

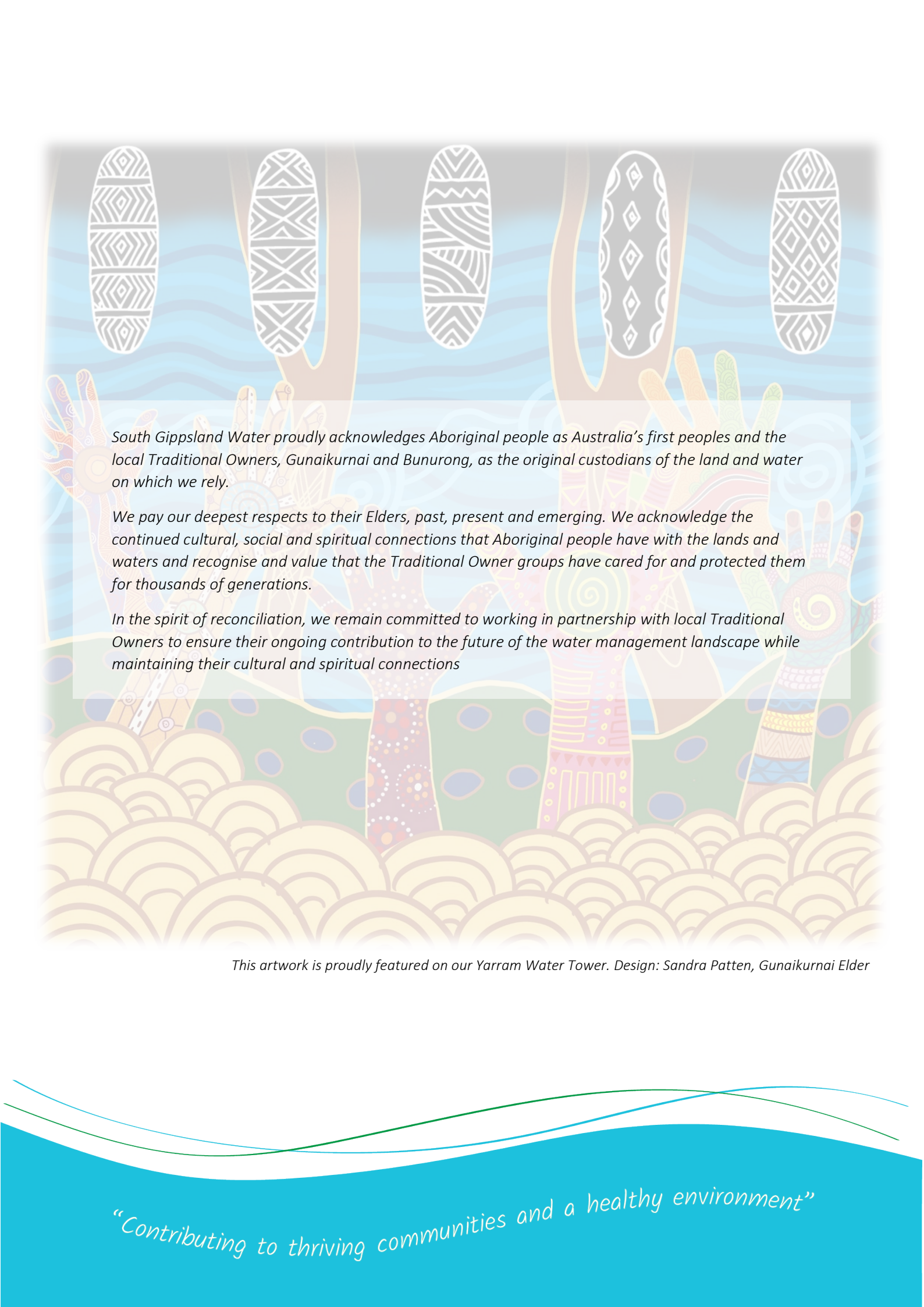


CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

South Gippsland Water

Effective from March 2023

"Contributing to thriving communities and a healthy environment"



South Gippsland Water proudly acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and the local Traditional Owners, Gunaikurnai and Bunurong, as the original custodians of the land and water on which we rely.

We pay our deepest respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the continued cultural, social and spiritual connections that Aboriginal people have with the lands and waters and recognise and value that the Traditional Owner groups have cared for and protected them for thousands of generations.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we remain committed to working in partnership with local Traditional Owners to ensure their ongoing contribution to the future of the water management landscape while maintaining their cultural and spiritual connections

This artwork is proudly featured on our Yarram Water Tower. Design: Sandra Patten, Gunaikurnai Elder

"Contributing to thriving communities and a healthy environment"

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“Contributing to thriving communities and a healthy environment”

1. INTRODUCTION

If you've recently moved to the region - welcome! We're passionate about providing quality services that contribute to thriving communities and a healthy environment for customers across our region. South Gippsland Water supplies water, sewerage and trade waste services, and where available, recycled water services to customers in large parts of South Gippsland Shire, Bass Coast Shire and a very small area of Wellington Shire Council.

1.1 SOUTH GIPPSLAND WATER AS A REGION

South Gippsland Water provides reticulated drinking water and wastewater services to 21 towns over 4,000 square kilometres.

Our service area is well known for its coastal destinations such as Inverloch, Cape Paterson, Venus Bay, Sandy Point and Port Albert. The region also has two internationally recognised National Parks: Wilson's Promontory and Tarra Bulga.

Dairy farming is the major industry in the region together with a range of other agricultural activities including beef, lamb, wine, cheese and vegetable production.

Based on our vision, mission, core values and functions, South Gippsland Water is a proactive service provider. We aim to contribute to economic development and provide environmentally sustainable water and wastewater services, in a way that benefits our customers and the wider community of the South Gippsland Region.

To find out more about our region, and how we service our customers with wastewater and water services, visit our website sgwater.com.au.

1.2 WE ARE A 'CUSTOMERS FIRST' ORGANISATION

Our customers are more than just someone who pays a bill. Our customers are anyone who lives in, works in or visits our service area. It is our customers who are at the forefront of what we do. Everything we do and every decision we make starts with our customer. South Gippsland Water exists to serve the people of our community and provide reliable water supply and wastewater services, all day, every day for homes, businesses, places and spaces.

We are committed to delivering services that are in line with our customer outcomes

- **Reliability:** We will plan for the future, be reliable and minimise unplanned interruptions to services
- **Customer Integrity:** We will act with honesty, respect and strive to balance affordability, value for money and fairness
- **Environment:** Be environmentally sustainable and adapt to a future impacted by climate variability
- **Water:** Provide safe, clean drinking water
- **Wastewater:** Provide a safe wastewater service that contributes to the liveability of our communities

1.3 ABOUT THE CUSTOMER CHARTER

This Customer Charter became effective on 1 March 2023 and replaces all South Gippsland Water's previous Customer Charters.

Our Customer Charter outlines our commitments, responsibilities and standards of service that we endeavour to provide to you - our customer.

The Customer Charter will also help you if you wish to contact us on any matter related to our services or if you need information or advice from us.

An important aspect of the Customer Charter is that we will be independently measured on how well we are meeting our obligations under this Charter.

This information will be publicly available, on our website [www.sgwater.com.au] so you will know if we are doing what we say we will. The initiatives outlined in our Customer Charter are our commitment that we will work to understand your needs and meet your expectations.

A 3.1 Legislative Basis for the Code *The Essential Services Commission's (ESC) Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service* is made under section 4F of the Water Industry Act 1994, in accordance clause 15 of the Water Industry Regulatory Order 2003. Copies of these and other regulatory documents or industry standards are available on request.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

To ensure that all information within this charter is easily accessible and that you are informed with all relevant information, we have broken this Charter into three sub-sections. These are as follows:

- **Your experience as a customer** – how you can contact us and what you can expect from us. This includes how we can provide you with assistance throughout difficult circumstances (*sections 2 to 7*).
- **Normal service delivery** – the standard of service and procedures when business is operating without any disruptions (*sections 8 to 9*).
- **When things don't go to plan** – what you can expect from us when things go wrong or not as planned. This includes how we will work with you to resolve issues, including on matters on service reliability, non-payments of bills and protecting our resources (*sections 10 to 13*).

YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A CUSTOMER

2. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN YOU AND SOUTH GIPPSLAND WATER

Accessing customer service and keeping up to date

You can phone or email us to find out your account information, payment options, concession entitlements, our customer support programs and information about our policies and procedures as well as the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria.

Get in touch!

Phone (available 24/7): **1300 851 636**

Email: sgwater@sgwater.com.au

Postal Address: PO Box 102, Foster VIC 3960

Fax: 5682 1199

Office Location: 14-18 Pioneer Street, Foster VIC 3960

Interpreter Service

We provide access to an interpreter service and a TTY service for speech and hearing-impaired customers. To access these services please call the numbers below.

Translating and Interpreting Service: 131 450

TTY facility: 1800 555 677

We encourage you to let us know your preferred method of communication and we will attempt to contact you this way, where possible. If you prefer electronic accounts, sign up to our [e-notices](#) platform and all your accounts and newsletters will come via email.

3. COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES

3.1 Making a Complaint or Dispute

Your complaint or dispute is important to us. We are committed to putting our customers first. Your feedback can help us in reviewing our practices and procedures, improving our overall service and customer experience.

Your complaint can be made by contacting our Customer Service Team on **1300 851 636**, who can provide you with a copy of our complaints and disputes policy on request. The policy is also available on our website.

Your complaint will be recorded in our customer service system and will be investigated by the complaints department. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can request the complaint be reviewed by Management.

Stay connected!

Our website is our principal channel for keeping our customers informed about what is going on in our service area and the things we are doing to enhance our services. We also use social media to share updates about our projects, services, education and crew.

Website: sgwater.com.au

Facebook: South Gippsland Water

Twitter: @SthGippsWater

Instagram: @southgippslandwater

LinkedIn: South Gippsland Water

3.2 Responding and resolving a complaint or dispute

We want to work with you to resolve any complaints or disputes you may have. South Gippsland Water will endeavour to acknowledge complaints as quickly as possible.

Expected time frames are:

- Complaints made in person or by phone within 3 business days.
- Complaints made in writing to complaints@sgwater.com.au will receive a formal response (or phone response if you prefer) within 10 business days.

In our response we will confirm the details of the complaint, our proposed actions, timelines and any reasons for the decision made, including details of any legislative or policy basis for the decision.

We will work with you to try to reach a mutually agreeable, fair and reasonable solution.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can request the complaint be reviewed by Management.

3.3 Complaints about charges

If a complaint or dispute relates to an amount of money we have charged, we will not seek to recover that money until the matter is resolved.

3.4 What if I don't find the outcome to be fair?

If you request a further review of our decision, it will be handled by the Managing Director of South Gippsland Water. In the response we will provide you with information about the Energy and Water Ombudsman of Victoria (EWOV) and other appropriate external dispute resolution forums.

EWOV is a not-for-profit, independent and impartial dispute resolution service. EWOV expects that:

Before you complain to [EWOV], you must give [us] a reasonable opportunity to resolve the dispute itself. If you've tried but you can't sort the problem out, [EWOV] can help you and [us] to reach a resolution. EWOV also refers some enquiries and complaints to us.

Energy and Water Ombudsman of Victoria (EWOV):

- Telephone: 1800 500 509 (free call)
- Web: www.ewov.com.au/complaints/online-complaint-form.

We will always endeavour to resolve any disputes in good faith directly with customers and other affected parties. If you tell us that you are satisfied with our response, we will consider the matter closed. We will also consider the case resolved if 10 business days have passed, without a request for review, or lodgement of a claim with the Energy and Water Ombudsman of Victoria or another external dispute resolution forum.

If you lodge a claim with an external dispute resolution forum, we will not consider the complaint resolved until the matter has been finalised with that external review forum.

4. STANDARDS OF SERVICE YOU CAN EXPECT

We aim to provide all customers with uninterrupted water and sewerage services. However, service interruptions can occur due to maintenance work or when we need to repair unexpected bursts, leaks

or blockages. When we need to undertake planned works in your area, we will notify you at least two business days prior to works occurring.

4.1 Bursts, leaks, blockages and spills

Should a burst, leak, blockage or spill occur in our systems please contact our customer service staff on the 24-hour emergency number 1300 851 636. When a burst, leak or blockage in our system occurs South Gippsland Water will:

- a) Promptly attend the site upon notification.
- b) Take action to rectify the situation, considering the potential or actual impact on i. Customers; ii. Others affected by the failure; iii. Property; and iv. The environment.
- c) Provide information about any unplanned interruption to a service through a 24- hour telephone enquiry service – 1300 851 636, which can advise callers of the estimated duration of any interruption.
- d) Provide information about unplanned service interruption to our website and social media accounts.
- e) Ensure that in the event of a sewage spill at your property, the damage and inconvenience to you and others affected is minimised; and
- f) Ensuring that action to promptly deal with the sewage spill (clean up and disinfection) is taken.

4.2 Planned interruptions – information and response

South Gippsland Water will inform affected residential customers, in writing, of the time and duration of any planned interruption to service, at least two business days in advance.

4.3 Service interruptions – response to incidents

Our service standards

To help ensure you do not experience unacceptable interruptions to service, we are committed to meet or exceed our Essential Services Commission (ESC) approved service standards (Table 1) in relation to management of:

- planned water supply interruptions
- unplanned water supply interruptions
- sewer spills and blockages

We are committed to:

- a) minimise the impact of unplanned interruptions to services (including restoration as soon as possible and the provision of information); and
- b) provide customers with access to emergency supplies of drinking water in the event of an extended unplanned interruption to water services.

Table 1. ESC approved service standard for water and sewer network performance

Water	Measure	Units	Target
1	Average minutes to respond to bursts and leaks (priority 1)	Minutes	30
2	Average minutes to respond to burst and leaks (priority 2)	Minutes	35
3	Average minutes to respond to burst and leaks (priority 3)	Minutes	500
4	Average duration of unplanned water interruptions	Minutes	110
5	Average duration of planned water interruptions	Minutes	240
6	Number of customers experiencing more than five unplanned water supply interruptions in a year	Number	0
Sewer	Measure	Units	Target
7	Average time to attend sewer spills blockages	Minutes	30
8	Average time to rectify a sewer blockage	Minutes	120
9	Sewer spills contained within 5 hours	Percent	95%
10	Customers receiving more than 3 sewer blockages in the year	Number	0

Guaranteed Service Levels

In addition to these service standards, we are also committed to delivering on a wider range of customer-focused key performance targets. Our customer outcomes and performance are available from our website.

We know that if we fail to meet our performance targets, our customers are inconvenienced. If your service levels are less favourable than the Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) thresholds (see Table 2), a rebate will automatically be applied to your bill.

We are not required to provide a rebate where the failure meet our Guaranteed Service Levels is caused by the action or inaction of a customer or a third party (a third party does not include any person or firm acting on behalf of South Gippsland Water).

Table 2. ESC approved service level obligations and rebate

Service level obligation	Details	Levels of service	Rebate for breach per customer (\$)
Unplanned sewer interruptions not rectified within 5 hours	We will rebate the customer when we fail to restore sewer supply (within 5 hours of notification) to a customer's property	All	Rebate of \$100
Sewage spill within a customer's house	We will pay the customer if we cause a sewage spill within a customer's house. We will also clean up the house and provide alternative accommodation as required	All	Rebate of \$1,000
Payment difficulty information disclosure	We will rebate the customer where we restrict the water supply of, or take legal action against, a residential customer prior to taking reasonable endeavours to contact the customer and provide information about help that is available if the customer is experiencing difficulties paying	All	Rebate of \$300

4.4 General customer obligations

So that we can work together to limit interruptions, and provide the best possible experience, we ask that our customers adhere to the following:

1. To pay charges incurred after vacating a property unless you give us at least 48 hours' notice.
2. To ensure that water meters are not damaged and can be accessed by our employees or contractors.
3. To maintain the property owner's infrastructure upon notice by us.
4. To remove trees upon request by us.
5. To seek our consent for any building or construction work that might interfere with our services or systems.
6. To not alter any works connected to our services or systems without our consent.
7. To adhere to contractual arrangements, leases or supply agreements including compliance with permitted use rules for recycled water
8. To observe restrictions imposed by us in accordance with the Water Restriction by-law.
9. To comply with by-laws issued by South Gippsland Water in accordance with the Water Act.
10. To maintain combined sanitary drains in accordance with the water law or any independent agreement with other landowners connected to the combined sanitary drain

4.5 Your privacy

We recognise that your privacy is of great importance, and we're committed to protecting your personal information. We collect personal and water use information for the purpose of providing water and sewerage related services and products, which includes billing and collection activities, promoting these services and products and market research. We may also use this information to proactively identify, contact and engage with you about your water and sewerage services. We may disclose your personal and water use information to our contractors for these purposes and other third parties and Government agencies.

Where we hold your personal information in conjunction with others (e.g., where your account is a joint one), we won't disclose your personal details to other account holders without your permission. Please contact us if you wish to arrange for someone else to have access to your account details.

You may request access to your personal information that we hold by writing to the Privacy Officer at South Gippsland Water, PO Box 102, Foster VIC 3960. Please note, we may charge you the reasonable cost of processing your request.

We've developed a Privacy Policy to ensure our customers' personal information is safeguarded. Our Privacy Policy represents how we handle information in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles outlined in the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014. For a copy of our Privacy Policy: Visit sgwater.com.au/about-us/corporate-policy-legislation/

5. Customers with additional needs

If you or a member of your household relies on some form of life-support device or has other additional needs that require them to have a continuous supply of water, you can register as an additional needs customer, and we can put in place some measures to help you.

5.1 Register as an additional needs customer

To register, please call our Customer Service Staff on **1300 851 636**.

South Gippsland Water will contact customers on our additional needs register:

- a) As soon as possible in the event of an unplanned interruption to a service; and
- b) At least 5 business days before a planned interruption. If a longer period of notice is required, please advise our Customer Service Staff on **1300 851 636**. In all cases South Gippsland Water will endeavour to minimise any inconvenience to our special needs customers.

Once you are registered as a special needs customer, your property will be flagged in our systems to ensure we give you priority treatment if your water supply is at risk of being interrupted. We always try to minimise inconvenience to our special needs customers.

South Gippsland Water also has practices and procedures in place to provide customers with access to emergency supplies of drinking water in the event of an extended unplanned interruption.

6. HOW WE CAN HELP IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES OR FAMILY VIOLENCE

6.1 Customer Support Program

We understand that the cost of services is important to you and that from time-to-time, some people may be going through difficult situations. If you are having trouble paying your account, or are experiencing family violence, we are committed to:

- Exempting you from further recovery action or restriction of supply
- Ensuring you are managed in an appropriate manner including security provisions and access to Customer Support Programs
- Providing information to you on our support programs, including water efficiency, our dispute resolution processes and payment options
- Referring you to an accredited financial counselling agency

You can tell us if you want us to communicate with a chosen support person or other representative.

South Gippsland Water has a range of alternate payment options available to assist you if you are having trouble paying your account. We will assist you, according to your personal circumstances, on a case-by-case basis by:

- Making provision for alternative payment arrangements in accordance with your capacity to pay.
- Offering to extend the due date for some or all the amount owed.
- Waiving or suspending interest payments on outstanding amounts according to our Debt Collections Policy.
- Redirecting a bill to another person for payment if the person agrees in writing.
- More frequent billing or payment options.
- Where appropriate, helping you by:
 1. Providing you with information on Government funded assistance programs including the Utility Relief Grant Scheme; or
 2. Referring you to an independent financial counsellor at no cost.

If you enter our Customer Support Program, you are required to meet the agreed payment arrangement and contact us if you need to **modify** your payment arrangement. If you fail to do this, the assistance will 'cease to apply' and you will be advised that normal debt recovery practices will commence.

Our Customer Support Program is open to residential and small business customers. You can read more about our Customer Support Policy on our website: www.sgwater.com.au

6.2 Family Violence

As a provider of essential services, South Gippsland Water has a role to play in supporting customers who may be experiencing family violence. When dealing with customers experiencing or affected by family violence, we are committed to:

- Recognising that family violence is not limited to physical violence. This can include economic and emotional abuse.
- Providing a careful and sensitive response, in consultation with the victim to achieve the best outcomes.

- Empowering customers, with our support, to manage financial impacts, security of their data, and future account management in a way that helps them with outcomes that meet their needs and supports them to move forward.
- Providing a safe environment for customers and employees to access relevant information and support.

The guiding principles we adopt are:

- The psychological and/or physical wellbeing of people affected by family violence is our priority.
- People affected by family violence, either directly or indirectly, are provided with support that is sensitive, respectful and without judgment.
- Our support services are accessible for our people and our customers, and flexible enough to respond to an individual's needs.
- Any personal information is managed privately and sensitively.

For customers who may be affected by family violence we will:

- Offer individual case-management should they wish, considering:
 - circumstances around accounts in joint names
 - debt waiver or deferment
 - allocation of debt and debt collection activities
- Ensure their information is handled securely and confidentially
- Ensure processes are in place that: – avoid customers having to repeat disclosure of their family violence – provide for continuity of service for those customers
- Provide information on our support programs including water efficiency, dispute resolution processes and payment options
- Refer customers who provide consent, to specialist family violence services (These are also published on our website).

You can read more in our Family Violence Policy on our website: www.sgwater.com.au. We review our policy and associated procedures on a regular basis and can provide these upon request.

7. POWER TO ENTER YOUR PROPERTY

Under the Water Act 1989 (ss. 133, 134, 149 and 221), we have the power to enter land in certain circumstances. From time to time, we may need to exercise that power to enter your property. Whenever this happens, our employees or contractors are required to carry appropriate identification.

You are required to allow us to enter your property for:

- Inspecting, reading, testing or replacing your meter
- Carrying out planned works
- Inspecting new drainage or plumbing connections
- Altering existing connections
- Restricting the water supply
- Inspecting works or undertaking any test to assess compliance with the Water Act 1989
- Removing trees that cause damage or interfere with access to our assets.

In most circumstances, unless you consent otherwise, we will provide you with seven days' notice before we enter your property. If we hold keys to your premises, they will be held in safe custody and returned upon notification from the customer.

There are some circumstances where we are not required to give you notice of intention to enter your property.

7.1 When notice to enter your property is not required

We are not required to give you prior notification to enter your property:

- In case of an emergency
- To read your water meter
- If we suspect that your meter is not connected or installed in accordance with our water metering and servicing guidelines
- If entry is required by an authorised officer under a warrant
- If there are reasonable grounds to believe there has been a breach of the Water Act 1989.

Where we do enter your property without prior notification, we will either:

- Notify any occupant present of the purpose for entry
- If no occupant is present at the property, leave a notice stating the identity of our employee/contractor and the date, time and purpose of entry

REGULAR SERVICE DELIVERY

This chapter focuses on connecting and using services under 'business as usual' conditions. See *Section 10-13* for information on what happens in the case of *service faults and disruptions*.

8. SERVICE CONNECTION AND QUALITY

8.1 Connection and maintenance of service

Our cornerstone services are drinking water delivery and wastewater disposal. If your property is connected to South Gippsland Water's systems, we will provide the relevant service in accordance with the Essential Services Commission's Water Industry Standard - Urban Customer Service and this Charter. Under the Water Act 1989 (s. 145), we have control of connections to services. Through our conditions of connection, you have an obligation to ensure our employees and contractors have reasonable access to connection infrastructure to maintain the reliability of our services.

Application to connect

If you would like to connect to one of South Gippsland Water's available services, please contact our Customer Service Team on **1300 851 636**, who will assist you in completing the application. They will also inform you of the applicable connection charges and any special requirements under Water Act 1989, or other relevant legislation.

Once you have submitted your application forms and paid the applicable fee, we will approve connection to your property within 10 working days.

Once connected, you must ensure that any meter on your property is easy for us to access to read, maintain or replace.

8.2 Our promise of service quality

Water quality

At all times we strive to ensure that the drinking water we supply is of high quality and meets standards of the *Safe Drinking Water Regulations 2015* and the National Health and Medical Research Council's Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. We expect to be held to account and do what we reasonably can to address customer concerns about water quality. In accordance with requirements of the *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*, we operate a robust water quality management system which focusses on the prevention and control of drinking water hazards.

As part of this system, we are required to carry out regular water quality sampling and testing and are subject to ongoing audits to ensure the system is working as it should be. We publish a summary of results of our testing program in our annual Drinking Water Quality Report available on our website. Customers may also access drinking water quality data by telephoning South Gippsland Water Customer Service on 1300 851 636, or by emailing sgwater@sgwater.com.au. In accordance with legislation, we will provide requested results within seven business days of the results being compiled.

8.3 Water flow rates

South Gippsland Water will ensure that your water supply is at least equal to the minimum flow rates shown in the table 3.

Exceptions to the minimum flow rates may apply if:

- A property owner's infrastructure is of a lower standard than required
- A service is provided via a private water main extension
- There is a drought or an emergency
- There is a water shortage due to peak summer demand
- There is an unplanned or a planned interruption
- Recycled water supply is reduced due to a shortage
- Recycled water supply is reduced in accordance with our permitted use rules
- Supply is restricted or disconnected in accordance with this document or the Water Act 1989 (section 145).

Table 3. South Gippsland Water minimum flow rates

Diameter of the property service pipe – in mm	Minimum flow rate – Litres per minute
20	20
25	35
32	60
40	90
50	160

8.4 Water Testing

If you ask us to, South Gippsland Water will test flow rates and water quality for compliance. This will be measured at the meter or tap nearest the water meter. However, South Gippsland Water:

- May impose a reasonable charge on you if the test demonstrates compliance with the product and delivery quality outlined above.
- Will advise you, prior to the test, that a reasonable charge may be imposed if the test demonstrates compliance with the product and delivery quality outlined above.
- Will pay the cost of the test if the test demonstrates that South Gippsland Water has not complied with the flow rates and water quality outlined above.

South Gippsland Water will rectify any substandard performance in the service, product, delivery, quality or testing process as soon as possible, or within a time agreed with you. The problem will be fixed by returning that service, product, delivery quality or testing process back to conformity with the set standard required by the service standards.

9. METERING, ACCOUNTS AND PAYMENT

The following area of the Customer Charter focuses on metering, accounts and payment under 'business as usual' conditions. What happens when things go wrong (for example, unusually high bills, payment difficulties, restriction of service) is discussed in Section 11 and 12 of this document.

9.1 Meter Reading

Access to your water meter

Your meter must be accessible so we can read it regularly. Where we can't read your meter, we may ask you to read it on our behalf. You can provide this after you have received your account and you'll also be able to request an adjusted account once we have your reading. We won't charge you for providing a self-read or for providing an adjusted account.

If you don't provide a reading, we will estimate the amount of water you use. The estimation will be calculated on your water usage history, and we'll make any necessary adjustments the next time we read your meter. We aim to receive an actual meter reading at least once every 12 months.

Customer Self Reads

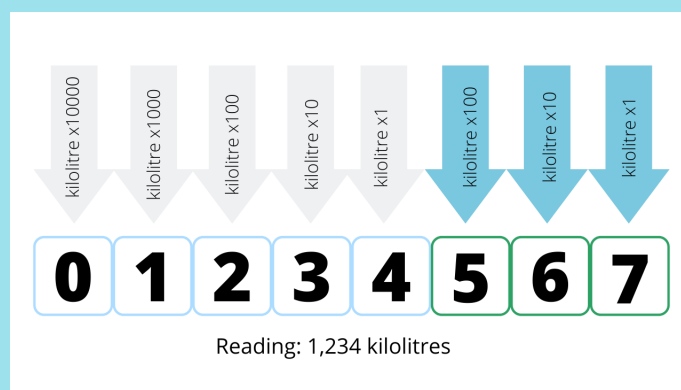
Our meter readers may leave instructions, or we may send you a request, asking you to take a meter reading. See: *Figure 1: How to read your water meter*.

Please phone (1300 851 636) or email (billing@sgwater.com.au) your reading to us. We also accept photos via email of your meter display.

Figure 1. How to read you water meter

Figure 1. How to read you water meter

A water meter is used to measure the amount of water that a property uses. It is generally located close to the front of a property, often just inside the boundary or fence line. It is also useful to know where the water meter is because a stop tap that controls the flow of water to the house is normally located with the water meter. In an emergency, such as a burst pipe, you can use this stop tap to turn off the water supply to the house. Looking at a meter from the top, all meters have an engraved serial number which is unique to each meter. This number allows us to identify which meter is associated with a property. The meter serial number appears on the front of your water bill. There is a series of numbers on the water meter that register the amount of water that has passed through your meter. We only require the black numbers (kilolitres).



Special Meter Reads Fee

If you request, we will also carry out a special meter reading outside the normal meter reading cycle, to determine any outstanding water consumption charges. However, we may charge a reasonable fee

for the service. We will not charge a fee if you have provided a self-read, have a digital meter or are currently receiving help under our Customer Support Program.

9.2 Account cycle, content, presentation and history

South Gippsland Water issues accounts three times each year, that are due for payment on 31st of January, 31st of May and 30th of September. Account cycles for customers who are high volume users of South Gippsland Water's services will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Upon request, South Gippsland Water will provide you with your account and water usage history for the preceding three years, free of charge, within 10 business days.

South Gippsland Water may charge a reasonable fee for providing account and usage history held beyond three years. We do not charge a fee for providing information or advice unless it is stated otherwise in the Water Industry Standard - Urban Customer Service. Account history is retained in accordance with the relevant Retention and Disposal Authority for Records of the Water Industry Functions (PROS 12/06). South Gippsland Water may refuse to provide a customer with their account and usage history where the provision of such information is contrary to the information handling procedures set out in the Corporation's Family Violence policy and the refusal is not in breach of law.

Types of charges

Depending on the type of property, you can be billed for:

- Service charges for water and/or wastewater
- Water usage charges
- Fire Service Inspection charges
- Backflow Prevention charges
- Cistern charges
- Wastewater disposal charges – minor trade waste customers only
- Trade waste charges – if applicable

The prices applied for the water use, water network, sewage disposal and sewerage network components of your bill are determined by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) through periodic price reviews. We will ensure we publicise when we vary our charges, this may include promoting the change in local print media, on our website or in our social media. The full set of charges and prices is available on our website.

Issue of bills

Accounts will be issued to:

- You at the physical or electronic address specified by you
- Your agent at your agent's physical address or electronic address if you have submitted a written request for us to do so
- Any person authorised to act on behalf of you at the physical or electronic address specified by that person

If no address has been specified, we may send the bill to the physical address of the property in respect of which the charges have been incurred, or to your last known address.

9.3 What will my account tell me?

We aim to make our accounts easy to understand and to provide you with all information required under the ESC Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service.

This includes (see *Figure 2. South Gippsland Water Service Account*), but is not limited to:

- the date of issue
- your billing address and account number
- the address of the property to which the charges in the account relate
- the date on which the meter was read or, if the reading is an estimation, a clear statement that the reading is an estimation
- the amount of water usage
- an explanation of the charges
- the amount you are required to pay
- the date by which you are required to pay
- the ways in which you can pay the account
- information about help that is available if you are experiencing difficulties paying
- details of our enquiry facility, including a 24-hour emergency telephone number
- referral to interpreter services offered by the water business
- any outstanding credit or debit from previous accounts
- the total of any payments made by you since the last account was issued
- information on concessions that are available and to which you may be entitled
- the average daily rate of water or recycled water use at the property for the current account period

If we send you an E-account (electronic account via email) we will ensure that this includes:

- a clear and accessible link to the full account or instructions about how to access the full account
- the amount to be paid and the due date
- how you can pay your account
- your water usage for the current period
- information about assistance available if you are experiencing difficulties paying and how to access this assistance
- information about our Customer Support Policy

Interest may be charged on outstanding amounts where we have not undercharged the customer. If interest has been applied, it will be clearly stated.

Please contact our Customer Service Team on **1300 851 636** for more information.

Figure 2. South Gippsland Water Service Account

South Gippsland Water
 ABN 40 349 066 713

SERVICE ACCOUNT
 Water & Wastewater are GST Free
 14- 18 PIONEER STREET, PO BOX 102, FOSTER 3060
 OFFICE HOURS: MONDAY - FRIDAY 9.30am - 5.00pm
 Fax: (03) 5682 1199 Email: sgwater@gippslandwater.com.au
 ☎ (03) 5682 0444 or 1300 851 636
 Date of Issue: 30th December 2013

Account Number **1234567890**

Total Amount Payable **\$180.05**

Payment Due by **31st Jan 2014**

SERVICE ADDRESS 1 Main Street, Your Town, VIC 1234 Developed

Previous Balance \$179.75 We Received \$179.75 Adjustments \$0.00 Interest \$0.00 Opening Balance \$0.00

SERVICE CHARGES
 Water (Period 1st Nov 2013 - 28th Feb 2014) \$101.80
 Waste Water (Period 1st Nov 2013 - 28th Feb 2014) \$151.30

VOLUMETRIC CHARGES
 SERIAL NO. 09W003511
 PREVIOUS READING 2 Jul 13 214
 CURRENT READING 8 Nov 13 227
 CONSUMPTION 13
 13kL @ \$1.66/kL \$21.60

Water Usage Graph
 This graph shows your water usage over the 4 bills (16 months).
 Average daily Water Usage in litres:
 Same Period Last Year: 82, This Period: 102

Total Current Charges Less Concession \$274.70
 Less Concession \$94.65
TOTAL AMOUNT DUE \$180.05

Interest charged at 6.9% per annum on overdue accounts.
 For concession eligibility refer to back of account.

HOW TO PAY
 Bring this slip with you if paying in person or send it with your cheque
 You will need these reference numbers when paying by BPay. Note: Your reference number changes when you move property
 You will need this reference number when paying by Credit Card. Note: Your reference number changes when you move property

POST billpay
 875 1160 0000000212000700 40
Credit Cards Please call 1300 301636
 or 012 quick
Customer Reference Number: 1234567890 1

Name: Jane Citizen
 Property: 1 Main Street, Your Town, VIC 1234

Biller Code: 3442
Ref: 1234567890 1
 Telephone & Internet Banking - BPay®
 Call your bank or credit union or building society to make this account your cheque, savings or credit card

\$ 180.05

Payment

Most customers will receive three accounts per year. Accounts are issued at least 28 days before the due payment date.

How to pay your account

We offer several convenient ways for you to settle your account:

- At all Australia Post Offices
- Easy payment plans – talk to us about smoothing your bill and paying by regular instalments to reduce the impact of a larger bill. Please contact our Customer Service Team on **1300 851 636** to arrange your payment plan.
- Direct debit – is easy and enables you to enjoy the flexibility of choosing from regular payments or when the bill is due. We do not require customers to agree to direct debit as a condition of service.
- BPay – enables you to make payments by telephone or online. It can be arranged through your participating bank, building society or credit union.
- Centrepay – if you receive any type of Centrelink payment you can have an agreed instalment amount automatically deducted from your Centrelink payment.
- Payment by Credit card – call 1300 301 636, have your account and credit card ready. You will be asked for your customer reference number [on the front of the account], the amount to be paid, credit card number, and expiry date. Please record your receipt number for future reference.
- By mail – South Gippsland Water PO Box 102 Foster VIC 3960
- Online via Payway visit www.sgwater.com.au and follow the link to 'Pay Your Bill'. Alternately, South Gippsland Water's Payway portal can be accessed directly via <http://www.payway.com.au/MakePayment?BillerCode=196584>
- In person at our Foster Office - 14-18 Pioneer Street, Foster
- In advance – contact our Customer Service Staff for full details on **1300 851 636**

Concessions

If you have a Pension Concession Card, Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card (excluding “dependants”) or a Health Care Card, you may be entitled to a concession on your water and wastewater [account](#) for your place of residence. Please telephone our Customer Service Staff on **1300 851 636**.

Payment difficulties

Residential and small business customers are eligible for support in the payment of their water and sewerage accounts. We have a range of options available, including payment extensions, flexible payment plans as a result of payment difficulties or family violence.

We will work proactively with you to provide assistance, we're here to help. If we understand the challenges you are facing, we can work together to tailor the support we provide. If our team notice that you may need help, we will reach out and offer assistance.

See *Section 6* for more information on our Customer Support Program. Please call **1300 851 636** for a confidential discussion on the most appropriate option for your situation.

9.4 Properties with common boundaries

If you own two properties, (one of which is vacant land,) that share a common boundary you can apply to South Gippsland Water to have them rated as one property, this is known as contiguous rating. Please contact our Customer Service Staff on **1300 851 636** for detailed information.

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO TO PLAN: SERVICE AND BILLING ISSUES

This section deals with faults and disruptions within our water and sewerage network.

10. REPAIRS

10.1 Repairs for which we are responsible

We always aim to minimise the impact of any disruption to services. If service is disrupted for any reason we will:

- Do our best to restore service as soon as is reasonably possible
- Be open and transparent with respect to how we deal with affected customers during any service disruption.

Although we do our best to ensure that no customer experiences unacceptable service, sometimes we need to disrupt service to undertake planned maintenance, or to repair a burst, leak or blockage in part of our network.

Customers with additional needs

If you are on dialysis, life support or have other additional needs, and you experience any issues with your water supply that we may not be aware of, please call our customer service team on 1300 851 636 and advise us of the problem and let us know that you are a customer with special needs.

We will provide access to emergency supplies of drinking water, in events of major planned or unplanned water interruptions.

Section 4 outlines the performance indicators we are committed to meeting in relation to:

- Planned water supply interruptions
- Unplanned water supply interruptions
- Sewer spills
- Sewer blockages

If there is a burst, leak or blockage in any of our drinking water, recycled water or sewerage networks, you can help us by reporting the fault via:

- Telephone: **1300 851 636**
- Email: faults@sgwater.com.au
- Website: sgwater.com.au

Once we are aware of a fault, we will:

- Prioritise the fault, considering the potential or actual impact on customers, the community, surrounding property and environment.
- Dispatch a crew to deal with the fault
- Provide updates as to the status of faults and interruptions via our website and social media channels

If there is a sewage spill on your property, we will ensure that:

- Damage and inconvenience to you and others affected is minimised
- The spill is promptly cleaned up and the affected area disinfected

If, in dealing with an emergency and rectifying a fault, our employees or contractors need to enter your property to undertake works, they will make sure that they:

- Cause as little inconvenience as possible
- Only stay on the property for as long as is reasonably necessary
- Remove all equipment they have brought onto the property
- Remove any debris and leave the property as close as possible to its original condition

10.2 Repairs for which you may be responsible

From time-to-time, we may become aware of plumbing repairs for which the property owner is responsible.

These repairs may be necessary to avoid (further) damage to:

- Your property's plumbing or other assets on your property
- A neighbour's property
- Our assets

In many cases, repairs are required to prevent water leaks that result in higher water bills to the customer and wasted water.

To limit the effects of leaks and other sources of damage, the property owner may be required to undertake maintenance of their water or sewerage pipes/services in accordance with provisions of the Water Act 1989 or the Building Act 1993.

We may, by formal written notice to the property owner – a *Notice to repair* – require the owner to repair or replace any property service pipes that the owner is responsible for maintaining. Relevant actions include (but are not necessarily limited to) a requirement to:

- Repair faults on pipes/services that are the owner's responsibility
- Maintain works on the property, or disconnect the property from our network
- Remedy a contravention of either:
 - relevant provisions of the Water Act 1989
 - a requirement made by South Gippsland Water under relevant provisions of the Water Act 1989.

If you fail to comply within the time specified in the *Notice to repair*, the Water Act 1989 (s145) provides that we may take the action specified in the *Notice to repair* – which will include possible disconnection of your property from the network – and charge the property owner the reasonable costs for which the owner is responsible.

If we carry out these works and we have been advised that the property is occupied by a tenant, both the tenant and owner will be notified.

We will promptly reconnect your property (that has been disconnected) when:

- The reason for disconnection is gone
- We receive a written undertaking as to compliance by the customer in a form acceptable to us and payment by the customer of any reasonable charge imposed by the water business

11. WATER QUALITY, METERING/ACCOUNT ACCURACY AND LEAKS

From time-to-time, customers may be faced with suspected or actual problems in relation to water quality or metering/billing accuracy.

11.1 Water quality or flow issues

You can expect drinking water supplies to meet the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Regulations 2015 – water that is clear and free from objectionable taste and odour.

11.2 Metering/account accuracy and water leaks

If you receive an unexpectedly high bill there are several possible reasons:

- You may have changed your water use habits, such as a water-related appliance
- There was an increase in the number of people in your household during this period
- Your bill is based on an estimated reading because we were unable to access your water meter
- There are water leaks somewhere around your property
- Your water meter may be inaccurate.

If you suspect that you have a leak or that your water meter is not accurate, before you ask us to test it, we encourage you to do an easy overnight meter test first. Visit our website for details.

It is rare that a meter will register an incorrect high meter reading. An unexpectedly high meter reading is more likely to be due to an internal leak. If you have an internal leak you will need to call a plumber to have the leak repaired.

Nevertheless, as the owner or occupier of a property you may request us to test the accuracy of the water meter that services your property. After receiving this request:

- We will replace the meter for the purpose of testing
- You may be required to pay a testing fee
- Once test results are received, we will notify you in writing of the results of the test

If the test shows that the meter is not meeting required standards of accuracy, we will refund the cost of the test. We will also refund or credit your account any amount you were overcharged.

12. ACCOUNT ISSUES AND SERVICE RESTRICTION/ DISCONNECTION

12.1 Adjusting accounts - undercharging or overcharging

If you believe you have been over or undercharged, please contact our Customer Service Team on 1300 851 636 as soon as possible.

Resolution processes are as below:

- Any identified undercharging over the past 4 months will be recovered in full
- Any identified undercharging prior to the past 4 months, that is not a consequence of illegal use of water, will be waived
- We will issue you a new (replacement) account statement
- We will allow the amount to be recovered to be paid by a flexible payment arrangement over a period at least equal to the period in which the undercharging occurred and a maximum of 12 months.

In the event of the illegal use of water or recycled water, we will reasonably estimate the usage for which you have not paid – regardless of how far back the undercharging extends – and bill you accordingly.

If you have been overcharged, we will:

- Let you know within 10 business days of becoming aware of the error
- Refund or credit the amount overcharged in accordance with your advice – refunds may take up to 10 business days to process

12.2 Other forms of financial adjustment

We may recover from you an amount charged by our financial institution if:

- Your cheque is dishonoured due to lack of funds or other reasons
- You have insufficient funds available when paying by direct debit

We will not charge residential customers the dishonour fee charged to us by our bank, while a customer is receiving a concession or receiving assistance as part of our Customer Support Program.

In circumstances where you continue to owe money to us, in accordance with the provisions of the Essential Service Commission's Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service, we reserve the right to:

- Impose a reasonable interest charge on overdue accounts consistent with maximum permissible rate set annually by the ESC.
- interest starts accruing on the day the amount is due and ends on the date all unrecovered amounts of the charge are paid in full, both days inclusive.
- If you are the owner of the property, impose a charge on your property consistent with section 274(4A) of the Water Act 1989 and section 4F(2)(f) (iii) of the Water Industry Act 1994.

We will not charge residential customers interest while a customer is receiving a concession, on a payment plan with us or receiving assistance as part of our Customer Support Program. If these reasons no longer apply and we charge interest to your account, we will not apply interest retrospectively.

12.3 NOTICES, LEGAL ACTIONS AND RESTRICTION OF SERVICE

Reminder notices

If payment is not made by the date stated on your account, we will send you a Reminder Notice no earlier than two business days after the due date – in the same way we sent your original **account**.

A Reminder Notice will include:

- The overdue amount
- The date of issue
- An explanation in plain language of the notice and of why it is being issued
- The date by which payment must be made, which must not be earlier than six business days for the issue date of the reminder notice
- A statement that payment of the overdue bill is required to be made by the date that is specified
- Payment options
- Information about payment difficulty assistance available to you
- A warning of further action that the water business may take, including (if relevant) referral to any outstanding amount to an external debt collection company for collection and

- Details of how to contact the water business.

Final notices

We will send you a Final Notice within 15 business days of your reminder notice and before taking action for non-payment in the same way we sent your original bill.

A Final Notice includes the same information as the Reminder Notice and will also specify assistance that is available to you. Including information about:

- the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)
- Our Customer Support Program (see *Section 6* of this document)
- Concessions or Government assistance programs that may be available to you.

In addition, we will provide a statement that legal action or restriction may be taken, and you may incur additional costs in relation to those actions. What you need to do to avoid legal action or restriction and the applicable fees to remove a restrictor. We will specify the date from which interest (if any) may be applied on outstanding amounts, and the percentage interest rate that may be applied. If you are also the property owner, we will specify that we may be able to recover outstanding amounts at the time of any sale of your property.

Reminder Notices and Final Notices do not include information about meter readings, usage, previous bills or past payments.

Our contact details are always provided on final notices and we encourage customers to make contact with us so we can understand the circumstances or challenges you are facing and help you plan a way forward.

Flexible payment plans

We'll make flexible payment plans available to you in accordance with your capacity to pay. A flexible payment plan will:

- State how the amount of the payments has been calculated
- State how long you'll pay the agreed amounts for
- Specify the amount to be paid and how often
- Be able to be modified at your request if there's a demonstrable change in your circumstances
- Be confirmed in writing to you as soon as possible after it starts

We will provide a letter that outlines:

- the total number of payments to be made
- the period over which the payments are to be made
- the date by which each payment must be made
- the amount of each payment

We're not required to offer a flexible payment plan if in the 12 months before you've had 2 flexible payment plans cancelled due to non-payment, unless you can provide reasonable assurance you'll comply with the plan. We will not charge additional debt recovery costs, including no interest on overdue amounts while you are making your payments based on your flexible payment plan.

For customers entering a flexible payment plan, where it is appropriate, we will refer you to other government funded programs or assistance. This may include programs such as the Community Rebate Program, government funded financial counsellors and the Utility Relief Grant Scheme. We will ensure you have any concessions available to you, applied to your account and can help you apply to programs such as the Utility Relief Grant Scheme.

Legal action and restriction of service

Legal action or restriction of your water supply are measures we take as a last resort. We will try to work with you to avoid this. In some circumstances we may take action to restrict your service by applying a restriction device to your water meter. This device limits the flow of water to your property to no less than 2 litres per minute (as measured at the meter or the tap nearest to the meter).

We may take legal action or restrict your water or recycled water services for non-payment if:

- More than 15 business days has elapsed since the issue of the Final Notice
- You have been sent a Final Notice including information on our Residential Customer Support Program (see Section 6 of this document) and other programs that are available to help you with payment difficulties
- South Gippsland Water have attempted to make contact with you about the non-payment on at least four occasions including but not limited to: a phone call inside and/outside of business hours, site visit to the service address, regular mail, registered mail, email, SMS and sending a Final Notice (within 15 days of issuing you a reminder notice). At least one of these attempts will be made after the Final Notice is sent.
- You have been notified of the proposed legal action or restriction and the associated costs, including the cost of removing a restrictor
- You have either:
 - been offered a flexible payment plan and you have refused or failed to respond, or
 - agreed to a flexible payment plan and have failed to comply with the arrangement.

We will maintain records of what information you are sent and when we have attempted to contact you.

We will not begin legal action or take steps to restrict your service due to non-payment if:

- You are receiving assistance from us for payment difficulties.
- The amount owed is less than \$300
- You are eligible for and have lodged an application for a government funded concession and are waiting on a response
- You have made an application under the Utility Relief Grant Scheme and are waiting on a response
- You are a tenant and the amount unpaid is owed by the landlord
- You have a claim against the landlord in respect of a water bill pending at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)
- The amount in dispute is subject to an unresolved complaint in accordance with our Complaints Resolution Policy (see *Section 3* of this document).

If we take legal action against you or restrict your water service because of non-payment before taking 'reasonable endeavours' (as defined by the Essential Service Commission) to contact you and provide information about help that is available, then we have breached our own Guaranteed Service Level. Where we breach a guaranteed service level, we will apply a rebate to your bill.

South Gippsland Water can pursue a debt owed by a person who is no longer a customer.

Additional limits on restriction

We will not take steps to restrict your service due to non-payment if:

- It is a Friday, public holiday, weekend, day before a public holiday, or after 3.00pm
- You are registered as a special needs customer
- We believe that the restriction will cause a health hazard, having considered any customer concerns
- It is a day of total fire ban declared by the Country Fire Authority in the area in which the property is located
- The restriction would reduce the supply of water (either drinking or recycled) to less than 2 litres per minute (as measured at the meter or the tap nearest to the meter)
- If we know that you or a person who is ordinarily a resident of the property is on any form of life support.

Removal of restrictions

We will restore a restricted service within 24 hours of becoming aware of the reason for restriction no longer existing. We may impose a reasonable charge for the removal of restrictors.

13. CONSERVING OUR PRECIOUS WATER SUPPLY

13.1 Permanent Water Saving Rules

Permanent Water Saving Rules apply in our service area. These rules encourage efficient use of water. They promote a common-sense approach to using drinking water:

- Water gardens and lawns between 6pm and 10am
- A trigger nozzle must be fitted when using a handheld hose
- Sweep, don't hose driveways and pathways

13.2 Drought preparedness

Our Drought Preparedness Plans help us (along with the other water corporations) manage our water resources during water shortages due to droughts. The plans are based on the following:

- Preparedness to optimise and manage our supply system to mitigate uncertainty in the future
- Ability to react promptly to drought or water shortages
- Preparedness of customers to manage their water use during droughts or water shortages
- Shared commitment to the sustainability and viability of critical community assets.

During a drought, if required, we may implement water restrictions as per the Water Restriction By-law, to mandate water use behaviour that will conserve water. Our customers must not contravene any restriction or prohibition on water use imposed by or under this By-law; penalties will apply.

13.3. Permitted uses for non-drinking water

Sources of non-drinking water include:

- Rainwater collected from your own property
- Greywater recovered from your own property.

Recycled water (Class B and C) should not be used for:

- Drinking
- Cooking or food preparation
- Bathing or showering (including sanitary sprays and bidets)
- Filling swimming pools or spas
- Filling water toys
- Operating evaporative cooling systems

You may collect and store rainwater for your own use. You may also recycle greywater on your property for non-drinking purposes or install a composting toilet that does not require connection to our water or sewerage services. However, it is important that you are aware of the possible health and technical issues. Before any greywater reuse, we recommend that you refer to:

- The Environment Protection Authority's *Code of practice – onsite wastewater management*
- The Victorian Building Authority's *Technical Solution Sheet 91.04 91: Grey or Recycled Water*
- Your local council for advice and information on required approvals
- Requirements for compliance with the Building Act 1993 is met for any plumbing work

Limits on recycled water services – Class B and C

Some properties and agricultural and recreation reserves in our service area are supplied with lower quality recycled water (Class B and C) through our network. This recycled water supply helps to conserve our drinking water. However, there are limitations on how recycled water can be used.

If a customer wishes to access recycled water for irrigation purposes and enter into a recycled water agreement, we will draw up the required documents. This includes the supply agreement and an Environment Improvement Plan which will outline conditions for use. These documents will be specific to each individual property, their intended use of the water and the limitations and/or requirements of the wastewater system they wish to access recycled water from.

We may refuse to provide recycled water service if the customer has not entered into a recycled water supply agreement or contract in a form acceptable to us and received consent from South Gippsland Water.

We may discontinue a recycled water service if the customer breaches the permitted use rules.



ABN 40 349 066 713

14-18 Pioneer Street, Foster VIC 3960

1300 851 636

www.sgwater.com.au

sgwater@sgwater.com.au

[END]

"Contributing to thriving communities and a healthy environment"