

## A year on, five times more regional water customers on hardship support

A year on from the first lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Victoria's water businesses continue to provide additional support to customers, with regional customers particularly hard hit.

[New data from the Essential Services Commission](#) shows the total number of customers in hardship programs rose by 615 in March, taking the total to 26,714.

The commission's water director Marcus Crudden says around 550 Victorian customers were awarded hardship grants each week in March, slightly fewer than in February.

"Last month we saw the number of weekly hardship grants awarded to customers in metropolitan Melbourne return to pre-pandemic averages, but in regional areas this figure is still five times the normal rate," he said.

On average 166 metropolitan customers were awarded hardship grants each week in March, just under the pre-pandemic norm of 170.

In regional Victoria, the weekly average was 387 compared to the historical average of around 75 grants awarded per week.

Mr Crudden said water businesses continue to proactively reach out to customers.

"Throughout the pandemic Victoria's water businesses have sought to ensure their customers are aware of existing support programs and new measures in response to the pandemic," he said.

More customers also applied for government Utility Relief Grants during March compared to February. The average weekly application rate was 591 in March, up from 550 in February.

**About the data:** Data is reported weekly by water businesses and is not audited by the commission. We are collecting a small subset of data included in our annual water performance report.

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