

Victorian water businesses – response to coronavirus

Public report – covering data to 29 November 2020


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.

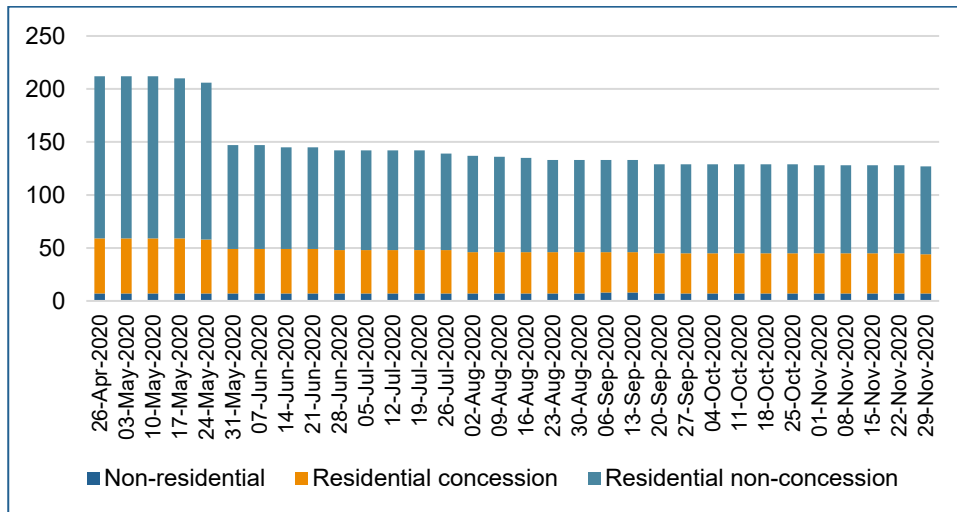
This report provides a summary of weekly data collected from water businesses since the week ending 26 April 2020. Note we do not audit the data provided by water businesses.

Key Insights

- **Victoria's water businesses continue to provide additional support to customers during the pandemic.** Water businesses have been proactive in reaching out to customers, including small business and other non-residential customers, to ensure they are aware of existing support programs as well as new support measures developed in response to the pandemic.
- **More customers applied for government Utility Relief Grants during November compared to October.** The average weekly application rate was 550 in November, up from 492 in October. November saw a low of 394 applications in the first week of the month, and a peak of 649 towards the end of the month.
- **Fewer customers received hardship grants from their water business each week during November compared to the end of October.** The November weekly average of 484 customers awarded hardship grants was 9.1 per cent lower than October's average of 533.
- **The number of metropolitan customers on water business hardship programs continues to steadily increase, rising by 2.5 per cent this month from 18,507 at the end of October to 18,964 at the end of November.** In regional areas, the figure fluctuated between about 5,200 and 5,500 from week to week earlier in the year, but has steadily increased since late August and was 5,969 at the end of November, 4.6 per cent higher than at the end of October.
- **Water businesses have generally stopped restricting customers' water supply and initiating legal action for non-payment of bills since at least late April.** Since the last week in October, one supply restriction has been lifted. At the end of November, 127 customers across the state still have their supply restricted.

Number of customer water restrictions in place at end of week

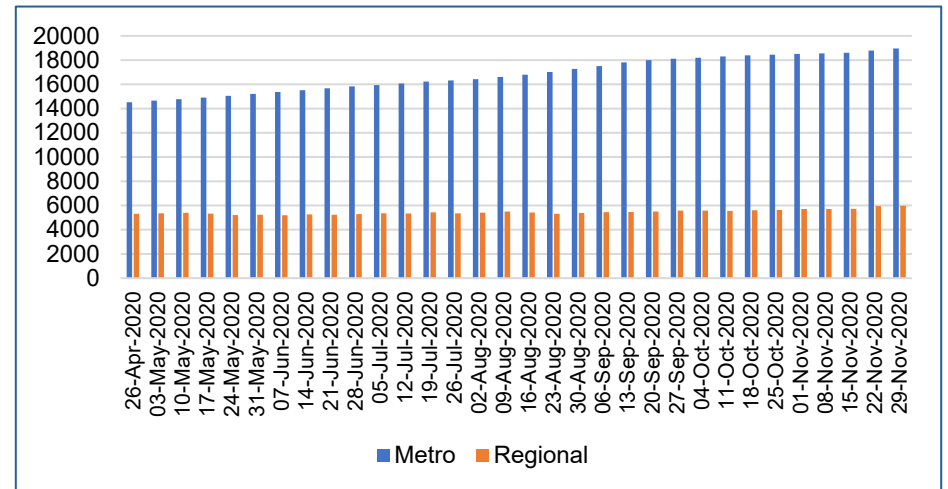
Past month (industry total): 



- A total of 127 customers had water supply restrictions in place at the end of November, continuing the downward trend from 212 in April when weekly reporting started.
- 83 residential non-concession customers, 37 residential concession customers and 7 non-residential customers currently have their water supply restricted.

Number of customers in hardship programs at end of week

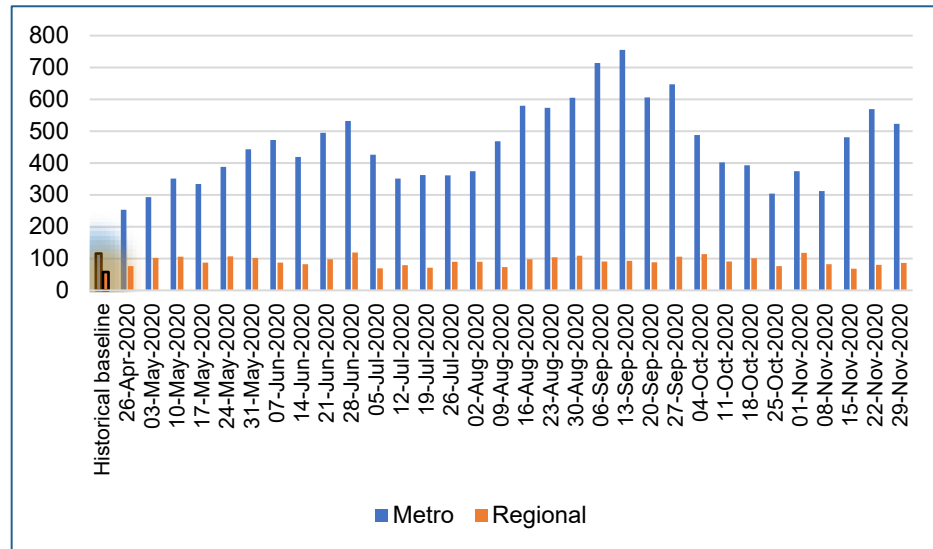
Past month (industry total): 



- The total number of customers in hardship programs rose by 717 (3 per cent) in November, bringing the total to 24,933. This is about 0.9 per cent of Victoria's over 2.9 million water customers.
- The number of metropolitan customers on hardship programs also increased, rising from 18,507 at the end of October to 18,964, an increase of 457 (2.5 per cent).
- In regional areas, the number was 5,709 at the end of October but has risen to 5,969 (a 4.6 per cent increase) by the end of November.
- On average, 439 customers have entered and 274 exited water business hardship programs each week.

Number of utility relief grants applied for during week

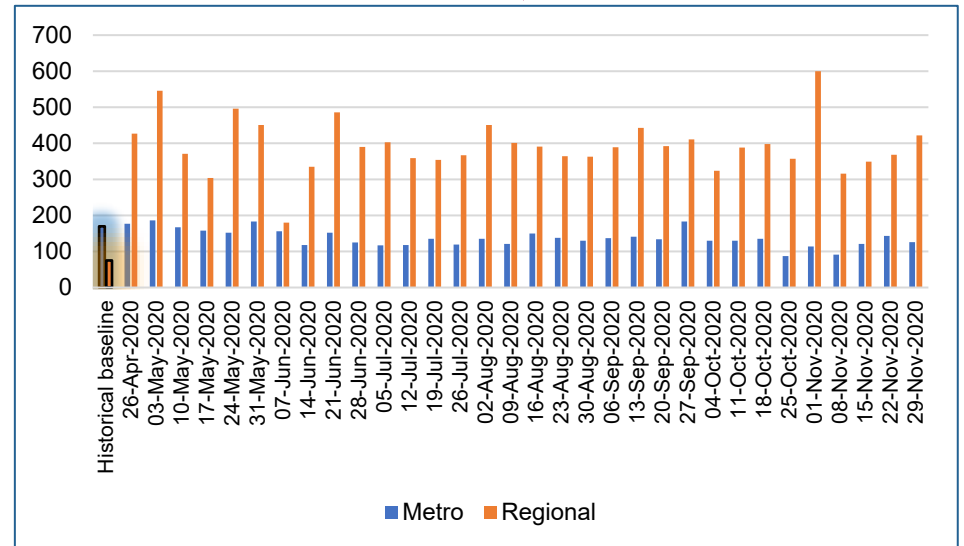
Past month average (industry total):



- The weekly average for state government utility relief grant applications in November was 550, an increase from the October average of 492. November saw a low of 394 applications in the first week of the month, and a peak of 649 towards the end of the month.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the weekly application rate at the end of November is around four times the historical average.
- In regional Victoria, the weekly application rate continues to be around double the historical average.

Number of customers receiving hardship grants during week

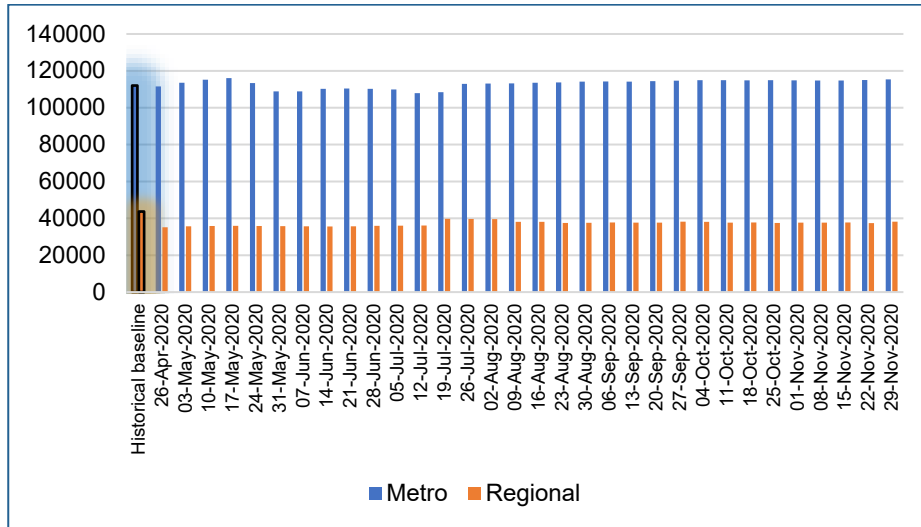
Past month average (industry total):



- The November weekly average of 484 customers awarded hardship grants was 9.1 per cent lower than October's average of 533.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the weekly average for November was 120 grants, lower than the historical weekly average of 170 grants.
- In regional Victoria, the weekly average for November was 364 grants, just under five times the historical weekly average of 75 grants.

Number of payment instalment plans in place at end of week

Past month (industry total):



- The number of customers on payment instalment plans has increased to 153,503 at the end of November. This is 945 (0.6 per cent) more than the 152,558 customers on instalment plans at 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 [here](#).

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.