

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

A **Residential** customer experiencing hardship, can be defined as:

'Someone who is identified either by themselves, East Gippsland Water, or an independent accredited financial counsellor as having the intention but not the capacity to make the required payments within the timeframe set out in East Gippsland Water's payment terms.'

A **Non-Residential** customer experiencing hardship, can be defined as:

'An entity who is identified either by themselves, East Gippsland Water, or an independent accredited financial counsellor as having the intention but not the capacity to make the required payments within the timeframe set out in East Gippsland Water's payment terms.'

A **Small Business** customer is defined as non-employing or a business employing less than 20 people and with an active ABN.

PURPOSE

This Customer Support Policy outlines the commitments and responsibilities that East Gippsland Water provides its customers to ensure a fair and consistent approach in managing customers in need of assistance; and a framework to support customers on a case-by-case basis who are affected by family violence and/or who are experiencing difficulty in paying their accounts.

East Gippsland Water is dedicated to providing prompt assistance and working with customers (or their nominated support person) towards solutions as a result of their individual situation.

Please note: this document is to be read in conjunction with East Gippsland Water's SOP 144 Customer Charter and SOP 150 Customer Support.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

East Gippsland Water is committed to:

- working together with key partners to achieve better environmental and community outcomes;
- continually improve every customer(s) interaction to enhance their experience;
- act sustainably, ethically and responsibly in everything we do;
- develop commercially realistic and innovative assistance programs for customers experiencing hardship; and
- meet the requirements of customers, government and stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

East Gippsland Water is committed to:

- providing assistance to residential and non-residential (incl. small business) customers who are identified as experiencing payment difficulties;
- providing assistance in any instance where a customer or their support person identifies as a victim of family violence, immediately referring the individual into the Customer, Community and Communications Team;
- dealing sensitively and appropriately with customers affected by family violence;
- communicating with customers
- open and inclusive dialogue with our customers (using their preferred method of communication) to improve the mutual understanding of complex issues;
- working with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), the Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV), financial counsellors and other stakeholders to provide assistance to customers in hardship;
- providing customers with a direct contact person to help address their issues, during which time any debt recovery actions such as water restriction and legal proceedings will be suspended;
- providing customers information on support and assistance options available to them on current and outstanding accounts;
- where authorised, partnering with support agencies (i.e. Anglicare, Orbost Regional Health, etc.) to reduce the impact to vulnerable customers requiring assistance.
- providing staff training designed to ensure customers experiencing payment difficulty are treated with sensitivity and respect.
- continual improvement in the manner it deals with customers experiencing hardship, including attending and participating in industry forums to gain a better understanding of the issues that face low-income, vulnerable and family violence customers.

APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY

This policy applies to all employees of East Gippsland Water.

REFERENCES

- SOP 150 Customer Support
- POL 045 Customer Charter
- SOP 144 Customer Charter
- POL 064 Family Violence
- SOP 177A Family Violence Guidelines – Customers
- SOP 177B Family Violence Guidelines – Employees
- POL 055 Debt Management
- SOP 048 Complaints Water and Sewerage Rates

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two (2) years.