

## Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

### Update – covering data up to 28 June 2020

The commission sent voluntary data requests to all retailers to monitor the number of energy customers on payment plans and those who are now enquiring about assistance with paying bills. The following provides our observations on the data reported to the commission to date.

This information should be treated as confidential until it is publicly released by the commission.

### Key observations in June

- No disconnections for non-payment in the month of June.

#### Residential customers:

- There was a large decrease in customers who called their retailer in June, with the weekly average electricity residential customers that enquired about payment assistance decreasing by 26 per cent since May.
- Compared to 31 May, there were fewer electricity residential customers receiving payment assistance who can and cannot pay for ongoing usage:
  - 29,820 who can pay for their ongoing usage, a two per cent reduction
  - 16,976 who cannot pay for their on-going usage, an eight per cent reduction
- The corresponding average arrears of electricity residential customers receiving payment assistance have decreased as well compared to 31 May. These figures can show some minor fluctuation between weeks and are impacted by billing cycles:
  - \$625 for those who can pay for their ongoing usage, a two per cent reduction
  - \$1,500 for those who cannot pay for their ongoing usage, a one per cent reduction
- Compared to 31 May, the average arrears have also decreased for gas residential customers receiving payment assistance who can pay for ongoing usage, but remained stable for customers who cannot pay for ongoing usage:
  - \$468 who can pay for their ongoing usage, a four per cent reduction

- \$1,141 who cannot pay for their ongoing usage, no change
- The weekly average residential customers missing paying their bill on time in June increased by four per cent for electricity and 13 per cent for gas compared to May. But we note that these figures show fluctuations between weeks depending on the billing cycles.
- In the month of June, we started receiving data on customers who chose to defer their payments. Retailers reported that an estimated 0.3 per cent of electricity and gas residential customers have chosen to defer their payments as at 28 June:
  - 8,439 electricity customers
  - 6,987 gas customers

The corresponding average amount outstanding for residential customers who chose to defer their payments as at 28 June:

- \$577 for electricity customers
- \$429 for gas customers

#### **Small business customers:**

- There was an estimated 40 per cent reduction in the weekly average number of small business electricity customers enquiring about assistance since May.
- An estimated one per cent of Victorian small business energy customers are receiving assistance from their retailers, a total of 2,494 electricity and 697 gas as of 28 June.
- There was an increase in the average arrears of small business customers receiving assistance from their retailers compared to 31 May:
  - \$1,264 for electricity, an 11 per cent increase
  - \$1,655 for gas, a 15 per cent increase
- The weekly average small business customers missing paying their bill on time in June decreased by 15 per cent for electricity and 9 per cent for gas compared to May.
- As at 28 June, an estimated 0.8 per cent of Victorian small business customers had deferred their payments. Retailers reported:
  - 2,306 electricity customers
  - 908 gas customers.
- The corresponding average amount outstanding for residential customers who deferred their payments as at 28 June:
  - \$2,453 for electricity customers
  - \$1,623 for gas customers

**About the data:** During the week ending 28 June 2020, we received submissions from 18 retailers covering 92 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Weekly data is reported by retailers on a voluntary basis and is not audited by the commission. This data consists of a small subset of the measures that are included in our annual performance report. This data does not yet allow us to draw specific conclusions on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic. We also note that some of these figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data – this can impact comparisons to other time periods.

## Victorian-wide data summary<sup>1</sup>

Indicator	Electricity			Gas		
	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun
<b>Residential customers – assistance and arrears</b>						
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	31,911 1.2%	30,564 1.2%	29,820 1.1%	22,125 1.1%	20,279 1.0%	20,577 1.0%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	21,017 0.8%	18,459 0.7%	16,976 0.6%	15,606 0.8%	13,707 0.7%	12,762 0.6%
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$618	\$641	\$625	\$498	\$485	\$468
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,385	\$1,515	\$1,500	\$1,092	\$1,141	\$1,141
<b>Small business customers – assistance and arrears</b>						
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,471 0.9%	2,489 0.9%	2,494 0.9%	696 1.1%	684 1.1%	697 1.1%
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,180	\$1,141	\$1,264	\$1,139	\$1,441	\$1,655
<b>Customers who deferred payments</b>						
Number of residential customers	-	-	8,439	-	-	6,987
Average amount deferred by residential customers	-	-	\$577	-	-	\$429
Number of small business customers	-	-	2,306	-	-	908
Average amount deferred by small business customers	-	-	\$2,453	-	-	\$1,623

<sup>1</sup> These figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data. Some weeks have missing data from retailers. This can impact monthly totals as well as comparisons to other time periods. Note that average arrears are calculated by estimating total arrears divided by the number of customers receiving assistance across the market (reported data only).

Indicator	Electricity			Gas		
	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (27 Apr to 31 May)	April (30 March to 26 April)	May (27 April to 31 May)	May (27 April to 31 May)
<b>Calls waiting times</b>						
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	111 seconds	72 seconds	77 seconds	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
<b>Calls and enquiries (market-wide)</b>						
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	84,551	90,651	95,333	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	8,622	12,589	9,310	6,050	9,373	7,354
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	1,839	2,439	1,467	318	309	241
<b>Missed bills (market-wide)</b>						
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	38,535	41,513	43,037	27,432	27,134	30,760
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,192	9,381	7,983	1,876	1,872	1,700