Organics

At Gippsland Regional Organics, we turn organic waste into high-quality compost.

Each year, we accept up to 250,000 tonnes of waste, including bio-solids from our wastewater treatment plants and green waste from councils and industries.

We safely treat the waste to produce around 60,000 tonnes of quality compost certified to Australian standards.

Gippsland Regional Organics plays an important role in diverting waste from landfill, and supporting sustainability and the circular economy.



Gippsland Regional Agribusiness

We manage 12 farming and forestry properties covering 10,000 Ha across the central Gippsland region. Our largest property, Dutson Downs, spans a massive 8,250 Ha near Golden Beach.

We also have properties at Drouin, Warragul, Mirboo North, Trafalgar, Moe, Morwell, Moondarra, Heyfield, Maffra, Stratford and Seaspray.

Our farms are strategically located close to our wastewater treatment plants, so we can easily use recycled water for irrigation.

Our properties are managed sustainably, with a focus on soil and animal health.

We use our compost products from Gippsland Regional Organics and reuse recycled wastewater at Gippsland Regional Agribusiness.

Our agribusiness activities include:

- Managing pastures and fodder crops
- Breeding and finishing cattle
- Dryland and irrigated cropping
- Soft wood forestry
- Recycled water irrigation.



Our relationship with Traditional Owners

We acknowledge that Traditional Owners have been the custodians of water and waterways for thousands of years.

We're partnering with Traditional Owners to ensure their aspirations and priorities are not only carefully considered, but they are part of designing the outcomes.

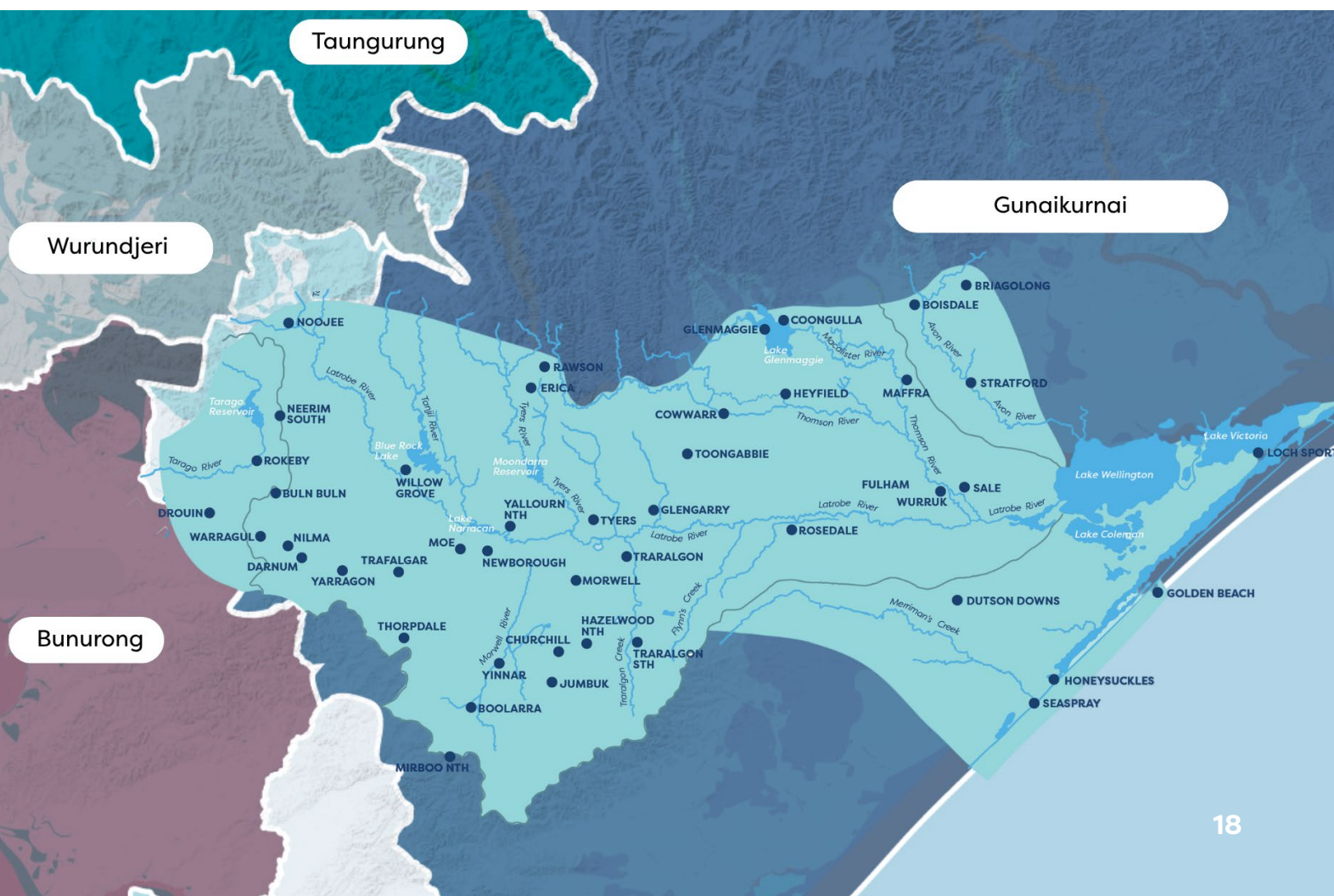
In our service area, the Traditional Owners are the Gunaikurnai people and the Bunurong people.

We work collaboratively with their

respective Registered Aboriginal Parties, the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

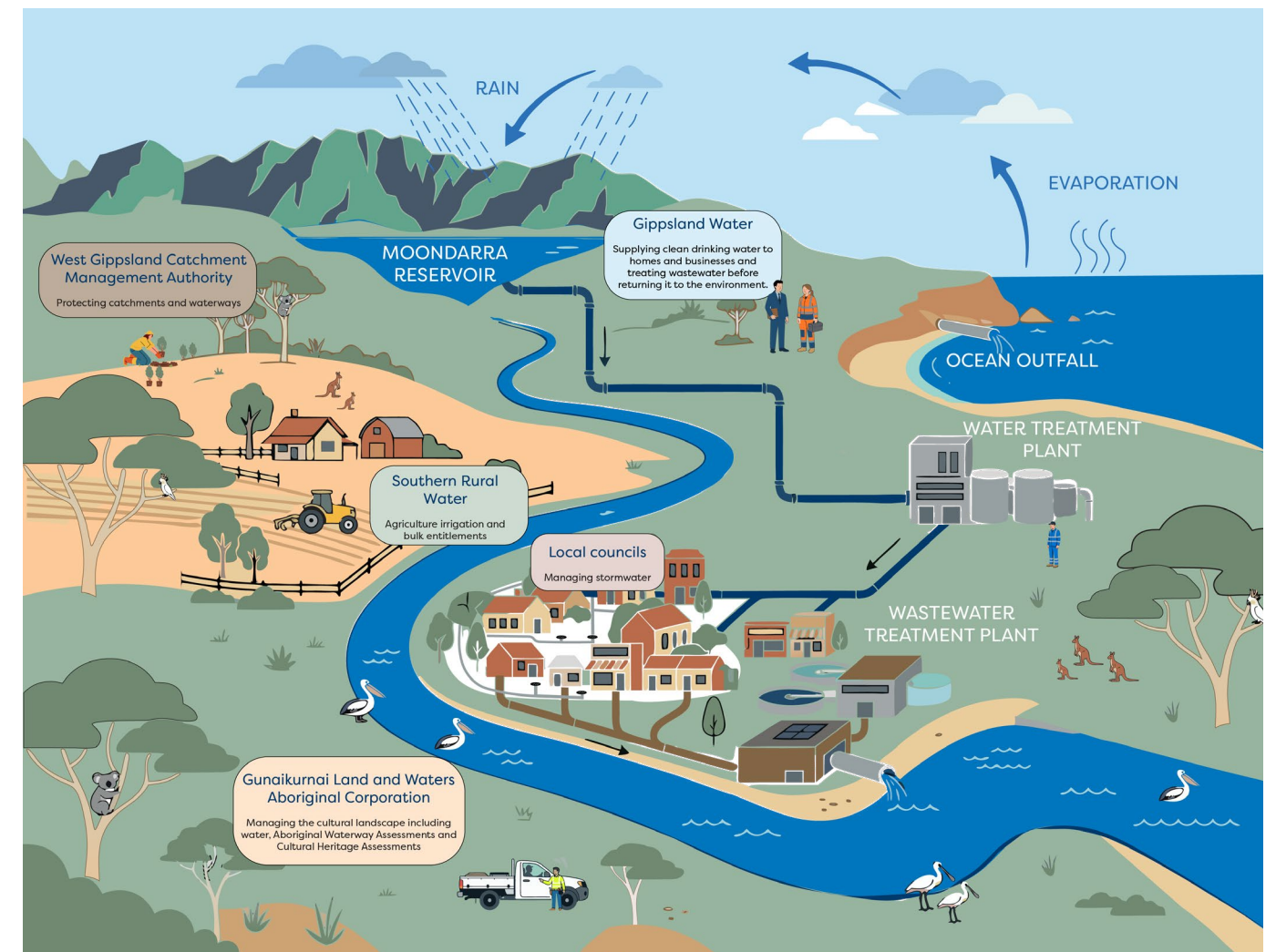
Our work with Traditional Owners includes improving access and ownership of unused drinking water resources; offering employment opportunities and education support; recognising and promoting the art and culture of local Traditional Owners; and providing access to land we manage for Traditional Owners to learn and practice culture.

Map of Traditional Owners in Gippsland Water region



Who does what in water

We work with multiple organisations to manage water in our region. Here are some of the main agencies who you might see in the community.



Who does what in water

Find out more about how water in our region is managed by multiple organisations, in the table below.

Agency or organisation	Key responsibilities in water	
Gippsland Water	• Deliver fresh, clean drinking water to our customers • Provide large volumes of raw water to industrial customers • Provide a wastewater service to customers (residential and industrial)	• Treat wastewater to minimise its impact on the environment • Build and maintain water and wastewater infrastructure, such as pipelines and treatment plants • Manage Moondarra Reservoir
Agriculture Vic	• Promote efficient and responsible water use in agriculture • Water testing for salinity	• Irrigation system assessments and advice • Pasture and crop irrigation advice
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	• Strategic management of Victoria’s groundwater, catchments and waterways, infrastructure, water saving and re-use projects, flood	management, governance and water legislation, in partnership with a network of government agencies and water authorities
Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA)	• Reduce pollution and waste in waterways and the environment • Respond to pollution incidents in waterways • Set water quality standards for policy and compliance	• Provide advice on meeting and exceeding environmental obligations • Research and monitoring of aquatic environments
Local councils • Baw Baw Shire Council • Latrobe City Council • Wellington Shire Council • South Gippsland Shire Council	• Manage stormwater in urban areas	• Manage public playing fields, parks and pools

Agency or organisation	Key responsibilities in water	
Southern Rural Water	• Authorise and regulate use of water from waterways, dams and bores for domestic and stock use, irrigation and commercial purposes • Manage large reservoirs and surrounding recreation areas including Blue Rock Lake, Cowwarr Weir and Glenmaggie Weir	• Manage irrigation districts, including the Macalister Irrigation District • Manage bulk entitlements for environmental water, power generation companies and raw (untreated) water for some water corporations • Issue licences to build dams or access waterways on your property
Traditional Owners • Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), • Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation	• Represent the Traditional Owners of Gippsland in relation to all aspects of the Cultural Landscape including water	• Aboriginal Waterway Assessments and Cultural Heritage Assessments
Victorian Environmental Water Holder	• Work with catchment management authorities (CMAs) and Melbourne Water on the annual Seasonal Watering Plan	• Coordinate the planning and delivery of water for the environment in rivers and wetlands across Victoria to ensure the efficient and effective use of available water to achieve the best environmental outcomes.
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	• Waterway and floodplain management • Regional catchment strategies and natural resource management plans.	• Weed control in waterways, streambank stabilisation and protection, planting native vegetation and installing fencing protect waterways • Manage and deliver water for the environment.

Planning for the future – why are we doing this now?

We're always planning for the future, but right now we're engaging for two important plans, which you and our community are helping to shape: our Price Submission and our Urban Water Strategy.

Price Submission

Our [Price Submission](#) is a five-year plan for our water and wastewater services. It includes our customer service standards, prices charged to customers and the investments we'll make in infrastructure.

The Essential Services Commission (ESC), the independent regulator of essential services in Victoria, reviews and approves our submission.

The work of the People's Panel will inform our next Price Submission, which will cover the period from 1 July 2028 to 30 June 2033.

Urban Water Strategy

Our [Urban Water Strategy](#) is a long-term plan to secure water and sewer system capacity in our region for the next 50 years. It outlines how we'll respond to challenges like population growth, climate change and droughts.

Our next Urban Water Strategy will include actions we need to take between 2027 and 2032 to ensure ongoing reliability of our services.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) reviews and approves our strategy.

It's useful for the People's Panel to be aware of this plan, however, customer and stakeholder engagement for the Urban Water Strategy 2027 is happening outside of the panel and it is not a key focus of the panel's work.



Our bills and prices

How we are funded

We are funded by our customers. Although we are owned by the State of Victoria, we don't receive funding from the government. The fees and charges paid by our customers are designed to cover the cost of our services – they're not designed to make a profit.

How our prices are set

The maximum prices for our water and sewerage services are set through our Price Submission and approved by the Essential Services Commission. They're based on a financial model, which includes:

- our expected operating costs
- how much we'll spend on capital projects and programs
- how long we expect our assets (infrastructure) to last
- how much money we may need to borrow
- the predicted demand for our water and sewerage services.

We use this financial model to work out the prices we need to charge for our services.

Our customer charges

Our bills include fixed charges that help to cover the cost of the services we provide to each property, plus a variable rate based on the amount of water you use each day.

Standard charges include:

- Water usage – Variable charge for the amount of water used at your property as recorded by the water meter.
- Water service – Charge for us to maintain the quality of your drinking water and maintain and construct water mains and treatment plants.
- Wastewater/sewerage service – Charge for us to responsibly dispose of the wastewater/sewage from your property with the exception of properties serviced by septic tank systems.

Our customer charges are the same across our whole service area. For example, if you live in Drouin, you pay the same water and wastewater charges as someone who lives in Sale.

This is how much customers are paying for our services in 2026-27.

Charges	Price
Water usage charge	\$2.5324 per kilolitre (kL)
Water service charge	\$199.59 per year
Note that this may alter depending on the size of the service.	
Wastewater/sewerage service charge	\$917.16 per year

Why is the fixed charge higher than the variable charge?

Many of our operating costs are fixed. This means that we must still pay the same amount to deliver our services, no matter how much water is used.

Where costs are driven by consumption, such as the treatment of drinking water, these are recovered by a variable charge.

The bulk of fixed costs relate to the cost of sewage treatment, hence the higher fixed charge.



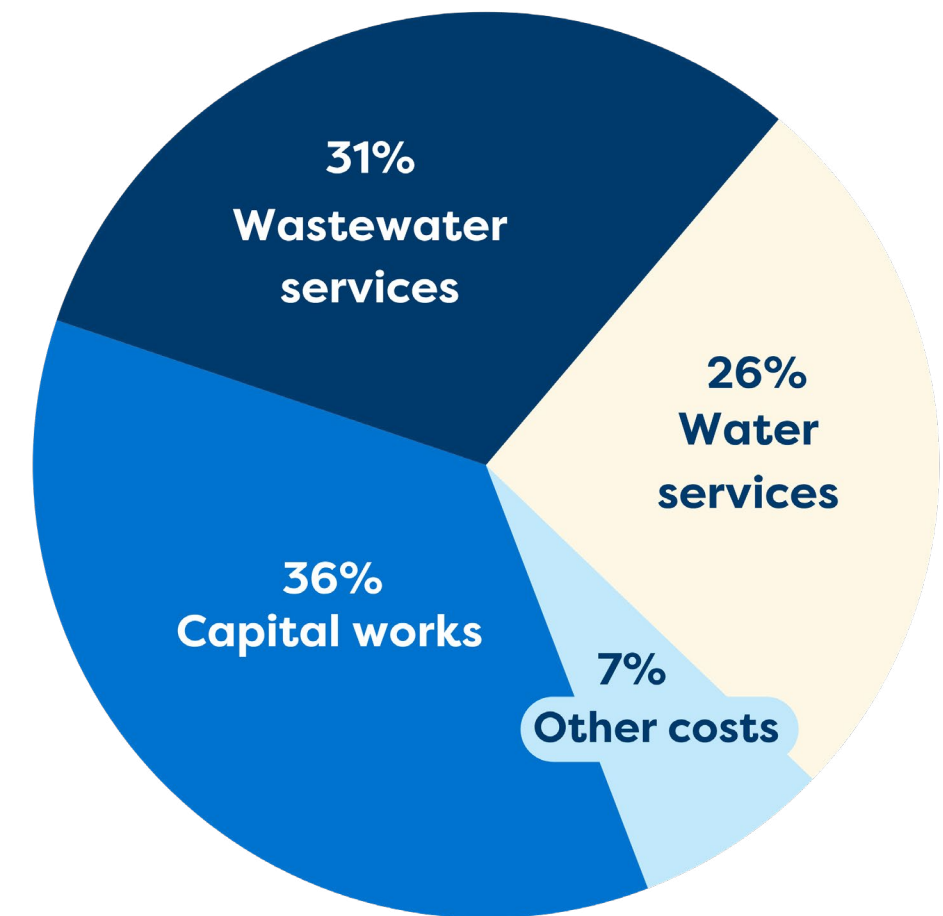
What your bill pays for

From fixing pipes to upgrading water meters and protecting our environment, there's a lot that goes into delivering clean, safe drinking water and a reliable sewer service for our community.

We maintain a \$2.3 billion water and sewerage network that includes 4,200km of pipelines, 245 pump stations, and 29 treatment plants. The fees and charges paid by our customers and businesses cover the cost of this service.

Your fees and charges cover the costs of:

- Keeping water and wastewater services running 24 hours a day
- Treating water to ensure it's safe to drink.
- Treating wastewater so it can be safely returned to the environment.
- Building or renewing infrastructure to ensure it meets the growing needs of Gippsland.



Capital expenditure

Capital expenditure covers upgrading and renewing water and wastewater treatment plants, as well as building new infrastructure to support our growing region.



Wastewater services

Wastewater is the used water that goes down your drains at home, like from showers, sinks, toilets, and washing machines. Our services involve maintaining sewer networks and treatment plants to safely remove, treat, and dispose of wastewater.



Water services

Water services includes managing our reservoirs, treating drinking water so it's safe, and maintaining the network of pipes that brings it to homes and businesses..



Other costs

Other costs cover things like our 24/7 emergency response, helping customers when they need support, business administration, and the environmental levy that helps protect our waterways and environment.

Our biggest expenses

We control our expenditure as much as possible, but we need to invest in the right places to ensure our business delivers what our customers need. This includes things like:

- Treating water and wastewater
- Chemicals for treating water to ensure its safe for people and the environment
- Energy to keep our plants and network running
- Investing in building, maintaining, monitoring and upgrading our infrastructure
- Technology and customer service
- Staff to deliver services.

Electricity savings

It takes a lot of electricity to run our water and wastewater services.

We've invested in a backup generator fleet to continue our operations during power outages.

The generators can be used to supply electricity back to the grid in peak demand to make a profit.

This initiative has delivered a multiple benefits:

- improving our service resilience
- supporting a stable electricity supply in our communities
- generating substantial cost savings for the business.

We've used our expertise and detailed knowledge to secure a competitive electricity contract that's resulted in substantial cost savings.

We've changed our goals to be powered by self-generated renewable energy due to changing market conditions.

Changing this target also results in further capital investment savings of \$1.9 million. We'll only invest in renewable projects that will result in overall cost savings.

These electricity initiatives are saving the business around **\$1.5 million** each year.

What we do to keep our prices down

We're always working to keep our costs and bills as low as possible. Examples include:

- Smart water sourcing, carefully selecting where we draw water from based on treatment and pumping costs, helping us produce treated water more efficiently and at a lower cost.
- Moving our fleet to electric vehicles where it makes sense.
- Long-term planning, including investing in our infrastructure for lasting performance and to keep prices steady for longer.

- Recycling waste and wastewater in our commercial businesses (Gippsland Regional Organics and Gippsland Regional Agribusiness) which helps us reduce our wastewater treatment costs.
- Absorbing or partially absorbing the cost of inflation, rather than passing it on to our customers - a commitment we made in our last Price Submission. Over the past nine years, we've saved average owner-occupier customers around \$214 off what their annual bill would have been if we passed on the full cost of inflation (see chart below).

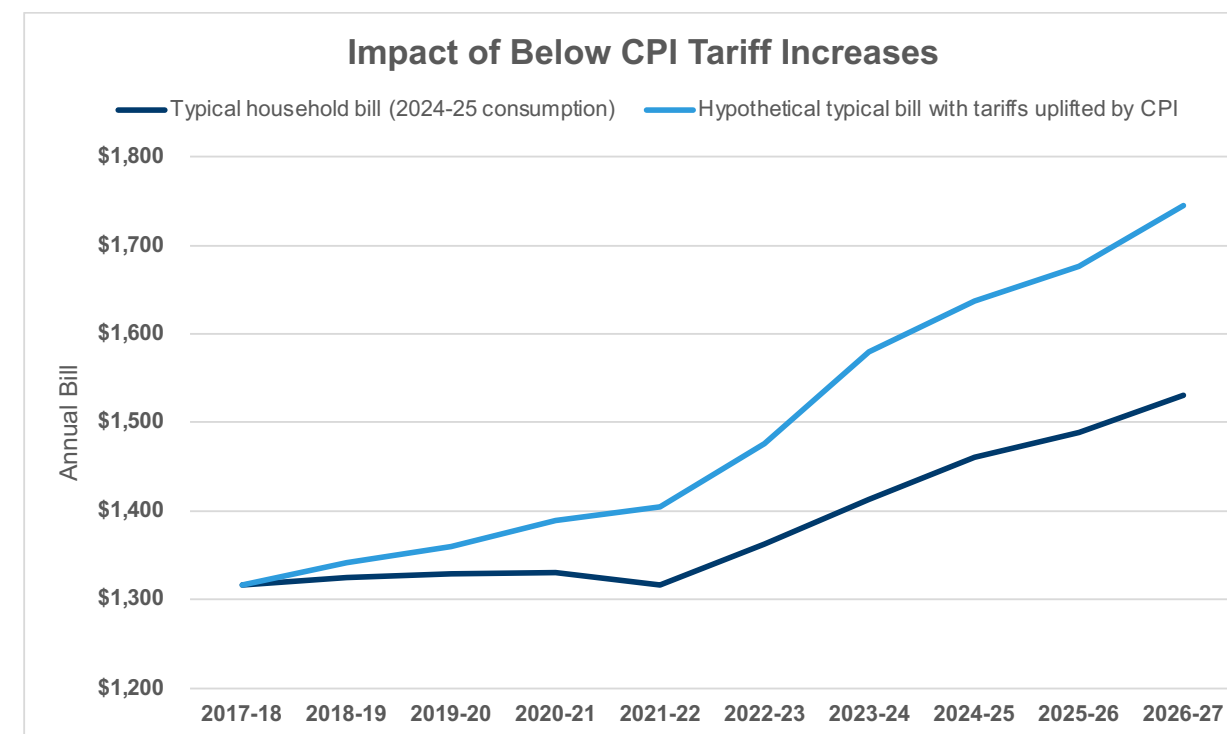


Chart showing cost of inflation absorbed by Gippsland Water,

Why our bills are higher than metropolitan water corporations

People who move to regional areas from cities sometimes notice that their water bills are higher. Compared to metropolitan water corporations, regional water corporations like ours have fewer customers to share the cost of delivering services across a larger area.

We also have a lot of smaller towns spread over a large area, which means we need additional pump stations and treatment plants to service these small communities.

Another reason why our bills seem higher is because, unless you’ve set up a payment plan with us, we issue a bill three times a year.

From 1 July 2027, we’ll move to quarterly billing in line with other Victorian water corporations. This will mean that the annual cost of our services will be split across four bills, rather than three. Paying a smaller bill, more frequently can be more manageable for many household budgets than paying a larger bill less often.

Regional water business	Average annual usage (kL)	Typical Bill 2025-26 (\$,nom)	Typical Bill 2026-27 (\$,nom)	Change (\$)	Change %
Barwon Water	160	\$1,183	\$1,243	\$60	5.1%
Central Highlands Water	150	\$1,386	\$1,450	\$64	4.6%
Coliban Water	190	\$1,632	\$1,735	\$103	6.3%
East Gippsland Water	141	\$1,420	\$1,477	\$57	4.0%
Gippsland Water	165	\$1,492	\$1,534	\$42	2.8%
Goulburn Valley Water	260	\$1,027	\$1,076	\$49	4.8%
CWM Water	240	\$1,489	\$1,550	\$61	4.1%
Lower Murray Water	480	\$1,171	\$1,220	\$49	4.2%
North East Water	194	\$1,097	\$1,205	\$108	9.8%
South Gippsland Water	121	\$1,405	\$1,537	\$132	9.4%
Wannon Water	150	\$1,303	\$1,368	\$65	5.0%
Westernport Water	95	\$1,412	\$1,458	\$46	3.3%
Average		\$1,311	\$1,378	\$68	5.2%

Average bill increases across regional Victorian water corporations

Healthy Country and protecting the environment

We work to make sure our operations have a positive impact on the environment and meet strict regulatory requirements.

This includes:

- Monitoring and managing the quality of treated wastewater before it’s returned to the environment
- Looking after our biodiversity sites, which are home to rare and threatened native plants and animals
- Controlling pest animals and weeds
- Ecological burns
- Planting native trees and shrubs
- Monitoring greenhouse gas emissions.



Carbon Offsetting

Removing and treating wastewater uses a lot of energy and naturally releases emissions such as nitrous oxide and methane. To make up for this, we plant native plants to offset the environmental impact.

So far, we’ve planted 200,000 native plants at Dutson Downs. These trees will remove around 30,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere over the next 25 years.

We’re also working with industry partners across the state to support large-scale offsetting projects and continuing to evaluate other options for local, nature-based carbon offsets across our region.



Managing Country together

The Traditional Owners of our service area are the Gunaikurnai people and the Bunurong people.

We work collaboratively with their respective Registered Aboriginal Parties, the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

We work with the Traditional Owners on cultural heritage, and we have an Inclusion Plan to create long-term opportunities to collaborate further in the management of Country on land we manage in the region.

The plan is our pathway to further strengthen our partnerships and connection to the Aboriginal community, putting us in a better position to respond to important changes in the way Traditional Owner rights are recognised and enabled.

Caretakers for tomorrow



Learn more about the work we do as Caretakers for tomorrow.

Click the link above or scan the QR code.



Bringing water to Country at Knob Reserve

In 2023, we completed a joint project with GLaWAC to bring drinking water to the Knob Reserve – a location of significance to Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners and the local Stratford community.

We built a new water main to connect the reserve to our system, ensuring we did not disturb the cultural value of the reserve, and installed drinking fountains.

The fountains feature artwork by local artist Robbie Farmham, celebrating the unique living culture of the Gunaikurnai community and their connection to water.



Cultural flow – transforming the Stratford water tower through art

We have collaborated with local Gunaikurnai artist Alice Pepper to turn the Stratford water tower into a colourful celebration of First Nations connection to water.

We commissioned Alice to create the artwork titled Cultural Flow. It represents how we work with Traditional Owners to ensure the waterways are cared for, preserved and protected for future generations.

The artwork reflects our pride and respect for First Nations communities and provides a cultural learning opportunity.

We chose Stratford as the site for this art installation due to culturally significant sites in the area for Gunaikurnai people and through engagement with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation.



Watch the video which captures the community reactions to the incredible artwork coming to life on the Stratford water tower.

Click the link above or scan the QR code.



Energy management

We are powered by 100 per cent renewable electricity, which includes a mix of electricity generated at our sites and purchased green power.

Our energy generation assets include solar, hydroelectric, biogas, and diesel generators. The mix of energy generation assets helps us reduce our electricity costs and emissions while maintaining a reliable and affordable service.

We can keep our services running during power outages with back-up diesel generation at our major sites. During times of peak electricity demand, we can also sell power back to the grid.

An affordable and reliable energy supply is essential for the economic and environmental sustainability of our business, as well as for reliable water and wastewater services for our customers.



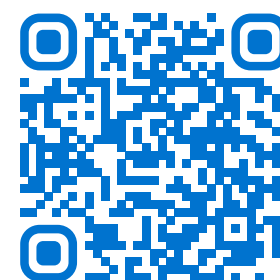
Our role in the community

We're a major employer in the region and we invest in our communities through education, sponsorship, drinking fountains, recreation facilities and environmental initiatives

Employment

We employ 424 staff across a huge range of roles for people from all backgrounds and with all levels of experience. We offer multiple pathways to local employment, including:

- Traineeships, where you work to achieve a nationally recognised qualification, while developing knowledge and skills on-the-job
- School-based apprenticeship and traineeships, where you can complete an apprenticeship or traineeship while you finish school
- Work experience, each year for students over 15 to gain experience and learn what a career in the water industry is like
- Summer internships, a 12-week internship for up to 13 undergraduate students each year
- Graduate program, a two-year program for recent university graduates
- Dedicated employment opportunities for Aboriginal people
- Scholarships for Federation University students, that provide funding as well as summer internship experience
- Job opportunities for people in all stages of their career across a wide range of disciplines.



We offer traineeships in water treatment, wastewater treatment, electronics and communications, administration, customer service and more!

Find out more about our career opportunities

Education

Our community and schools-based education programs provide valuable resources for our communities.

Our community education is centred around our educational campaigns:

- Drink Gippy Tap, which teaches people about where their water comes from and the benefits of drinking tap water
- Reduce Your Use, which helps people save water
- Caretakers for Tomorrow, which shares the work we do to promote Healthy Country and aims to encourage customers to take environmental action.

We take fun, campaign activities to community events and promote the educational messages through our website, social media channels, newsletters, and sponsorships.

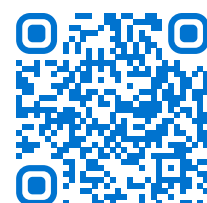
Our school-based education program plays an important role in developing an understanding of the value of water and driving positive behaviour for a healthy and sustainable future. Teachers praise our important and age-appropriate messages that support learning linked to the Victorian curriculum.

Our sessions for students include topics on the natural and urban water cycle, water and wastewater treatment, water efficient behaviours and water for health, with a strong emphasis on sustainability. Key messages from our community education campaigns are integrated into these sessions.

We also coordinate site tours of our facilities for small groups of students, community groups and industry.



Learn more about our education program in our video.



Sponsorship

We provide sponsorships to strengthen connections with the community and deliver meaningful and practical support for community groups.

Most of our sponsorship spend is in the donation of drinking fountains to local councils or community groups, for them to install and maintain in community areas. We also provide a lot of in-kind sponsorships, which usually involves donating water bottles to community groups or loaning our portable drinking fountains or water trailer for local events.

In the last three years, we've also supported 125 local organisations plus 130 local sports clubs through in-kind sponsorships. This includes donations of our popular Drink Gippy Tap active prize packs, which local sports teams to award to their junior players.

We also provide a limited number of financial sponsorships to organisations that meet our criteria, including offering community good and value for money.



Learn more about our sponsorship program in our video.

Scan the QR code or click the link above





Community engagement

Our customers and communities provide input into our services, performance and priorities through our ongoing and dedicated community engagement activities. We respond to what we hear from our customers in making key decisions.

We get regular input from two community groups, our Customer Reference Group (CRG) and our Sounding Board.

Our CRG is made up of diverse members from our community and each member of the group contributes their insight and experience. We select members to represent a wide range of personal perspectives, lived experiences and professional skills.

Our CRG meets four times a year to inform and enhance our decision-making and planning for the future at a strategic level.

Find more information about the CRG and the terms of reference, visit www.gippswater.com.au/crg

Our Sounding Board is a group of more than 800 customers and community members who share their views to help guide our decision-making. Sounding board members receive invitations to participate in customer research opportunities, such as surveys and focus groups – and even this People’s Panel.

Recreation facilities

Moondarra Reservoir is our largest catchment and storage reservoir. We maintain access to parts of the site for bushwalking, walking or jogging and picnics. Facilities include barbecues, picnic tables, toilets and lookout areas.

South of the dam spillway is the start of the Wirilda walking track, a 14km bushwalk which generally follows the Tyers River to our pumping station at the Wirilda Environmental Park.

Our storages and settlement ponds at our treatment plants attract a rich variety of birdlife. A publicly accessible bird hide is located adjacent to our Drouin wastewater treatment plant. The hide overlooks the treatment lagoons with their abundant birdlife.

At other sites, by special arrangement, we can organise for groups to observe the birdlife or participate in bird counting surveys.



What is happening around us and how we're responding

Gippsland is changing. The changes are significant and they affect local people, communities and organisations - including ours.

Local industries are changing

We are the state's major industrial water and wastewater service provider.

For decades, we've supported Victoria's biggest water consumers in critical industries like power generation, oil and gas, paper production, briquette production and food manufacturing.

Our systems were designed to supply large volumes of water to these big water users, as well as manage large volumes of industrial wastewater.

Recent and future closures of the region's power stations and other major industries provide an opportunity for new water-reliant industries to be established.

Our current modelling shows there is enough water within our existing bulk entitlements to support

additional industrial demands, whilst continuing to manage our existing demands.

Our highest priority will always be providing drinking water to residential customers.

Without new major industry, our infrastructure will be under-used but will still incur costs which would then have to be covered by the whole customer base.

New industry could cover the costs and help ensure residential customers are not fully burdened by the additional costs.

Data centres

There has been a lot of discussion in the media and in local communities about the potential for data centres in our region.



Find out more about how we could support data centres.

Increased financial pressures

Higher everyday costs are putting strain on household and business finances. The number of customers needing help with our bills has grown significantly since 2023.

Our service area is diverse in both geography and demographics with people from many communities experiencing varying levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

While all major council areas within our service area experience some level of vulnerability, the nature and severity differ significantly. The Latrobe City area remains one of Victoria's most disadvantaged regional municipalities with some of the most vulnerable communities in the state.

There are growing numbers of people experiencing vulnerability who need targeted support across our service area.



How we support people experiencing financial difficulties

Our professional and caring team works with people experiencing financial difficulties to give them the support they need.

We have a strong focus on helping customers experiencing vulnerability and specialist training to deliver this support.

Our Customer Care team helps customers having trouble paying their bills. We can tailor a plan with support and assistance to suit each customers’ individual circumstances and needs.

Customers in our support program



10,184
customers supported since 2023

2023
1,900

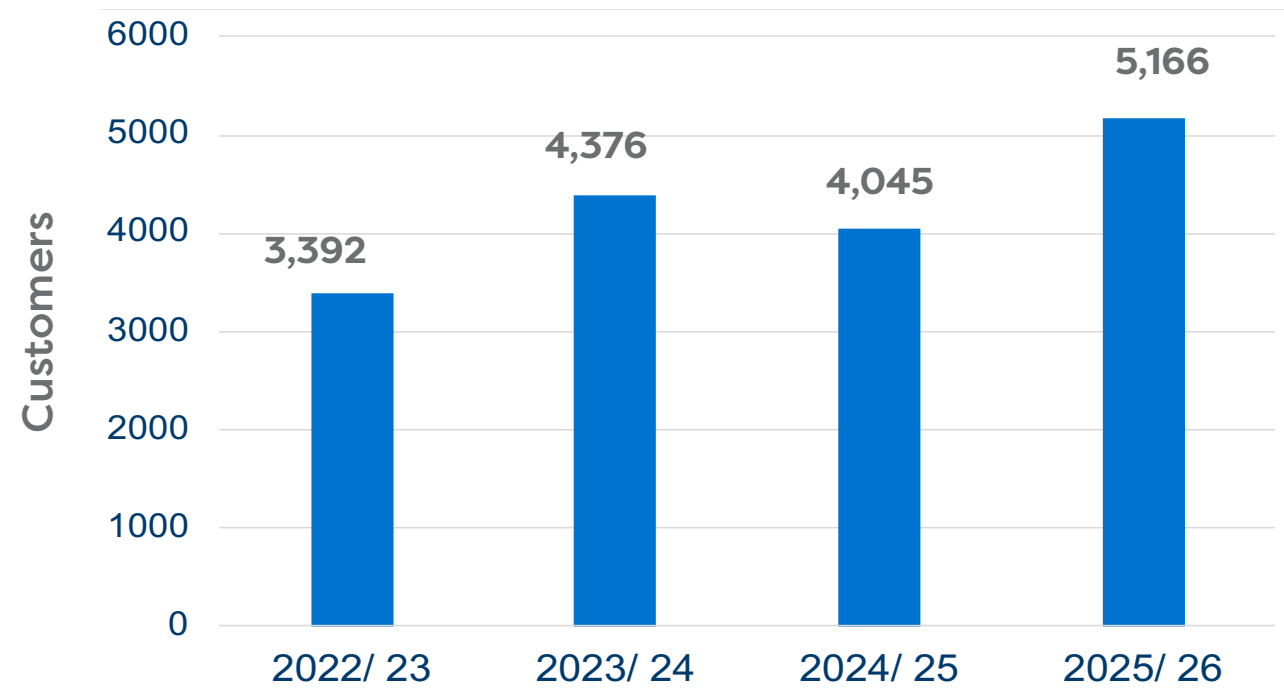
2024
2,564

2025
2,949

2026
2,771

**30 June each year*

Customers supported by our Customer Care team



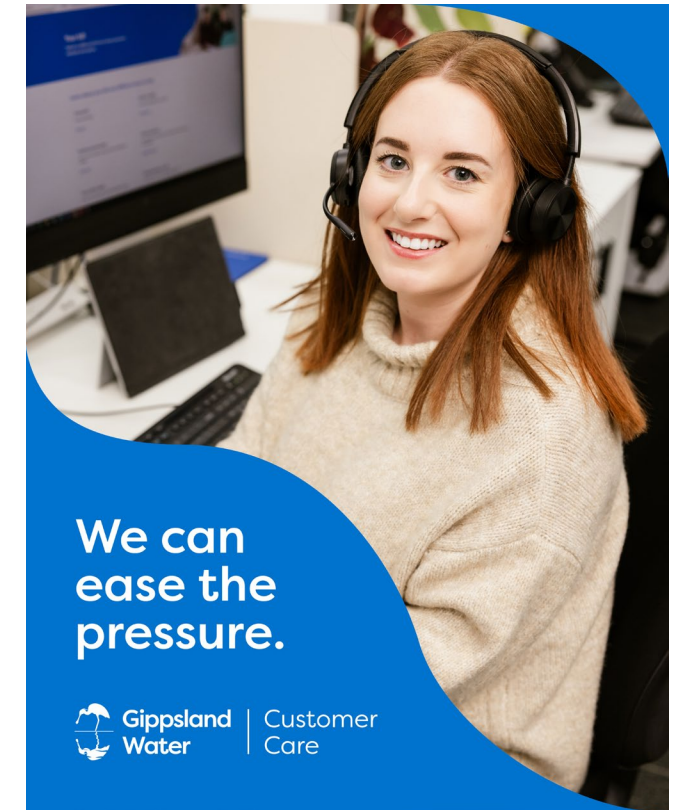
Customer Care campaign

Our Customer Care campaign aims to make sure people having trouble paying their bills get the support they need from us.

People can be sceptical about reaching out for help. They can also feel embarrassed or ashamed. They can actively avoid engaging with us – even to the extent of ignoring their bills. Our campaign encourages these people to contact us for help. It uses friendly language and puns to show that we’re approachable, sensitive and easy to deal with.

We promote this campaign through inserts in bills, newsletters, our social media accounts and website – as well as through paid advertising on local radio, shopping centre digital displays, venue bathrooms, newspapers and on social media.

We also provide information and opportunities to get on-the-spot support at in-person pop-ups across our service area.

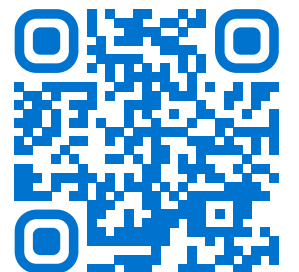


We can ease the pressure.

Gippsland Water | Customer Care

For more information about our Customer Care program, including our Customer Support Policy, Family Violence Policy and the Water Industry Standards visit www.gippswater.com.au/customer-care

Scan here.



The climate is changing

Victoria's climate and streamflow (flow of water in streams and rivers) is highly variable, but within this variability we have experienced a warming and drying trend over recent decades. We've also seen increases in extreme, short-duration rainfall and storm events.

Our climate will continue to be variable with wet years and dry years, against a background drying trend. With a warmer future and projections of declining water availability, we can expect more frequent and severe droughts in coming decades and increases in extreme rainfall events.

Higher temperatures dry out the earth and put our infrastructure at risk of damage or failure. They can also increase water consumption with gardens, lawns, parks and recreation reserves requiring more water, more frequently.

Extreme rainfall and storm events can cause power outages and overwhelm our treatment facilities.

Our 2024 Climate Change Strategy outlines what we are doing to respond to climate change through mitigation and adaptation. It focuses on renewable energy investment, environmental stewardship and infrastructure upgrades to increase resilience and reduce our emissions.

The changing climate is also considered in our water resource planning, especially our Urban Water Strategy. The strategy gives an overview of the capacity of our water supply and wastewater systems now and into the future, identifying actions we'll take to ensure the ongoing reliability of our services.

Customer and stakeholder input for the 2027 Urban Water Strategy is part of our Planning for the future engagement program.

To read our Climate Change Strategy visit

www.gippswater.com.au/climate-change-strategy

Scan here.



Our approach to climate change: mitigation and adaptation

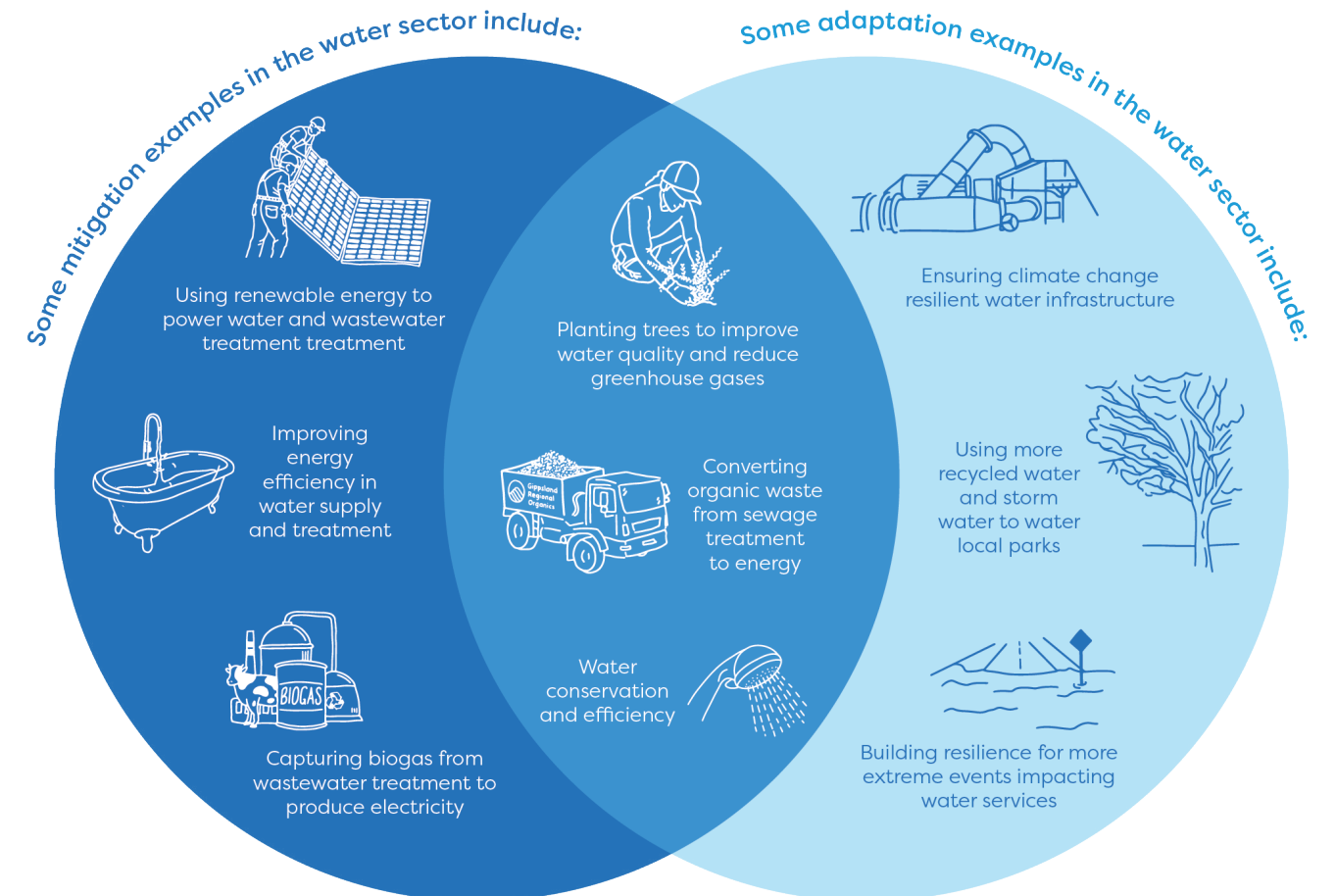
Climate change action is typically divided into two categories: adaptation and mitigation.

Mitigation focuses on dealing with the causes of climate change by reducing global greenhouse gas emissions.

Adaptation focuses on living and coping with the impacts of climate change.

Some climate change actions involve both adaptation and mitigation activities.

The image below shows some examples of actions we take in the water sector to in response to climate change.



The challenge ahead



Through the People's Panel,
we want you to help us respond
to our core challenge:

How can we balance the services our community needs, now and into the future, while keeping bills fair?

As we face rising costs, ageing infrastructure, a changing climate, and changes to local industries, we need to work through the trade-offs that shape an affordable bill and reliable services.

Key issues

Within the core challenge, you'll focus on two key areas that could have a significant impact on customer bills and experience, these are:

- how we approach our transition to digital meters
- how we invest in service reliability.

Short summaries about the key issues are on the following pages of this report.

More detailed information will be provided on these topics in the Issues Report, which will be available from Panel Day 2.

You'll also hear from subject matter experts, in person.



Digital meters

Water meters play a critical role for our customers. Our meters measure how much water customers use, and how much they pay on each bill.

Our network is large. We have **80,000** customer connections, which supply drinking water to more than **168,000** people in our region.

Around **60%** of the meters in our network are over **15 years old**, and of these half are over 20 years old. These meters are due to be replaced.

Across the water sector, there has been a shift toward digital meters.

We recognise that digital meters are in our future and we're working out the potential costs and benefits of different ways of moving to them, from traditional mechanical meters.

We're considering what digital meters could mean for customers, our service, our systems, our environment and our ability to plan for the future.

We'll share our experiences, learnings and modeling with you. Then, we'll explore how quickly we should implement our digital meter transformation program, so we can balance service delivery and keeping bills fair.



Service reliability

We have service standards we need to meet in supplying water and wastewater to our customers. These are set out in our Customer Charter and overseen by the Essential Services Commission.

Drier conditions are putting **greater pressure** on our water network, leading to more water main and service pipe bursts and leaks. Bursts and leaks **increased by 46%** from 2023/24 to 2024/25, and in 2025/26 remained 47% higher than 2023/24 levels.

We expect the number of leaks and bursts to continue to increase as our climate changes.

For our customers, more leaks and bursts means a bigger risk of their water supply being interrupted.

To meet our current service standard for responding to bursts and leaks, we'll need to invest more, which ultimately means an **increase to customer bills.**

We're also weighing up the proactive maintenance we could do to provide an even better service for customers.

Doing more proactive maintenance won't reduce the number of leaks and bursts, but it could reduce the impact of service interruptions. This would mean a further increase to customer bills.

We want you to consider different service levels - and the overall customer experience of them - against the increased cost to customers they will bring.

We'll share different modelling with you that shows different service levels and proactive maintenance and the corresponding impact they would have on customer experience and customer bills.

Then, we'll explore in more detail the modelling you support.

Other insights

We've been exploring other parts of our core challenge with our customers, community and stakeholders through other activities in our 'Planning for the future' engagement program.

You can learn more about what we've heard and learned so far in the Engagement Report.



We want to collaborate with you through the People's Panel.



This means that we will look to you for advice and innovation and will incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.

Let's focus on what we can change

Not everything can be influenced through this process, including:



1. Regulatory and safety obligations

This includes compliance, cyber-security and safety standards and requirements.



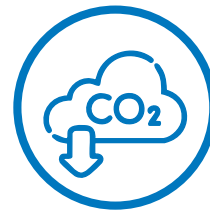
2. Timing and delivery of mandated actions

Certain actions, timelines and focus areas are locked in through legislation, compliance obligations or government direction.



3. The split between fixed and variable charges on bills

This is worked out to ensure we cover our fixed operating costs. We engaged our customers on this for our 2018 and 2023 Price Submission*.



4. Net zero and renewable energy commitments

These are essential mandated requirements that we must meet.

Your voice matters

We look forward to a productive People's Panel.

Your voice matters and your input will shape our plans for the years ahead.

*Fixed vs variable bill charges: 2023 Customer Reference Group deliberation

As part of our 2023 Price Submission engagement, our Customer Reference Group deliberated on whether we should continue to investigate changes to our fixed/variable tariff structure, reaching consensus that we should not.

Reasons for this included:

- clear customer feedback that our long-term financial viability should not be impacted by a tariff change
- the limited ability for a variable tariff to encourage responsible water use

- social equity issues associated with a more variable tariff, including that larger families and renters would face higher bills with minimal ability to control them.

A summary of the session is available on our website, in the March 2022 CRG meeting summary.

[View the CRG meeting summary archive](#)

PLANNING *for the* FUTURE



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