

## Pandemic impact on customers shows in latest water data

The past 12 months of economic challenges brought on by the coronavirus pandemic has seen the number of Victorian customers in hardship programs steadily increasing, with metropolitan Melbourne hit the hardest, according to data collected by the Essential Services Commission.

While water businesses have been supporting customers, including small business and other non-residential customers, to ensure they are aware of existing support programs, the number of customers in debt or struggling has grown significantly.

The commission's water director Marcus Crudden says the [latest data](#) shows the number of Melbourne customers in hardship programs has increased more than 40 per cent since May 2020.

He says the commission's [latest customer survey](#) conducted last month shows signs the community appreciated the sector's efforts to support customers throughout the pandemic.

"We survey 5,800 water customers every 12 months and ask them to rate their water business on value for money, reputation in the community, trust and overall satisfaction.

"The latest survey shows customer trust in their water business has risen slightly while all other indicators remain steady compared to the last survey in February 2021," he said.

Mr Crudden says this is the first time the commission has published business specific information on the water sector's response to the pandemic.

"Our monitoring of water businesses shows there has been a good response to assisting customers in need, however, there is great variability in performance between water businesses, this suggests there may be opportunities for some businesses to learn from others.

"Customers can now compare how their provider has responded against other water businesses, with some regional providers leading the way," he said.

**About the data:** Data is reported weekly by water businesses and is not audited by the commission. We are collecting a small subset of data included in our annual water performance report.

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