
Changes to water code to help victims of family violence

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Water

Victoria's water businesses have praised efforts to improve protection for family violence victims, saying changes to the water code will help them deliver better outcomes for their customers and communities.

The state's largest water businesses, representing around 75 per cent of Victorian households, have commended the work of the Essential Services Commission in bringing the industry together to address family violence.

Commission chairman Dr Ron Ben-David thanked water businesses for their support. He noted that while the customer service code changes respond to one of 227* recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the project has come to mean much more to those involved.

'Working together to find better ways protect vulnerable customers has forged a real sense of a shared commitment and collaboration between us, the sector and related welfare agencies,' he said.

The heads of City West Water, South East Water and Yarra Valley Water have written a joint submission to the commission praising it for 'displaying leadership in an open and transparent manner and ensuring engagement with a broad range of stakeholders'.

Yarra Valley Managing Director Pat McCafferty says the code changes will help water businesses raise awareness of family violence in the community.

‘Introducing family violence policy standards is a great start and very consistent with the Victorian water sector's existing activities to support vulnerable customers in our community,’ he wrote.

‘We're enthusiastic about working in partnership with the Commission to ensure there are appropriate support mechanisms for people who are experiencing family violence.’

The code changes will require water businesses to develop and implement family violence policies that, as a minimum, address:

- implementing training and support for frontline staff dealing with customers affected by family violence
- preventing the disclosure of private and confidential customer information to perpetrators
- enabling customers to access existing payment difficulty programs provided by businesses
- minimising the need for customers to repeatedly tell their story to different staff
- referring customers to appropriate support services.

Strongly supported by Victoria’s water businesses, this is the first time in Australia that an economic regulator has formalised an integrated response to family violence.

For general enquiries

Phone: [\(+61 3\) 9032 1300](tel:+61390321300) or [1300 664 969](tel:1300664969)

Email: reception@esc.vic.gov.au

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