

Customer outcome 2



Warn me,
inform me

- Keeping customers informed and in control
- Rectifying interruptions to minimise disruption
- Reducing disruption in peak times
- Understanding individual needs and impacts

What our customers say

Whether a supply or service interruption is planned or unplanned, warnings and proactive notifications aren't just highly valued – they're expected.

What we do now

We issue SMS and email alerts to 63 per cent of customers for both emergency and planned outages; comparatively, our rectification times lead the metropolitan Melbourne water sector.



Our five-year approach

We plan to increase the number of customers warned and informed about disruptions, with a focus on minimising disruption during peak times and maintaining our high standards related to fixing faults. We want to better understand the impacts of even the smallest outage or interruption on our customers' daily needs and routines.



What our customers told us

While our customers rely on us to get the basics right, they're aware and understand that our services may be interrupted from time to time.

Customers value attempts to minimise disruption

Customers who have experienced a service disruption are less forgiving if they weren't warned or informed about what was going on and when the outage would be resolved.

Whether the interruption is planned or unplanned, warnings and proactive notifications aren't just highly valued by our customers – they're expected.

"I want to receive notifications for all relevant faults and emergencies, regardless of whether I can contact the support centre 24/7."
– 65+ male, Sandringham (via bill simulator)

Customers want to be kept informed and in control

We are one of the only water corporations to send email and SMS notifications for unplanned and planned works (except between 10 pm and 6 am).

"You sent me a text message, I knew what was going on... my elderly neighbour didn't but I could tell her." – focus group participant

For many customers, both residential and business, progress tracking on works underway is also important, providing certainty, a sense of control and transparency.

While progress tracking is a relatively new expectation, its use by other industries provides greater expectation in ours: *"I can track my pizza with Dominos... why can't I track your trucks and what's happening?"* – focus group participant

It's a demand we pre-empted with the development of South East Water LIVE, an online portal where customers can track works in their area, or track and report faults online in real-time.

Being warned and informed about faults and interruptions is valued by our customers, who appreciate the control and certainty that it provides. Results from our bill simulator show that more than 30 per cent of customers are willing to pay more to support increased investment and improvement in this area.



Customers want us to understand their individual needs and impacts

As an essential services provider, there's customer demand for us to better understand the impacts of even the smallest outage or interruption, and the timing of these, on their daily needs and routines.

"Be aware if the household has a baby or elderly people in the house."
– CALD focus group, Vietnamese community member

"I couldn't get the kids bathed, school clothes washed or dinner cooked." – online community participant

One-on-one interviews with large corporate customers showed that expectations for notifications are heightened for those with special needs (*"I want to know ahead of time. I have to plan"*) and those who need to plan to manage associated risks (*"We operate 24/7. Interruption is a very big risk for us"*).

For some large business customers, notification around even the potential risk of outages was just as important: *"We even want to discuss a risk possibility, not even an actual one... We have response plans in place for possible outages."*

In the case of some small and large business customers, the disruption of even small outages can be large, impacting operations and revenue: *"I got to the stage where we had a day's production in tanks... I actually ran out of water twice and stopped production."*

Customers want us to rectify interruptions to minimise disruption

For our customers, it's equally important that we respond quickly to any faults or interruptions and *"fix it immediately"* (online community).

For many, speed to rectify the issue outweighs other elements such as compensation: *"I didn't care about the money, I'd give it to the bloke to fix it faster"* (focus group).



What we do now, our plans and measures

We have tailored our approach for the next regulatory period based on our customers telling us that they expect to be warned and informed about water supply faults to help minimise disruption to their lives.

Keeping customers informed and in control

When there is a water fault or outage, we inform customers via email and SMS notifications under our Digital Notification Program (where we have mobile and email details) as well as by more traditional methods such as mail and letterbox drops.

In 2016-17, we extended our Digital Notification Program and sent more than 120,400 alerts to keep customers better informed about water outages (compared to 65,184 during 2015-16).

Via our bill simulator, customers told us that they support our Digital Notification Program and support communication enhancements to better inform them when there is an interruption.

During the next regulatory period we propose to:

1. Increase the number of customers notified when there is a water supply interruption. We will measure the percentage of customers notified for unplanned water supply interruptions via email and SMS (for whom we have contact details). We will achieve this increase by enhancing customer data and communication capabilities. We will also trial extending our notification periods, as we currently notify customers

when the interruption is between 6 am and 10 pm, or when it is longer than 30 minutes.

3. Explore email and SMS notifications for other types of interruptions, including sewerage blockages and potential water quality issues.
4. Provide even greater transparency about our strong performance in speed of response and rectifying water and sewerage supply interruptions to ensure our customers are better assured during times of disruption.
5. Improve South East Water LIVE functionality and raise customers' awareness that they can track what we're doing online 24/7.

Table 8 Customers notified when there is a fault

	2016-17 current performance	2022-23 target
Percentage of customers notified per unplanned water supply interruptions (for whom we have email/mobile details, greater than 30 minutes)	60%	80%





Rectifying interruptions to minimise disruption

During the next regulatory period we propose to:

1. Maintain our average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions in line with the following, ongoing guaranteed service level obligations to best minimise the time we take to rectify water and sewerage interruptions:

- unplanned water supply interruptions restored within five hours
- sewerage interruptions restored within four hours
- internal and external sewage spills.

2. Maintain our service levels in planned water interruptions restored within the notification period.

Currently, 98 per cent of our planned interruptions occur within the notification period we give to customers. We also have a high level of performance in meeting rectification times, comparative to the industry, with an average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions of approximately 88 minutes per interruption .

Please refer to the 'Delivering on customer outcomes' section, which outlines the proposed payments for not meeting these guaranteed service levels.

Throughout our customer engagement, customers indicated that they want us to focus on rectifying interruptions rather than just responding to them.

Table 9 Average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions

	2013-18 current period average performance	2018-23 target each year over period
Average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions	88 minutes	88 minutes

Table 10 Water supply interruptions restored within notification period

	2013-18 current period average performance	2018-23 target each year over period
Percentage of planned water interruptions restored within notification period	98%	98%



Reducing disruption in peak times

As part of our commitment to enhancing our understanding of customer disruption levels associated with network faults and works, we are investigating ways to reduce disruption in peak times. We are currently implementing a survey so that customers have the opportunity to provide specific feedback to better inform us of their level of disruption, key areas

of impact and opportunities for mitigation. This will be used as a basis for measuring disruption in future years.

During the next regulatory period we propose to:

1. Investigate ways to reduce the number of customers impacted during peak times (5 am to 9 am and 5 pm to 10 pm) when impact may be greatest.

2. Measure and reduce the number of customers interrupted during peak times as a percentage total of planned and unplanned water supply interruptions.

3. Investigate other ways to best reduce disruption as we gain an enhanced understanding through our surveys.

Table 11 Number of customers impacted by an unplanned water supply interruption in peak times

	2013-18 current period average performance	2022-23 target
Percentage of customers impacted by an unplanned water supply interruption in peak times	28.1%	27.6% (46,200 customers)



Minimising disruption

To meet our agreed service levels, South East Water renews approximately 35 km of water mains each year, which impacts approximately 4,000 customers. These customers have generally experienced three to four interruptions within 12 months. To minimise their disruption while we renew their water main, we have designed an approach where customer water supply is only interrupted for five minutes while we connect an interim supply, and for another five minutes when we reinstate supply with the new water main.

In cases where a main shutoff is required, the number of customers impacted has been dramatically reduced through technology that uses a pneumatic temporary valve arrangement. In all instances customers are notified in advance. We have surveyed the customers impacted by these works, to gain insights on our performance including inconvenience, reinstatement and noise so that the renewal process is continually improved and the impact to customers is minimised.

Understanding individual needs and impacts

We have learned from our customers, both residential and business, that even the smallest interruption can impact their lives.

To improve our proactivity in minimising the impacts of faults and outages, during the next regulatory period we propose to:

1. Improve how we capture and manage customer details and preferences.

2. Improve awareness of the support services we provide to help minimise disruptions (such as alternative water supplies, bottled water, alternative accommodation and clean up support in the event of sewage spills) so customers can be assured that we recognise individual needs on a case-by-case basis.

Key actions, activities and programs to help keep our customers warned and informed



Project	Cost (\$M)	Impact to average customer bill (\$ per annum)	Description
Expand Digital Notification Program	Business Support Systems Program, which supports a number of outcomes Refer to 'Capital expenditure forecasts' section	+\$3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Extend notification capabilities to a broader range of fault and emergency work types. → Understand and influence an enhanced customer experience. → Capture customer contact details and enhance ongoing data quality and management. → Explore new ways to measure and monitor disruption.
Operations and Maintenance Program	Delivered through baseline expenditure. Approximately \$7M in direct costs currently within baseline operating expenditure	\$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Continue existing program to maintain high levels of service in rectification. → Focus on minimising disruption where it's efficient to do so.