

MEDIA RELEASE

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Maintaining service levels with no bill increase for five years, except for inflation

East Gippsland Water will be maintaining current levels of service for the next five years, with no increase in the average customer bill, except for inflation.

This commitment forms a key part of the organisation's business plan for 2018 to 2023, which has just undergone a comprehensive review by the water industry economic regulator, the Essential Services Commission.

The plan comes into effect from 1 July and allows for a significant program of investment to continue in water and sewerage services. It takes on board some two years of engagement involving around 2,200 customers across the region to gauge those services highly valued by the community.

Around \$62 million will be invested in a major capital works program over the five year period. This will include replacing or upgrading ageing infrastructure to maintain high quality, reliable services to customers, and takes into account regulatory requirements, long-term projections for population growth and climate change.

Complementing this, East Gippsland Water will be spending around \$19 million a year for the day-to-day operation and maintenance of existing water and sewerage infrastructure.

Other specific customer priorities and preferences that have been incorporated into the plan include: providing grants to local schools and community groups for environmental projects; bill rebates for outdoor community-run, not-for-profit recreation groups; and, maintaining current levels of financial assistance to customers experiencing genuine financial difficulty paying their water bills.

There are six Guaranteed Service Levels, chosen by East Gippsland Water's independent Customer Committee to help ensure customers continue to receive high standards of service.

Excluding inflation, the average residential customer, using 146kL (146,000 litres) of water a year, will see their combined bills for water and sewerage decrease by \$5 over the 2018/19 financial year and no bill increase from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2023.

East Gippsland Water's Managing Director, Bruce Hammond, said, "We've actively engaged with our customers, and the independent Customer Committee, to help us set our priorities for the coming five years, and we are grateful for all the very informative input received.

"We're committed to affordable water and sewerage services, which means we'll be absorbing increases in any external business costs as much as we can, so there's no increase in the average residential customer bill except for inflation."

Ends

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The average customer bill (excluding inflation)

Year	**2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total bill for the average residential customer *	\$1,189	\$1,184	\$1,184	\$1,184	\$1,184	\$1,184

*Based on average water use of 146,000 litres a year

** Average customer bill after allowing for rebate