

## South East Water

Delivering for our customers

Customer Charter - 1 July 2018

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## About South East Water

At South East Water, we support healthy and liveable communities by delivering water, sewerage and recycled water services to residential, commercial and industrial customers who rely on us every day and every night.

Our service area borders more than 270 kilometres of coastline and covers a land area of 3,640 square kilometres from Port Melbourne to Portsea and east of Pakenham.

Our customer base is diverse, ranging from high-rise communities in Southbank to growth suburbs in Casey, and from intensive industrial areas in Dandenong, to small agricultural holdings in Somerville.

Our region is also one of the most culturally diverse in Australia, with our customers speaking more than 200 languages.

Within this region, we operate and maintain water, recycled water and wastewater networks, and support fair and affordable access to our services for the 1.75 million people who live and work there.

Ninety-three per cent of our customers rely on us for their home; seven per cent for their business.

Based on this, each year we deliver 108.7 billion litres of drinking water and collect 81.4 billion litres of wastewater at the Eastern Treatment Plant and our local water recycling plants.

As one of Melbourne's three government-owned metropolitan water retailers, we're a corporation established under the Water Act 1989. Our activities are governed by this Act and the Statement of Obligations issued by the Water Minister under Section 4I of the Water Industry Act 1994.

## What is the customer charter?

This Customer Charter outlines your rights and responsibilities as a valued customer of South East Water. It also sets out South East Water's rights and responsibilities as your water, recycled water and sewerage provider.

The Essential Services Commission's (ESC) *Customer Service Code* forms the basis of this charter and is available online [www.esc.vic.gov.au](http://www.esc.vic.gov.au). The ESC is responsible for reviewing and assessing compliance of our charter against its code and our approved service standards, as specified within our water plan.

## Your rights as our customer

### Your rights to water supply and sewerage services

If you're connected to one of our services (drinking water, recycled water or sewerage), we'll provide that service in accordance with this charter.

*PropertyConnect* is an online self-service hub for requesting South East Water services and for lodging applications to connect to our water, sewerage or recycled water assets. You can register for *PropertyConnect* any time at [southeastwater.com.au/propertyconnect](https://southeastwater.com.au/propertyconnect).

Where you request connection to one of our services, we will connect you or approve connection within 10 business days, provided that:

- the service is available to your property
- you have paid, or agreed to pay, all applicable connection fees
- you have complied with our terms and conditions of connection.

We strive to achieve similar connection times for our recycled water service; however, we reserve the right to vary this timeframe.

### Extended private water supply works

Extended private water supply occurs where our water or sewer main does not front or pass through your property – and therefore you're connected to our water or sewer mains via a privately owned pipe. If you receive your service via a private owned pipe, we provide your service to the point where it connects with the private main. As such, the responsibility for the installation, maintenance and repair of private water supply works and private extensions rest with the owners of such pipework.

Please note we are not able to guarantee the water quality, pressure or reliability to private extension customers beyond the point where water leaves our supply pipes. If you're not satisfied with the quality of your water, please contact us and we will investigate for you.

### Separate written agreements

South East Water supplies some services under an express written agreement with you (such as trade waste, private extension supplies and recycled water). The terms of such agreements often differ from, and prevail over, the terms mentioned in this charter.

## Quality of service

### Our services

This section details the key service standards we aim to deliver to our customers. At South East Water, we aim to meet or exceed your expectations in relation to the range of services we provide. A more comprehensive list of service standards that the ESC have approved is provided in Appendix A.

### Drinking water

As our customer, you can expect a drinking water supply that meets regulatory requirements outlined in the *Safe Drinking Water Regulations 2005* and is clear and free from objectionable taste and odour. To ensure we achieve this objective, we carefully monitor water quality and take appropriate action to rectify any problems. We also publish the results of our water quality monitoring in our annual *Water Quality Report* which is available on our website at [southeastwater.com.au/reports](http://southeastwater.com.au/reports)

If the water pipes in your property boundary are in poor condition or the service is provided via a private extension, we cannot guarantee the quality of water supply beyond the point where it leaves our pipes. One instance of poor condition in water pipes is copper corrosion. This worldwide problem affects a small number of customers and often leads to a blue/green water discolouration of water through your tap. This water may contain copper at concentrations above the current health guidelines.

If you suspect your property has blue/green water please contact us on **132 812**.

### Flow rates

We ensure that the flow rate for your drinking water service meets minimum standards. We provide a minimum flow rate for a standard 20 mm service, which equates to 20 litres per minute to the property boundary. However, this may not be possible if your water pipes are:

- undersised or in poor condition
- the service is provided via a private extension or maintained private extension
- there is a drought
- emergency or local water shortage due to peak summer demand
- there is a planned or unplanned interruption to your water supply
- supply is restricted or disconnected in accordance with law.

We measure the flow rate at the water meter or, where there's no water meter installed, at the tap at your property boundary. If you believe that your service is not meeting minimum flow rates, you may ask us to conduct a test. If the test demonstrates that we're not complying, we'll rectify the problem as soon as possible and pay for the cost of the test. If the test demonstrates that we are complying, then we'll charge you for the cost of the test.

Pipe size	20 mm	25 mm	32 mm	40 mm	50 mm
Flow rate	20	35	60	90	160

If you're a residential customer, you can get an indication of your flow rate by testing at the tap nearest to your meter, provided that the tap and the pipe work leading to the tap are in reasonable condition (free from corrosion and obstructions) and properly maintained.

### Recycled water

Where we provide you with recycled water, this supply will comply with all applicable requirements of health and environmental regulations including those set by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) - as specified in its guidelines.

### Sewerage services

Sewage collection and treatment is vital for the protection of public health and our environment. If you're connected to our sewerage system, we'll supply you with sewerage services and take all reasonable care in operating our sewerage system to avoid blockages, spills and odours.

### Sewer blockages

The first sign of a sewer blockage affecting your property usually occurs when a toilet becomes slow to drain away; there's gurgling from other internal fittings; or there's some form of spillage from a surface fitting like a gully trap, overflow relief gully or waste grate.

### Trade waste services

Liquid waste discharged from factories and commercial businesses to the sewers is known as trade waste. If you run a business that wants to discharge trade waste into our sewers, your business must first enter into a trade waste agreement with us. This agreement protects health and safety, our sewers, the operation of our water recycling plants, the environment and the recycling of sewage and biosolids.

More details about requirements for entering into a trade waste agreement and standards can be found in our trade waste customer charter at [southeastwater.com.au/tradewaste](http://southeastwater.com.au/tradewaste).

### Interruption to service

We understand the inconvenience that any interruption to your drinking or recycled water supply or sewerage service may cause. We aim to provide you with access to these services all day, every day, and we make every reasonable effort to minimise the number of interruptions to our supply system and promptly attend to any emergency. To limit the impact of any unplanned interruptions, we provide a 24-hour emergency service.

Any works we undertake are in accordance with safety standards set by our Occupational Health and Safety system (certified against ASO 4801), VicRoads, or any other relevant health or safety authority.

As your water and sewerage service provider, we aim to:

- restore your drinking or recycled water service within five hours in the unlikely event of an unplanned interruption to your supply
- minimise the unlikely event of unplanned drinking or recycled water supply interruptions to no more than five in any 12 month period
- minimise the number of sewer blockages you experience to no more than three in any 12 month period
- within one hour of being notified, attend any site of a burst or leak on our water or sewer pipes which might cause substantial or moderate damage to your property, your neighbours' properties or the environment
- clear a sewer blockage in our sewer, which is affecting your ability to use the service, within four hours
- contain a sewer spill caused by our assets on your property within five hours
- contain a sewer spill caused by our assets within your house within one hour.

### Unplanned interruptions

In the unlikely event of an unplanned interruption to your drinking or recycled water supply, you can obtain information within 30 minutes of South East Water being notified of the interruption by visiting [southeastwater/waterlive.com.au](http://southeastwater/waterlive.com.au) or by calling **132 812**.

### Planned interruptions

From time to time we may need to interrupt your supplies to undertake planned maintenance or asset renewals. When an interruption is required we'll inform you about the time and duration of any planned interruption, at least two business days in advance.

In the event of a planned interruption to the water supply, we'll provide access to emergency supplies of drinking water.

### Health or special needs

If you need water for a life support machine, it is important to register this requirement with us. Once you have registered with us we'll provide you with a free allowance of 42,000 litres of water every billing quarter, contact you at least four business days before any planned interruptions to your water supply, and contact you as soon as possible after an unplanned interruption to your drinking water supply. You may also register other special medical needs with us.

### Restoring supply

If water supply to your property has been restricted, once the reason for restriction has been resolved we'll restore your water supply upon payment of a fee within 24 hours.

## Creating a sustainable future

### Sustainable water use

We all have a role in responsible water use and by using water wisely we can help to secure water supplies and create greener and more liveable communities for now and into the future.

Reducing your water usage can also help to reduce your bill; the more water you use, the higher your bill is likely to be. This is because your water bill is partly based on how much water you've used and sent back into the pipe network down the drain or toilet.

From time to time the government and/or South East Water offer programs to encourage you to save water such as rebates on the purchase of water saving devices. For details on current available programs, please visit our website at [southeastwater.com.au](http://southeastwater.com.au) or contact us.

South East Water does not prevent you from:

- collecting and using rainwater for your own use
- installing a composting toilet which does not require connection to our water or sewerage systems
- diverting domestic grey water for non-drinking purposes, such as watering your garden.

Please take into account health and environmental considerations prior to installing these systems; local council or other approvals may also be required. In particular, these systems must not allow cross-contamination of the drinking water supply.

### Permanent Water Use Rules

Permanent Water Use Rules are in place across metropolitan Melbourne. They are a set of common sense measures, designed to prevent wastage of the drinking water supplied by South East Water – such as not using watering systems during the heat of the day or hosing down paved areas. For more information visit [southeastwater.com.au/permanentwateruserules](http://southeastwater.com.au/permanentwateruserules)

### Water restrictions in drought or emergency

In addition to Permanent Water Use Rules, from time-to-time there could be a drought or emergency where the use of water may be restricted or prohibited. Any restriction or prohibition of water will be in accordance with a schedule of restrictions on the use of water contained in our *Drought Response Plan* or *Emergency Management Plan*, which must be approved by the Minister for Water. Breaches of water restrictions can lead to prosecution, fines and restriction of your water supply.

An up-to-date copy of any approved *Drought Response Plan* or *Emergency Management Plan* is available at our headquarters during business hours for inspection upon request.

### Recycled water

If we supply your property with both drinking water and recycled water, then your property has a dual water supply system. This means that one pipe entering the property delivers water for drinking, bathing and washing purposes and a second, purple-coloured pipe delivers recycled water for clothes washing, toilet flushing and external garden use. Both of these pipes will have had a full system integrity check when recycled water was first supplied, to ensure there are no cross-connections between the drinking water and recycled water supplies.

If recycled water is supplied to your property, you must comply with the permitted uses for the service and inform all users and visitors of the permitted uses associated with this service. This helps to ensure your safety and the safety of your visitors. We will keep you regularly informed about the permitted uses of recycled water and notify you if changes are made. The limits on the permitted use of recycled water are available at [southeastwater.com.au/recycledwater](http://southeastwater.com.au/recycledwater)

We reserve the right to restrict your supply of recycled water or stop you using recycled water if you don't comply with the permitted uses.

### Plumbing works

State Government of Victoria legislation requires that a licensed or registered plumber conduct all plumbing work. All such work must be completed in accordance with the *Victorian Plumbing Regulations* and the *Plumbing Code of Australia*.

We also advise conducting a cross-connection check after any plumbing works have been undertaken on your property, to ensure recycled water pipes and drinking water pipes are not cross-connected on your property.

If you're a new recycled water customer, we will send you copies of the permitted uses and cross-connection instructions within five days of becoming a customer.

## Charges and billing

If you're a residential customer you can contact us via email or set up an online account to:

- pay and view your bills
- set up direct debit, monthly or fortnightly payments
- switch from paper to electronic bills.

Register at [mysoutheastwater.com.au](https://mysoutheastwater.com.au) or send us an email via [support@southeastwater.com.au](mailto:support@southeastwater.com.au)

### Drinking water and sewerage charges

Your water bill generally contains two main components that we charge for:

1. a service charge, which is a fixed fee levied for accessing our water and sewerage infrastructure
2. a usage charge for your water usage and sewage disposal.

Other relevant charges will be separately itemised on your bill. The water corporations only read cold water meters and not hot water meters.

The volume of water used forms the basis of the usage charge for water and sewage disposal. However, we adjust the sewage disposal volume allow for the estimated amount of water not disposed to sewer (for example, garden watering). We calculate your sewage disposal charge based on a fixed percentage of your water usage. You have the right to ask us to review the formula if you believe it substantially and systematically overstates the estimated volume. You need to provide reasons to support your request on an appeal form for us to review the estimate. Please contact us if you would like an appeal form mailed to you.

Under the relevant legislation, the owner of a residential property is liable for any water and sewerage service charges. The occupier of a residential property is liable for any usage charges, provided the property is separately metered and we have been advised of the full name and other personal details of the tenant as required by South East Water (such data requirements will include, but not be limited to telephone number, date of birth and drivers' licence number). If an owner and/or their authorised representative fails to provide tenancy details, we will hold the owner liable for all water usage and sewage disposal charges incurred during the relevant period.

For non-residential properties, as required under legislation, the property owner is liable for water and sewerage service charges and usage charges. We understand that as part of your lease agreement you may have an arrangement in place with your tenant regarding payment of these charges. If you require South East Water to change the mailing address of this account (e.g. amending to 'care of' your tenant), please notify us in writing. You can do this by emailing [support@sew.com.au](mailto:support@sew.com.au) or sending a letter to: South East Water, PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198.

We will directly bill tenants of non-residential properties for trade waste charges in accordance with their trade waste agreement.

### Recycled water charges

Similar to drinking water, service and usage charges also apply for recycled water. In some cases, these charges will be billed to you directly and in other cases your owners corporation will be billed. Billing will occur four times a year, unless we agree otherwise, and usage charges will be based on the volume of recycled water used.

### Fire service charges

We only impose fire service charges in respect of each connection to the water main that supplies

water to a sprinkler system or fire service within a property.

#### Extended private water supply fees

Properties supplied with water as part of extended private water supply works are charged a supply fee at the same rate as properties connected to the water supply. Details of charges are available on our website.

#### When you will be billed

We will bill you on a quarterly basis unless otherwise agreed, for water, sewerage, trade waste, recycled water and Melbourne Water's drainage rates (where relevant). The Parks Charge is billed annually on behalf of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, to help maintain and improve some of Victoria's parks, trails and other facilities, including our zoos, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance.

If you're a non-residential customer using significant volumes of drinking water or recycled water, or discharging large volumes of trade waste or sewage, you may be billed monthly for usage charges.

#### Issue of bills

Depending on your preference, we will issue a bill to you either:

- electronically at your nominated email address
- at the physical address you nominate
- via your agent at the physical address you nominate, where you have made a request to us to do so
- via any person authorised to act on your behalf at the physical or electronic address you nominate.

If no address is specified, we'll send the bill to the property address where the charges have been incurred, or to your last known address.

### What you will see on your water and sewerage bill

Your water and sewerage bill will include the following information:

- the date the bill was issued
- your postal address, account number and the address of the property for the charges incurred
- the date the water meter at the property was read, or if an estimate was made instead, a clear statement that an estimate was made
- the amount you're required to pay, the total of any payments you have made since the last bill and any outstanding credit or debit from previous bills
- service charges, usage charges, rates that we collect on behalf of Melbourne Water and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Parks Charge) and any other charges we have power to impose will be separately itemised on your bill
- the date you need to pay your bill by
- the ways you can pay
- information about how we can help if you're finding it hard to pay
- our telephone contact details
- information about our interpreter service; or
- information about available concessions and any concession to which you may be entitled.

### Paying your water and sewerage bill

You'd be required to pay your water and sewerage bill by the due date shown on your bill. This will be at least 14 days after the date the bill was issued.

Payment methods include:

- eftpos®
- direct debit
- BPAY
- credit card
- in person at any Australia Post office
- cheque
- through a facility provider of income support (i.e. Centrelink)

For the latest payment methods, please refer to your bill or visit

**[southeastwater.com.au/paymentoptions](http://southeastwater.com.au/paymentoptions)**

### Bill history

Upon request, we can provide you with your water bill history for the preceding seven years. There will be an administration charge for providing information more than seven years old.

We 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 our family violence policy and the refusal is not in breach of law.

### Rebates

Not-for-profit organisations may be eligible for a rebate on drinking and recycled water and sewerage service charges (but not usage charges) if the property is predominantly used for:

- education purposes
- hospitals and nursing care
- religious worship
- outdoor sporting and recreational activity
- charity.

### Concessions

If you're a residential customer and hold an eligible concession card, you may be eligible for government funded concessions on some of your charges on your principal place of residence.

### Payment assistance

Anyone can experience financial pressures from time to time and staying on top of household bills isn't always easy.

We offer a range of support options to help you manage these costs. Whether you're after greater flexibility with your payments, information about sustainable water use or looking for a bit more help, we're here to assist if (and when) you need it.

If you're finding it hard to pay your water and sewerage bill, please let us know as soon as you can. The earlier you let us know, the sooner we can help.

### Get greater flexibility with your bill payments

We offer flexible payment plans consistent with your capacity to pay and your water usage levels. We will confirm in writing, within 10 days, any payment plan we make with you and state how the payment amount has been calculated, the period of time over which you will pay the agreed amount and the amount to be paid in each instalment. If you would like to arrange a flexible payment plan, please contact us.

We are not required to offer you a payment plan, if, in the previous 12 months, you have had two flexible payment plans cancelled due to non-payment. In such a case, we will offer you an alternate flexible payment plan only if you provide reasonable assurance to us that you will comply with the new arrangement.

If you have been offered a flexible payment plan and refused or failed to respond, or if you have agreed to a flexible payment plan and failed to comply with the agreement, we may take legal action or restrict your supply.

If you receive Centrelink benefits, you can have your bill payments automatically deducted through Centrepay (contact [Centrelink](#) to set this up).

### Access support through South East Water Assist

A specialist team is on hand to help if you're experiencing financial difficulty. Our South East Water Assist team can provide practical support options or connect you to free and confidential financial counselling services.

The team can also discuss our plumbing assistance program with you. If you're eligible, this program provides you with free access to plumbing services – helping you to conserve water and reduce your water and sewerage bills.

### Family violence

Family violence impacts all areas of our community and as such we recognise the role we can play in providing account solutions and/or support services for customers that does not limit their access to an essential service.

South East Water has specially trained frontline staff to identify, guide and assist customers experiencing or suffering the effects of family violence. Confidentiality and safety are our utmost priorities; we treat every customer with respect and provide a service that minimises repeat disclosure and provides individual case management. We also acknowledge that we're not experts and will use our community partner and referral pathways to provide in-depth and ongoing support and advocacy.

Our *Family Violence Support Policy* details the options, initiatives and support we can offer you if you're experiencing family violence. It also outlines our commitment to ensure this is delivered by knowledgeable and understanding staff in a manner that respects and cares for our customers and in line with South East Water's commitment to supporting victims of family violence.

Any customer identified as being impacted by family violence will have no action taken on their account while being managed in the South East Water Assist Program. The account will be recalled from any in-house or third party collections activity and no restrictions of water supply will be processed. The customer will have full access to all financial support options available.

Each case will be handled by the South East Water Assist team with customer's safety and privacy given priority. All customers, including those with joint accounts, will have their circumstances reviewed and an outcome reached based on the safety and privacy of both parties.

### Supporting you in hardship

Our *Vulnerable Customer and Hardship Policy* outlines the standards we adopt in relation to managing your account if you're experiencing financial hardship and your rights as someone who's experiencing financial hardship.

For details please visit [southeastwater.com.au/paymentsupport](http://southeastwater.com.au/paymentsupport) or contact us.

### Your rights

You, and every one of our customers experiencing financial hardship, has the right to:

- be treated sensitively on a case-by-case basis and have your circumstances kept confidential
- receive information about alternative payment arrangements, our *Vulnerable Customer and Hardship Policy* and state

government concessions including the Utility Relief Grant Scheme (URGS)

- nominate an amount you can afford to pay on an agreed arrangement plan
- choose from various payment methods offered by us and receive written confirmation of the agreed payment arrangement within 10 working days of the agreement being reached
- re-negotiate the amount of instalment payments in the event there's a change in your circumstances
- receive information about free and independent financial counselling services from an accredited financial counsellor
- receive a language interpreter service at no cost to you
- be shielded from legal action and additional debt recovery costs while you continue to make payments according to an agreed schedule
- not have your water supply restricted as long as you have agreed to a payment arrangement
- have access to water efficiency information to assist in reducing your consumption.

### Flexible payment plans

We offer flexible payment plans consistent with your capacity to pay and your water usage levels. We are not required to offer you a payment plan, if, in the previous 12 months, you have had two flexible payment plans cancelled due to non-payment. In such a case, we will offer you an alternate flexible payment plan only if you provide reasonable assurance to us that you will comply with the new arrangement.

If you have been offered a flexible payment plan and refused or failed to respond, or if you have agreed to a flexible payment plan and failed to comply with the agreement, we may take legal action or restrict your supply.

### Final water bills

If you're an owner vacating your property we will send you a final account for any outstanding amounts that did not form part of your property settlement adjustment.

If you're a tenant, we require at least two business days' notice so we can read the water meter, and a forwarding address to send your final water bill. If you don't tell us that you're leaving your property, you will be responsible for usage charges until the date the water meter is next read even though you may have already vacated the property.

Any unpaid debt on a water and sewerage account for properties you previously occupied within our service area can be transferred to any new account you have with us.

If your property is supplied with recycled water, we require at least five working days' notice upon change of occupancy in order to provide the next resident with the necessary information kit to inform them of the extra service available, if they choose to use it.

### Overdue account notices

If you fail to pay your water and sewerage bill by its due date we will send you a reminder notice, or a reminder email. We encourage you to contact us on **131 851** before the due date if you will be unable to pay your bill by the due date.

### Final notices

At least seven days before we take action for non-payment of a water bill (for example, restricting your water supply or commencing legal proceedings), we will send you a final notice. The final notice will specify help that is available; remind you that the bill is overdue; and that it must be paid to avoid legal proceedings or restriction of your drinking or recycled water supply (which may also result in you incurring additional costs).

### Dishonoured payment

If we incur costs from a financial institution due to your cheque being dishonoured, or by having insufficient funds available when paying by direct debit, we may recover those costs from you.

### Undercharging

If we have undercharged you, except in the case of illegal use, we will limit the amount to be recovered to the 12 months prior to notifying you of the undercharging. We will also allow you to pay the amount over a time period equal to the period in which the undercharging occurred.

### Overcharging

If we have overcharged you we'll notify you within 10 business days of becoming aware of the error and refund or credit the amount according to your preference. If you have any overdue water and sewerage bill/s charges unpaid, we will apply the credit to your bill/s. No interest shall accrue to a credit or refund as a result of overcharging.

### Information about price changes

We'll notify you as soon as possible of any change to both service and usage charges. Such information will accompany your first water and sewerage bill, issued after a price change. We publish a schedule of approved fees and charges on our website at [southeastwater.com.au/residentialprices](http://southeastwater.com.au/residentialprices) and [southeastwater.com.au/businessprices](http://southeastwater.com.au/businessprices) and can also provide you with a copy upon request.

## Actions for non-payment

We will make all reasonable efforts to help you pay your water and sewerage bill. However, if you have not paid or agreed to pay by at least 28 working days from the time the bill was first sent to you, we may take legal action or restrict your drinking and recycled water supply. If you're experiencing payment difficulties, it may be possible to avoid legal action and restriction of your water supply by offering a suitable repayment proposal to us. There may be some

additional costs to you if legal or restrictive action has to be taken.

#### Limits on legal action and restriction

We'll not take legal action or restrict your drinking or recycled water supply:

- if the amount owed is less than \$200
- without having sent a final notice (refer to 'Collection')
- without having sent information about our *Vulnerable Customer and Hardship Policy*; programs that are available to you if you're having difficulty paying; or giving you a chance to receive the benefit of a concession or relief grant
- without specifying any assistance that is available, including information about the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)
- without attempting to contact you about the non-payment
- without having sent information warning of the proposed restriction or legal action and the associated costs that may be incurred by you, including the cost of removing a restriction device
- if you're eligible for and have lodged an application for an eligible concession card and the application is outstanding
- if you have made an application for a Utility Relief Grant Scheme and the application is outstanding
- if there's an unresolved dispute about the amount owing
- if you're a residential tenant and
  - your landlord owes the amount unpaid
  - you have a claim against the landlord in respect of a water and sewerage bill pending at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

This does not restrict our right to pursue a debt owed to us by a person who is no longer a customer.

#### Additional limits on restriction

We will also not restrict your drinking or recycled water supply in the following circumstances:

- on a Friday or the day before a public holiday; or after 3 pm; or on a day of Total Fire Ban declared by the Country Fire Authority in the area in which the property is located
- if you're registered as a special needs customer (for example, you need water for a life-support machine). This does not apply to recycled water
- if we believe that the restriction will cause a health hazard.

#### Interest on overdue amounts

We may charge you interest once an amount is overdue. We won't charge you interest if you hold an eligible concession card, if you're on an approved payment plan, or if you have advised us that you're experiencing financial hardship.

The maximum rate of interest we charge on unrecovered amounts will be in accordance with the maximum rate set by the Essential Services Commission.

### Charges over property

Property based charges (lien) applies for all South East Water services provided to a property owner (both residential and non-residential). This includes charges for services for drinking water, sewerage, recycled water, fire and any usage charges.

When lien debt is incurred against a property, this debt remains with the property upon change in ownership. This is provided under Section 274(4A) of the *Water Act 1989* and the *ESC Customer Service Code*. This means that upon settlement of a property, any unpaid charges will become the responsibility of the purchaser.

### Minimum flow rate during restriction

If your water supply is restricted, we will reduce the supply of water to no less than two litres per minute at the tap nearest to the water meter. If the restriction is likely to cause a health hazard, please contact us on **131 851**.

Please note it is an offence under the *Water Act 1989* to tamper with a restrictive device legally installed by South East Water.

### Restoring supply

When the reason for your restriction no longer exists (for example, you pay your water bill or make alternative payment arrangements with us) we will restore your drinking and/or recycled water supply after you pay the relevant fee. We'll do so within 24 hours (and sometimes on the same day if you take the required action before 3 pm).

## Reading your water meter

### Why you have a meter

Our drinking water and sewerage usage charges are based on the volume of water you use and that you send back into our network via the drain or the toilet.

We calculate your bill by reading the water meter on your property. If the meter becomes defective, registers incorrectly or is removed from a property service, we may estimate how much water you've used. This estimate will be subject to later correction if it proves to be incorrect. We will take reasonable measures to ensure that you have an actual meter reading at least once in every 12 months and use reasonable endeavours to take an actual reading every billing cycle. Where your meter is not readily accessible, we may ask you to make it accessible. Otherwise we will estimate your meter reading.

If you receive recycled water at your property, your usage will be calculated by reading a meter separate from your drinking water meter. Recycled water meters are coloured purple to distinguish them from drinking water meters.

### Testing your meter

If you think that your meter is reading inaccurately, you may request us to test it. You will be required to pay a testing fee. If the test shows that the meter is not meeting required standards of accuracy, we will replace it and refund the cost of the test. We will also refund or credit any amount you were overcharged.

We'll notify you of the results of the test within five business days after completing the test.

We usually conduct special meter readings with a change of tenant process in order to produce a final account for the property. These special meter readings are free of charge.

### Access to your meter

If your meter is not readily accessible, we may ask you to make it accessible for reading and maintenance.

If we are not able to read your meter, for example, if its location makes access difficult, we may ask you to read the meter on our behalf. If your meter is difficult to access, we can, on payment of a fee, arrange for the installation of a remote reading device, which enables us to read your meter without entering your property. However, we may still need to have access to the meter from time to time, whether to read it or exchange it. This includes exchanges on properties that are supplied water via a galvanised wrought iron service.

### Meter security

If your meter is stolen, you should contact us within two business days, as well as the local police, to report the theft. We may request a financial contribution from you towards the costs associated with the replacement of the stolen meter. For new developments that are under construction, the applicant (if not the owner but the owner's agent), accepts responsibility on behalf of the owner, for costs associated with stolen meters.

### Keys

In some cases we may need to hold keys to your property to enable us to access your meter. If so, we will hold those keys in safe custody and return them to you when you notify us that you're vacating the property or if access is no longer required. Only authorised representatives of South East Water will have access to these keys.

## Entry to your property

Our employees and people we authorise have a right to enter onto your external property for a number of purposes, such as reading your water meter, carrying out works, and to find out whether water legislation is being complied with. If we need to enter onto your land we will cooperate as much as possible with you, cause as little harm and inconvenience as possible, leave the land as near as possible in the condition in which we found it and not stay longer than is necessarily reasonable.

When entering onto your property, our employees and people authorised by us are required to carry and display current identification at all times.

Our employees and people we authorise are not required to give you notice to enter onto your property to read a water meter; carry out a trade waste inspection; respond to emergency works; with a warrant issued by a magistrate; or to find out whether water legislation is being complied with.

Except in those circumstances, we will give you at least seven days' notice of our intention to enter onto your property to carry out any works, or conduct an inspection or test unless you consent to a shorter period.

Generally, won't enter onto a residential property before 7.30 am or after 6 pm without your consent.

However, for trade waste inspections we can enter onto a property at any reasonable time, or in an emergency, at any time.

If an employee or person authorised by us enters onto your property when no one is home (except for the purposes of reading an easily accessible

meter), the person will leave a notice stating their identity and the date, time and purpose of entry onto your land.

We ask you to inform our employees and people authorised by us of anything on your property that could be dangerous to them, for example, a guard dog.

### South East Water's powers

We have a number of powers that obligate you, as a property owner, to correct faults in your plumbing, remove trees and contribute to the cost of our works, for example when redeveloping a property. We will exercise these powers amongst other powers permitted to us under the *Water Act 1989*, relevant legislations and in accordance with the Essential Service Commission's *Customer Service Code Urban Water Businesses*.

You must not connect to, alter or remove any works connected to our system without our consent. If you plan to add or remove sewerage and water fixtures or commence any building work which may obstruct access to our assets (and you have not first obtained our consent for the work) you may be committing an offence.

### Penalty infringement notices

We can issue on-the-spot fines in excess of \$500 for breaches of Permanent Water Use Rules or water restrictions.

### Prosecution

Where there has been a successful prosecution for a breach of Permanent Water Use Rules, fines in excess of \$9,000 and/or imprisonment for up to six months may be imposed.

### Restriction of your supply

We may restrict your water supply if you breach Permanent Water Use Rules (and a fee may be imposed for removing a restricting device).

## Responsibilities for maintenance

### Water supply

In general, South East Water is responsible for maintaining the water service up to and including your property meter. Where there's no meter, we are responsible to the property connection point where a stop valve or tap controls the flow of water to your private extension.

Where the primary meter or part of the property service pipe (other than a fire service) is within or beneath the walls of a structure built on a serviced property, an additional stop valve must be installed external to the property within 300 mm of the property boundary (unless otherwise approved by us). Access for control of the valve should be secured by placing a casing pipe and approved valve cover over the stop valve in line with our requirements and those of any other relevant authority.

### Sewerage services

If you're a property owner, you're responsible for maintaining all sanitary drains up to our property connection branch. In accordance with the *Water (Estimation Supply and Sewerage) Regulations 2014* existing property connection branches may be longer than the length for which we are responsible. Where an existing property connection branch is now the responsibility of the property owner, plumbers are to ensure care is taken to prevent infiltration of foreign material or ground water into the our sewerage system. Plumbers must ensure all existing drains comply with the provisions of AS/NZ3500.2.

Please note that build over clearances are applicable (refer to the [Customer Guidelines for Proposed Works Over/Adjacent to Water Authority Assets up to and including 225 mm diameter](#) on our website).

To find out where your property connection branch is located, please contact us. For a small fee, we can also provide you with a copy of your property service plan.

Sewerage works which you're required to maintain must be kept in good repair and good working order, so that they operate in an efficient and hygienic manner. To do this, you will need to keep any inspection shaft, grate, vent or grease trap connected to these works clean, clear and accessible at all times. If you know or suspect that any stormwater on your property is connected to the sewerage system, you need to engage a licensed plumber to rectify it.

Slightly different rules apply to combined drains and pressure sewer systems. Further information is available on our website.

### Victorian Building Authority Certificate of Compliance

If your property's sanitary drain requires maintenance or repairs and is covered by a Victorian Building Authority Certificate of Compliance, please contact the licensed plumber who issued the certificate in the first instance, or, for further information, please contact the Victorian Building Authority.

### **Sewer main outside property boundary, building close to or on building line**

To meet our build over requirements, where a sewer main is located outside your property's boundary within government land, South East Water can choose to terminate the property connection branch externally to the property boundary of the service allotment.

Private sanitary drains are not permitted within an adjoining private property curtilage.

If your property connection branch terminates outside your property boundary, the owner must obtain permission(s) prior to the work(s) commencing from South East Water and any other relevant government authorities.

Sanitary drains should be laid having regard to the applicable road owner's requirements. If you're the developer, plumber and/or owner of the property, it is your responsibility to ensure sanitary drains be laid having regard to these requirements.

South East Water's ownership terminates one metre from the building, foundations or building overhang where an existing and/or proposed structure is:

- located on or near your property's boundary; and
- the sewer main is located outside your property's boundary and within government land.

### **Combined drains**

In accordance with the *Water (Estimation Supply and Sewerage) Regulations 2014*, the location of an allotment in relation to the property connection branch determines the responsibility for maintenance and repair.

### **Pressure sewer system**

If your property is serviced by a pressure sewer system, we own and are responsible for maintaining the pump unit and all works from the unit to our sewer. You're responsible for maintaining all sewerage works on your property beyond the unit.

The relevant conditions of connection also require you to maintain the power supply, the independent circuit-breaker and the power cable to the pump control panel on your property and to pay electricity charges for operating the pump.

### **Owners' corporations and multi-unit developments**

South East Water is not responsible for any shared private water and sewer mains in an owners' corporation, multi-unit development or any other property sharing a private main. It is the responsibility of the owners' corporation of individual owners of the development to maintain any such shared private mains. However, any water meter purchased from us will remain our responsibility to maintain.

## Enquiries, complaints and disputes

We pride ourselves on providing excellent customer service. By bringing your concerns or problems to our staff at an early stage, you can help us to understand if things go wrong and how we can improve both our services and our policies. Our aim is to resolve the problem in the beginning and to ensure that you're satisfied with the outcome.

### Resolving your problem

If you're ever dissatisfied about any aspect of your dealings with us, often all it takes to find a solution is to talk with one of our customer service officers. Our team is ready and equipped to listen to your concerns and aim to resolve your problem at the first point of contact.

We will respond within 10 working days to any complaint lodged with us. If the case is complex and we are unable to deal with the substance of the enquiry within 10 days, an interim response will inform you about when you will receive a reply.

Further details about our complaints handling procedures are available on our website at [southeastwater.com.au](http://southeastwater.com.au) or by contacting us.

### How to take your matter further

If you're not satisfied with our reply, you may contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman by phone on 1800 500 509 or by mail to GPO Box 469D, Melbourne 3001. Depending on the nature of the problem you may contact Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

### Disputes about money

If your complaint involves a dispute about money you owe, we won't seek payment unless 10 business days have elapsed since we have informed you of our decision and you have not sought a review of the decision or lodged a claim with an external dispute resolution forum. You must, however, pay any other amount owing to us that does not directly relate to the dispute.

## Information and privacy

### Privacy

We must keep your personal information confidential and comply with binding privacy laws, such as the Information Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic)*, the Health Privacy Principles contained in the *Victorian Health Records Act 2001*, other privacy legislation that may apply from time to time, or any approved privacy code or privacy policies we adopt and publish. For further information about our confidentiality obligations, please visit [southeastwater.com.au/privacy](http://southeastwater.com.au/privacy).

### Enquiries

If you have any enquiries, please visit [southeastwater.com.au/contactus](http://southeastwater.com.au/contactus) or contact us during business hours. Our aim is to answer your enquiry promptly and courteously.

You can also make an enquiry by writing to **PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198** or by email to [support@southeastwater.com.au](mailto:support@southeastwater.com.au)

If you request a written reply, you will receive one within 10 working days. Otherwise, we will respond to your enquiry via the telephone within 10 days.

## Appendix A: Our service commitments

### Guaranteed Service Levels

Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) payments are financial payments that we'll honour for any customer who experiences service levels below our defined thresholds. Whenever we become aware that we've failed to meet a specific GSL, we'll automatically apply a rebate to your next water and sewerage bill. If you believe you're entitled to a rebate you may enquire by contacting us on **131 851**, or by writing to us at PO Box 2268, Seaford, Vic, 3198.

Under our GSLs, we will give a \$60 rebate if:

- we cut your water for more than five hours
- you receive more than five unplanned water supply interruptions in any 12 month period (from 2018-19 for every water supply interruption from the sixth in any 12 month period)
- we allow more than three unplanned sewerage interruptions during any 12 month period at your property (this includes a payment for every interruption beyond three)
- we fail to restore a sewerage service interruption within four hours. This does not include sewer service interruptions in your own pipe work.

We will give a \$500 rebate if:

- you're a residential customer and we commence legal action or take steps to restrict your water supply prior to taking reasonable endeavours to contact you and provide you with information about the help available to you if you're experiencing difficulties paying.

We will give a \$1,000 rebate if:

- we fail to contain a sewer spill on your property within five hours of being notified.

We will give a \$1,500 rebate if:

- there's a sewer spill inside your premises caused by our infrastructure and we take longer than one hour to contain it.

We will donate up to \$10,000 to a local community group impacted by a spill if:

- a sewage spill caused by South East Water results in a beach closure.

Please note that GSL payments don't apply to the recycled water supply or water services supplied by a private extension.

Where our failure to meet a GSL is as a result of an event caused by, or is the responsibility of, the customer concerned or a third party, a GSL rebate won't be provided.

## Approved service standards

This charter outlines our customer service standards that we aim to deliver on all day, every day. If we fail to meet these standards, you may be eligible for a price reduction on your water supply and sewerage system charges.

This is our list of service standards, as approved by the Essential Services Commission:

<i>Service Standard</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
<b>Water</b>					
Customers experiencing more than 5 unplanned water supply interruptions in any 12 month period (number)	532	532	532	532	532
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 1) (minutes)	36	36	36	36	36
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 2) (minutes)	92	92	92	92	92
Average time taken to attend bursts and leaks (priority 3) (minutes)	264	264	264	264	264
Average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions (minutes)	88	88	88	88	88
Average duration of planned water supply interruptions (minutes)	179	179	179	179	179
<b>Sewerage</b>					
Customers receiving more than 3 sewer blockages in any 12 month period ( number)	17	17	17	17	17
Average time to attend sewer spills and blockages (minutes)	47	47	47	47	47
Average time to rectify a sewer blockage (minutes)	137	137	137	137	137
Spills contained within 5 hours (per cent)	100	100	100	100	100

## Glossary of terms

**Accessible stop valve:** a stop valve that is placed above or below ground within a stop valve cover approved by South East Water.

**Customer Service Code:** established by the Essential Services Commission (ESC) and specifies minimum customer-related standards, procedures, policies and practices with which water businesses must comply.

**Eligible concession card:** means a Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink or the Department of Veteran Affairs; a Centrelink Health Care Card; or a Department of Veteran Affairs Gold Card. (Cards marked as 'Dependent' are not eligible.)

**Essential Services Commission (ESC):** the independent economic regulator established by the State Government of Victoria to regulate prescribed essential utility services supplied by the electricity, gas, water, ports, grain handling, rail freight industries and aspects of the insurance industry.

**Sanitary drain:** a line of pipes including all fittings, conveying or intended to convey sewage (from the kitchen, bathroom, laundry and toilet) or trade waste from a serviced property to a South East Water sewer main. These pipes are separate to those provided to collect stormwater from a roof via downpipes and run-off from paved areas. The property owner is responsible for maintaining their sanitary drain.

**Maintained private extension:** a water main constructed by South East Water under a maintained private extension scheme. These schemes enable reticulated water supplies to be provided to small communities in remote areas (e.g. Maryknoll) to receive a limited water supply at a reduced cost.

**Melbourne Water:** manages drainage services, the reservoirs and major sewage treatment works serving Melbourne. Provides wholesale water and sewerage services to metropolitan Melbourne water corporations.

**Non-residential customer:** the owner of a property used for non-residential purposes.

**Overflow relief gully:** a drain-like fitting located outside the home, designed to release any sewage overflow external of your home, in the event of a sewer blockage.

**Permitted uses:** required limits placed by South East Water on relevant customers on the permitted use of recycled water, to comply with health regulation and environmental regulation.

**Planned interruption:** an interruption, which is caused by South East Water to allow planned maintenance or augmentation of works to be carried out.

**Pressure sewer system:** involves a number of individual household pumps pumping sewage via a pressure line. The cumulative effect of all the pumps moves the sewage to the treatment plant.

Pressure sewer systems are used in situations where the normal gravity sewer system is more difficult to implement (for example, where the water table is high).

**Private extension:** where a South East Water water main does not front or pass through a customer's property, the property owner (or a previous owner) may have connected to a South East Water water main using their own pipe work.

**Private fire service:** that part of any works from the water main of a water corporation to an outlet on a serviced property, where the outlet is designed to supply water to the property for the principal purpose of combating an outbreak of fire on the property, whether or not that part of the works is also connected to another outlet used for purposes other than combating an outbreak of fire.

**Private water supply works (internal property pipework):** in relation to a serviced property, this means the property service pipe (including any backflow prevention device and any other fixtures or fittings other than a water meter) from the outlet of any fixtures installed on the serviced property to the property service works, but does not include any extended private water supply works.

**Property service pipe:** the water supply pipe connecting the water main of a water corporation to the outlet of any fixtures installed on a serviced property.

**Property service works (external works generally maintained by the water corporation with the exception of private fire services and extended private water supply works):** the property service pipe (including any stop valves and any other fixtures or fittings other than a water meter) reaching from from a water main of a water corporation to:

- the primary meter; or
- the property boundary (if the primary meter is more than two metres inside the property boundary); or
- the first accessible stop valve where
  - the primary meter or part of the property service pipe is within or beneath the walls of a structure built on the serviced property; or
  - where there's no water meter.

**Recycled water:** water that has been derived from sewerage systems or industry processes and treated to a standard that is appropriate for its intended use (EPA, 2003).

**Stop valve (isolation):** a flow control fitting capable of regulating and shutting off the flow in a water main or property service pipe, and includes any fitting of a stop tap type, gate valve, ball valve or ferrule tap type.

**Water recycling plant:** a structural plant that treats incoming sewage to whatever level or levels are required to safely recycle the water; for example, irrigating crops, flushing toilets, etc. Includes producing biosolids suitable for reuse.

**Residential customer:** the owner or occupier of a dwelling used for residential purposes.

**Sewage:** water and waste discharged from a property into our sewer via a drain or toilet.

**Sewerage system:** the pipes and pumping stations that carry sewage from your home to a water recycling plant.

**South East Water:** a water corporation wholly owned by the State Government of Victoria under the *Water Act 1989*.

**Trade waste:** liquid waste, as opposed to domestic sewage, which is generated by industrial, commercial, trade or manufacturing processes and is discharged to the sewer.

**Unplanned interruption:** an interruption which is caused by a fault in South East Water's system or a fault which is the maintenance responsibility of South East Water.

**Water main:** the water main of a water corporation including any stop valve and any fittings located at the connection between a water main and a property service pipe.

## South East Water's contact details

### Our headquarters

WatersEdge  
101 Wells Street  
Frankston Vic 3199

### Mailing address

South East Water  
PO Box 2268  
Seaford, Vic, 3198

### Online

Web [southeastwater.com.au](http://southeastwater.com.au)

Email [support@southeastwater.com.au](mailto:support@southeastwater.com.au)

If you're a residential customer you can contact us or manage your account online. Register at [mysoutheastwater.com.au](http://mysoutheastwater.com.au), live web chat (between 9 am to 7 pm) or send an email to [support@southeastwater.com.au](mailto:support@southeastwater.com.au).

### Phone numbers

Faults and emergencies (24 hours)	132 812
Account enquiries (Monday to Friday 8 am to 7 pm)	131 851
Hearing impaired service	133 677 (ask for 131 851)
Interpreter service	9209 0129
Country and interstate callers	03 9552 3737
Overseas billing enquiries	+613 9552 3737

### Essential Services Commission

T: 9032 1300; 1300 664 969  
Web: [esc.vic.gov.au](http://esc.vic.gov.au)

### Energy and Water Ombudsman (Vic)

GPO Box 469  
Melbourne Vic 3001  
PH: 1800 500 509  
Web: [ewov.com.au](http://ewov.com.au)

### Large print copies

For large print copies of this charter, please contact us on 131 851.