



Media Release
10 April 2018

TASMANIAN WATER AND SEWERAGE STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT 2016-17

Tasmania's independent Economic Regulator today released its latest review of the State's urban water and sewerage industry, providing consumers and stakeholders with an insight into the issues and challenges faced by the State's single service provider, TasWater.

Mr Joe Dimasi, the Tasmanian Economic Regulator, said "the Report shows that most Tasmanians have secure and safe water supplies and demonstrates that significant investment in water quality and delivery has reduced the occurrence of unsafe drinking water in regional towns. The challenges associated with achieving TasWater's objective of lifting all boil water alerts and public health alerts by August 2018 were demonstrated during the year, with four water supplies moved to permanent boil water alerts. As at 30 June 2017, there were 25 water supplies affected by long term boil water alerts or public health (do not consume) alerts. However, TasWater had lifted ten alerts by early 2017-18."

Mr Dimasi also noted that "performance of most of the State's sewage treatment plants (STPs) continues to be below expectations with 42 STPs failing to achieve at least 90 per cent compliance with discharge limits." However, overall environmental compliance has improved after several years in decline, achieving 85.9 per cent (flow-weighted) compliance in 2016-17. A new agreement between TasWater and the environmental regulator to target the State's largest STPs and those that pose localised environmental risk, with a focus on improving environmental performance, is expected to deliver further improvements.

While the total number of complaints received by TasWater fell by 14 per cent to 2 500, the number of complaints relating to water quality increased by 23 per cent, representing 54 per cent of all complaints. TasWater has produced some good results in relation to customer service, with customers generally not waiting long to talk to call centre staff. TasWater has outperformed its mainland counterparts in this respect for the last two financial years.

Around 15 per cent of customers across Tasmania experienced an unplanned interruption to their water supply in 2016-17 while 93 per cent of high priority (ie with potential to cause harm) water bursts and leaks were attended to within 60 minutes. Mr Dimasi said that "unfortunately my assessment of performance against the customer service standards was constrained this year by a lack of reliable data, caused by issues with TasWater's implementation of a new asset management information system."

"Rising operating costs and investment in new infrastructure underlie growing water bills for customers, although Tasmanians are paying around \$150 less per annum for water and sewerage than their mainland counterparts." Mr Dimasi said.

Mr Dimasi noted that 2016-17 saw greater liaison between TasWater and its stakeholders and a more structured and robust approach from TasWater to the prioritisation of its capital expenditure. Both of these initiatives are intended to help improve compliance and increase the efficiency of operations generally.

"TasWater has invested significantly to improve its compliance outcomes during 2016-17. However, it continues to face a range of challenges that means it must balance competing priorities to deliver efficient outcomes." Mr Dimasi said.

For further information contact:
Dean Burgess
Office of the Tasmanian Economic Regulator
Tel: (03) 6166 4422

The State of the Industry Report 2016-17 is
available at:
www.economicregulator.tas.gov.au
Go to *Hot Topics*