



MEDIA RELEASE
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**INCREASED WATER CONSUMPTION MAIN DRIVER OF
INCREASE IN WATER BILLS DURING 2012-13**

Water consumption across Victoria rose for the second consecutive year, up 9 per cent in 2012-13, according to the *2012-13 Water Performance Report*, released today by Victoria's economic regulator, the Essential Services Commission.

The report incorporates data provided and independently verified for the 13 regional businesses, three metropolitan retailers and Melbourne Water, for the 12 months to June 2013.

Weighted average household consumption across Victoria's 16 water businesses increased from 150 kilolitres (kL) in 2011-12 to 163 kilolitres (kL) in 2012-13.

According to the Commission Chairperson, Dr Ron Ben-David, "this increase in water consumption continues to reverse the trend of declining consumption between 2006-07 and 2010-11, but is still well below consumption levels prior to the recent drought".

By business, water usage increases ranged from 2 to 22 per cent, with the largest increases in the state's hotter northern regions.

Average annual household bills were higher in 2012-13 than in 2011-12 for all water businesses. The average household bill for owner occupiers ranged across businesses from \$832 (Lower Murray Water) to \$1261 (Gippsland Water).

"These increases reflected scheduled price rises, along with the higher average household consumption. Metropolitan prices were frozen at 2011-12 levels (to return unrequired desalination payments), so the higher average consumption was the primary cause of metropolitan bill increases", Dr Ben-David said.

Included in the Report was the level of supply restrictions imposed by water businesses on customers who did not pay their water bills.

A two per cent increase was recorded in the number of domestic customers whose water supply was restricted for non-payment, from 2381 in 2011-12 to 2439 in 2012-13, and a 16 per cent increase for non-domestic customers.

Legal actions taken against domestic customers for non-payment of bills rose slightly from 661 customers in 2011-12 to 811 in 2012-13.

The use of instalment plans for residential customers increased for 10 of the 16 businesses, reflecting an increased uptake by customers of the opportunity to spread their bill payments more evenly and more frequently.

Dr Ben-David said that all urban water businesses were obliged to comply with the Victoria-wide customer service code for water users, to assist customers in financial hardship.

“As a regulator, our priority is monitoring compliance with relevant regulatory obligations, as well as promoting ongoing improvement in assisting customers”, Dr Ben-David said.

Customer complaints were also up in 2012-13, with complaints to businesses up 12 per cent from 2011-12 and complaints to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) up 9 per cent.

According to Dr Ben-David, “the increase was driven mainly by payment queries and water quality complaints related to colour from metropolitan Melbourne customers.”

A copy of the report is available on the Commission’s website, along with a five year performance summary: **www.esc.vic.gov.au**

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