

Local Government and Water
Essential Services Commission
via email water@esc.vic.gov.au

Response to Essential Services Commission on Issues Paper (June 2010) Developing a hardship related guaranteed service level measure

Westernport Water (in conjunction with our Customer Consultative Panel) regularly reviews our hardship program to ensure we offer the best possible outcome to our customers who experience difficulty in paying their account.

We support the proposal by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) to introduce a guaranteed service level (GSL) measure for hardship customers.

This response provides our comments on the questions posed by the ESC in their June 2010 Issues Paper.¹

Increase in threshold limit before legal action / restriction process can commence

We support the ESC's proposed amendment to the customer service code to increase the threshold to \$200.

Reasonable endeavours to contact a customer

The ESC has proposed the introduction of a checklist for minimum "reasonable endeavours"² to be used for assessment against a GSL payment. Westernport Water currently undertakes the first three steps outlined in the table and also undertakes further attempts (letters / phone calls) to contact our customers prior to taking any legal / restriction activity. We support the additional requirements of two phone attempts or registered letter as proposed in Step 4.

However, Westernport Water would like it noted that 60% of our customer base are non-permanent residents and therefore the new Step 5 (Attempt at personal contact by personal visit with a customer) is not practical for all our customers. We will certainly attempt to make a personal visit contact with all our permanent residents but we are unable to support a mandated personal contact visit for all customers.

¹ Issues Paper, Developing a Hardship Related Guarantee Service Level Measure, June 2010

² Table 1, Page 9, Issues Paper, Developing a Hardship Related Guarantee Service Level Measure, June 2010

The proposed GSL

We support the proposed GSL measure and believe that the use of the checklist will provide an objective and auditable process.

Coverage and timing issues

We support the coverage and timing of the proposed GSL as this provides us with the time to ensure we are fully resourced to manage any additional workload as a result of the additional contact regime.

We would also like to be informed by the ESC and our colleagues (especially other regional corporations) as to the results of the 2010 implementation.

Payment amount for breach of GSL

We support the ESC's proposed fixed payment of \$300 and also welcome the Commission's resolution that the payment can be used to credit a customer's account.