



Water Performance Report 2023–24

Performance of Victorian Urban Water and Sewerage Businesses

10 December 2024

Amended 16 December



Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways on which we work and live.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

As the First Peoples of this land, belonging to the world's oldest living cultures, we recognise and value their knowledge, and ongoing role in shaping and enriching the story of Victoria.

An appropriate citation for this paper is:

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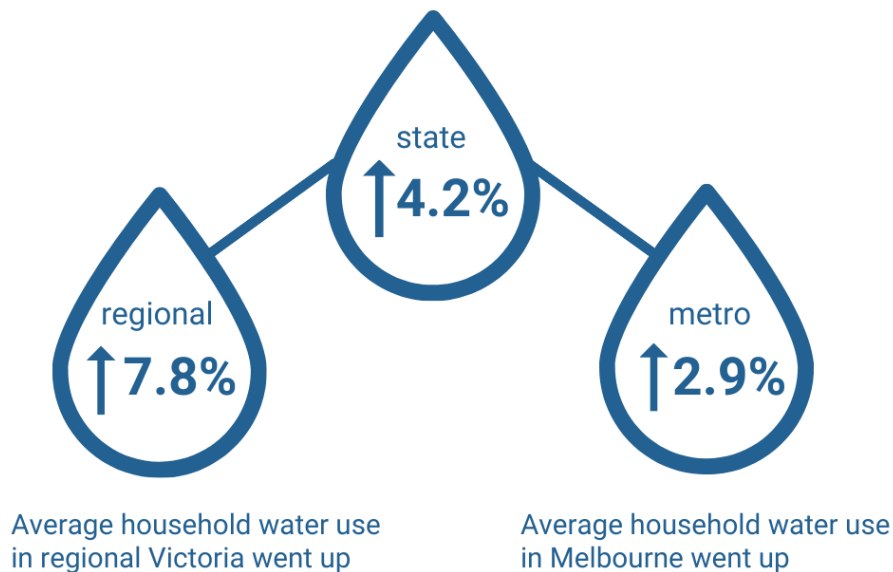
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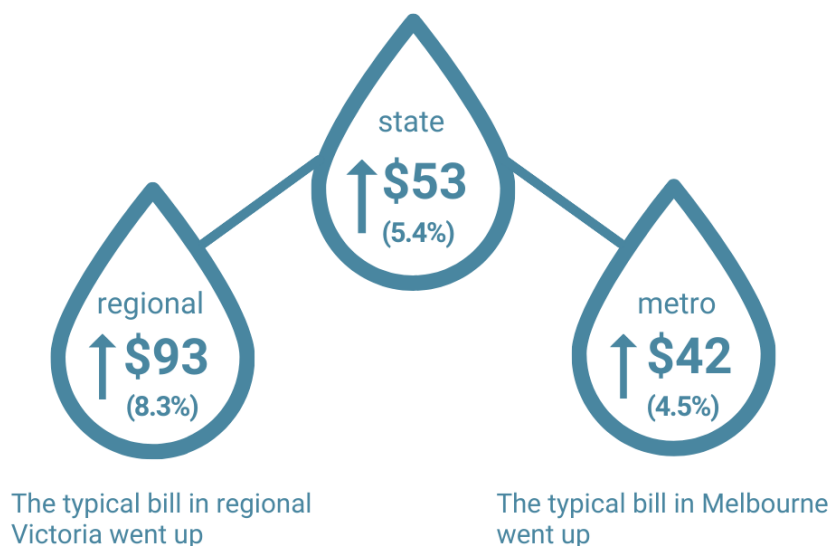
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Key changes from 2022-23 to 2023-24

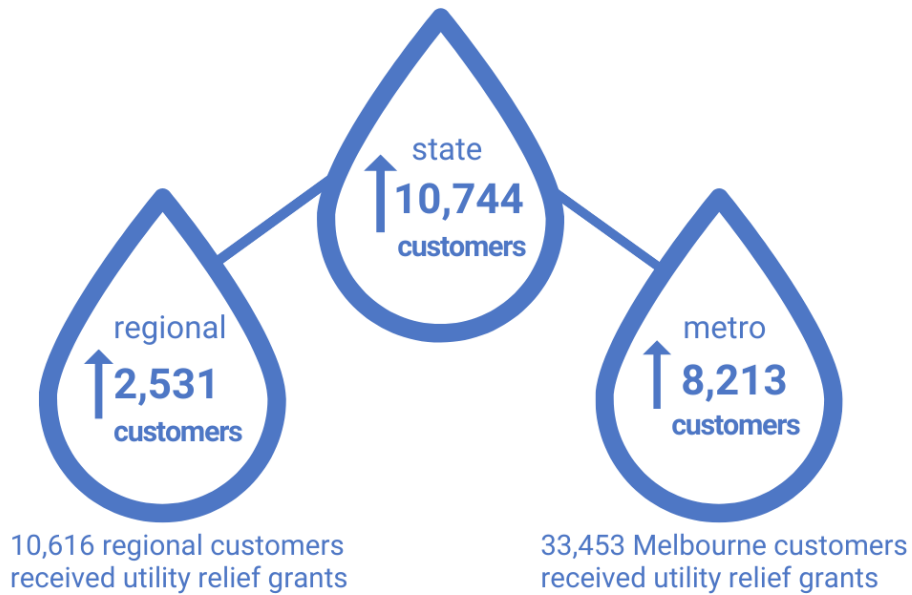
Victorians used more water



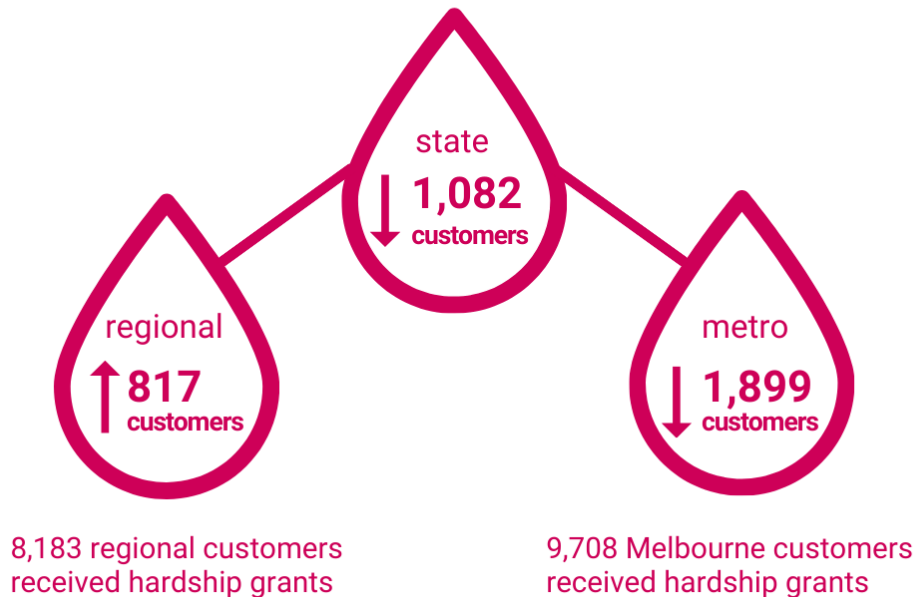
The typical annual water bill increased



More customers received utility relief grants from the state government to help pay their water bills



Fewer customers received hardship grants from their water business to help pay their water bills



Three businesses initiated legal action for unpaid water bills, while five businesses have resumed water supply restrictions



In 2023-24, 169 customers had their water supply restricted, compared to zero in 2022-23



In 2023-24, legal action was initiated against 72 customers, compared to 38 in 2022-23

Monitoring performance

Victoria's 15 urban water businesses operate across a range of geographic, environmental and social conditions. The Essential Services Commission reports on the Victorian urban water sector's performance, both as a whole and as individual businesses.

We compare each water business in the areas of customer bills, household water use, and other key service measures such as customer experience.

The *Water Performance Report 2023-24* is just one of the ways we report on the sector. This report should be read in conjunction with our:

- [water business outcome reports](#)
- [quarterly customer survey reporting](#)
- [water performance report dashboard \(new for 2023-24\)](#).

Water business outcomes reports

Our outcomes reporting drives improvements to ensure better outcomes for water customers. It is tailored to the commitments each water business makes under our outcomes reporting framework.

Quarterly customer survey reporting

Our quarterly customer survey reporting measures customer satisfaction in four areas:

- value for money
- reputation in the community
- level of trust
- overall satisfaction.

Water performance report dashboard

Our new interactive dashboard supports the publication of our annual water performance report by providing a concise and high-level overview on a range of data indicators related to the performance of Victorian water businesses. It allows users to explore information related to household water use, typical bills, payment assistance, customer service, network reliability, and environmental impact. Performance data is presented as aggregates or weighted averages at three levels: statewide, regional versus metropolitan businesses, and by individual water businesses.

What we found in 2023-24

Businesses support their customers

Victorian water customers have been impacted by increased cost-of-living pressures in 2023-24.

Water bills have increased, mainly driven by:

- high annual inflation of 7 per cent, though some businesses had price increases lower than this inflation figure.
- higher household water usage due to a drier year compared to 2022-23
- approved price movements following the [2023 water price review](#).

Water businesses continued to support customers experiencing financial hardship. More state-government funded Utility Relief Grants and flexible payment plans were accessed by customers. However, the number of hardship grants awarded by water businesses fell. Water businesses awarded 18,973 hardship grants in 2022-23 but only awarded 17,891 in 2023-24, despite customer numbers increasing by 52,384.

Five regional water businesses placed restrictions on a total of 169 customers' water services as a measure of last resort for unpaid water bills. This is the first year such restrictions were imposed since the practice was ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Water businesses confirmed that restrictions were measures of last resort and that no restrictions were implemented for customers receiving any form of assistance for payment difficulties, in accordance with the water industry standards. All other businesses continue to voluntarily suspend restrictions.

Some key indicators of service performance, such as sewer service reliability, increased across the state, indicating continued good levels of service in some areas.

The typical Victorian residential water customer

In 2023-24, a typical Victorian residential water customer:

- **Used more water**
Average statewide household water use increased by 6 kilolitres (4 per cent) to 151 kilolitres. This reflects a year with below average annual rainfall.¹ (See Section 1.2.)
- **Received a higher bill**
The typical annual bill increased by \$42 to \$986 for Melbourne owner occupiers and by \$25 to \$490 for Melbourne tenants. The typical annual bill for owner occupiers in regional Victoria increased by \$93 to \$1,217 and by \$43 to \$349 for tenants in regional Victoria. A

¹ 'Victoria in 2023', Bureau of Meteorology (2023), available at: [Victoria in 2023](#) accessed 18 November 2024.

7 per cent increase in inflation, higher household water use, and new price paths for 14 businesses contributed to the increase in the typical annual bill across the state.

- **Received support for payment difficulties**

Efforts by water businesses to support customers continued in 2023-24. The total value of state-government funded Utility Relief Grants increased by 24 per cent, providing \$11.2 million in water bill relief for Victorian customers. Additionally, the number of customers on flexible payment plans increased by 3 percent, despite a 6 per cent decline in hardship grants provided by water businesses. The number of residential customers receiving concessions on their water accounts increased by less than one per cent, totalling 24 per cent statewide. (See Section 1.7)

- **Saw a decrease in their customer service experience**

Customer perception surveys revealed a slight decline in satisfaction with water businesses, with average customer ratings decreasing across all survey areas. The customer service benchmarking study also revealed a reduced customer experience score compared to previous years. Additionally, complaints increased statewide, primarily concerning water quality. (See Chapter 2.)

- **Experienced more water supply interruptions but fewer sewer network interruptions**

Water networks were less reliable for metropolitan customers with an increase in average customer 'minutes off supply', however regional customers saw an improvement this year. Sewer network reliability improved with a decline in blockages and spills. (See Chapter 3.)

Why we report on performance

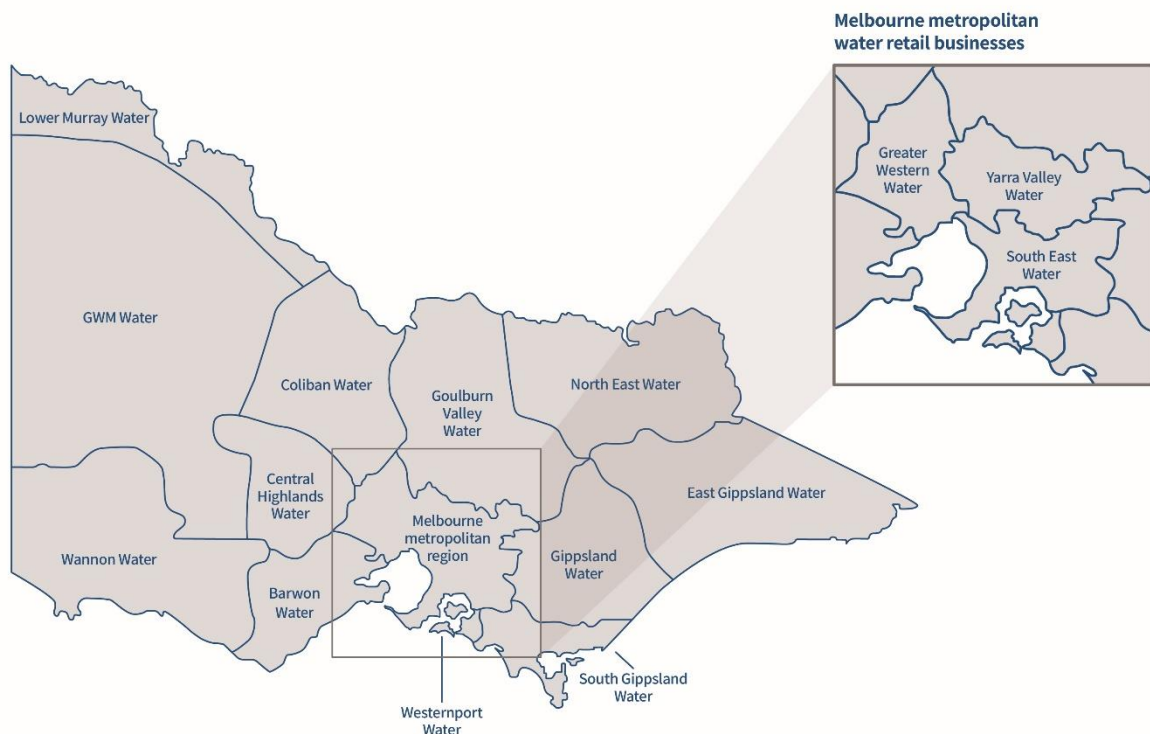
The Water Industry Regulatory Order 2014 (WIRO) requires the Essential Services Commission to monitor and report publicly on water sector performance. This report covers specific performance indicators of the 15 Victorian urban water businesses over a five-year period with attention given to their performance in 2023-24.²

For each business we compare these indicators against:

- other businesses
- its own performance over time.

Figure A shows the 15 urban water business boundaries and the Melbourne metropolitan region.

Figure A: Victorian urban water businesses in 2023-24



² Clause 18 of the Water Industry Regulatory Order 2014.

Rural water businesses are excluded from this report, as well as the rural activities of GWMWater and Lower Murray Water, which provide both urban and rural services.

Water business performance reporting:

- helps guide discussions between water businesses and their customers about service priorities and performance targets
- allows comparison between water businesses on service standards
- informs the decision-making processes of water businesses, regulatory agencies and the Victorian Government.

Water business customers

Table A shows the number of urban water and sewerage customers that each of the water businesses serviced in 2023-24, as well as the total numbers of customers in metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and statewide.

In addition to a 2.7 per cent increase in population in Victoria in 2023-24, there were 52,384 more water customer connections.³ This is about a 1.7 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

³ 'National, state and territory population: Statistics about the population and components of change (birth, deaths, migration) for Australia and its states and territories', Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release#states-and-territories>, accessed 14 November 2024.

Why we report on performance

Table A Urban water and sewerage customers in 2023-24

	All water customers	Residential water customers	Non-residential water customers	Sewerage customers
Greater Western	631,537	583,127	48,410	621,876
South East	836,708	774,079	62,629	813,007
Yarra Valley	893,480	831,807	61,673	834,392
Barwon	181,844	168,372	13,472	165,950
Central Highlands	79,511	73,397	6,114	69,559
Coliban	81,639	74,500	7,139	74,657
East Gippsland	25,904	22,908	2,996	21,612
Gippsland	76,490	70,256	6,234	69,093
Goulburn Valley	63,858	57,285	6,573	56,507
GWMWater	32,594	27,907	4,687	26,476
Lower Murray	35,497	31,553	3,944	31,006
North East	56,103	51,238	4,865	51,436
South Gippsland	22,361	19,196	3,165	19,863
Wannon	45,226	38,696	6,530	38,840
Westernport	18,658	17,485	1,173	17,224
Metro total	2,361,725	2,189,013	172,712	2,269,275
Regional total	719,685	652,793	66,892	642,223
Statewide total	3,081,410	2,841,806	239,604	2,911,498

Our pricing framework

The PREMO framework – Performance, Risk, Engagement, Management and Outcomes – provides incentives for water businesses to deliver better value to customers and holds them accountable for delivering on their commitments. Our outcomes reporting tracks how each business has assessed its performance against its outcome commitments made to customers at its last price review. For 14 Victorian water businesses, the 2023-24 year marks the first year in the new outcomes reporting cycle under the PREMO framework. All outcome reports can be accessed on our [website](#).

Our regulatory functions

We are the economic regulator of the Victorian water sector. One of our regulatory functions is to monitor and to report publicly on the performance of the Victorian Government-owned water businesses.

We are also responsible for regulating service standards and conditions of supply. However, we do not regulate or drive performance in the areas of water conservation, the environment and water quality, although some of these areas are covered in our report.

Other bodies with a role in the state's water services are:

- the Environment Protection Authority Victoria: responsible for regulating environmental standards
- the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action: responsible for water conservation measures
- the Department of Health: responsible for drinking water quality standards.

The data used in this report

This report is based on:

- performance data reported by the businesses against key performance indicators specified by us, and comments from the businesses explaining their performance
- findings from independent regulatory audits on the reliability of the performance data reported by the businesses. Where data has not passed the audit requirements, it has been excluded from this report or qualified in our discussion.

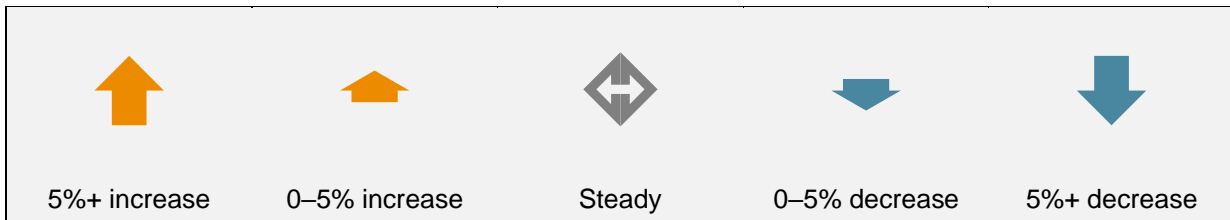
Data snapshots

We use snapshots alongside some indicators to highlight changes that have occurred at the metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria level, and the statewide trends. The averages presented in this report are weighted on the number of customers each business services. Accordingly, the state average is weighted towards the metropolitan average since there are more

Why we report on performance

customers in metropolitan Melbourne than in regional Victoria. The arrows in the snapshot show the percentage change compared to the previous year with the exception of the change arrows in the recycled water usage snapshot which shows the percentage point change. Depending on the indicator, an increase could be an improvement or a deterioration in performance.

Snapshot symbol definitions



Access our 2023-24 water performance resources

Find our 2023-24 performance information at <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/water-performance-reports>, including:

- this report comparing the performance of the 15 urban water businesses
- a data dashboard that provides a granular view of data used in this report
- a summary of the data behind our tables and charts in this report.

1. Household water use, typical bills, and payment assistance

This chapter looks at the average water use of households and typical bills at the average water usage level across Victoria.

The bill estimates in this chapter reflect prices charged by water businesses in the year from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

We also discuss how some customers are paying their bills. Government support and water business assistance programs are available where customers are experiencing payment difficulties. If bills remain unpaid, customers may face water supply restrictions or legal action.

1.1. 2023-24 at a glance

Annual average household water use increased by 6 kilolitres (4.2 per cent) to 151 kilolitres.

The statewide typical annual bill for both owner occupiers and tenants increased compared to the previous year. The statewide typical bill for owner occupiers increased by \$53 to \$1,039 and for tenants it increased by \$30 to \$458.

Compared to the previous year, more customers received grant assistance from the Victorian Government to help with one-off bill payments.

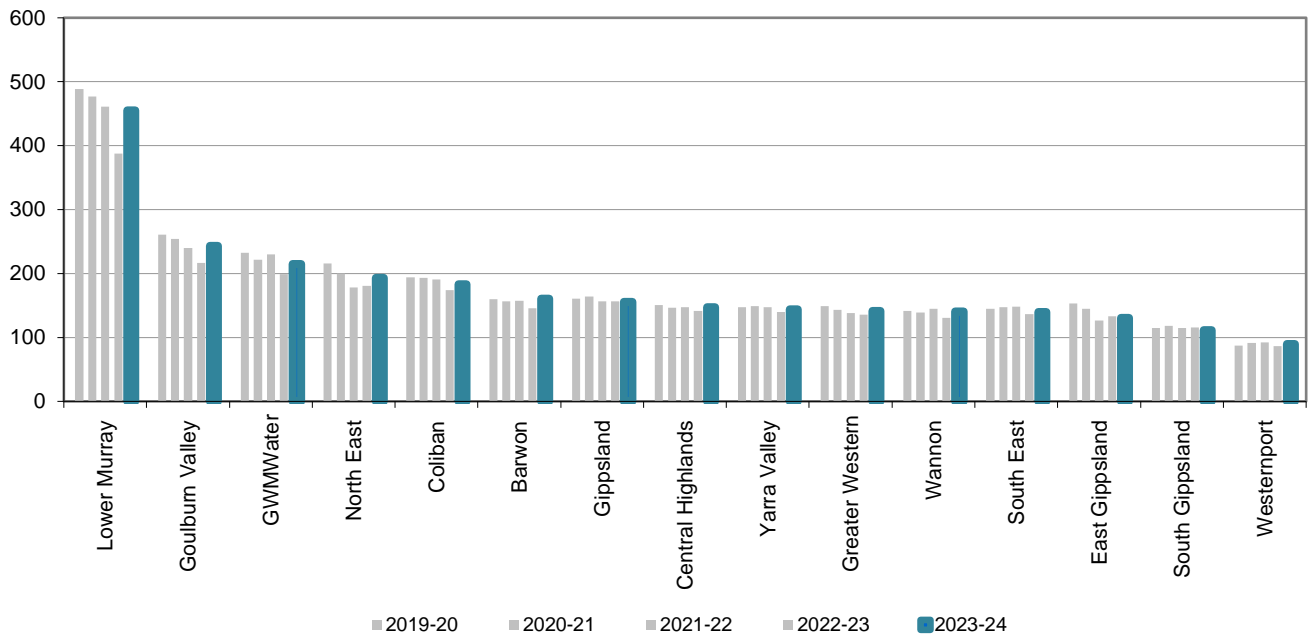
Compared to the previous year, water businesses awarded fewer hardship grants to customers. The average value of grants increased from \$328 to \$354.

Three regional water businesses initiated legal action against customers for non-payment of bills. Five regional businesses resumed installing water supply restrictions for non-payment, marking the first year that restrictions were implemented since water supply restrictions were ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2. Average household water use

Water use varies around the state due to different climates, household demographics, property sizes, and any water restrictions that may be in place. Figure 1.1 shows the average annual household water use across the last five years, measured in kilolitres.

Figure 1.1 Average household use (kilolitres per household)



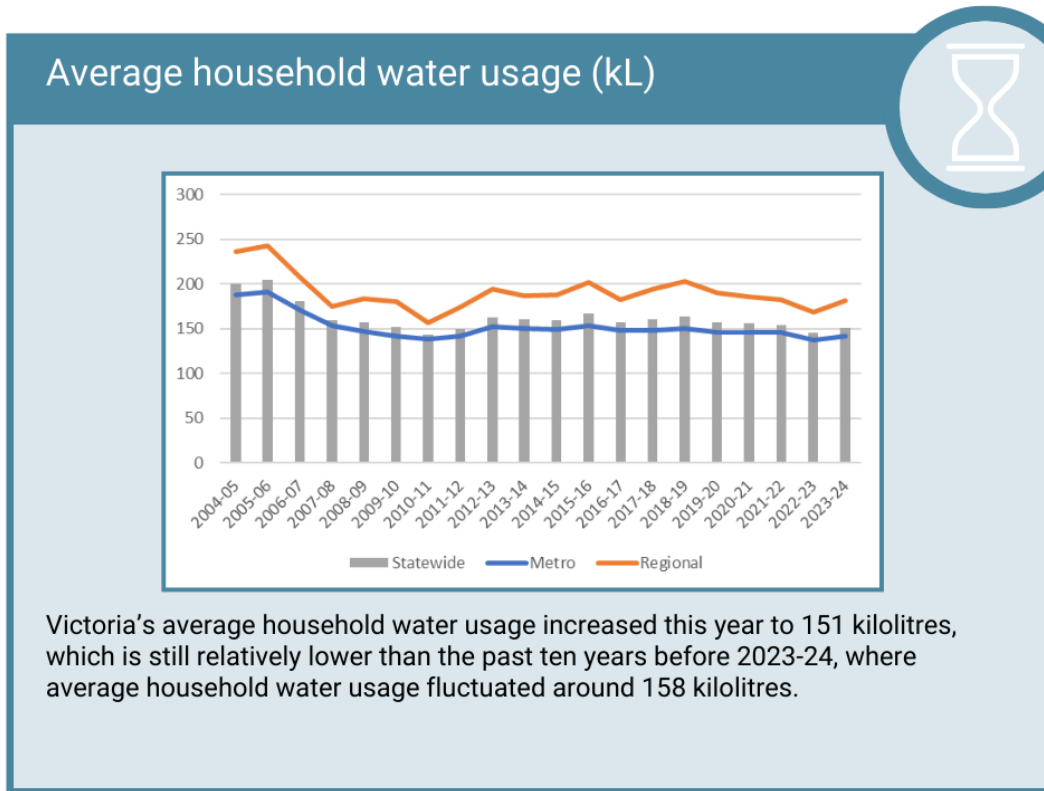
Snapshot - average household water use, kilolitres

Statewide average		4.2%	Metro average		2.9%	Regional average		7.8%
2023-24	151	↑	2023-24	142	↑	2023-24	182	↑
2022-23	145		2022-23	138		2022-23	169	

Key observations

- Across Victoria, average annual household water use in 2023-24 increased by 4.2 per cent, to 151 kilolitres, bouncing back after a drop last year. Most water businesses reported an increase in use, with seven businesses reporting an increase of 5 per cent or more. This coincides with rainfall being above average in the summer but below average in spring, winter and autumn.
- In metropolitan Melbourne, average annual household water use increased by 2.9 per cent. Of the three metropolitan water businesses, Greater Western Water recorded the largest increase in use at 4 per cent. No metropolitan business recorded a decrease in use.

- In regional Victoria, average annual household water use increased by 7.8 per cent. Lower Murray Water recorded the largest usage increase of 17 per cent due to below average rainfall, and South Gippsland Water recorded the largest decrease in use of 3 per cent.



1.3. Typical household bills

Household bills across Victoria vary due to:

- the cost to service different regions
- sources of water
- historical decisions about tariff structures
- the average volume of water used.

Bills are a combination of how much water is used, prices for fixed and variable rate charges, and other charges. Owner occupier households pay both fixed and variable charges for their bills. Landlords pay the fixed charges for their property and the tenants only pay the variable charges.

Only metropolitan Melbourne households had a variable sewerage charge in 2023-24.⁴ Note that although metropolitan businesses include waterways and drainage or parks charges in their bills on behalf of Melbourne Water, we do not include these charges in our calculations of the typical bills.

Figure 1.2 shows typical bills for owner occupiers across five years and Figure 1.3 shows typical bills for tenants across five years.

How typical bills are calculated

Typical household bills shown for each year are in that year's dollars. We use each business's average household usage (see Section 1.2) to calculate an indicative household bill for water and sewerage services. This includes both the fixed and variable water and sewerage charges, and any applicable rebate.⁵

For regional businesses with multiple pricing zones, we used the prices in the largest town to calculate that business's typical household bill.

Some water businesses previously applied a rebate to residential bills. For many water users, this rebate was shown as an annual credit on water bills. Following the 2018 price review, this rebate has either not applied or is being phased out.

Want more information?

The interactive bill estimator, available at www.esc.vic.gov.au/water/information-water-consumers, calculates an indicative bill for annual water usage, and compares the bill across all water businesses.

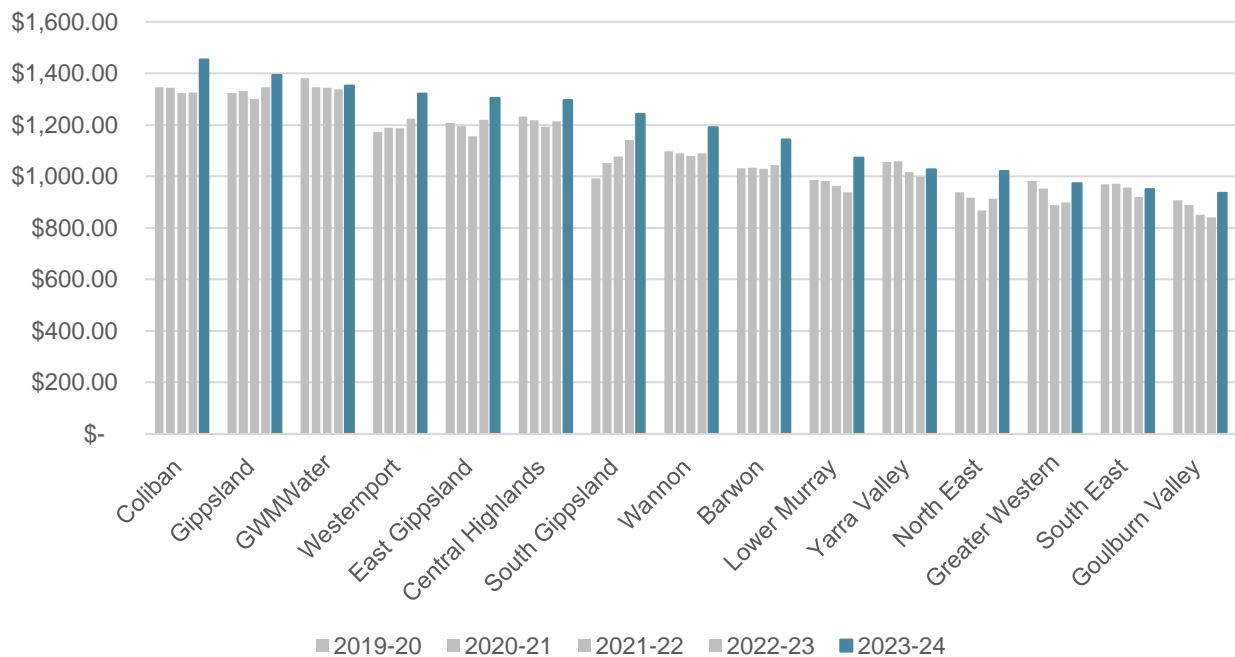
Our website also explains some key terms for understanding bills, and describes how we regulate prices: www.esc.vic.gov.au/water/water-prices-tariffs-and-special-drainage/

⁴ In their 2023 price submissions, both South East Water and Yarra Valley Water proposed to remove the variable sewer disposal charge, and this no longer applies from 1 July 2023. Greater Western Water also proposed to remove this charge in its 2024 price submission, to apply from 1 July 2024. Based on customer feedback, the businesses have simplified residential customer bills by incorporating the sewer disposal charge into the variable water charge.

⁵ For consistency in comparison, we have excluded the metropolitan drainage charges for Melbourne Water and the metropolitan parks charges set by the Minister for Water, collected on their behalf by the metropolitan water businesses via water bills. These charges are not directly levied by these water businesses and are not part of their revenue stream.

Figure 1.2 Typical household bills including inflation, owner occupiers

(\$, nominal)



Greater Western Water bill based on former City West Water area

Typical annual bills have been rounded to the nearest dollar

Snapshot - typical owner occupier water bill, nominal dollars

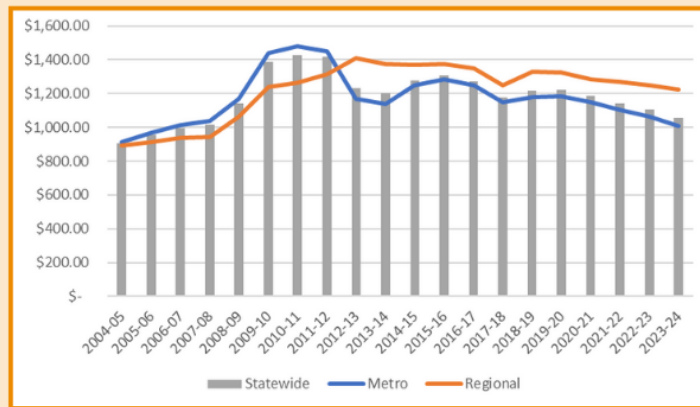
Statewide average		5.4%	Metro average		4.5%	Regional average		8.3%
2023-24	\$1,039	↑	2023-24	\$986	↑	2023-24	\$1,217	↑
2022-23	\$986		2022-23	\$944		2022-23	\$1,124	

Key observations

- In 2023-24, the statewide annual typical bill for owner occupiers increased by \$53 (5.4 per cent) to \$1,039. Higher household water consumption in 2023-24 and higher prices contributed to this increase in the statewide owner occupier typical bill. This increase occurs in conjunction with a 7 per cent increase in inflation that came into effect at the start of 2023-24.
- In metropolitan Melbourne, the annual typical owner occupier bill increased by about \$42 to \$986 in 2023-24.
- Greater Western Water customers saw the largest increase in their bill, which increased by \$76 from \$898 in 2022-23 to \$974 in 2023-24, which correlates to a relatively large increase in average household water use and inflation.

- In regional Victoria, the typical owner occupier bill increased by \$93, from \$1,124 in 2022-23 to \$1,217 in 2023-24. This is correlated with a 7.8 per cent increase in annual household consumption in regional areas and a 7 per cent increase in inflation.
- Coliban Water customers received the highest typical bill statewide in 2023-24 at \$1,455. Goulburn Valley Water customers received the lowest typical bill statewide for a fifth year in a row at \$937.

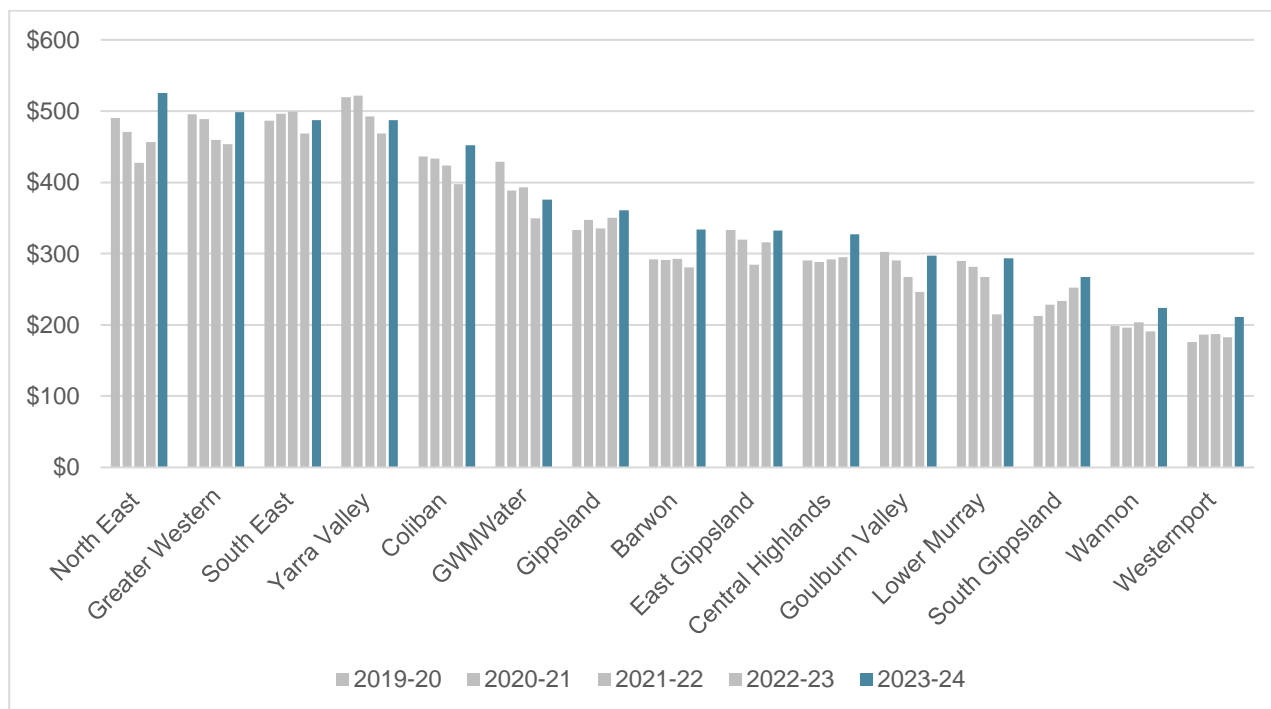
Owner occupier typical bills (real \$2023-24)



This chart shows the trend in typical household bills excluding inflation and holding consumption constant. It provides a long-term view of price changes on customer bills. Typical bills for both metropolitan and regional customers increased during the height of the millennium drought in 2009 and 2010 to allow businesses to recover costs of expansion of water supply infrastructure. Since then, bills have slowly trended downward but are still well above the levels of bills seen in the mid-2000s.

Figure 1.3 Typical household bill including inflation, tenants

(\$, nominal)



Typical annual bills have been rounded to the nearest dollar

Snapshot - typical tenant water bill, nominal dollars

Statewide average		7.0%	Metro average		5.5%	Regional average		14.1%
2023-24	\$458	↑	2023-24	\$490	↑	2023-24	\$349	↑
2022-23	\$428		2022-23	\$465		2022-23	\$306	

Key observations

- The statewide annual typical bill for tenants increased by \$30 (7 per cent), from \$428 in 2022-23 to \$458 in 2023-24. Relatively high prices and an increase in average annual household water consumption in 2023-24 has contributed to this increase in the statewide typical tenant bill.
- In regional Victoria, tenants’ typical bills increased by \$43 (14.1 per cent) to \$349 in 2023-24.
- In Melbourne, the typical bill for tenants increased by \$25 (5.5 per cent), from \$465 in 2022-23 to \$490 in 2023-24.
- Each metropolitan water business recorded an increase in typical tenant bills, with Greater Western Water customers receiving the largest increase at 9.9 per cent. This mainly reflects a 4 per cent increase in Greater Western Water customers’ annual household water use and higher inflation. Of the metropolitan water businesses’ customers, Yarra Valley Water customers

How much households use and pay for water

received the smallest increase in their typical bill at 3.9 per cent and also had the second lowest increase in annual household water use.

- Lower Murray Water customers saw the largest increase in their typical bill of 37 per cent from \$215 in 2022-23 to \$294 in 2023-24, which is higher than bills in the preceding years, but again mainly reflects the larger increase in consumption this year and the high inflation figure. Gippsland Water's customers saw the smallest increase of 3 per cent from \$350 in 2022-23 to \$360 in 2023-24.
- North East Water and Greater Western Water customers' typical tenant bill was the highest in the state in 2023-24 at around \$526 and \$498 with bills increasing by 15 and 9.9 per cent, respectively.
- Westernport Water customers continue to receive the lowest typical tenant bill statewide of \$211 (reflecting a relatively high share of fixed charges in bills) with an increase of 15.9 per cent.

1.4. Concession customers

Twenty-four per cent of residential customers have a concession applied to their water bills, this is the same as the previous year.⁶ The Victorian Government, through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, provides concessions to assist low-income households with water and sewerage bills at their principal place of residence. In 2023-24, \$177.02 million was contributed as concessions to residential water bills. The number of concession households increased by 232 (0.03 per cent), from 673,255 in 2022-23 to 673,487 in 2023-24.

Customers holding a concession card can contact their water business to apply for a concession. Concessions may be applied retrospectively.

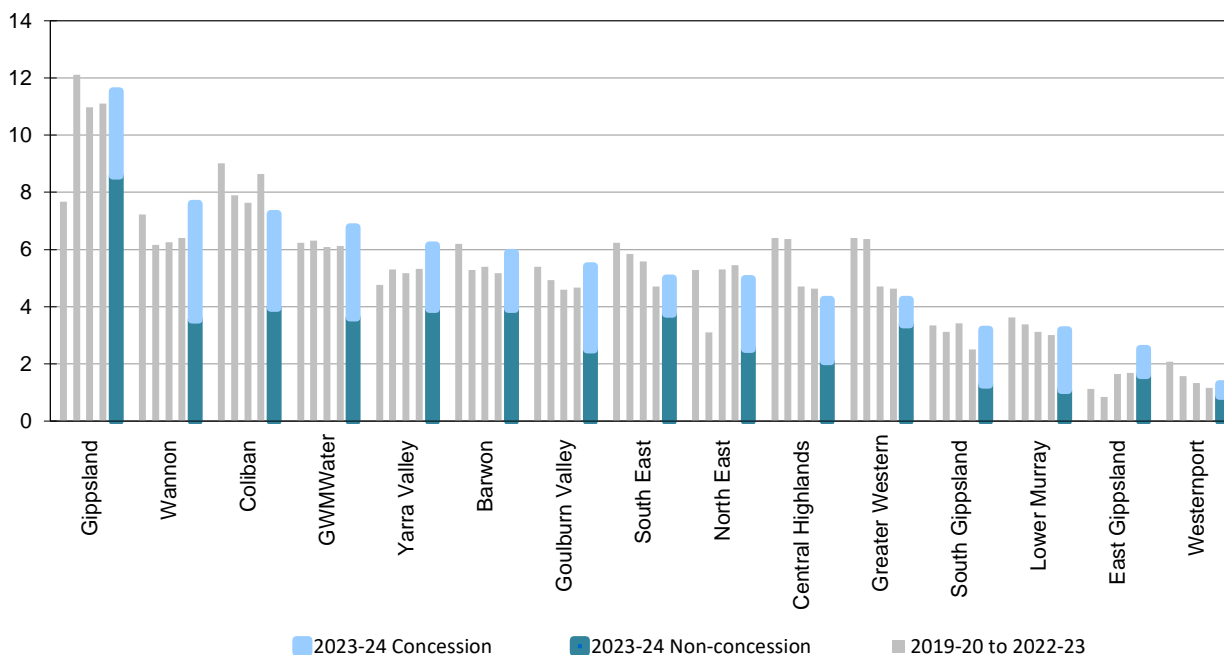
1.5. Customers on flexible payment plans

Instalment plans are alternative payment arrangements offered by water businesses to provide flexibility for customers in managing their bill payments and may assist those experiencing payment difficulties. Payment arrangements may include giving customers the ability to pay off their bill in monthly instalments. Figure 1.4 shows the number of customers on instalment plans per 100 customers as recorded on 30 June 2024 and split between the proportion of concession customers (light blue) and non-concession customers (dark blue).

⁶ Concession data sourced from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Figure 1.4 Residential customers with instalment plans per 100 customers

(at 30 June 2024)



Snapshot - residential instalment plans per 100 customers

Statewide average		0.9%	Metro average		0.3%	Regional average		3.0%
2023-24	5.4	↑	2023-24	5.2	↑	2023-24	6.0	↑
2022-23	5.4		2022-23	5.2		2022-23	5.9	

Key observations

- The total number of residential customers on instalment plans at the end of 2023-24 increased from 149,657 to 153,760 (a 3 per cent increase), reflecting a steady increase in the last two years. This is further reflected with a small rise in the number of residential customers on instalment plans per 100 customers of 0.9 per cent across the state.
- Most businesses reported a slight increase or no change at all in the rate of customers on instalment plans.
- The rate of residential customers with instalment plans ranged from 1.3 per 100 customers for Westernport Water customers to 11.5 per 100 customers for Gippsland Water customers. This variation will be influenced by differences in demographics of water businesses’ customer bases, the structure of the payment plans and how each business promotes these to its customers.
- South Gippsland Water and East Gippsland Water reported the largest increases in the rate of customers on instalment plans. South Gippsland Water reported an increase of 27 per cent and

East Gippsland Water reported an increase of 50 per cent. Both businesses do not have a comparatively high rate of customers with instalment plans.

- GWMWater (22 per cent) and Central Highlands Water (22 per cent) reported the largest decreases in customers with instalment plans.

1.6. Utility relief grants

The Utility Relief Grant scheme is a Victorian Government grant scheme for eligible households that provides up to \$650 for each utility within a two-year period. This is different to a hardship grant, which is provided by a water business and is tailored to each customer's circumstances. Hardship grants are discussed in Section 1.7.

Water businesses must assist customers experiencing payment difficulties on a case-by-case basis by appropriately referring customers to government funded assistance programs or to an independent financial counsellor. This includes helping eligible customers apply to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for a Utility Relief Grant.

The Utility Relief Grant scheme significantly benefits customers experiencing financial difficulties by lowering their water bill debt and reduces the bill debt carried by water businesses. The grant payment is generally used to assist with a temporary financial crisis.

Table 1.1 provides information relating to the number of customers who have received a utility relief grant in 2023-24. The wide spread in number and rate of customers receiving grants across the water businesses suggests some businesses are doing more than others to assist their customers to access these grants. Businesses with lower application and approval rates should consider how they can better help their customers to benefit from this available support.

Table 1.1 Utility relief grant scheme in 2023-24 (residential customers)

(\$, nominal)

	Number of grants initiated	Number of grants approved	Percentage of grants initiated that are approved	Average value of grant paid	Grants approved per 100 customers
Greater Western	6,264	5,630	90%	\$284	0.97
South East	8,965	7,860	88%	\$282	1.02
Yarra Valley	20,393	19,963	98%	\$206	2.40
Barwon	1,770	1,603	91%	\$296	0.95
Central Highlands	1,557	1,409	90%	\$324	1.92
Coliban	1,404	1,300	93%	\$344	1.74
East Gippsland	536	527	98%	\$256	2.30
Gippsland	1,770	1,569	89%	\$333	2.23
Goulburn Valley	825	794	96%	\$321	1.39
GWMWater	331	304	92%	\$350	1.09
Lower Murray	525	283	54%	\$364	0.90
North East	1,785	1,697	95%	\$270	3.31
South Gippsland	537	484	90%	\$292	2.52
Wannon	298	252	85%	\$353	0.65
Westernport	405	394	97%	\$267	2.25
Statewide	47,365	44,069	93%	\$254	1.55

Source: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Note: data for Greater Western Water updated 16 December 2024. Statewide totals and averages have also been updated accordingly.)

Grants approved per 100 customers refers to the number of grants approved per the relevant water business's own residential customer base.

Approval rates greater than 100 per cent may arise where grants are approved after the end of the financial year in which they were lodged.

How much households use and pay for water

Key observations

- In total, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing approved 44,069 Utility Relief Grants in 2023-24, 32 per cent more than in 2022-23. This equates to \$11.2 million in utility relief for Victorian water customers and is a 24 per cent increase on the total value of grants approved in 2022-23. This reflects continued efforts by both water businesses and the department to support customers during difficult financial times.
- The average grant value for the state was \$254, which is \$18 less than the average of \$272 in 2022-23. Across businesses, average grant values ranged from \$206 for Yarra Valley Water customers to \$364 for Lower Murray Water customers.
- The proportion of Victorian customers receiving grants also increased, from 1.33 per 100 customers in 2022-23 to 1.55 per 100 customers in 2023-24.
- North East Water had the highest number of approved grants per 100 customers, with 3.31 out of every 100 customers receiving a grant. It also had one of the highest approval rates for grants initiated.
- The proportion of Yarra Valley Water customers receiving the Utility Relief Grant remained high and the total number of Yarra Valley Water customers receiving grants was more than 6,000 higher than the two other metropolitan businesses combined.
- Wannon Water had the lowest number of approved grants per 100 customers, with 0.65 out of every 100 customers receiving a grant. Lower Murray Water had the second lowest grant rate at 0.90 per 100 customers.
- Statewide, 93 per cent of applications initiated by customers were ultimately approved by the state government. This is an increase from 2022-23, where 89 per cent of applications initiated were approved statewide. Lower Murray Water's approval rate of 54 per cent was well below the state average, suggesting it could do more to assist its customers to complete their grant applications.

1.7. Customer hardship grants from water businesses

Hardship grants are another approach used by water businesses to assist customers experiencing payment difficulties. These often take the form of co-payment schemes, where the water business will waive a periodic payment if the customer meets a set number of scheduled payments, with the waived payment counted as a hardship grant. Table 1.2 provides information about the number and value of hardship grants received by customers from each water business in 2023-24. As with the Utility Relief Grants, there is a wide spread in the rate of customers receiving hardship grants across the water businesses. As the form of hardship support varies from business to business, we do not focus on the type of hardship support provided by businesses. Instead, we focus on the level of support provided by businesses.




Table 1.2 Hardship grants (residential customers)

(\$, nominal)

	Average value of a customer grant, 2023-24	Average value of a customer grant, 2022-23	Per 100 customers, 2023-24	Per 100 customers, 2022-23
Greater Western	\$253	\$339	0.11	0.12
South East	\$409	\$540	0.43	0.47
Yarra Valley	\$586	\$417	0.69	0.90
Barwon	\$120	\$113	2.32	1.99
Central Highlands	\$533	\$170	0.15	0.09
Coliban	\$198	\$144	3.83	2.82
East Gippsland	\$225	\$193	1.25	1.41
Gippsland	\$218	\$195	0.28	0.23
Goulburn Valley	\$294	\$161	0.18	0.56
GWMWater	\$236	\$237	0.77	0.43
Lower Murray	\$0	\$0	0.00	0.00
North East	\$598	\$126	0.33	1.32
South Gippsland	\$1,457	\$0	0.01	0.00
Wannon	\$232	\$314	0.37	0.35
Westernport	\$79	\$59	1.12	1.33
Statewide	\$354	\$328	0.63	0.68

How much households use and pay for water

Snapshot - hardship grants approved per 100 customers

Statewide average		-7.4%	Metro average		-17.9%	Regional average		9.6%
2023-24	0.63		2023-24	0.44		2023-24	1.25	
2022-23	0.68		2022-23	0.54		2022-23	1.14	

Key observations

- Across the state, water businesses awarded hardship grants to a total of 17,891 customers in 2023-24, representing 0.63 customers receiving grants per 100 customers. This compares to a total of 18,973 customers in 2022-23, representing 0.68 per 100 customers. Despite the reduction this year, this rate remains significantly higher than the years leading up to the pandemic.
- Regional Victoria businesses' rate of hardship grants awarded to customers increased from 1.14 customers awarded grants per 100 customers in 2022-23 to 1.25 in 2023-24. In Metropolitan Melbourne the rate decreased from 0.54 customers awarded grants per 100 customers in 2022-23 to 0.44 in 2023-24.
- The state average grant value increased, rising from \$328 in 2022-23 to \$354 in 2023-24.
- The average grant value for each business ranged from \$0 (Lower Murray Water, with no hardship grants again this year) to \$1,457 (South Gippsland Water, with a single high value grant).
- Coliban Water again reported the highest rate of hardship grants awarded with 3.83 grants awarded per 100 customers, followed again by Barwon Water with 2.32 per 100 customers. Both businesses have increased the number of grants from their sector high rates last year.
- Lower Murray Water did not award any customers hardship grants in 2023-24. Lower Murray Water has not awarded a customer hardship grant since 2020-21.

1.8. Actions for non-payment of bills

Water legislation allows water businesses to limit the water flowrate to non-paying customers by inserting a restriction device in the customer's water supply line. Water businesses may also take legal action against customers to recover unpaid debt.

Water businesses must assist customers who are experiencing payment difficulties by:

- observing minimum periods of notice before applying supply restrictions or pursuing legal action to recover outstanding debts
- not restricting a customer's water supply or pursuing legal action before first taking additional steps to secure payment, including making a reasonable attempt to contact the person, offering a payment arrangement and resolving any dispute over the outstanding amount.
- not restricting the water supply to a customer who is receiving any form of assistance for payment difficulties under the water industry standard
- not restricting the water supply to a customers who is eligible for and has lodged an application for an eligible concession card and the application is outstanding or a customer who has made an application under the Utility Relief Grant Scheme and the application is outstanding.

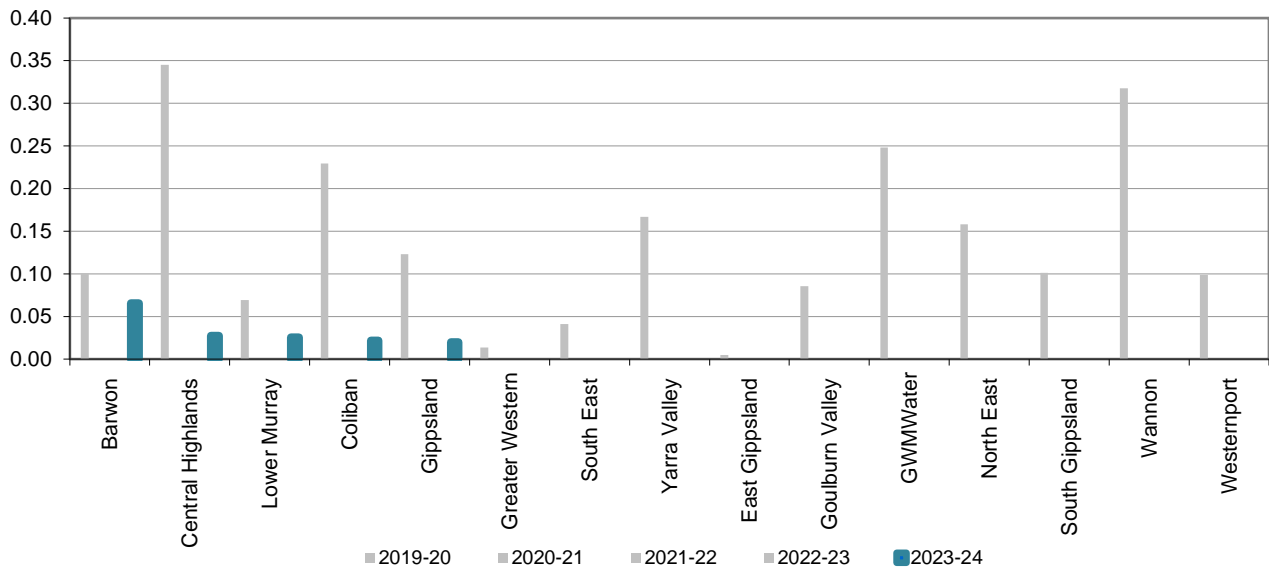
Our water industry standards set out the procedures water businesses are required to follow before restricting a customer's water supply or taking legal action.

Debt recovery actions

During the pandemic and its associated lockdowns, water businesses suspended debt recovery actions against water customers, in line with the guidelines provided by our water industry standards. Barwon Water, Central Highlands Water, Coliban Water, Lower Murray Water and Gippsland Water were the only water businesses to have resumed water supply restrictions for non-payment of bills.

Figure 1.5 shows the number of customers who had their water supply restricted per 100 customers for each water business across the last five years. Figure 1.6 shows the number of customers that faced legal action per 100 customers across the last five years.

Figure 1.5 Water supply restrictions for non-payment of bills (per 100 residential customers)



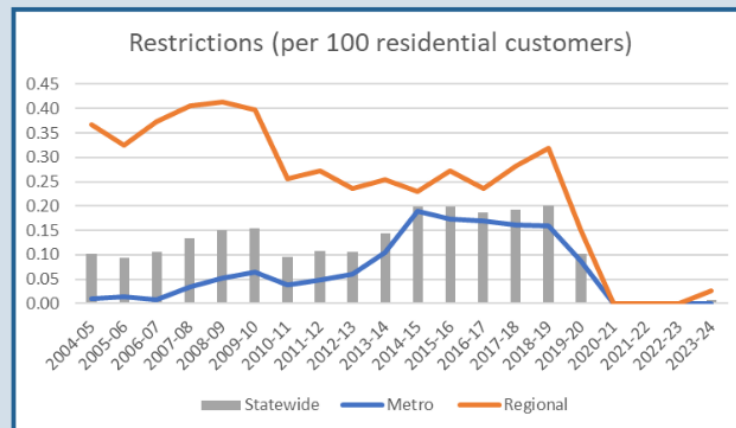
Snapshot - residential water supply restrictions per 100 customers

Statewide average		NA	Metro average		0.0%	Regional average		NA
2023-24	0.01	↑	2023-24	0.00	↔	2023-24	0.03	↑
2022-23	0.00		2022-23	0.00		2022-23	0.00	

Key observations

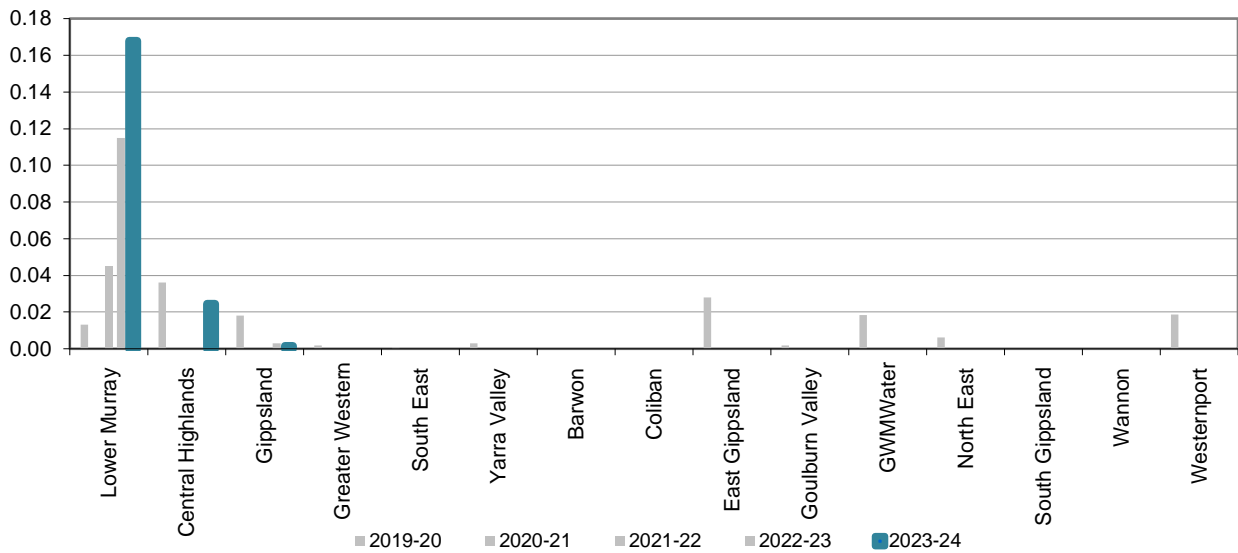
- There were 169 new water supply restrictions for non-payment of bills in 2023-24. Barwon Water reported the highest rate of residential water supply restrictions with 0.07 restrictions per 100 customers, followed by Central Highlands Water and Lower Murray Water with 0.03 restrictions per 100 customers.
- The number of residential water supply restrictions for each business ranged from 8 (Lower Murray Water) to 110 (Barwon Water). All the residential water supply restrictions have occurred in regional Victoria and no metropolitan business has pursued any residential water supply restrictions.
- Water businesses confirmed that restrictions were measures of last resort and that no restrictions were applied to customers receiving any form of assistance for payment difficulties, in accordance with the water industry standards.

Water supply restrictions for non-payment of bills



The restriction rate for non-payment of water bills fell to zero in 2020-21 due to a moratorium on water supply restrictions during the pandemic. In the past year, the rate of customers facing water supply restrictions has increased slightly due to five businesses commencing water supply restrictions. In the past, the regional restriction rate was much higher than the restriction rate in Melbourne. The difference between the regional and Melbourne restriction rates started to narrow from about 2014-15.

Figure 1.6 Legal actions for non-payment of bills (per 100 residential customers)



Snapshot – legal actions per 100 residential customers

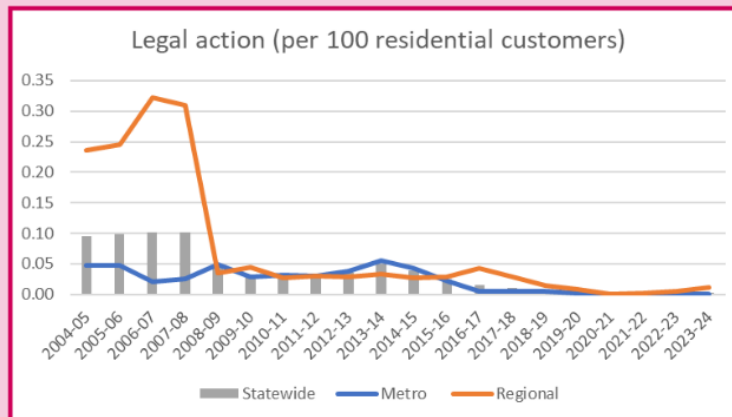
Statewide average		91.8%	Metro average		0.0%	Regional average		92.5%
2023-24	0.00	↑	2023-24	0.00	↔	2023-24	0.01	↑
2022-23	0.00		2022-23	0.00		2022-23	0.01	

Key observations

Central Highlands Water, Lower Murray Water and Gippsland Water were the only water businesses to pursue legal action for non-payment of bills in 2023-24, totalling 72 new legal actions. Notably, these three were also among the five businesses that resumed water supply restrictions this year.

All three businesses confirmed no action was taken against customers identified as experiencing financial difficulty.

Legal actions for non-payment of bills



In 2020-21 the rate of legal action for non-payment of water bills fell to zero due to a moratorium on legal action during the pandemic. In the past two years the rate of customers facing legal action has increased slightly due to two businesses recommencing legal activities which has now increased to three in 2023-24. Besides these three businesses, all other businesses have continued to voluntarily cease all legal activities even after the moratorium was lifted. Before the pandemic, the rate of legal action was trending towards zero.

2. How water businesses respond to their customers

This chapter explores how water businesses manage enquiries to their call centres. We also examine the most common areas for complaints made to water businesses and when customers take their complaints to the ombudsman.

Our water industry standard places obligations on businesses for responding to enquiries or complaints and providing appropriate service. These obligations include:

- having policies, practices and procedures for handling customers' complaints and disputes
- providing certain information to customers on request.

Specific details can be found in each water business's Customer Charter, which is available on their websites.

2.1. 2023-24 at a glance

Our customer perception survey results for 2023-24 have fallen slightly compared to 2022-23, indicating customers are slightly less satisfied with their water business.

Our customer service benchmarking study indicates customers received a slight decrease in customer service compared to previous years.

Across the state, the number of complaints made to water businesses increased, with the largest proportion of complaints relating to water quality.

Complaints about water quality also increased compared to the previous year.

2.2. How customers rate their water business

We survey 1,300 water customers every quarter (5,200 customers a year) across the 15 urban and regional water businesses on how they think their water business rates across four key areas:

- value for money
- reputation in the community
- level of trust
- overall satisfaction.

Our customer perception survey results for 2023-24 show that average customer ratings of their water business have fallen in all four areas when compared to the previous year's results. For more information about our customer surveys and to view the trend over a longer period, see <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/how-customers-rate-their-water-business>.

Figure 2.1 compares the state average scores in 2023-24 for each of the four areas surveyed with the survey scores in 2022-23. Figures 2.2 to 2.5 show the scores out of 10 that customers gave their water business for each of these four areas for each quarterly survey in 2023-24 and the overall average for 2023-24. Businesses are ranked according to the average score for the year, as shown by the blue bar.

Figure 2.1 State average scores for each area surveyed

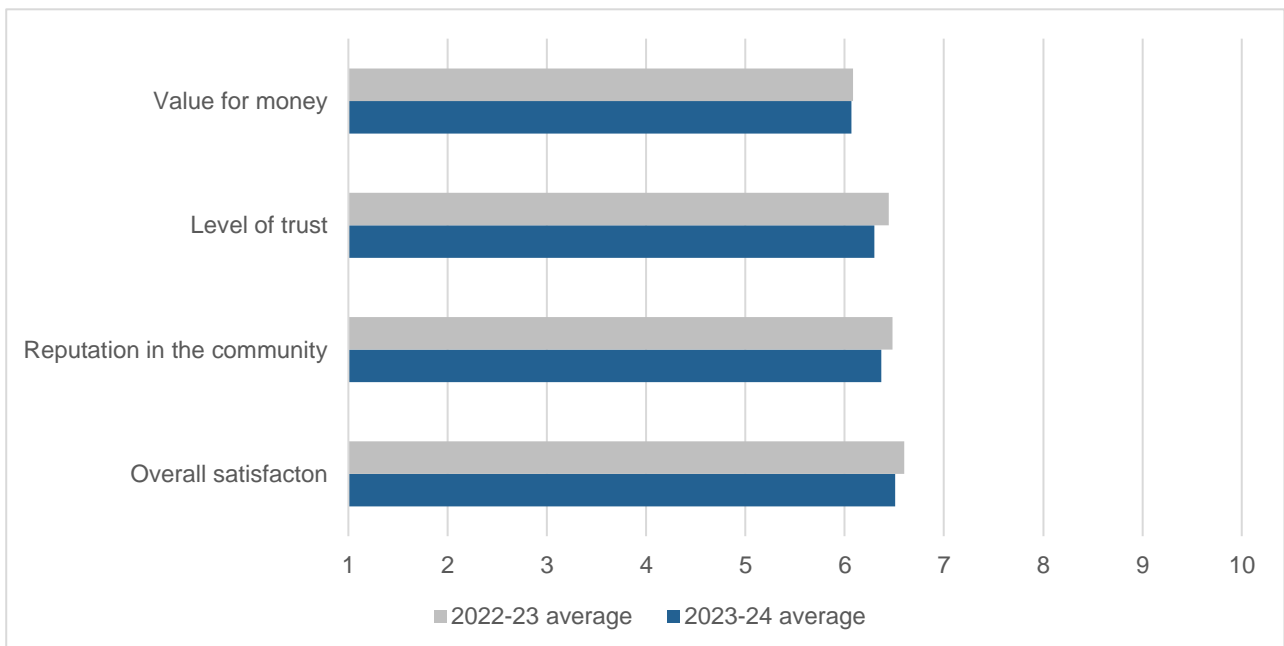


Figure 2.2 How customers rated their business for value for money

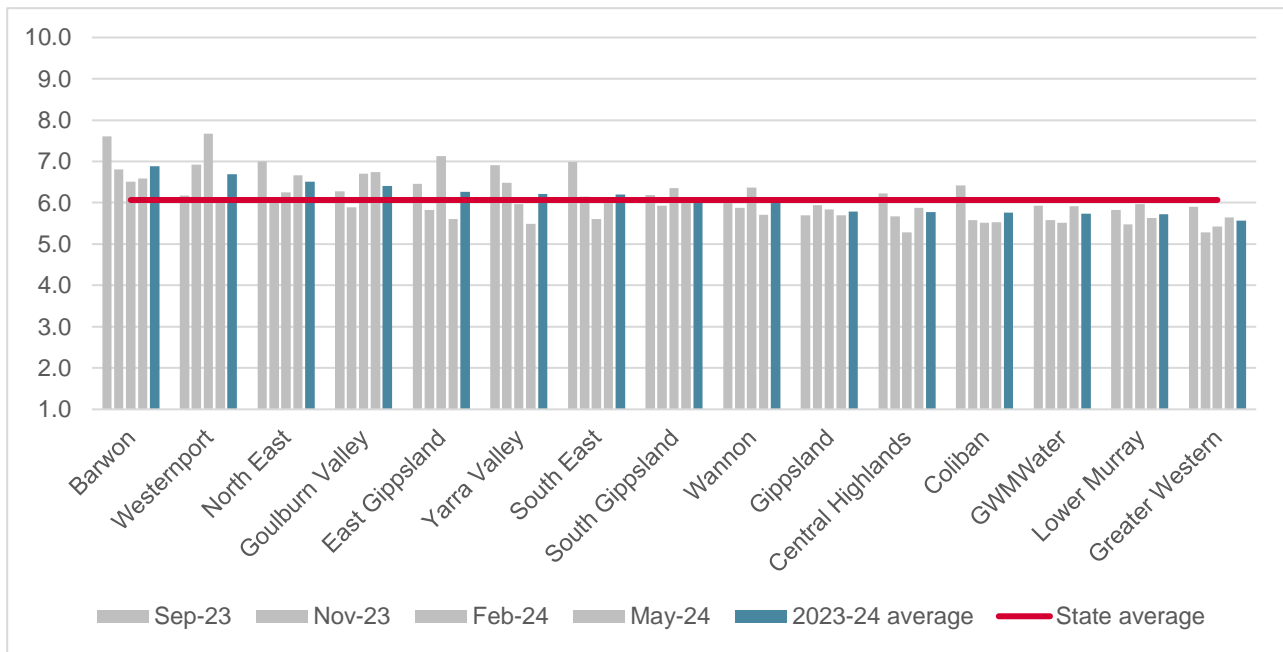
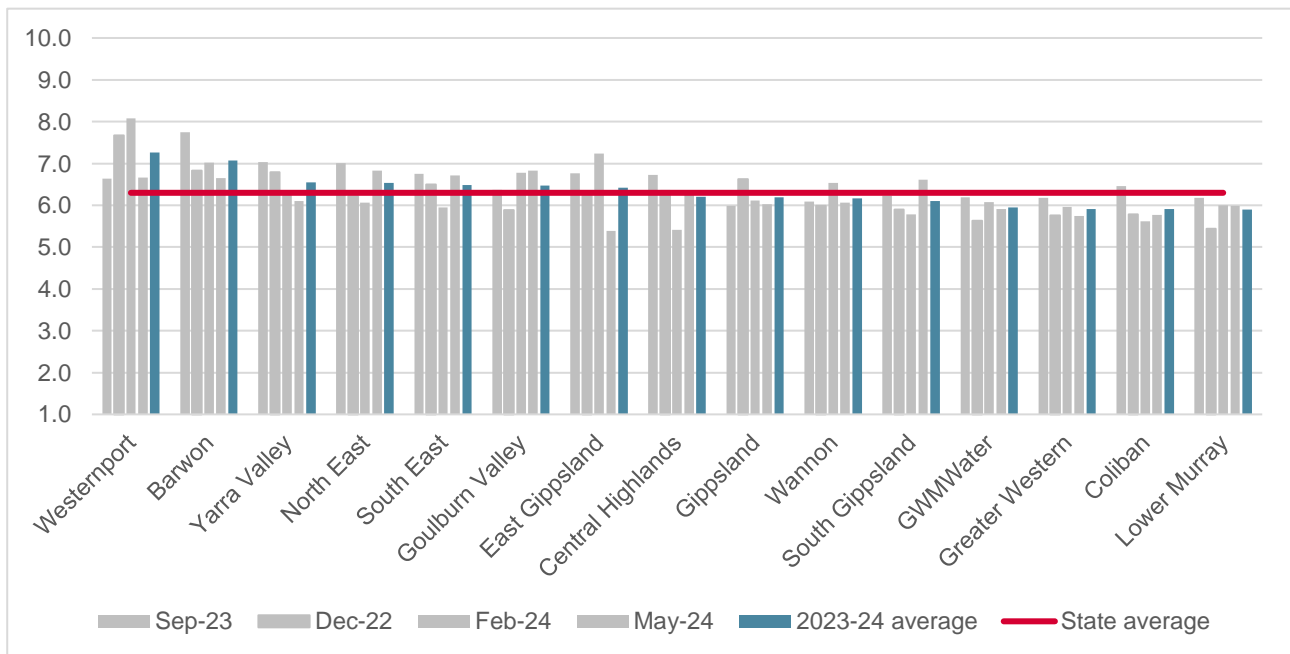


Figure 2.3 How customers rated their water business for level of trust



How water businesses respond to their customers

Figure 2.4 How customers rated their water business on reputation in the community

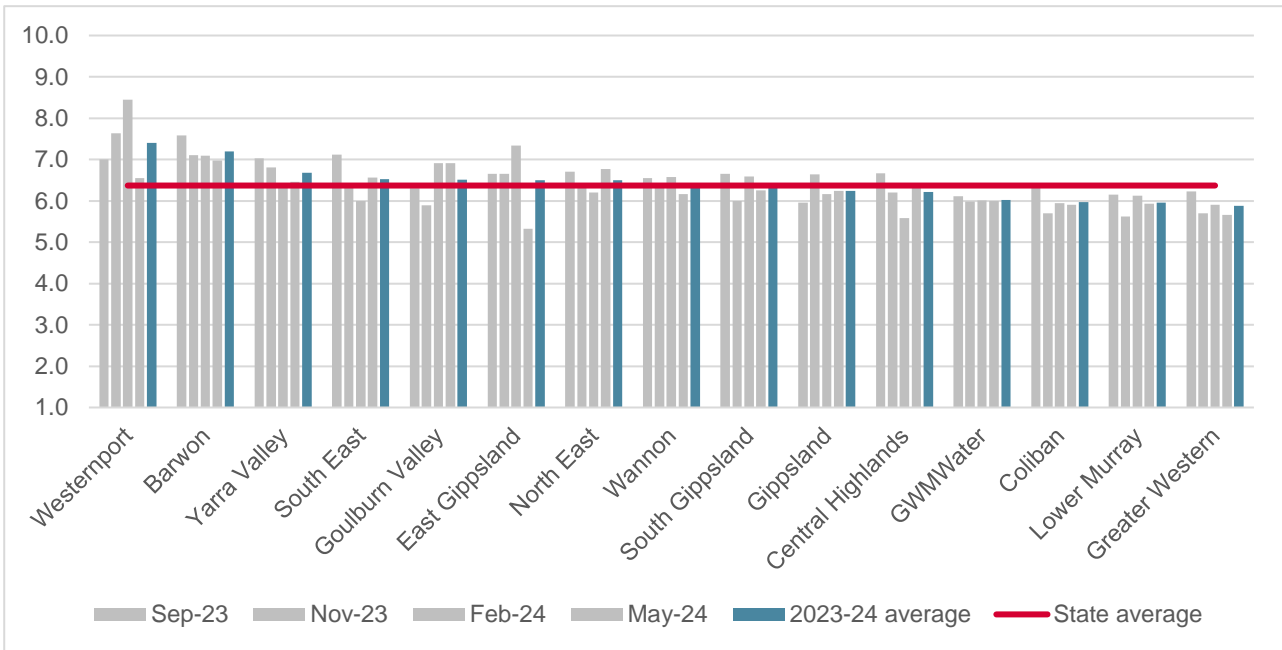
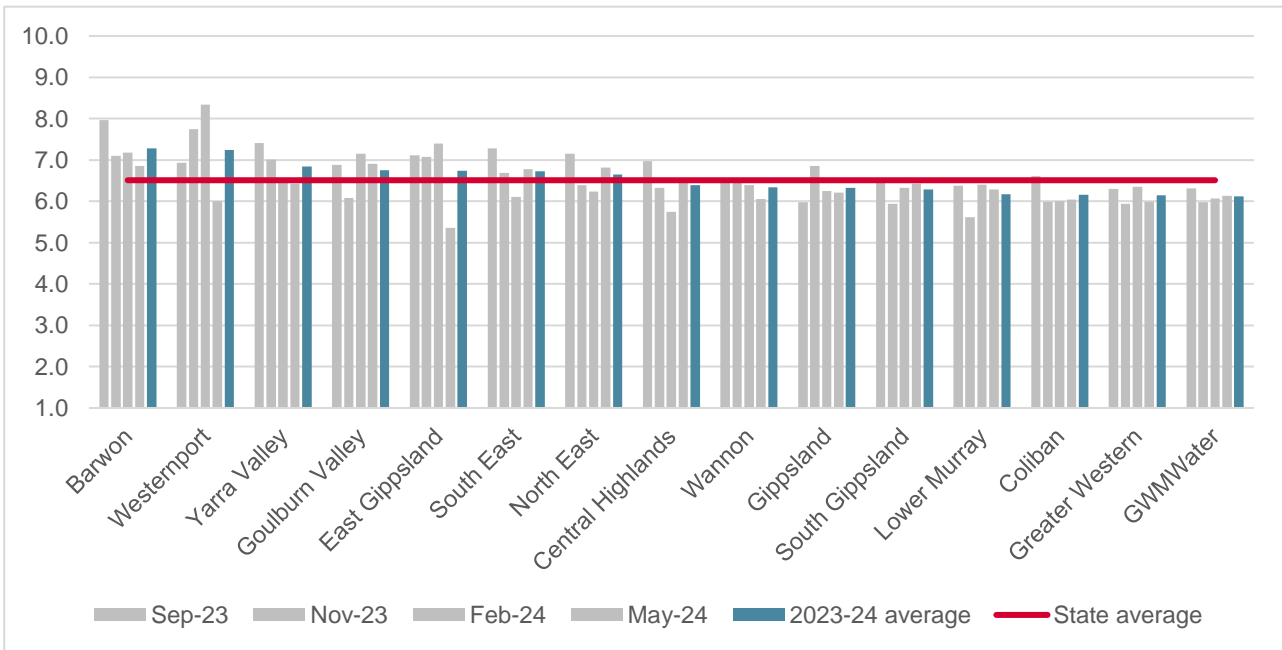


Figure 2.5 How customers rated their water business for overall satisfaction



Key observations

- Like the Customer Service Benchmarking Australia findings on call centre customer experience, scores across all areas surveyed were down in 2023-24 compared to last year. Level of trust experienced the largest decrease, from 6.44 in 2022-23 to 6.30 in 2023-24.
- Scores continue to vary only slightly from business to business. Similar to previous years, in 2023-24 the highest rated business and lowest rated business in each of the areas surveyed differed by approximately one rating point.
- Customers rated Barwon Water and Westernport Water as the two highest performers in the state, ranking in the top two in all four areas surveyed. They were the only businesses to achieve scores of 7 or higher in all areas except value for money.
- Customers rated Lower Murray Water in the bottom two in all categories except overall satisfaction. However, their scores in all areas vary only slightly from other similar performers.

2.3. Water business customer service

We asked Customer Service Benchmarking Australia (CSBA) to independently benchmark the call centre performance of Victorian water businesses. Posing as genuine customers with general enquiries, trained CSBA mystery shoppers contacted each of the water businesses' call centre agents on 60 occasions via the account line (as opposed to the fault line) and scored each interaction.

Customer Service Benchmarking Australia uses a proprietary approach called SenseCX for scoring the key aspects of the customer experience during a telephone call.

The key aspects are described as: **engage**, **introduce**, **clarify**, **resolve**, and **close**. The scoring approach measures performance in these key aspects across the following three areas:

- **Ease** – the effort the customer must expend to accomplish their goals. The interaction must be easy. The agent should actively guide the customer through a clear process towards resolution.
- **Sentiment** – how the experience and interaction make the customer feel. Customers want to be treated as an individual, not just another transaction in the agent's day.
- **Success** – the degree to which the customer is able to accomplish their goals. Customers want to get what they came for and move on. They need to be understood and provided with a no-fuss resolution.

The SenseCX approach provides a benchmark comparative score, and helps businesses identify specific areas where they can improve the customer experience. Points are allocated for meeting specific criteria across the three areas. The score is simply the percentage of total points achieved out of the total points available for each area.

Overall, the Victorian water sector performed better than all other Australian sectors measured by CSBA. Despite still performing above other sectors, it saw a drop in performance in 2023-24, with a score of 54 per cent, two percentage points lower than in 2022-23. In 2022-23, CSBA updated specific measures within the framework to address changing customer expectations, resulting in a decline in scores across the sector. While other sectors have caught up, the water sector is still lagging in its recovery compared to others.

CSBA also provides aggregate SenseCX scores from other industry sectors for comparison with the water sector. Table 2.1 outlines the median scores for each of the sectors in 2023-24, which all fall within a six-percentage point range.

Table 2.2 provides the overall average score for each water business, along with average scores for each of the three pillars: ease, sentiment and success.

Table 2.1 Victorian metropolitan and regional water sectors compared to other Australian sectors in 2023–24 (median score under SenseCX)

Sector	Median score (per cent)
Victorian Regional Water Sector	54
Victorian Metropolitan Water Sector	53
Education	53
Australian Water Sector	53
All Utilities	50
Government	49
Automotive	48
Commercial	48
Financial Services	48

Source: Customer Service Benchmarking Australia

Table 2.2 Water businesses' overall benchmark scores and scores for each area under SenseCX (per cent)

Water business	Score	Ease	Sentiment	Success
Barwon Water	65	57	74	65
Coliban Water	57	43	68	61
GWM Water	55	39	67	58
South East Water	54	40	66	57
South Gippsland Water	54	38	65	59
Wannon Water	54	35	64	61
Yarra Valley Water	53	35	63	59
Central Highlands Water	53	41	66	54
Westernport Water	52	33	65	59
Greater Western Water	52	35	62	60
East Gippsland Water	52	33	61	59
Goulburn Valley Water	52	33	63	59
North East Water	51	32	62	57
Gippsland Water	51	33	64	56
Lower Murray Water	51	34	62	55
Victorian Water Sector (average)	54	37	65	59

Source: Customer Service Benchmarking Australia

Key observations

- The Victorian water sector overall score and scores for each of the three areas – ease, sentiment, and success – all dropped slightly compared to the previous year.
- The overall sector score dropped by two percentage points to 54 per cent. The areas of ease and sentiment both dropped by one percentage point to 37 per cent and 65 per cent respectively. The decline in ease and sentiment scores suggests customers had a harder

How water businesses respond to their customers

time navigating water business process to get to a resolution and the service was slightly less personable.

- Success scores saw the biggest decline and dropped six percentage points to 59 per cent. This regression indicates fewer customers had their problems resolved, at least at the first point of contact.
- Ease continues to be the lowest scoring area for all water businesses with a sector average score of 37 per cent, well below the sector average scores for sentiment at 65 per cent and success at 59 per cent. This indicates helping customers stay informed and increasing transparency to guide them to a resolution continues to be an area for improvement for most water businesses. CSBA does note that challenges in this area are reflective of the broader customer service industry.
- Coliban Water, South Gippsland Water, Gippsland Water, Central Highlands Water, Goulburn Valley Water, and Wannon Water were the only businesses to see an improvement in their ease score compared to last year, while all other businesses saw a drop in this area.
- Central Highlands Water, Gippsland Water and North East Water saw an improvement in their sentiment score this year compared to last year.
- South Gippsland Water was the only business whose success and overall scores did not decline.

Want more information?

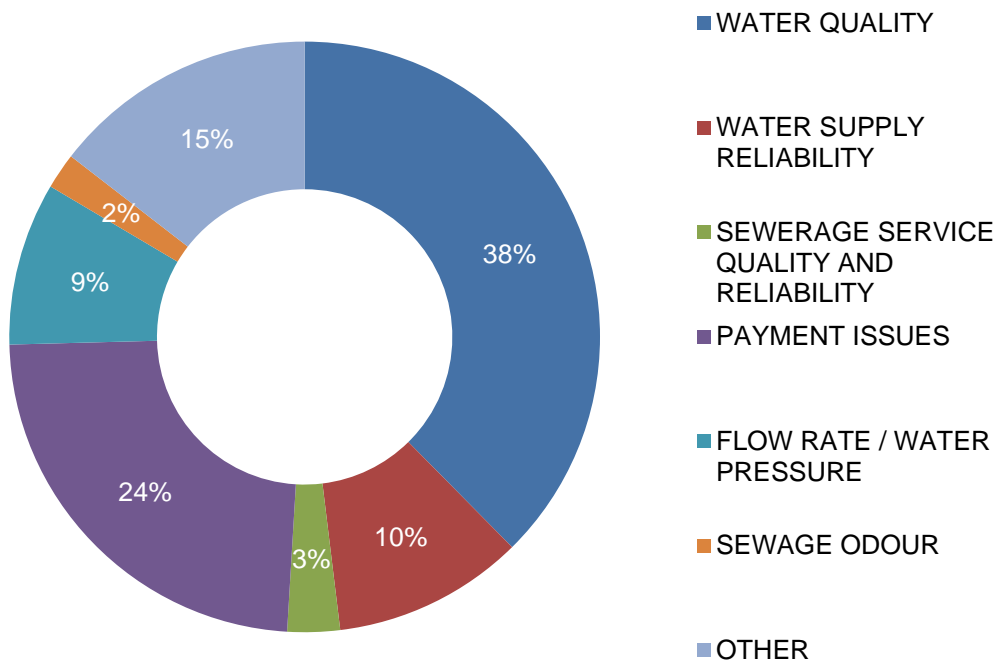
See our [data summary](#) which contains the data that forms the basis for our tables and charts.

2.4. Complaints made to water businesses

Customer complaints can indicate dissatisfaction with the services provided by water businesses.⁷ If a business cannot resolve a complaint directly with the customer, the customer may refer the matter to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) for further investigation. Figure 2.6 shows the breakdown of total complaints made to water businesses in 2023-24 according to several categories, and sizes each category according to its relative share of complaints.

⁷ A complaint is recorded if a customer registers dissatisfaction in a complaint category. Australian Standards define a complaint as an 'expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or handling of a complaint where a response is implicitly expected or legally required.' (AS/NZS 10002:2014) Under our reporting definitions, any customer query related to water quality must be recorded as a water quality complaint.

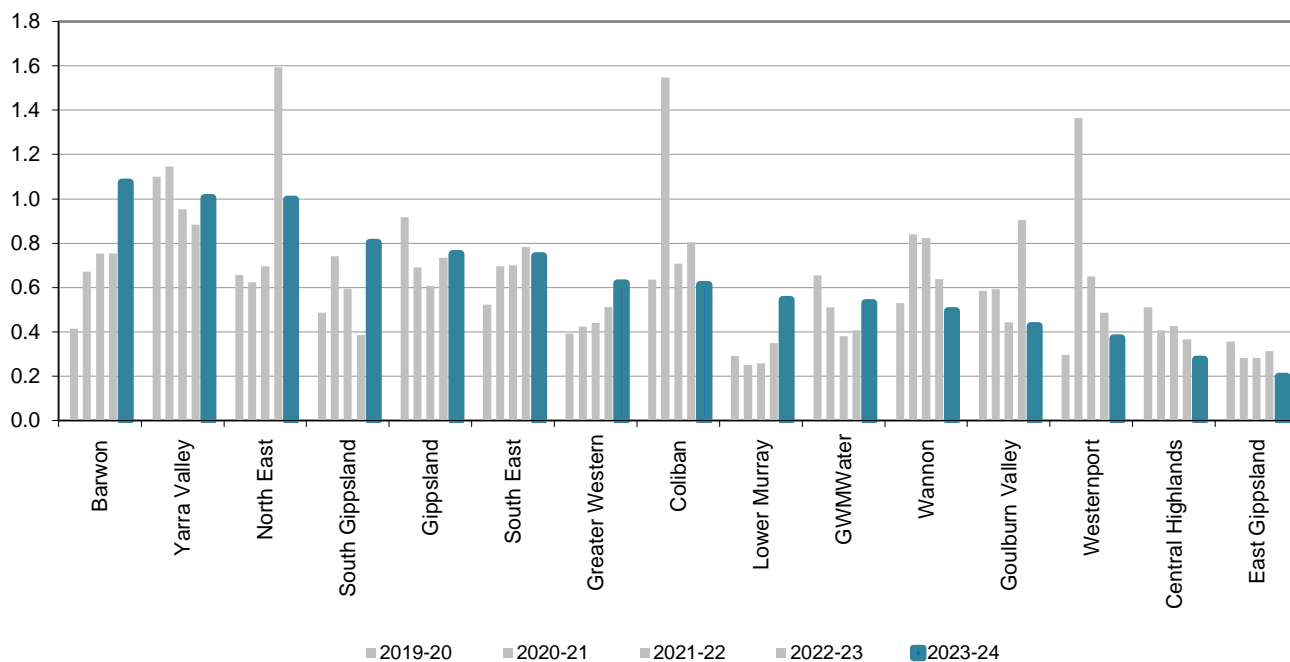
Figure 2.6 Complaints by category in 2023-24 (total complaints made to water businesses)



Water businesses reported a total of 24,050 customer complaints across Victoria in 2023-24. This is a seven per cent increase from 22,445 total complaints in 2022-23. Water quality complaints continue to represent the largest proportion at 38 per cent of the total statewide complaints, which is 1 percentage point higher than in 2022-23. In contrast, the proportion of complaints related to flow rate or water pressure decreased by two percentage points from 11 per cent in 2022-23 to 9 per cent in 2023-24.

Water quality complaints remain the most common complaint for all water businesses except Barwon Water and Central Highlands Water. Barwon Water received more complaints about issues classified as ‘other’ and Central Highlands Water received more complaints about water pressure/flow rate issues. Figure 2.7 shows the complaint rate for each water business per 100 customers.

Figure 2.7 Complaints made to water businesses (per 100 customers)



Snapshot - total complaints, per 100 customers

Statewide average		5.3%	Metro average		7.9%	Regional average		-3.7%
2023-24	0.78	↑	2023-24	0.81	↑	2023-24	0.69	↓
2022-23	0.74		2022-23	0.75		2022-23	0.72	

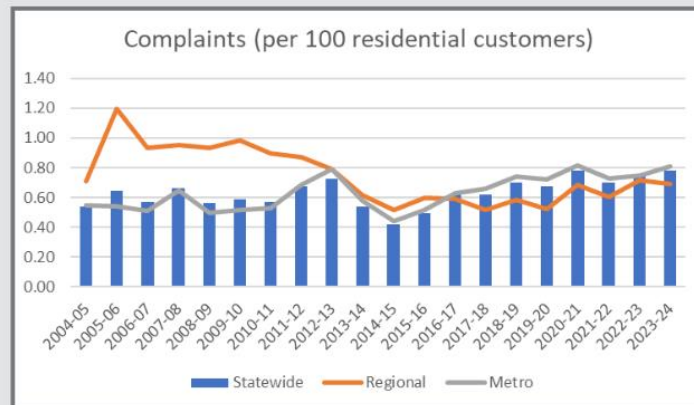
Key observations

- The average customer complaint rate increased in 2023-24 to 0.78 complaints per 100 customers, compared to 0.74 complaints per 100 customers in 2022-23.
- The increase in the statewide complaint rate is driven by the large increase for metropolitan water businesses. The metropolitan complaint rate increased to 0.81 from 0.75 complaints per 100 customers while the regional complaint rate fell to 0.69 from 0.72 complaints per 100 customers. The increase in metropolitan Melbourne was driven by increases in the complaint rates of Greater Western Water and Yarra Valley Water. The main drivers of these increases are issues related to billing and payments, water quality, and water supply reliability.
- Barwon Water reported the highest complaint rate with 1.07 complaints made per 100 customers, while South Gippsland Water had the largest increase in its complaint rate, increasing by 0.42 from 0.38 complaints per 100 customers in 2022-23. Barwon Water’s increase was primarily driven by complaints regarding billing and payment issues, as well

as water pressure and flow rate issues. It noted that complaints about payment issues are related to a lack of flexibility in how water usage is charged.

- Goulburn Valley Water reported the largest decrease in its complaint rate following a spike last year, decreasing from 0.90 in 2022-23 to 0.43 in 2023-24.
- East Gippsland Water continues to report the lowest complaints rate, at 0.2 complaints per 100 customers.

Complaints made to water businesses

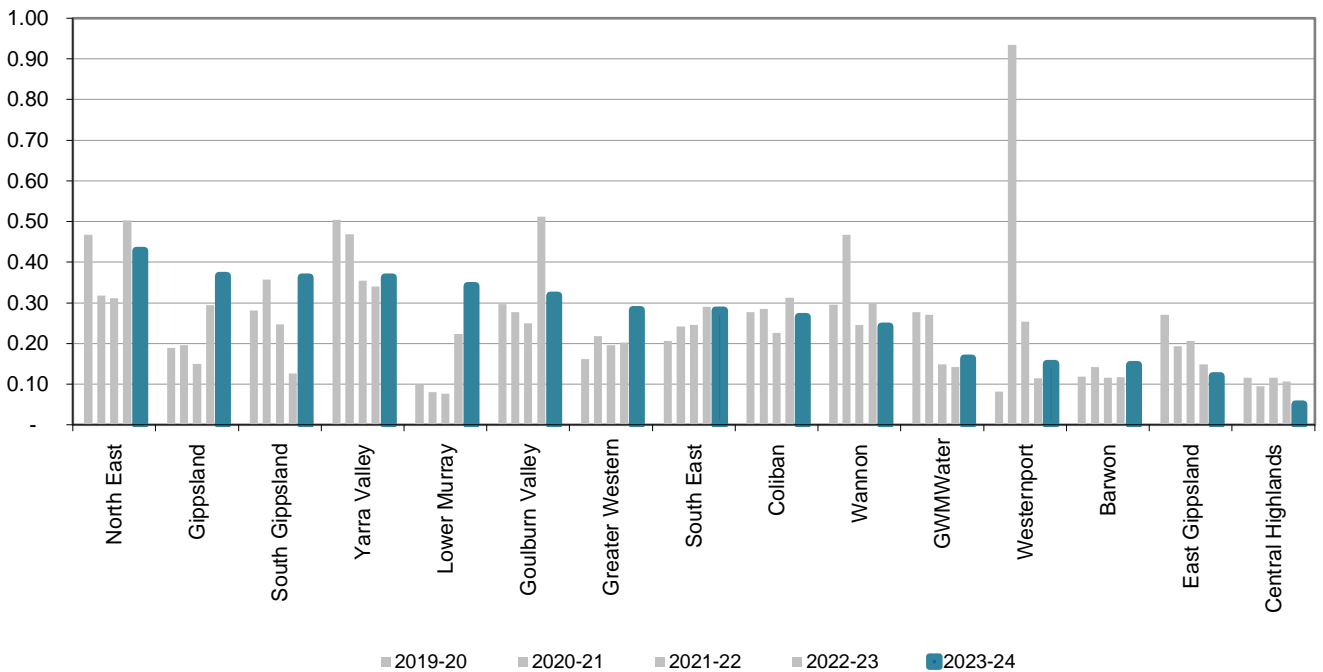


The rate of complaints made to water businesses has varied year on year in Victoria. The regional complaint rate has come down from a peak in 2005-6 to below the metropolitan rate. In recent years both the metropolitan and regional complaints rates have trended slightly up.

2.5. Water quality complaints made to water businesses

The number of water quality complaints is a measure of customer satisfaction with the colour, taste and odour of water supplied. Figure 2.8 shows the number of water quality complaints received by each water business per 100 customers across five years.

Figure 2.8 Water quality complaints made to water businesses (per 100 customers)



Snapshot - water quality complaints, per 100 customers

Statewide average		6.6%	Metro average		9.3%	Regional average		-3.9%
2023-24	0.29	↑	2023-24	0.31	↑	2023-24	0.23	↓
2022-23	0.28		2022-23	0.29		2022-23	0.24	

Key observations

- A total of 9,044 water quality complaints were made to water businesses across the state in 2023-24, an increase of 707 (8.4 per cent) from 2022-23. This equates to 0.29 complaints per 100 customers, a slight increase on last year’s complaint rate of 0.28.
- In metropolitan Melbourne, water quality complaints per 100 customers increased from 0.29 in 2022-23 to 0.31 in 2023-24. This increase was mostly driven by two major water main bursts that Greater Western Water experienced. These bursts temporarily increased the amount of sediment in the water delivered to customers. South East Water was the only

metropolitan business to report a decrease in its water quality complaint rate, decreasing from 0.29 per 100 customers in 2022-23 to 0.28 per 100 customers in 2023-24.

- The water quality complaint rate in regional Victoria decreased slightly from 0.24 per 100 customers in 2022-23 to 0.23 per 100 customers in 2023-24.
- North East Water reported the highest water quality complaint rate with 0.43 complaints per 100 customers. This is despite reporting a lower complaint rate than it had in 2022-23, where it reported 0.50 complaints per 100 customers. South Gippsland Water reported the largest increase in water quality complaints, increasing from 0.13 in 2022-23 to 0.36 in 2023-24. This increase is largely due to a rise in complaints about water colour, mostly driven by mains breaks in Leongatha. South Gippsland Water's mains renewal program commenced a mains renewal program in 2023-24, which has recently been completed.
- East Gippsland Water and Central Highlands Water reported the lowest water quality complaint rates, with 0.12 complaints per 100 customers and 0.05 complaints per 100 customers respectively. East Gippsland Water attributed this to its ongoing commitment to reliable services and timely notifications of outages.

3. Water and sewer network reliability

This chapter looks at reliability of the water and sewer networks. It explores how often customers are without a water supply and how often sewer blockages and spills impact customers. Our measures only consider the pipe network and pumps under the control of the water businesses and exclude the private property connections managed by customers.

3.1. 2023-24 at a glance

Water networks were less reliable, as shown by the increase in average customer minutes off supply for metropolitan Melbourne.

Sewer service reliability increased across the state, with a decline in sewer blockages and spills.

3.2. Water service – minutes off supply

‘Minutes off supply’ is a measure of how many minutes on average a customer for each water business was without their water supply during a year. This measure only looks at interruptions to water mains and excludes smaller ancillary pipelines or private connections.

Various factors affect average minutes off supply, including the:

- number of interruptions
- duration of each interruption
- number of customers affected by each interruption.

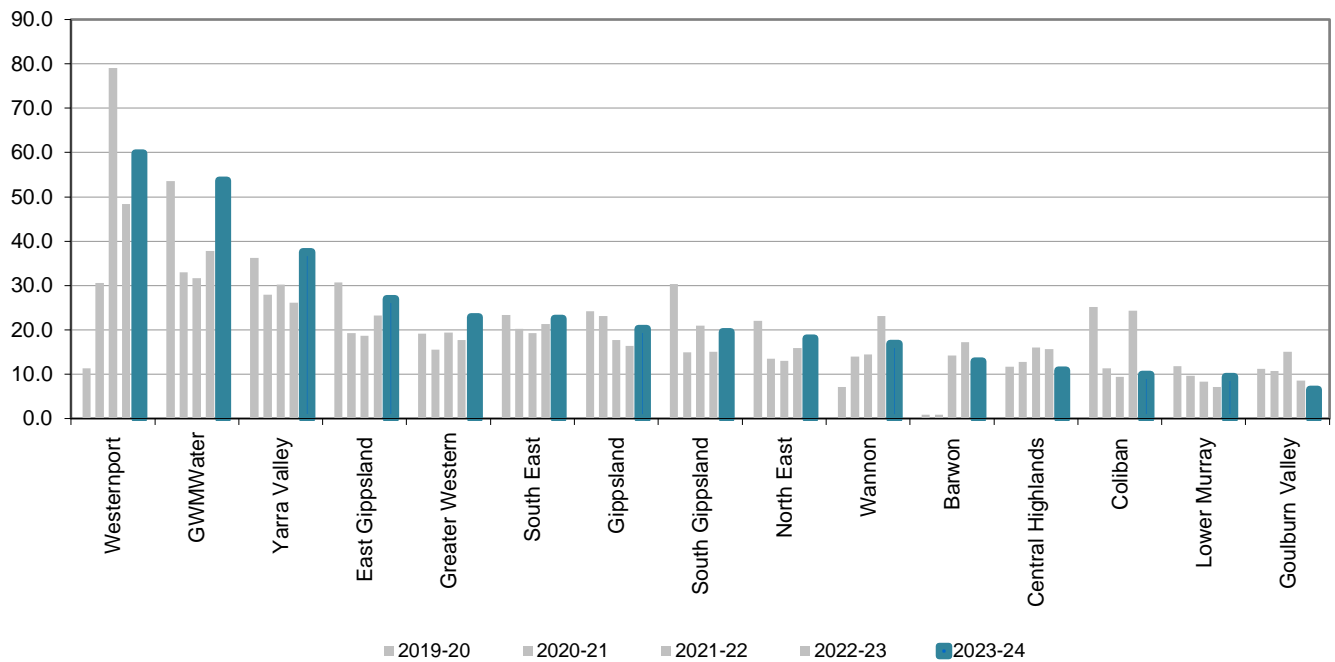
Whether interruptions are planned or unplanned also gives insight into the stability and reliability of the network. Figure 3.1 shows the average time in minutes a customer had their water supply interrupted for each water business across the last five years.

Types of interruptions – planned and unplanned

A planned interruption occurs when a customer has received at least two days’ notice of an interruption to their water service. An unplanned interruption occurs when this notice was not given, or the duration of a planned interruption exceeded the time estimated.

The duration of supply interruptions can be greatly affected by factors including the size and location of the pipeline, access to the worksite, the availability of work crews to attend, and the nature of the repair required.

Figure 3.1 Average minutes off water supply per customer



Snapshot - average customer minutes off supply

Statewide average		20.2%	Metro average		27.8%	Regional average		-9.8%
2023-24	26	↑	2023-24	28	↑	2023-24	17	↓
2022-23	21		2022-23	22		2022-23	19	

Key observations

- Across Victoria, the average customer minutes off supply increased by 20.2 per cent from 21 minutes in 2022-23 to 26 minutes in 2023-24.
- In Melbourne, the average customer minutes off supply increased by 27.8 per cent from 22 minutes to 28 minutes, driven mainly by an increase in Yarra Valley Water’s planned minutes off supply and increase in Greater Western Water’s unplanned minutes off supply. Yarra Valley Water attributed most of its increase to a range of maintenance works on its water and sewerage network, while Greater Western Water cited a number of complex water main bursts that took an extended time to repair. Both businesses highlighted that the hot and dry weather that was typical in 2023-24 tends to increase water main failures.
- Regional Victoria saw a 9.8 per cent decrease in customer minutes off supply, from 19 minutes to 17 minutes.
- Westernport Water reported the highest average customer minutes off supply at 59.8 minutes, increasing from its 2022-23 value of 48.3 minutes. Westernport Water

attributed this increase to a single unplanned water main burst that resulted in interruptions to three localities for an extended period of time.

- Goulburn Valley Water had the lowest average customer minutes off supply at 6.5 minutes, achieving a 24 per cent reduction in average customer minutes off supply from its 2022-23 value of 8.5 minutes.
- Coliban Water decreased its average customer minutes off supply from 24.4 in 2022-23 to 9.9 minutes in 2023-24. Coliban Water's 2022-23 average customer minutes off supply was abnormally high due to a significant water main burst in April 2023 in Kyneton, so its 2023-24 performance is a return to the norm.

3.3. Sewerage service – sewer blockages

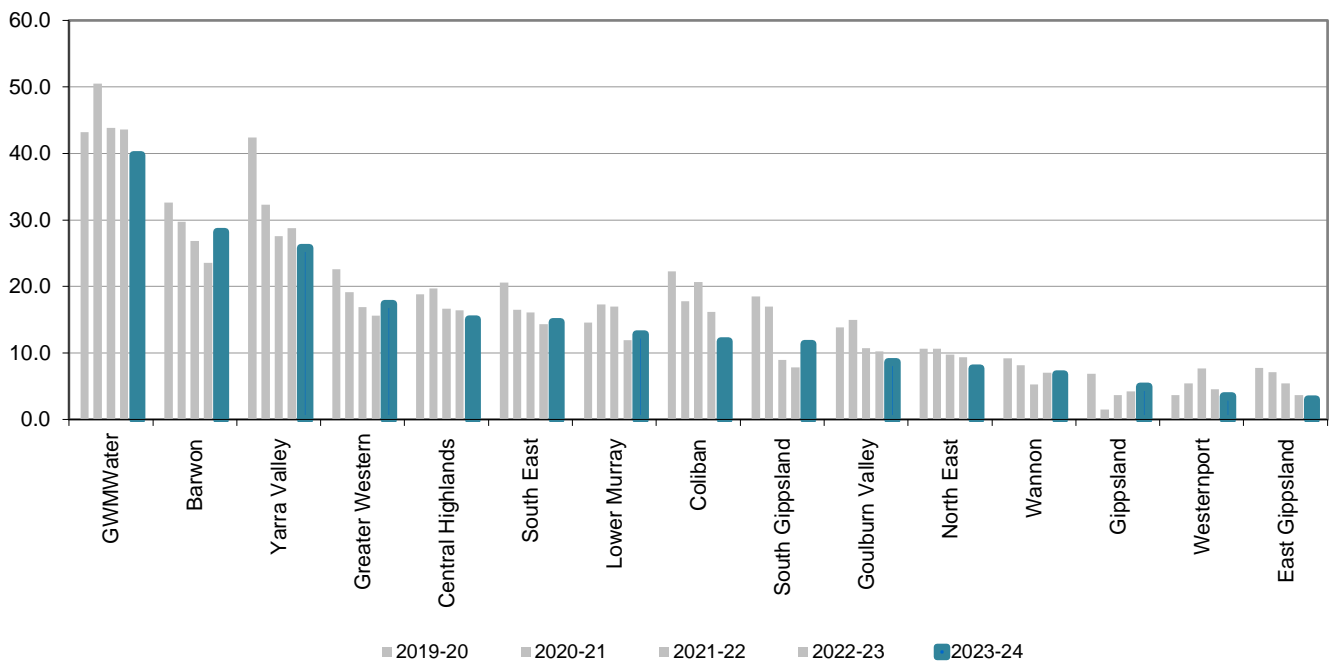
Sewer networks consist of:

- trunk and reticulation mains (core infrastructure involving large pipes and pumps to transfer sewage to treatment facilities)
- house connection branches and property drains (ancillary smaller infrastructure that transfers sewage from customers to the sewer mains)
- private connections from customers to connection branches or property drains (faults in these are the responsibility of customers).

Figure 3.2 shows the number of sewer blockages reported per 100 kilometres of sewer main for each water business across the last five years.

A sewer blockage is a partial or total obstruction of a sewer main that impedes sewage flow. It does not include blockages in the ancillary infrastructure or private connections.

Figure 3.2 Sewer blockages per 100 kilometres of sewer main



Snapshot - sewer blockages per 100 kilometres of sewer main

Statewide average		-2.4%	Metro average		-2.9%	Regional average		-1.1%
2023-24	17.6	↓	2023-24	19.6	↓	2023-24	14.1	↓
2022-23	18.0		2022-23	20.2		2022-23	14.3	

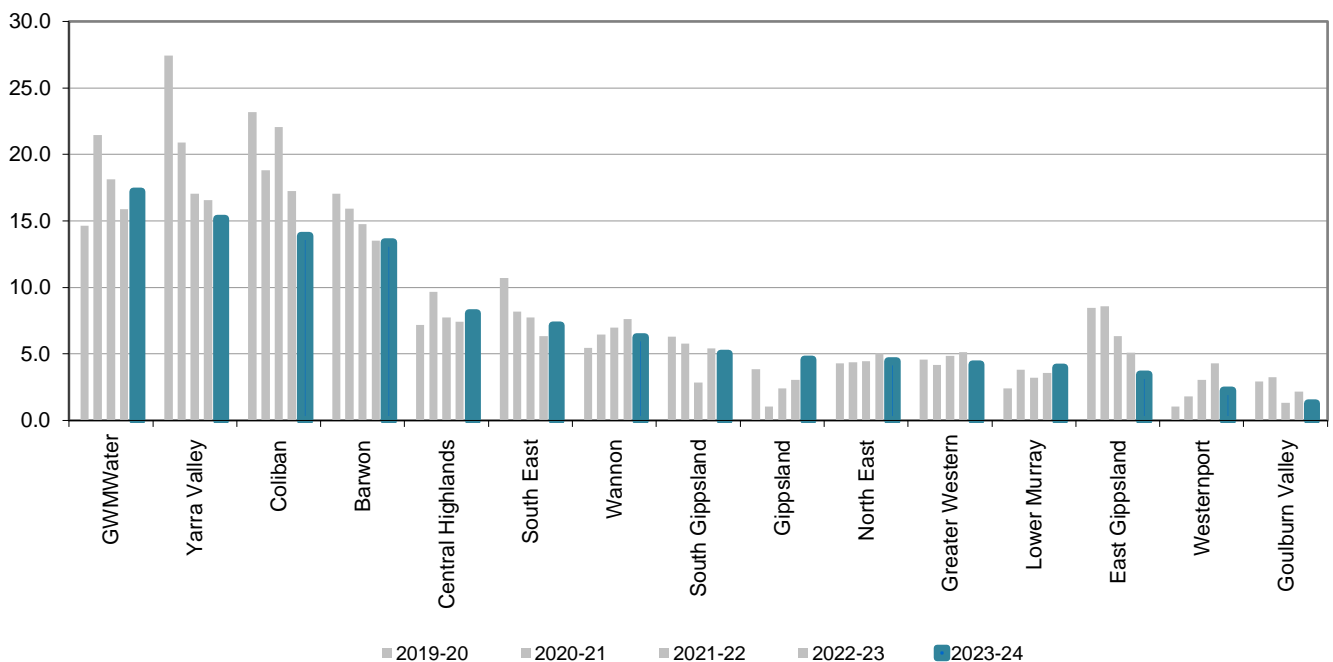
Key observations

- The rate of sewer blockages has decreased, falling 2.4 per cent from 18 in 2022-23 to 17.6 in 2023-24. (This has been the case since 2019-20.)
- Metropolitan Melbourne saw a 2.9 per cent decrease, with just under 20 blockages on average per 100 kilometres of sewer main. Of the three metropolitan businesses, Yarra Valley Water was the only one to report lower sewer blockage rates in 2023-24. Greater Western Water and South East Water reported increases of 11 per cent and 2 per cent respectively.
- In regional Victoria, the blockage rate slightly decreased from 14.3 sewer blockages per 100 kilometres of sewer main in 2022-23 to 14.1 in 2023-24.
- GWMWater continues to report the highest rate of sewer blockages across the state with 40 blockages per 100 kilometres of sewer main despite a 9 per cent decrease this year. It has reported the highest rate each year since 2016-17.
- East Gippsland Water and Westernport Water reported the lowest sewer blockage rates with 3 and 4 blockages per 100 kilometres of sewer main respectively in 2023-24.




3.4. Sewerage service – containment of sewer spills

Spills are a failure to contain sewage within the core sewer infrastructure. Figure 3.3 shows the number of sewer spills reported per 100 kilometres of sewer main for each water business across the last five years.

Figure 3.3 Sewer spills per 100 kilometres of sewer main



Snapshot - sewer spills per 100 kilometres of sewer main

Statewide average		-5.2%	Metro average		-4.8%	Regional average		-6.0%
2023-24	9.0		2023-24	9.5		2023-24	8.2	
2022-23	9.5		2022-23	9.9		2022-23	8.7	

Key observations

- The statewide average sewer spill rate decreased by 5.2 per cent. There were 9.5 sewer spills per 100 kilometres of sewer main in 2022-23, compared to 9 spills per 100 kilometres in 2023-24.
- Of the fifteen water businesses across the state, ten reported a decrease in sewer spill rates, three more than last year.
- Westernport Water has reported the largest decrease in sewer spill rate, from 4 spills per 100 kilometres of sewer main in 2022-23 to 2 spills in 2023-24, equal to a 48 per cent reduction.
- Goulburn Valley Water continues to report the lowest sewer spill rate, with 1 sewer spill per 100 kilometres of sewer main in 2023-24 and an average of 2 over the last five years.

Containing spills within five hours

- Five businesses (Barwon Water, Central Highlands Water, East Gippsland Water, GWMWater and Westernport Water) contained 100 per cent of sewer spills within five hours in 2023-24. This is two businesses more than the previous year.
- Three businesses (Yarra Valley Water, Coliban Water and Greater Western Water) contained close to 100 per cent of spills within five hours, containing 99.7, 99.7 and 99.6 per cent within five hours respectively.
- The percentage of spills contained within five hours for the remaining seven businesses were:
 - Gippsland Water: 98.8 per cent, up from 98.2 per cent in 2022-23.
 - South East Water: 98.4 per cent, down from 99.1 per cent in 2022-23.
 - Lower Murray Water: 96.4 per cent, down from 100 per cent in 2022-23.
 - South Gippsland Water: 96.3 per cent, down from 100 per cent in 2022-23.
 - Wannon Water: 90.5 per cent, down from 97.4 per cent in 2022-23.
 - North East Water: 79.7 per cent, down from 81.8 per cent in 2022-23.
 - Goulburn Valley Water Water: 72.2 per cent, down from 90 per cent in 2022-23.

4. How much water is recycled

4.1. Recycled water – effluent treatment and reuse

Wastewater is:

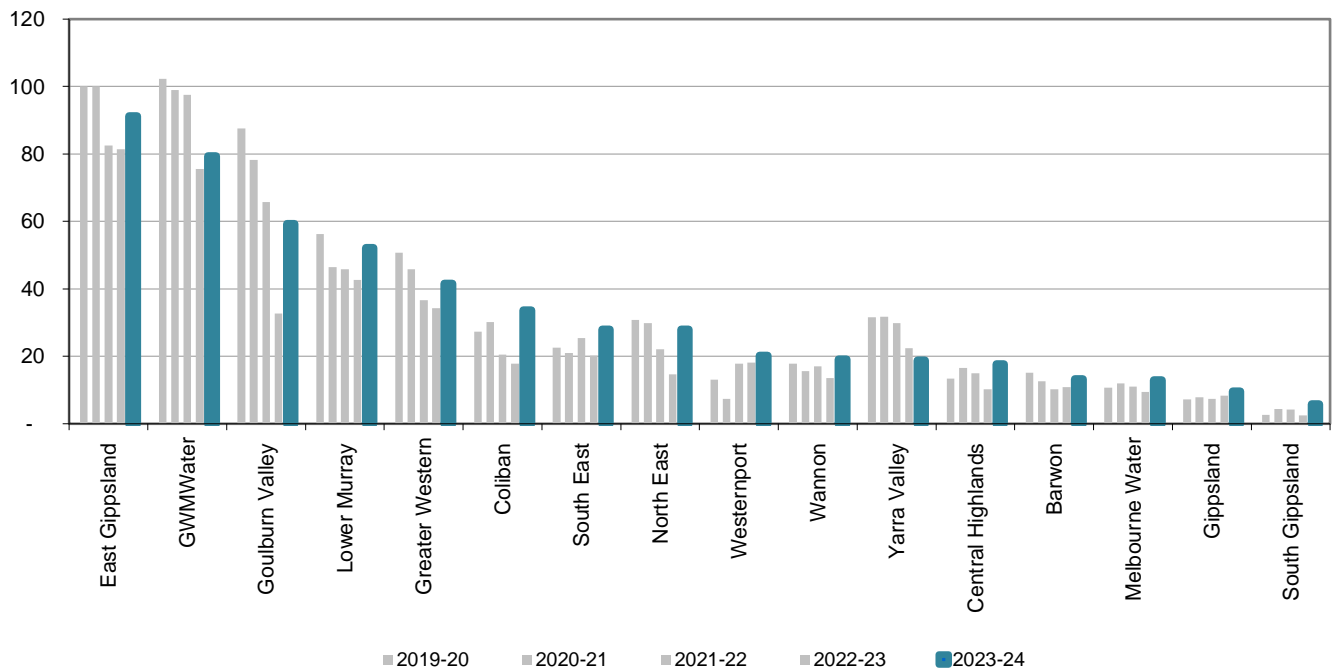
- residential and non-residential sewage
- trade waste from commercial and industrial customers
- and stormwater that reaches the sewer network.

The wastewater treatment plants produce an effluent stream. This stream is normally discharged to the environment if it is unused or not recycled.




Recycled water is generally used on turf farms, dairy farms and recreational lands (such as parks and golf courses). It is also used in some industrial processes and for irrigation. Some businesses operate ‘third pipe’ recycled water supply systems to their customers, for non-potable uses such as watering the garden and flushing the toilet. Recycled water can also be used for beneficial environmental outcomes, such as maintaining wetlands.

Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of water recycled as a percentage of the volume of effluent produced by each water business across the last five years.

Figure 4.1 Recycled water used as a percentage of effluent volume produced



Snapshot - proportion of effluent reused: per cent and change from previous year:
percentage point

State Average		4.6	Metro Average		3.6	Regional Average		7.8
2023-24	18		2023-24	15		2023-24	26	
2022-23	13		2022-23	11		2022-23	18	

Key observations

- Statewide effluent production decreased by seven per cent in 2023-24, from 573,681 megalitres in 2022-23 to 535,187 megalitres in 2023-24.
- Eighteen per cent (93,744 megalitres) of the effluent produced was reused as recycled water. This compares to 74,364 megalitres of effluent reused as recycled water in 2022-23, or 13 per cent of that year’s total amount of effluent produced.
- Most businesses reused significantly less than 50 per cent of the effluent they produced. Despite this, statewide effluent reuse increased by 4.6 per cent due to a drier than average year, where there is less availability of excess water from rainfall.
- Four businesses – East Gippsland Water, GWMWater, Goulburn Valley Water and Lower Murray Water – reused over 50 percent of the effluent produced in 2023-24, two more than last year.
- Yarra Valley Water was the only business to report a reduction in percentage reused, down by 16 per cent. Yarra Valley Water attributed the reduction to both its Aurora and Bushy Creek Recycled Water Treatment Plants going offline for upgrades in the first quarter of 2023.
- South Gippsland Water continues to report the lowest proportion of recycled water usage. In 2023-24 it reused six per cent of the effluent it produced, three percentage points higher than in 2022-23.



Essential Services Commission

Level 8, 570 Bourke Street

Melbourne Victoria VIC 3000


ABN: 71 165 498 668

Phone: (+61 3) 9032 1300 or 1300 664 969

Fax: (+61 3) 9032 1303

Email: reception@esc.vic.gov.au

Website: www.esc.vic.gov.au

 Business hours: Monday to Friday from 8.45am to 5pm

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