

MEDIA RELEASE

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Further controlled release of recycled water imperative at Paynesville

The ongoing impacts of excessive rainfall have left East Gippsland Water with no choice but to commence a further controlled release of recycled water from its wastewater treatment facility at Paynesville.

The on-site storage for recycled water has again reached capacity following exceptional rainfall levels across the East Gippsland region this year and a controlled release is critical to prevent uncontrolled overflow to surrounding communities and the environment. The release, into nearby Forge Creek, will commence this week (week commencing 30 May).

This latest action follows previous necessary, controlled releases from the Paynesville site during August/September and November/December last year.

In all cases we comply with regulatory requirements, including notifying downstream neighbours, residents, relevant community groups and government agencies. Signage is being erected in the immediate area to advise that recycled water is mixing with creek water and this water should be avoided.

East Gippsland Water's acting Executive Manager Service Delivery, Neville Pearce, said, "As with all previous controlled releases, we are also conducting regular testing of the treated wastewater quality and creek flows to monitor and minimise any environmental impact. We are using an independent laboratory service and the data gathered is provided to our regulators.

"The water to be released has been treated and in normal circumstances is beneficially used for the irrigation of pasture. However, the volume exceeds what can be used for irrigation and is having an impact on how much water we can safely hold back in storage at the facility. The last 15 months have been exceptionally wet and overwhelmed our capacity to irrigate on our land.

"We greatly appreciate the cooperation of the local community. These are exceptional times and the weather is having a real impact on our region. Unfortunately, as we head into winter we cannot rule out the possibility of further discharges, including elsewhere in East Gippsland.

"In the past year we've had no choice but to make controlled releases of treated wastewater from our Lakes Entrance (in Kalimna), Cann River, Metung, Omeo and Bairnsdale wastewater treatment facilities. In addition we have a discharge underway at our wastewater treatment facility near the Cann River township."

Upgrades are being carried out at East Gippsland Water's Paynesville wastewater treatment facility to future proof the treatment and irrigation infrastructure. There are currently around 132 hectares of irrigated pasture using recycled water at the facility – including ten hectares purchased two years ago. Irrigation expansion has already commenced to help cope with future extreme wet weather events and meet population growth. Design is nearing completion on up to 50 extra hectares of irrigation, which will be completed in less than 12 months and in time for next summer. A new irrigation storage lagoon will also be constructed.

Ends