

Victorian water businesses – response to coronavirus

Public report – covering data to 01 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.

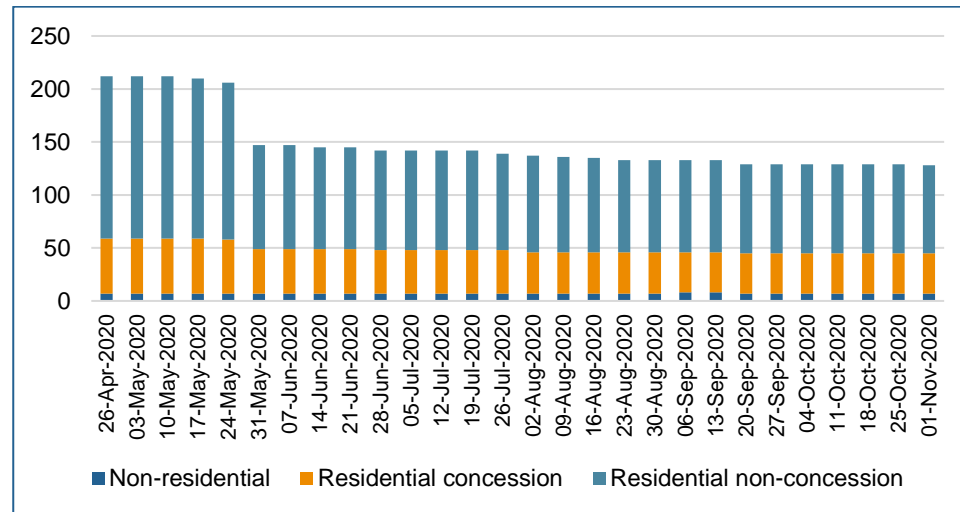
This report provides a summary of weekly data collected from water businesses since the week ending 26 April 2020. Note we do not audit the data provided by water businesses.

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.
- **Fewer customers applied for government Utility Relief Grants during October compared to September.** The average weekly application rate was 492 during October, down from 775 in September. The weekly rate peaked at 602 in early October and dipped to 380 towards the end of the month.
- **Fewer customers received hardship grants from their water business each week during October compared to the end of September.** The October weekly average of 533 customers awarded hardship grants was 4.5 per cent lower than September’s average of 558. While the number of customers awarded hardship grants at each business continues to fluctuate week by week, 714 customers received grants in the final week of October, 260 more than the last week of September, and the second highest weekly number since we began collecting weekly data.
- **The number of metropolitan customers on water business hardship programs continues to steadily increase, rising by 1.7 per cent this month from 18,195 at the end of September to 18,507 at the end of October.** In regional areas, the number has continued to fluctuate from week to week and was 5,709 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 September, one supply restriction has been lifted. At the end of October, 128 customers across the state still have their supply restricted.

Number of customer water restrictions in place at end of week

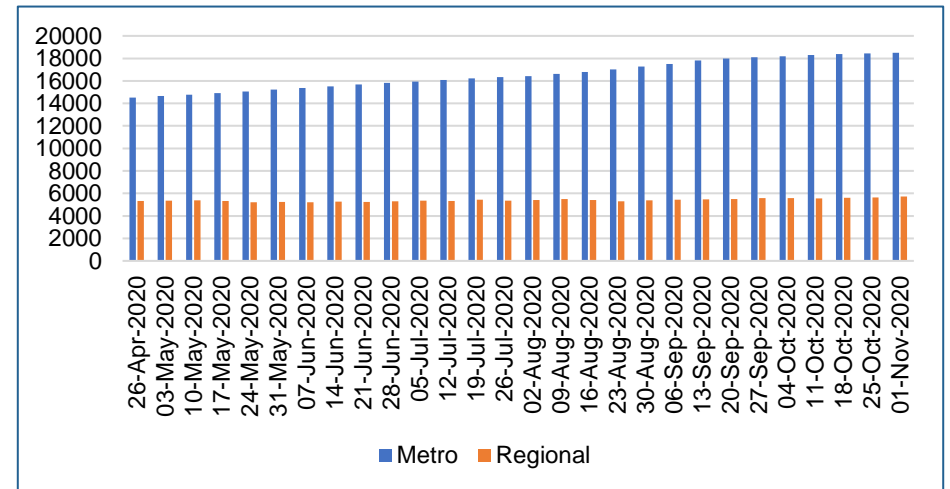
Past month (industry total):



- A total of 128 customers had water supply restrictions in place at the end of October, continuing the downward trend from 212 in April when weekly reporting started.
- 83 residential non-concession customers, 38 residential concession customers and 7 non-residential customers currently have their water supply restricted.
- The end of September report of 131 customers has been corrected to 129 after a water business informed us it had misreported the number of restrictions in place.

Number of customers in hardship programs at end of week

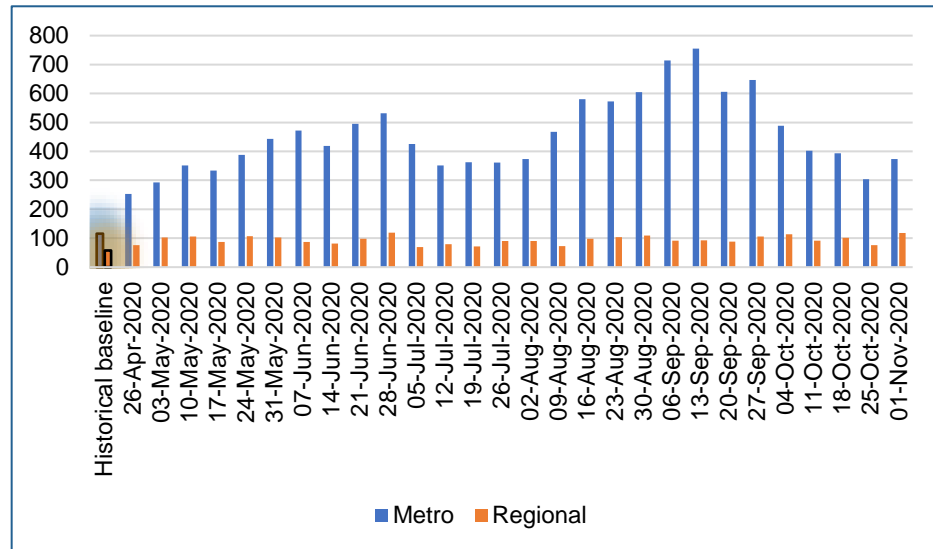
Past month (industry total):



- The total number of customers in hardship programs rose by 438 (1.8 per cent) in October, bringing the total to 24,216. This is about 0.8 per cent of Victoria's over 2.8 million water customers.
- The number of metropolitan customers on hardship programs also increased, rising from 18,195 at the end of September to 18,507, an increase of 312 (1.7 per cent).
- In regional areas, the number was 5,583 at the end of September but has risen to 5,709 (a 2.3 per cent increase) by the end of October.
- On average, 438 customers have entered and 275 exited water business hardship programs each week.

Number of utility relief grants applied for during week

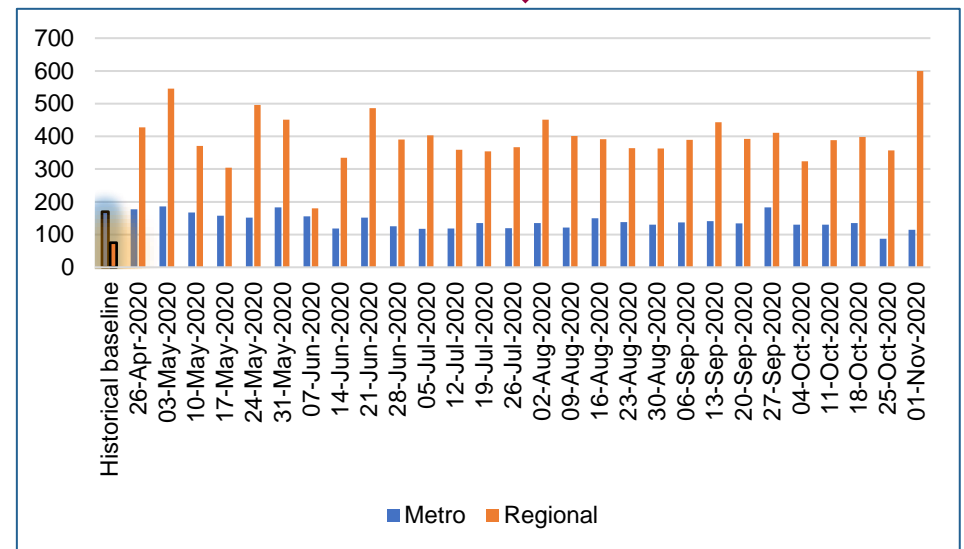
Past month average (industry total):



- The weekly average for state government utility relief grant applications in October was 492, well below the average of 775 for September. October saw a peak of 602 applications in the first week, dropping to 380 towards the end of the month.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the weekly rate is over three times the historical average at the end of October.
- In regional Victoria, the weekly rate remains around double the historical average since the end of October.

Number of customers receiving hardship grants during week

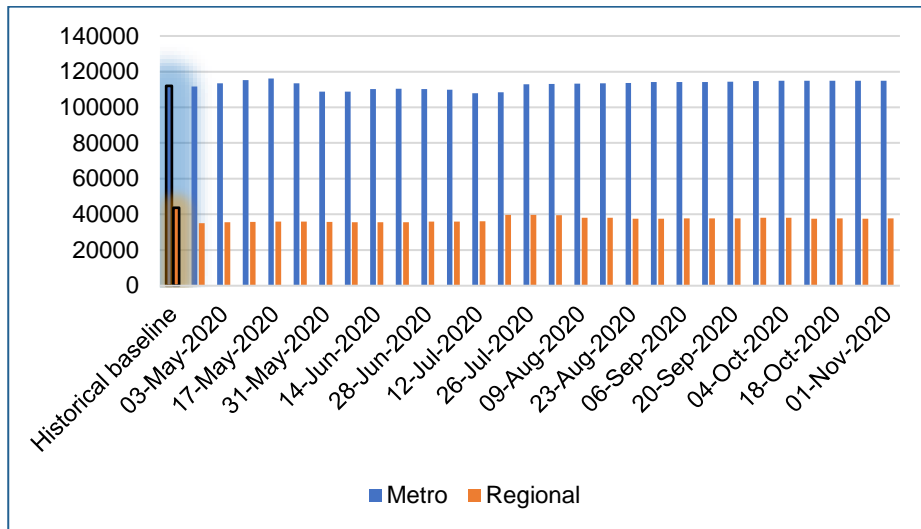
Past month average (industry total):



- The October weekly average of 533 customers awarded hardship grants was 4.5 per cent lower than September's average of 558. However, the weekly number has risen to 714 grants awarded at the end of October, the highest weekly figure since May.
- In metropolitan Victoria, the weekly average for October was 119 grants, lower than the historical weekly average of 170 grants.
- In regional Victoria, the weekly average for October was 413 grants, more than 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 decreased slightly to 152,558 at the end of October. This is 433 (0.3 per cent) fewer than the 152,991 customers on instalment plans at the end of September.

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.