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## RURAL WATER CUSTOMER SERVICE CODE

5 AUGUST 2020



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## Rural Water Customer Service Code

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### AMENDMENT RECORD

Issue No.	Date	Nature of amendment
1	25 June 2008	Schedule 1 approved service standards
2	5 December 2012	Amended clauses to account for debt management changes following the passing of the Water Amendment Act 2012
3	1 July 2013	Schedule 1 approved service standards
4	27 July 2016	Schedule 1 approved service standards and new clause 8.6
5	5 April 2017	Inserted family violence clause and consequential amendments made
6	1 August 2018	Amended schedule 1 to give effect to service standards approved in water price review 2018 (takes effect from 1 July 2018)
7	9 June 2020	Amended schedule 1 to give effect to service standards approved in water price review 2020 (takes effect from 1 July 2020)
8	5 August 2020	Inserted new clause and schedule to effect coronavirus support

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# PART A INTRODUCTION

This code is made under section 4F of the *Water Industry Act 1994* in accordance with the Water Industry Regulatory Order made pursuant to section 4D of the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this code is to specify standards and conditions that water businesses must comply with in providing regulated supply services and granting licences to customers (unless specifically exempted by this code or by a decision of the Commission) but not bulk supply services or licensing provided to an urban water business.

This code does not apply to supply services provided by urban water businesses covered by the Commission's urban water business customer service code.

Each water business is required to:

- (a) comply with the customer-related standards, procedures and practices set out in this code; and
- (b) develop, issue and comply with a customer charter which meets the procedural and substantive requirements of this code and sets out the water business's approved service standards.

## AMENDMENT TO THIS CODE

This code may be amended by the Commission on its own initiative or in response to a proposal by a water business or other stakeholders.

The Commission will not amend this code until water businesses and other stakeholders have had a reasonable opportunity to make representations and those representations have been considered, in accordance with the Commission's Charter of Consultation and Regulatory Practice.

The Commission will give reasonable notice to water businesses of any amendments to this code.

## COMMENCEMENT

This code regulates water businesses from 1 July 2007.

New clause 11 (Family Violence) commences on 1 July 2017. A water business must have a family violence policy from that date and must ensure that the policy is fully implemented by 30 June 2018.

New clause 12 (National Cabinet Coronavirus Support Policy and Principles – April 2020 (National Principles)) commences on 18 August 2020. A water business must apply the National Principles as required by clause 12.

## SEPARATE WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

A separate written agreement for the provision of a supply service made before 1 July 2007 need not comply with this code.

A separate written agreement for the provision of a supply service made after 1 July 2007 cannot reduce the rights of a customer provided for or implied in this code unless:

- (a) satisfying code requirements is not practical; and
- (b) the water business expressly identifies any significant departures from this code to the customer.

## LICENCES

A licence issued or granted before 1 July 2007 need not comply with this code.

Subject to any conditions prescribed or fixed under water law, a licence renewed, issued or granted after 1 July 2007 cannot reduce the rights of a customer provided for or implied in the following clauses of Part B of this code:

- (a) Clause 1 relating to charges;
- (b) Clause 2 relating to complaints and disputes;
- (c) Clause 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 relating to billing;
- (d) Clause 4 relating to payments;
- (e) Clause 5 relating to collection;
- (f) Clause 7 relating to works and maintenance; and
- (g) Clause 9 relating to information,

unless the water business expressly identifies any significant departures from this code to the customer.

# PART B STANDARDS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND SUPPLY

## 1. CHARGES

### 1.1 Variation

A water business may, subject to water law, its approved service standards and any relevant determination of the Commission, vary charges to customers.

A water business must notify customers of any variation in charges for supply services or a licence on or with the first bill after the decision to vary the charges has been made.

A water business may calculate a pro-rata charge to effect a variation in charges where the variation date falls within the period during which a customer's bill is calculated.

## 2 COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTES

### 2.1 Complaints and disputes policy

A water business must have and comply with policies, practices and procedures for the handling of complaints from customers and others affected by the water business's operations.

Without limiting this general obligation, a water business's complaints and disputes policy must provide:

- (a) that if a written reply is requested from a customer the water business will not take longer than 10 business days to respond to an enquiry or complaint; and
- (b) that a reply to a customer's enquiry or complaint must deal with the substance of the enquiry or complaint or tell the customer when they will receive such a reply if the enquiry or complaint is complex; and
- (c) the reasons for any decision to be given, including details of the legislative or policy basis for the reasons if appropriate; and
- (d) a complaint escalation process that gives a customer:
  - (1) the opportunity to raise the complaint up to the level of a senior manager within the water business's management structure; and
  - (2) contact details of, and information about referral to, EWOV or another external dispute resolution forum in the event that the customer has raised the complaint to a higher level and is not satisfied with the water business's response;
- (e) that the water business is restricted in its ability to recover an amount of money, the subject of which is in dispute, until the dispute has been resolved; and
- (f) that a customer is informed of the matters in paragraphs (a) to (e).

## 2.2 Resolution of disputes

A water business must endeavour to resolve in good faith any dispute directly with its customers and others affected by its operations.

For the purposes of clause 2.1(e), a water business may consider a dispute about non-payment resolved if:

- (a) it has informed the complainant of its decision on the complaint or any internal review of the complaint; and
- (b) 10 business days have passed since the complainant was informed; and
- (c) the complainant has not:
  - (1) sought a further review under this clause; or
  - (2) lodged a claim with EWOV or another external dispute resolution forum.

A water business must not consider a dispute resolved until any claim lodged with EWOV or another external dispute resolution forum has been finalised.

## 3. BILLING

### 3.1 Billing frequency

A water business must consult with its customer service committees and customers generally to determine or alter the dates or periods for billing customers.

### 3.2 Water business's meter readings

A water business must use reasonable endeavours to ensure that all customers whose properties have a meter which measures volumetric use for billing purposes have an actual meter reading at least once every 12 months.

### 3.3 Special meter readings

Upon request by the customer, a water business must determine a customer's outstanding charges outside of the normal billing cycle.

The water business may calculate the outstanding charges by:

- (a) arranging for a special meter reading at a reasonable charge payable by the customer; or
- (b) requesting customers to provide a reading of the meter; or
- (c) providing an estimated bill at no cost to the customer.

### 3.4 Issue of bills

A water business may issue a bill to:

- (a) a customer at the physical or electronic address specified by the customer; or
- (b) a customer's agent at the physical or electronic address specified by the customer if the customer has made a written request to the water business; or
- (c) any person authorised to act on behalf of the customer at the physical or



electronic address specified by that person.

If no address has been specified, a water business must send the bill to the physical address of the property in respect of which the charges have been incurred, or to the customer's last known address.

### 3.5 Content of bills

A bill issued by a water business must contain the following information:

- (a) the date of issue;
- (b) the customer's billing address and account number;
- (c) the address of the property to which the charges in the bill relate;
- (d) (as applicable) the date on which the meter was read, or if the reading is an estimation, a clear statement that the reading is an estimation;
- (e) the amount the customer is required to pay;
- (f) the date by which the customer is required to pay;
- (g) the ways in which the customer can pay the bill;
- (h) information about help that is available if the customer is experiencing difficulties paying;
- (i) details of the water business's enquiry facility, including a 24 hour emergency telephone service number;
- (j) referral to interpreter services offered by the water business;
- (k) any outstanding credit or debit from previous bills;
- (l) information on concessions available and any concession to which the customer may be entitled;
- (m) if the bill relates to a licence, that failure to pay may result in suspension of the licence; and
- (n) if the water business intends to charge interest on outstanding amounts, a clear statement of the rate of interest and from what future date it is to be applied.

### 3.6 Presentation of charges

A bill issued by a water business must separately itemise each charge, including any interest payable on outstanding amounts, or tariff component.

### 3.7 Adjustment of bills

A water business may recover an amount undercharged if:

- (a) except in the case of illegal use, the amount to be recovered is limited to the amount undercharged in the 12 months prior to the water business notifying the customer that undercharging has occurred; and
- (b) the amount to be recovered is listed as a separate item and is explained on or with the customer's bill; and
- (c) it allows the customer to pay the amount to be recovered over a time period equal to the period in which undercharging occurred, up to a maximum of 12 months; and

- (d) it allows the customer to pay the amount to be recovered through a water business's instalment plan in accordance with clause 4.3.

A water business may identify an amount undercharged as a result of a customer's illegal use of water by estimating the usage for which the customer has not paid. In respect of this amount, a water business may exercise other rights available to it, including rights under clause 6.

If a water business overcharges a customer, it must:

- (a) inform the customer within 10 business days of becoming aware of the error; and
- (b) refund or credit the amount overcharged in accordance with the customer's instructions.

## **4. PAYMENTS**

### **4.1 Payment methods**

A water business must accept payment from customers:

- (a) in person at a network of agencies or payment outlets;
- (b) by mail;
- (c) by electronic means;
- (d) by direct debit arrangement in accordance with any agreement between the water business, the customer and the customer's bank; and
- (e) in advance.

A water business must not require customers to agree to direct debit as a condition of providing a supply service or issuing a licence.

### **4.2 Payment difficulties**

Subject to water law, a water business must, on a case-by-case basis, assist customers who have payment difficulties by:

- (a) making provision for alternative payment arrangements in accordance with a customer's capacity to pay including:
  - (1) offering a range of payment options, including flexible payment plans in accordance with clause 4.3; or
  - (2) redirection of the bill to another person for payment provided that person agrees in writing;
- (b) providing for written confirmation of an alternative payment method referred to in clause 4.2(a) to be sent to customers within 10 business days of an agreement being reached;
- (c) offering to suspend the due date for some or all of an amount owed;
- (d) having policies stating any circumstances in which it will waive or suspend interest payments on outstanding amounts; and
- (e) where appropriate, referring customers to:
  - (1) government funded assistance programs; or

- (2) a rural financial counsellor.

### 4.3 Flexible payment plans

Any flexible payment plan offered by a water business to customers must:

- (a) state the period over which the customer will pay the agreed amount; and
- (b) specify an amount to be paid in each period; and
- (c) be able to be renegotiated at the request of a customer if there is a demonstrable change in their circumstances; and
- (d) be confirmed in writing to the customer prior to or as soon as practicable after the flexible payment plan commencing.

A water business is not required to offer a customer a flexible payment plan if the customer has, in the previous 12 months, had 2 flexible payment plans cancelled due to non-payment unless the customer provides a fair and reasonable assurance (based on the circumstances) to the water business that the customer will comply with the plan.

## 5. COLLECTION

### 5.1 Reminder notices

If a customer fails to pay by the required date(s) stated in a bill, a water business must send a reminder notice.

### 5.2 Warning notices

At least 5 business days prior to taking any action for non-payment, a water business must send a payment warning notice that:

- (a) specifies any assistance that is available to the customer, including contact information for EWOV; and
- (b) advises the customer that the bill is overdue and must be paid for the customer to avoid suspension, legal action or restriction; and
- (c) specifies that the water business might be able to recover outstanding amounts at the time of any sale of the customer's property (if the customer is also the property owner); and
- (d) cautions that, if legal or restriction action is taken, the customer may incur additional costs in relation to those actions; and
- (e) specifies the date from which interest (if any) may be applied on outstanding amounts, and the percentage interest rate that may be applied.

### 5.3 Additional contents of reminders and warning notices

All reminder notices and warning notices must contain (in addition to the requirements of clause 5.1 and 5.2) all of the information listed in clause 3.5 except information about meter readings, usage, previous bills or past payments.

## 5.4 Interest on unrecovered amounts

Subject to water law and clause 5.5, if:

- (a) a water business fixes a date by notice in (or provided together with) the customer's bill, being not less than 14 days after an amount is due to be paid by the customer; and
- (b) the notice referred to in paragraph (a) indicates that if an amount due remains unpaid after the date fixed by the notice, interest will accrue from the date the amount is due; and
- (c) any part of the amount payable by the customer is not paid by the date fixed by the notice referred to in paragraph (a),

then, a water business may charge interest on the unpaid amount.

## 5.5 Maximum rate of interest that may be charged

For the purposes of section 281(1) of the *Water Act 1989* and section 4F(2)(f) of the *Water Industry Act 1994*:

- (a) the maximum rate of interest that may be charged on unrecovered amounts is:
  - i. 10 per cent until 30 June 2013; and
  - ii. on and from 1 July 2013 an annual rate set by the Commission each May based on the 10 year Australian Commonwealth Government Bond Rate plus a margin to be determined by the Commission; and
- (b) the interest starts accruing on the day the amount is due and ends on the date all unpaid amounts of a charge are paid in full, both days inclusive.

## 5.6 Other charges

Apart from the application of section 274(4A) of the *Water Act 1989* - whereby amounts owed to a rural water business by a customer in relation to a property owned by the customer are a charge on that property - a water business must not impose other charges in respect of outstanding amounts owed by a customer unless otherwise approved by the Commission.

## 5.7 Application of funds

Where possible and/or reasonable in the circumstances all amounts received by a water business from customers must be applied to the debt that has been outstanding the longest.

## 5.8 Dishonoured payment

A water business may recover from a customer an amount charged by the water business's financial institution due to:

- (a) a customer's cheque being dishonoured; or
- (b) a customer having insufficient funds available when paying by direct debit.

## **6. ACTIONS FOR NON-PAYMENT**

### **6.1 Suspension**

A water business may suspend a customer's supply service for non-payment if:

- (a) more than 10 business days have elapsed since the issue of a reminder notice referred to in clause 5.1; and
- (b) the customer has been sent a warning notice referred to in clause 5.2 including information on programs that are available to help customers with payment difficulties; and
- (c) the water business or its agent has attempted to make contact with the customer about the non-payment.

### **6.2 Restriction and legal action**

A water business may take legal action or restrict a customer's supply service for non-payment if:

- (a) the water business has complied with the steps in clause 6.1; and
- (b) the customer has been notified of the proposed restriction or legal action and the associated costs; and
- (c) the customer has:
  - (1) been offered a flexible payment plan under clause 4.3 and the customer has refused or has failed to respond; or
  - (2) agreed to a flexible payment plan and has failed to comply with the arrangement.

### **6.3 Limits on suspension, restriction and legal action**

A water business must not commence legal action or take steps to suspend or restrict a customer's supply service due to non-payment if:

- (a) the amount owed by the customer is less than \$200 unless the customer has failed to pay consecutive bills in full over a period of not less than 12 months;
- (b) the customer is eligible for and has lodged an application for a government funded concession relating to amounts charged by a water business and the application is outstanding; or
- (c) the amount in dispute is subject to an unresolved complaint procedure in accordance with a water business's complaints policy.

This clause does not restrict a water business's rights under water law to pursue a debt owed to it by a person who is no longer a customer.

### **6.4 Additional limits on restriction**

A water business must not take steps to suspend or restrict a customer's supply service due to non-payment if:

- (a) it is a Friday, public holiday, weekend, day before a public holiday, or after 3.00 pm; or

- (b) it is a day of total fire ban declared by the Country Fire Authority in the area in which the property is located.

## **6.5 Removal of restrictions**

A water business must restore a supply service suspended or restricted under this clause within 1 business day of becoming aware of the reason for suspension or restriction no longer persisting.

## **7. WORKS AND MAINTENANCE**

### **7.1 Maintenance obligations**

A water business must implement programs to maintain its systems in accordance with its approved service standards.

A water business must inform customers of the maintenance obligations of the customer and the water business.

### **7.2 Worker identification**

A representative of a water business must not enter a customer's property without appropriate identification.

### **7.3 Keys held by water business**

If a water business holds keys to a customer's premises, the keys must be held in safe custody and returned to the customer upon notification of the customer's vacation of the relevant property or if access is no longer required.

## **8. QUALITY AND RELIABILITY OF SERVICES**

### **8.1 Water supply quality**

Where a water business delivers water directly to a customer, the water business must endeavour to inform customers of material changes in the quality of water supplied by it which would be likely to affect the purposes for which the water is used by customers.

### **8.2 Delivery of water and access to drainage services**

A water business must ensure that its supply services are provided in accordance with its approved service standards, except to the extent that:

- (a) the customer does not comply with any applicable requirements of service or supply;
- (b) the customer's infrastructure falls short of the required condition;
- (c) a supply service is provided via private infrastructure;
- (d) there is a drought or an emergency;
- (e) there is an unplanned or planned interruption;

- (f) supply is restricted or suspended in accordance with this code;
- (g) for a drainage service, use of the supply service would exceed applicable limitations of the drainage system;
- (h) amendments to approved service standards have been agreed with customers;  
or
- (i) water law provides otherwise.

### **8.3 Rectification**

A water business must rectify any deficiency in satisfying clauses 8.1 and 8.2 as soon as possible after it becomes aware of the deficiency, or within a time agreed with the customer.

### **8.4 Obligation to provide reliable services**

Subject to its Statement of Obligations, a water business must develop and implement plans, systems and processes and manage its assets to ensure that supply services are provided on a reliable basis.

A water business must use reasonable endeavours to minimise the impact of unplanned interruptions to supply services.

A water business must comply with standards specified in its approved service standards and any other standard which is approved by the Commission.

### **8.5 Planned interruptions – information and response**

A water business must inform affected customers of the time and duration of any planned interruption to a supply service at least five business days in advance.

### **8.6 Performance reporting (GMW)**

Goulburn-Murray Water must report on its website and by direct written communication to its customer service committees its performance against each of its approved service standards set out in schedule 1. Such reports must be made as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year.

## **9. INFORMATION**

### **9.1 Enquiries**

A water business must have policies, practices and procedures to provide the following information (where relevant to a water business's operations) to customers through an enquiry facility:

- (a) account information;
- (b) bill payment options;
- (c) concession entitlements;
- (d) programs available to customers who are having payment difficulties;
- (e) information about the water business's complaint handling procedures;

- (f) information about EWOV;
- (g) water allocations;
- (h) water ordering;
- (i) licence applications and renewals; and
- (j) applicable fees.

## 9.2 Fees for information or advice

Unless stated otherwise in this code, a water business must not charge a fee for the provision of information or advice required under this code to customers or others affected by its operations.

## 9.3 Schedule of charges

A water business must publish its schedule of fees and charges as approved by the Commission on its website and provide a copy to a customer upon request.

## 9.4 Water allocation policy

A water business must ensure that an up to date copy of its water allocation policy is available at its offices during business hours for inspection upon request and for viewing on its website.

## 9.5 Overuse policy

A water business must have and comply with policies, practices and procedures for the overuse of water by customers.

## 9.6 Efficient and responsible use of water

A water business must provide information to customers about the efficient and responsible use of Victoria's water resources and how customers may conserve water.

## 9.7 Billing history

Upon request by a customer, a water business must provide the customer's account and usage history for the preceding three years within 10 business days, or other period by agreement. A water business may refuse to provide a customer with their account and usage history where the provision of such information is contrary to the information handling procedures set out in the water business's family violence policy and the refusal is not in breach of law.

A water business may impose a reasonable charge for providing a customer's account and usage history held beyond three years in accordance with the relevant Public Record Office Standard General Disposal Schedule for the Records of Water Authorities.

## 9.8 Regulatory information

A water business must provide to customers upon request any regulatory



instruments other than the *Water Act 1989*, including a copy of this code.

## 9.9 Communication assistance

A water business must provide, or provide referral to, an interpreter service and a Telephone Typewriter (TTY) service for speech and hearing impaired customers.

A water business must publish, and provide upon request, its customer charter in languages other than English to the extent required under the guidelines issued by the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

## 9.10 Customer obligations

A water business must use reasonable endeavours to keep each customer informed of the customer's material obligations under water law.

## 9.11 Privacy

A water business must outline in its customer charter such obligations and particulars of the water business's privacy practices in accordance with applicable laws.

## 10. GUARANTEED SERVICE LEVELS

If a water business implements a guaranteed service level scheme as approved by the Commission:

- (a) the scheme must provide for any GSL rebate available to customers under the scheme to be applied automatically in the event that customer entitlement to the GSL rebate arises; and
- (b) the scheme must ensure that any GSL rebate is paid or given to customers as soon as practicable after a customer entitlement to the GSL rebate arises.

## 11. FAMILY VIOLENCE

A water business must have and implement a family violence<sup>2</sup> policy.

As a minimum, the policy must:

- (a) provide that all relevant staff have ongoing training to:
  - (1) identify customers affected by family violence;
  - (2) deal appropriately with customers affected by family violence; and
  - (3) apply the water business's family violence policy and related policies and procedures to customers affected by family violence;
- (b) identify the support the water business will provide to staff affected by family violence, including any training, leave, external referrals and counselling available;

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<sup>1</sup> Current guidelines are titled "Improving the Use of Translating and Interpreting Services: A Guide to Victorian Government Policy and Procedure".

- (c) promote customer safety by providing for the secure handling of information about those who are affected by family violence, including in a manner that maintains confidentiality;
- (d) specify the water business's approach to debt management and recovery where a customer is affected by family violence, including but not limited to:
  - (1) the recovery of debt from customers with joint accounts; and
  - (2) the circumstances in which debt will be suspended or waived;
- (e) recognise family violence as a potential cause of payment difficulties under clause 4.2, and address what payment support will apply to customers affected by family violence;
- (f) provides for a process that avoids customers having to repeat disclosure of their family violence, and provides for continuity of service; and
- (g) provide a means for referring customers who may be affected by family violence to specialist family violence services.

A water business must:

- (h) publish on its website, and keep up to date, the assistance and referrals available to customers affected by family violence and how customers may access such assistance;
- (i) provide a copy of the the family violence policy to a customer upon request; and
- (j) provide for a periodic review mechanism of the policy and its associated procedures.

## **12. NATIONAL CABINET CORONAVIRUS SUPPORT POLICY AND PRINCIPLES – APRIL 2020 (National Principles)**

On 9 April 2020, the National Cabinet agreed a policy approach and set of principles to support households and small businesses facing hardship in paying for essential services during the coronavirus pandemic (the National Principles). The National Principles are set out in Schedule 2.

The National Principles are intended to protect both residential and small business customers of water businesses experiencing financial hardship during the coronavirus pandemic. They seek to establish a nationally consistent approach by essential utility services providers, including water businesses, to providing hardship support to their residential and small business customers.

Each water business must apply the National Principles to their residential customers

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<sup>2</sup> "Family violence" has the meaning given in section 5 of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic).

(customers using regulated services primarily for household use) and their non-residential customers that qualify for the JobKeeper Payment from the national government (business customers). These two categories of customers will, for purposes of this clause 12, and implementation of the National Principles, be the household and small business customers referred to in those Principles.

A water business may apply the National Principles to a broader class of non-residential customer.

To the extent that any standards and condition of service and supply provided in this code are inconsistent with the National Principles, the National Principles applied as required by this clause 12 take precedence.

## PART C CUSTOMER CHARTERS

### 13. REQUIREMENT FOR CHARTER

#### 13.1 Purpose of charter

A water business must develop and issue a customer charter to inform customers about the supply services and licensing activities performed by the water business and the respective rights and responsibilities of the water business and of customers.

The charter will set out the terms and conditions for the supply of a supply service and issuing or granting a licence (together with any supplementary terms that the parties may expressly agree).

#### 13.2 Multiple charters

A water business may have more than one charter with the approval of the Commission.

#### 13.3 Consultation

Before adopting or varying a customer charter, a water business must consult with its customers. Consultation with a customer service committee constitutes consultation with customers for the purpose of this clause.

#### 13.4 Submission for assessment

Before adopting a charter or any variation to a charter, a water business must submit it to the Commission, with details of customer consultation undertaken, for the Commission to review it and assess compliance of the charter with this code and the water business's approved service standards.

#### 13.5 Review of charter

A water business must periodically review the content of its charter to ensure the charter accurately reflects the operations and services of the water business and the regulatory environment in which it operates.

#### 13.6 Required amendment

A water business must amend its charter at the request of the Commission to:

- (a) deal with matters raised by the Commission as a result of its assessment; or
- (b) update the charter to reflect an amendment to this code or the water business's approved service standards.

## 14. CONTENT OF CHARTER

A water business must set out in its charter:

- (a) information about or explaining each of the standards and conditions in Part B of this code (including, where relevant, the detail of the standards and conditions which are set out in the water business's approved service standards); and
- (b) all material rights and responsibilities of the water business and its customers in relation to supply services and licensing activities, relevant to or performed by the water business.

In particular, and without limiting this general obligation, the charter must include:

- (c) where this code requires a water business to have a policy or provide information, an indication of how the policy or information may be obtained;
- (d) an explanation of the water business's rights and obligations in respect of:
  - (1) supply service provision and the issuing or granting of licences;
  - (2) the number of days from the issue of a bill by which it must be paid;
  - (3) actions it may take for non-compliance with this code or water law;
  - (4) temporary or permanent suspension or restriction of supply services; and
  - (5) actions taken by the water business to meet its obligations to protect the environment;
- (e) a description and explanation of the water business's practices and processes in respect of:
  - (1) the types of charges for provision of a supply service and issuing or granting licences;
  - (2) how the water business will deal with complaints and disputes, including contact details for EWOV;
  - (3) billing, payments and collection; and
  - (4) standards and targets it intends to meet in relation to reliability of supply and the rectification of supply services (eg. rectification of infrastructure failure) and issuing or granting licences; and
- (f) information about how the water business will deal with customers (including joint account holders) affected by family violence, including the handling of customer information, billing and debt management.

## 15. CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION

### 15.1 Publication of charter

A water business must publish its charter on its website and must provide a copy to a customer upon request.

A water business must keep a copy of its charter at its principal offices for inspection upon request.

## 15.2 Summary of charter

A water business may summarise or otherwise communicate the contents of its charter if the summary document at least addresses:

- (a) the issuing of bills;
- (b) the types of charges;
- (c) the payment of accounts;
- (d) payment assistance available to customers (including concessions where relevant);
- (e) key service standards as approved by the Commission;
- (f) the maintenance responsibilities of the water business;
- (g) enquiry and complaint handling details, including contact details for EWOV;
- (h) privacy information in accordance with privacy legislation;
- (i) contact details of the water business; and
- (j) where a copy of the water business's charter may be obtained from.

## 15.3 Provision of charter or summary

A water business must provide a copy of the charter or a summary of the charter:

- (a) to existing customers with the first mail correspondence after it has been approved by the Commission; and
- (b) to new customers within one month of becoming a customer.

## PART D DEFINITIONS

**“approved service standards”** means standards and conditions of service and supply approved by the Commission under clause 15 of the Water Industry Regulatory Order.

**“business day”** means a day on which banks are open for general banking business in the city or town in which the water business’s head office is located, not being a Saturday or a Sunday.

**“Commission”** means the Essential Services Commission established under the *ESC Act*.

**“complaint”** means a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about an action, proposed action or failure to act by a water business, including a failure of the water business to observe its published policies, practices or procedures.

**“customer”** means a person who:

- (a) seeks a supply of water from a water business;
- (b) applies for, or is the holder of, a licence; or
- (c) has a private or other right to water under water law,

but does not include a “regulated entity” as defined in Part 1A of the *Water Industry Act 1994* or a holder of a “bulk entitlement” as defined in the *Water Act 1989*.

**“domestic and stock use”** has the meaning given to that term by the *Water Act 1989*.

**“electronic address”** means an e-mail or internet address supplied by a customer to a water business for the purposes of the receipt of bills and other service related communications.

**“enquiry”** means a written or verbal approach by a customer which can be satisfied by the water business providing written or verbal information, advice, assistance, clarification, explanation or referral about a matter.

**“enquiry facility”** means a telephone call centre or on-line information facility.

**“ESC Act”** means the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001*.

**“EWOV”** means the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria).

**“external dispute resolution forum”** includes Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

**“financial year”** means a year ending 30 June.

**“GSL Rebate”** means any form of payment or compensation made to a customer by a water business due to a breach of the water business’s stated obligations under a guaranteed service level scheme approved by the Commission.

**“interruption”** means in the case of a customer’s water supply, a total loss of flow from a water business to a customer.

**“irrigation service”** means a service (including, for the avoidance of doubt, an irrigation

drainage service and a drainage diversion service) supplied pursuant to Part 11 of the *Water Act 1989*.

**“licence”** means a water share, licence or registration issued or granted under Part 3A, Part 4 or Part 4B of the *Water Act 1989* (but not a bulk entitlement), and **“licensing”** means activities of a water business relating to a licence.

**“planned interruption”** means a scheduled interruption to a supply service to a customer which is caused by a water business to allow routine maintenance or augmentation to be carried out.

**“reasonable charge”** means a fee or charge that is approved or specified by the Commission in accordance with clause 8 of the Water Industry Regulatory Order.

**“regional water business”** means a Regional Urban Water Authority within the meaning of the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

**“restrict”** means to physically reduce the flow of water.

**“supply service”** means a water supply service provided by a water business to a customer and includes an irrigation service and any other supply of water for domestic and stock use but does not include the activities of a water business relating to licences.

**“suspension”** means the suspension of customer access to any water ordering or request system, including rejecting a water order received by a water business.

**“system”** means a water business’s physical infrastructure for providing a supply service.

**“unplanned interruption”** means an interruption to supply services to a customer caused by a fault in the water business’s system or a fault which is the maintenance responsibility of the water business.

**“water business”** means:

- (a) a Rural Water Authority (as defined in Part 1A of the *Water Industry Act 1994*);
- (b) Lower Murray Water Authority and Grampians-Wimmera Mallee Water Authority;
- (c) a regional water business in so far as it is providing a supply service which is not regulated by the Commission’s “Urban Water Business Customer Service Code” (relating to drinking water, non-potable water, recycled water and sewerage services);
- (d) Melbourne Water Corporation in relation to its licensing activities,

and each of their successors and assigns.

**“water law”** means the relevant requirements contained in or made under the *Water Act 1989* and the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

**“urban water business”** means a regional water business or City West Water Corporation, South East Water Corporation, Yarra Valley Water Corporation and their successors.



# SCHEDULE 1

## APPROVED SERVICE STANDARDS

For the purposes of clause 8 and the definition of “approved service standards”, the following standards and conditions of service and supply and associated targets have been approved by the Commission for the following businesses.

### Goulburn-Murray Water

<i>Service standard</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
<b>Customer Service – Licencing and Administration</b>				
Processing allocation trade applications within 5 business days	90%	90%	90%	90%
Processing water share applications within 10 business days	95%	95%	95%	95%
Processing change of ownership applications within 10 business days	90%	90%	90%	90%
<b>Customer Service Standards – General Administration</b>				
Customer service complaints to Energy Water Ombudsman Victoria (per 1000 customers)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Complaints process managed to the satisfaction of the customer	85%	85%	85%	85%
We respond to complaints in writing within three business days	100%	100%	100%	100%
Telephone calls answered within 60 seconds	85%	85%	85%	85%
Rate of first point resolution (for phone calls)	64%	66%	68%	70%
<b>Diversion Service Standards</b>				
Our diversions customers have access to the water resource monitoring data they need within two weeks of it being submitted	90%	90%	90%	90%
Access to unregulated stream flows is managed in accordance with restriction triggers in local management rules (existing)	100%	100%	100%	100%
Customer access to groundwater is managed through seasonal allocations which are announced in accordance with relevant management plans	100%	100%	100%	100%
Customers receive notification in writing (through SMS, email or written letters) within 24 hours	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Water Districts Service Standards</b>				
Supply interruptions do not exceed 96 hours	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Pumped Irrigation Service Standards</b>				
Irrigation orders delivered on day requested	98%	98%	98%	98%
Supply interruptions do not exceed eight hours in the summer months and 48 hours in the winter (modified to reflect new summer and winter specific performance measures)	80%	80%	80%	80%
Notification by SMS within two hours when there is a supply interruption and again when it is restored	100%	100%	100%	100%

<i>Service standard</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>	<i>2023-24</i>
<b>Water Delivery Services Standards for GMID Irrigators</b>				
% of orders delivered on day requested	95%	95%	95%	95%
Flow rate is within 10 per cent of the order	80%	80%	80%	80%
<b>Drainage Services Standards</b>				
Drains are maintained to a level that they are available to remove run-off	98%	98%	98%	98%
<b>Bulk Water Services Standards</b>				
Up to 100 per cent of design storage capacity	100%	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of time a customer demand can be met	99%	99%	99%	99%
<b>Bulk Water Services Standards Network Delivery Efficiency</b>				
Customers are informed of seasonal determinations as per the defined time frames	100%	100%	100%	100%
Customers are informed about risk of spill announcements as per the defined time frames	100%	100%	100%	100%
Minimum flow rates are maintained in accordance with specifications in the relevant bulk entitlements	98%	98%	98%	98%
Water delivered to customer properties through the closed piped network as a percentage of water extracted	92%	92%	92%	92%
Water delivered to customer properties through the open channel network as a percentage of water extracted	85%	85%	85%	85%

Note: Numbers have been rounded

## GWMWater

<i>Service standard</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
<b>Rural Pipeline Supply (By District/Supply System)</b>					
Unavailability of supply systems for continuous periods in excess of 72 hours (%) <sup>1</sup>	3	3	3	3	3
Number of Pipeline bursts and leaks (per 100km of pipeline)	1	1	1	1	1
Unaccounted for water (%)	10	10	10	10	10
<b>Bulk Water</b>					
Annual compliance with storage operator obligations (%)	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Licensing/Administration</b>					
New applications for groundwater & supply-by-agreement licenses determined within days 60 (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Applications for renewal of groundwater licenses determined within 40 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
New applications for surface diversion determined within 22 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Application for renewal of surface diversion & supply-by-agreement licenses determined within 60 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Processing of permanent transfer/Surface Diversion/Groundwater licenses within 60 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Processing of temporary transfer of water entitlement volumes within 15 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Processing of permanent transfer of water entitlements volumes within 60 days (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Number of diversion licenses metered or assessed for metering at 30 June (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Volume of total surface water and groundwater entitlements metered at 30 June (%)	90	90	90	90	90

Note: Numbers have been rounded

<sup>1</sup> GWMWater will cart non-potable water to the homestead for interruptions that exceed 72 hours, at no cost to the customer.

## Lower Murray Water

<i>Service standard</i>	<i>Unit of Measurement</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
<b>Outcome 1 – Supply me with water when I need it</b>						
Water orders delivered on time (whole of rural business)	Percentage	> 98	> 98	> 98	> 98	> 98
Channel / pipe bursts and leaks (whole of rural business)	Per 100 km	< 64	< 63	< 62	< 61	< 60
Deliver capital plan on cost and on time (Projects >\$1 M)	Percentage	95	95	95	95	95
<b>Outcome 2 – Keep my costs to a minimum</b>						
Billing payment issues complaints	Number	< 4	< 4	< 4	< 4	< 4
Deliver price path commitment for rural customers as approved by the commission	Pass/Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Deliver 1% per annum efficiency improvement	Pass/Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Statutory compliance reports generated automatically	Percentage	90	92	94	96	100
<b>Outcome 3 – Be easy to contact and quick to respond</b>						
Post interaction satisfaction survey: Number of completed surveys	Number	150	150	150	150	150
Post interaction satisfaction survey: Level of customer satisfaction	Percentage	> 80	> 80	> 80	> 80	> 80
Community satisfaction survey	Percentage	> 78	> 79	> 80	> 81	> 82
Customer complaints to EWOV	Number	< 7	< 7	< 7	< 7	< 7
Calls answered within 60 seconds (operations room)	Percentage	> 85	> 85	> 85	> 85	> 85
Report our performance against all rural customer outcomes to customers annually	Pass/Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
<b>Outcome 4 – Comply with other government obligations</b>						
Compliance with government reporting policy requirements	Percentage	100	100	100	100	100
Implement strategies to deliver Letter of Expectations and associated policies (Water for Victoria)	Pass/Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
<b>Customer Service Code – Irrigation</b>						
Number channel bursts and leaks - Merbein	per 100 km	155	154	153	152	151
Number channel bursts and leaks - Red Cliffs	per 100 km	65	64	63	62	61
Number channel bursts and leaks - Robinvale	per 100 km	10	10	10	10	10
Number channel bursts and leaks - Millewa	per 100 km	7	7	7	7	7
Number channel bursts and leaks - Mildura	per 100 km	150	148	146	144	142
Unaccounted for water - Merbein	Percentage	12	12	12	12	12
Unaccounted for water - Red Cliffs	Percentage	12	12	12	12	12
Unaccounted for water - Robinvale	Percentage	2	2	2	2	2
Unaccounted for water - Millewa	Percentage	20	20	20	20	20
Unaccounted for water - Mildura	Percentage	15	15	15	15	15

<i>Service standard</i>	<i>Unit of Measurement</i>	<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
<b>Customer Service Code – Licensing/Administration</b>						
Use licences determined within 30 days	Percentage	90	90	90	90	90
Processing transfer of water use licences between Lower Murray Water customers within 10 days	Percentage	90	90	90	90	90
Processing permanent transfer of water shares between Lower Murray Water customers within 10 days	Percentage	85	85	85	85	85
Number of works licences metered or assessed for metering at 30 June	Percentage	95	95	95	95	95
Volume of total annual use limit metered at 30 June	Percentage	95	95	95	95	95

Note: Numbers have been rounded

### Southern Rural Water

<i>Service standard</i>		<i>2018-19</i>	<i>2019-20</i>	<i>2020-21</i>	<i>2021-22</i>	<i>2022-23</i>
Applications completed within set timeframes (% applications)	90	90	90	90	90	90
Delivery volume accuracy (Werribee Irrigation District) (% deliveries)	98	98	98	98	98	98
Delivery efficiency (Werribee Irrigation District) (% water)	70	75	80	80	80	80
Delivery reliability (Werribee Irrigation District) (% orders)	99	99	99	99	99	99
Delivery volume accuracy (Bacchus Marsh Irrigation District) (% deliveries)	98	98	98	98	98	98
Delivery efficiency (Bacchus Marsh Irrigation District) (% water)	70	75	80	80	80	80
Delivery reliability (Bacchus Marsh Irrigation District) (% orders)	99	99	99	99	99	99
Channel pool performance (Macalister Irrigation District) (% time)	78	79	81	82	85	85
Delivery efficiency (Macalister Irrigation District) (% water)	80	82	85	85	85	85
Delivery reliability (Macalister Irrigation District) (% orders)	99	99	99	99	99	99
Customers with access to Demand Management System (% customers)	40	50	60	70	75	75
Water is harvested at the maximum possible rate (Pykes Creek and Merrimu) (% time)	95	95	95	95	95	95
Recycled water salinity (EC)	<1800	<1800	<1800	<1800	<1800	<1800
Headworks release within 10% or 5ML of ordered flow (Werribee system) (% time)	95	95	95	95	95	95
Headworks release within 10% or 1ML of ordered flow (Maribyrnong system) (% time)	95	95	95	95	95	95
Headworks release within 10% of ordered flow (Latrobe system) (% time)	95	95	95	95	95	95

Note: Numbers have been rounded

## SCHEDULE 2

### **NATIONAL CABINET CORONAVIRUS SUPPORT POLICY AND PRINCIPLES – APRIL 2020 (National Principles)**

#### **SUPPORT FOR HOUSEHOLDS AND SMALL BUSINESSES FACING HARDSHIP IN PAYING FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES**

To protect both residential and small businesses experiencing financial stress, hardship support by essential service providers (energy, water and telecommunications providers, and local governments) should:

- Adhere to the following nationally consistent principles, which builds on actions required or sought for residential and small business customers in the energy and telecommunications sectors;
- Align with nationally consistent approaches to identifying those in financial stress. For example, businesses that qualify for the JobKeeper Payment are defined as being under financial stress under this arrangement; and
- Focus on keeping those facing hardship connected and working to find a mutually sustainable solution to enable households and businesses to rebuild on the other side.

Customers who can pay their bills should continue to do so, to help ensure the continued financial viability of essential service providers.

These principles aim to promote consistency across sectors and jurisdictions, including for eligibility to hardship programs, and ensure an appropriate safety net is in place for vulnerable families and businesses during the economic shock caused by COVID-19. These principles are in addition to existing policies and requirements, which may apply to these sectors.

#### **Support Principles**

- 1 Encourage customers to contact their service providers at the earliest opportunity to discuss their situation.
- 2 Establish clear processes to identify, and to promptly and appropriately manage, households and small businesses experiencing financial stress, including small businesses eligible for the JobKeeper Payment, such as customers who:
  - a. Repeatedly fail to pay bills on time

- b. Submit questions or issues to customer service centres.
- 3 Offer households and small businesses that indicate they may be in financial stress, including small businesses eligible for the JobKeeper Payment, the option of going on a payment plan and/or other flexible options including bill smoothing, flexible repayment options, payment deferrals, extensions and access to Centrepay or other payment services.
  - 4 Be prepared to modify existing payment plans if a customer's changed circumstances make this necessary.
  - 5 Do not disconnect or restrict supply to households or small businesses in financial stress, including small businesses eligible for the JobKeeper Payment.
  - 6 Defer referrals of households and small businesses in financial stress, including small businesses eligible for the JobKeeper Payment, for debt recovery/collection proceedings and credit default listings.
  - 7 Suspend sale of debt while there is an arrangement in place with a customer under a hardship policy.
  - 8 Waive late fees, interest charges and charges for collection of overdue amounts for households and small businesses in financial stress, including small businesses eligible for the JobKeeper Payment.
  - 9 Provide clear, up-to-date and readily available information about arrangements available to those in financial stress via multiple physical and digital communication channels.
  - 10 Provide advice to households and small business customers about appropriate government concession programs and financial counselling services, and strategies to reduce their bills, and/or consumption of the service, in order to reduce future payment difficulties.
  - 11 Minimise the frequency and duration of planned outages for critical works, and provide as much notice as possible to assist households and businesses during any outage.

### **Compliance and Delivery**

These support measures should be provided through appropriate existing support and delivery mechanisms, including local governments, service providers and industry associations. This includes:

- Local Government NSW
- Local Government Association of South Australia

- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Local Government Association of the Northern Territory
- Local Government Association of Queensland
- The Western Australian Local Government Association.