

## Unprecedented year saw continued benefits to Victorians

Safeguarding the community and protecting the rights of Victorian households and small businesses have been among the main priorities for Victoria's independent economic regulator during the past year of unprecedented challenges.

As outlined in its Annual Report 2019-20, tabled today in parliament by Assistant Treasurer Danny Pearson, the Essential Services Commission held the providers of essential services to account and responded directly to the needs of the Victorian community.

Chairperson Kate Symons said the commission had worked quickly to gain an understanding of the economic challenges of the pandemic and to implement measures to relieve customer hardship.

"We have met the unprecedented challenges of this time head on," she said. "In these tough times it is even more vital that the commission monitors the behaviour of retailers.

"In 2019–20, we put a cap on how much Victorians could be charged if they were late for their energy bill and our new pricing framework means customers benefit from improved services and investment in areas they value most.

Ms Symons says the commission introduced new rules to increase customer protection for Victorian households and small businesses.

"We have issued more than \$2 million in penalty notices to energy companies for failing to meet their obligations to their customers," she said.

Ms Symons says the long-term supply electricity had also been a priority during 2019-2020 and encouragingly 12 new energy licences were issued Victoria's growing demand for energy was met.

Other highlights of 2019–20 included:

- helping save 6.9 million tonnes of greenhouse gases through the Victorian Energy Upgrades program
- setting the Victorian default offer for 2020 resulting in around 170,000 Victorian households and small businesses continuing to save hundreds on their electricity bills than before the offer was introduced

- increasing stakeholder engagement (including virtually), with 28 events reaching more than 1,200 attendees
- reporting that all local councils met the state's rate cap, or a variation approved by the commission
- beginning work on a vulnerability strategy.

The commission's annual report 2019–20 is now available at: <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/about-us/our-performance/annual-reports>.

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