

# Victorian water businesses – response to coronavirus

## Summary report – covering data to 28 November 2021

As part of the Essential Services Commission's role in administering the customer protection framework in Victoria's water sector, we began collecting data in April 2020 on the support provided to customers to track the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This data reflects the extent of support provided to customers who are having difficulty paying their water bills. We are also regularly interviewing water businesses to better understand the support measures they have implemented and the actions they are taking to support their customers.

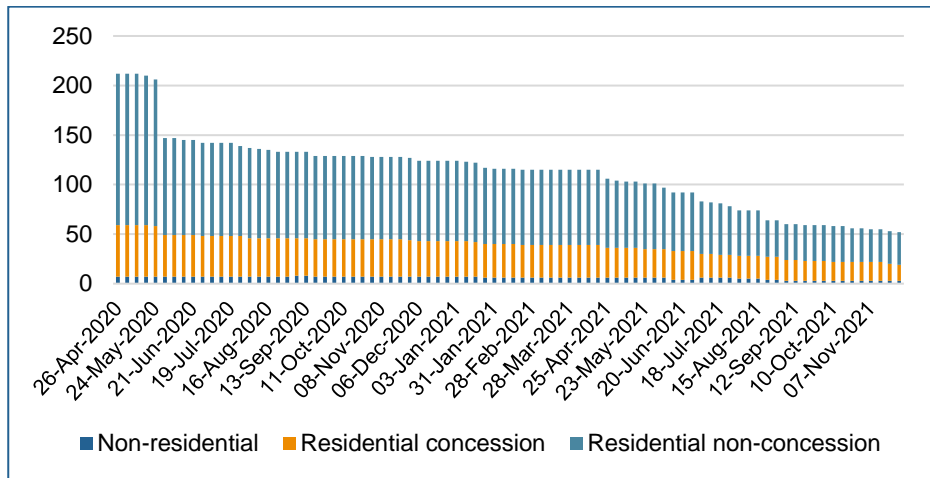
This report provides a summary of weekly data collected from water businesses since the week ending 26 April 2020. Note we do not audit the data provided by water businesses.

### Key insights

- **More customers applied for government Utility Relief Grants during November compared to October.** The average weekly application rate was 507 in November, up from 468 in October. In the past month there was a peak of 582 weekly applications and a low of 365 applications. In metropolitan Victorian, the average weekly application rate increased to 378 in November from 347 in October.
- **The weekly number of customers awarded hardship grants decreased in November compared to October.** On average 229 metropolitan customers were awarded hardship grants each week in November. This was 55 fewer than the October average of 284 per week, but still 51 more than the pre-pandemic norm of 178. In regional Victoria, the November weekly average was 246 grants, 28 fewer than the October weekly average. This level is over three times the pre-pandemic norm (about 67 grants awarded per week).
- **The number of metropolitan customers on water business hardship programs increased by 98 (0.5 per cent) from 20,967 at the end of October to 21,065 at the end of November.** There was also an increase of 61 customers in regional Victoria, where the figure at the end of November was 5,804 compared to 5,743 at the end of October (a 1.1 per cent increase).
- **Water businesses have generally stopped restricting customers' water supply and initiating legal action for non-payment of bills since at least late April 2020.** At the end of November, 52 customers across the state currently have their supply restricted, four fewer than at the end of October.
- **The number of payment instalment plans in place decreased by 9,771 in November, to 150,960 at the end of the month.**

## Number of customer water restrictions in place at end of week

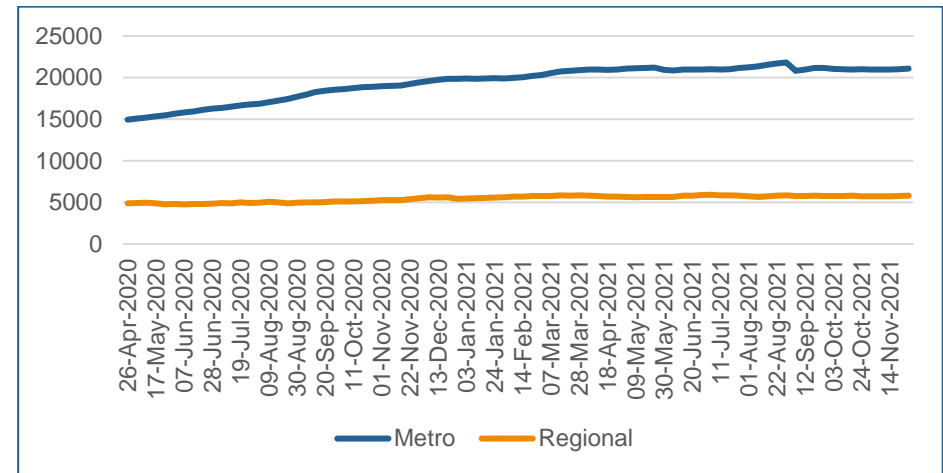
Past month (industry total):



- A total of 52 customers had water supply restrictions in place at the end of November, a decrease of four since the end of October.
- 33 residential non-concession customers, 16 residential concession customers and 3 non-residential customers currently have their water supply restricted.

## Number of customers in hardship programs at end of week

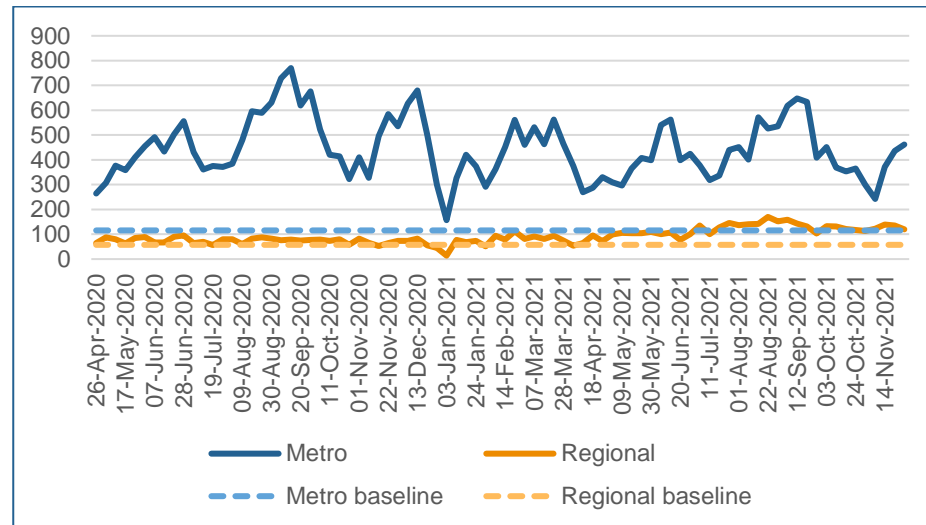
Past month (industry total):



- The total number of customers in hardship programs increased by 159 (0.6 per cent) in November, bringing the total to 26,869. This is about 0.9 per cent of Victoria's over 2.9 million water customers.
- The number of metropolitan customers on hardship programs increased by 98 customers (0.5 per cent) from 20,967 at the end of October to 21,065 at the end of November. In regional areas, the number of customers on hardship programs at the end of November was 5,804. This is 61 (1.1 per cent) more customers than at the end of October.
- On average, 383 customers entered and 343 exited water business hardship programs each week in November.

## Number of utility relief grants applied for during week

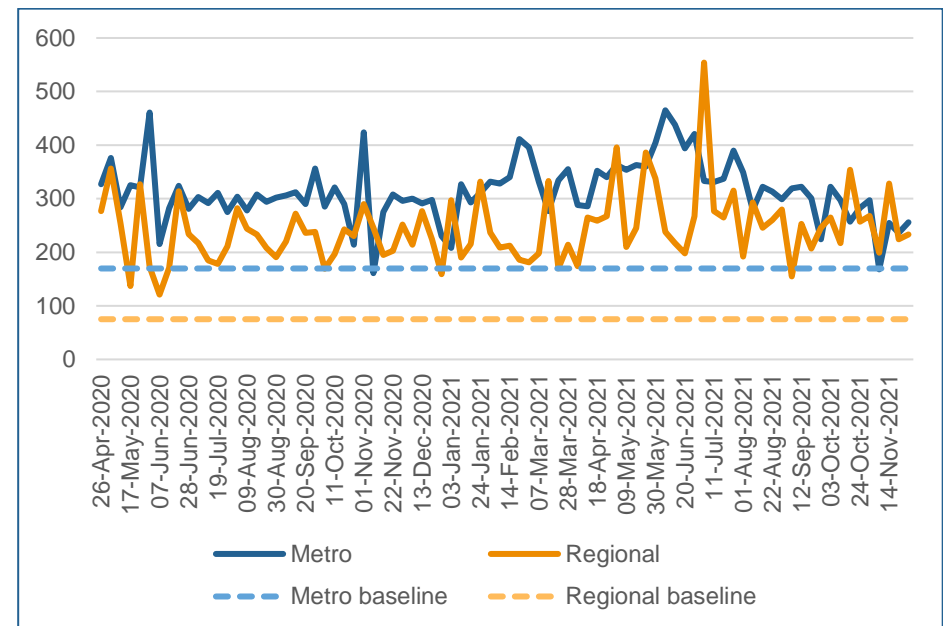
Past month (industry total):



- The weekly average for state government utility relief grant applications in November was 507, an increase on the October average of 468. In the past month there was a peak of 582 weekly applications and a low of 365 applications.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the average weekly application rate for November was 378, an increase on the October average of 347 and about three times the pre-pandemic historical average. The number of metropolitan customers applying for the utility relief grant has been spiking roughly every three months – this trend is being driven by one metropolitan water retailer and aligns with its quarterly billing cycle.
- In regional Victoria, the average weekly application rate increased to 129 in November, from 121 in October.

## Number of customers receiving hardship grants during week

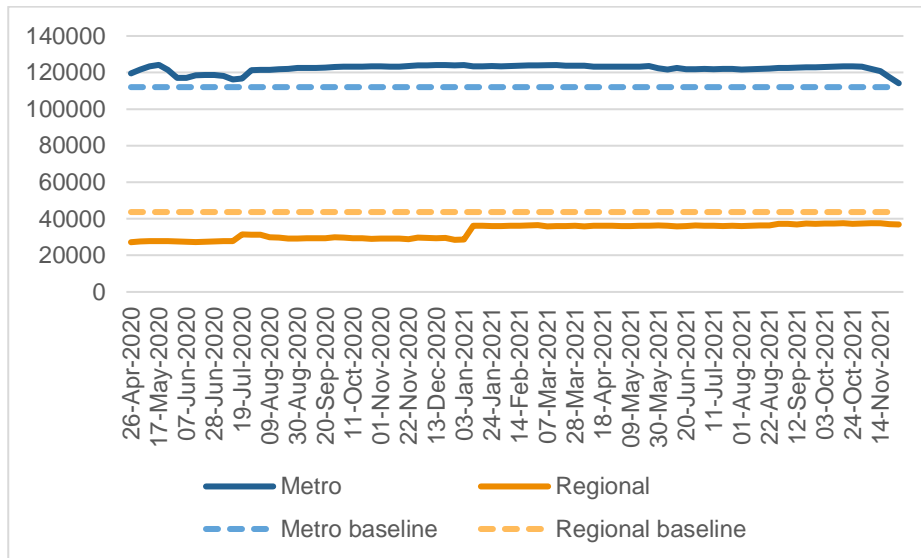
Past month (industry total):



- The November weekly average of 475 customers awarded hardship grants is lower than the October weekly average of 558 customers.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the weekly average for November was 229 grants, 55 fewer than the October weekly average, but 51 more than the pre-pandemic weekly average of 178 grants.
- In regional Victoria, the weekly average for November was 246 grants, 28 fewer than the October weekly average and over three times the pre-pandemic weekly average of 67 grants.

## Number of payment instalment plans in place at end of week

Past month (industry total):



- There were 150,960 customers on payment instalment plans at the end of November, a decrease of 9,771 (6.1 per cent) compared to the end of October.

**About the data:** Data is reported weekly by water businesses and is not audited by the commission. We are collecting a small subset of the annual data that is included in our annual water performance report. Definitions of the performance indicators we collect are available on our website at [www.esc.vic.gov.au/water-performance-reports](http://www.esc.vic.gov.au/water-performance-reports).

The historical baseline included in some of the charts above shows a typical weekly figure for that measure, which we calculated using available data reported to us in previous years as part of normal annual performance reporting. These baselines can be considered as pre-pandemic norms and serve as a comparison to the current weekly reported data.