Our research shows Melburnians expect their water utilities to continually find efficiencies to better manage our water now and in the future.

Two-thirds of customers support upgrading our water network to digital meters to help us manage our water more sustainably.

The millennium drought changed the way we managed water and led to the introduction of recycled water, stormwater harvesting and the desalination plant. Digital meters could be the next era for our water utilities.

DIGITAL METERING JOINT PROGRAM
FACT SHEET

November 2016
The metropolitan Melbourne water utilities – City West Water, South East Water and Yarra Valley Water – are working together to explore digital water meters. We are working towards making a decision in late 2017 on whether to upgrade our meter fleet to digital meters.

Our research shows Melburnians expect their water utilities to continually find efficiencies to better manage our water. Digital technology could be the next era to help us manage our water more sustainably, now and in the future, in an increasingly drier climate and with a growing population.

CONTACT US
City West Water
citywestwater.com.au

South East Water
southeastwater.com.au

Yarra Valley Water
yvw.com.au
**What are digital water meters?**
Digital water meters link to telecommunications networks to transmit water meter readings and communicate information about the water network. By increasing the number of digital meters in our network the water utilities will have more granular information to more efficiently manage your water supply now and in the future. More timely information will also help identify bursts and leaks both within the customer’s property and the wider water network.

**How do digital water meters benefit customers?**
Digital water meters can provide alerts to help identify leaks both within the customer’s property and in our water network, so they can be fixed quickly, saving water and money. Currently water meters are read manually and customers are billed quarterly so months of wasted water and money can occur before a bill arrives alerting a customer to a leak. Digital water meters can also provide customers with more timely information on their water usage, for example through a website, App, and/or email, so they can make informed choices about their water consumption.

**What work is being done as part of the Digital Metering Joint Program?**
As part of the program the three water utilities are trialing new technologies in metering and communications, and testing the market. We are working together on customer research, economic modelling and business case development. This partnership approach provides potential for efficiencies that will benefit everyone in the metropolitan area.

By combining the experience and technical capabilities of the three water utilities, together with expert advice and checks, we will thoroughly assess if digital water meters are viable and deliver benefits to our customers, stakeholders and businesses. We are working towards making a decision in late 2017 on whether to upgrade our meter fleet to digital meters. Ultimately, in order for digital water meters to proceed the decision needs to stack-up financially and support is required from:

- customers
- Victorian Government
- Essential Services Commission (independent industry regulator for the water utilities)

**Where are digital water meters used already?**
Digital metering technologies are becoming increasingly more viable and can provide benefits beyond metering. During the past five years, digital water meters have been rolled-out in areas throughout Europe and North America.

The three Melbourne water utilities have separately trialed digital water meters in the past. A trial in Craigieburn discovered eight per cent of homes less than five years old had leaks and 30 per cent of homes aged around 30 years old had leaks. The large leaks in some of the older households cost around $100 or more in wasted water per month.

In Melbourne, we’ve been replacing water meters at the end of their approximately 15-year life with the same type of meter since the 1940s.

**How much will digital water meters cost?**
We’re working to understand the financial implications of digital water meters and investigating options to determine if digital meters are feasible without impacting customers’ hip pockets.
Are the water utilities privately or publicly owned?
Unlike the electricity and gas industries, the metropolitan water utilities are publicly owned by the Victorian Government. The utilities pay a dividend to the government annually to be reinvested into the State.

What do digital water meters look like?
We are trialing a range of digital water meters to determine the most suitable technology for the customers’ and the water utilities’ needs. Digital water meters are about the same size as your existing water meter. To install a digital meter, the existing meter is simply removed and replaced with a digital meter in the same location by a qualified installer.

How do digital water meters transmit data?
Digital water meters usually communicate information to the utilities through low level radiofrequency (RF) waves, a form of electromagnetic energy present all around us from natural and man-made sources. We will be trialing communications technologies that are well within the Australian safety standards and likely to produce even less than a 20th of the RF measured by a mobile phone. Digital water meters would replace your current meter which in many cases is located at the property boundary, near the footpath. Independent RF testing will be undertaken prior to a potential meter replacement.

What is the timeframe for the program?
• Water Utilities’ Boards review the viability of digital water meters in 2017;
• If viable, Victorian Government, ESC and customer support is required prior to proceeding;
• If all approvals are received, the utilities could begin upgrading meter fleets from early 2019 onwards;
• Ongoing customer and stakeholder engagement will occur as the project progresses.

Digital meters have the capacity to reduce the amount of water lost from the supply system each year to bursts and leaks in mains pipes.

To install a digital meter a qualified installer removes the existing meter and replaces it with a digital meter in the same location, usually at the property boundary near the footpath.