



Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

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Ms Janobai Smith
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Ref: MIN049329



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Dear Ms Smith

DIGITAL WATER METERS

Thank you for your email of 30 September 2018 to the Hon Lisa Neville MP, Minister for Water about digital water meters. As this matter is in my area of responsibility, the Minister has asked that I respond on her behalf.

The Victorian Government is committed to delivering affordable, efficient and innovative water services for all customers. The Government has worked with water corporations to keep water prices low and Victorians will continue to have some of the lowest water bills in Australia following the Essential Services Commission's recent pricing determinations.

Any changes to metering technology undertaken by the water corporations will be at no further cost to water customers. The cost of meters is currently part of the service charge paid by water customers which covers the cost of meter replacements as required.

With Melbourne's population set to almost double within 50 years and climate change leading to more extreme droughts, Victoria's water corporations are working on new ways to improve the water network. One of the ways this is being done is by replacing aging technology, such as analogue water meters, with innovative technology that can help to identify leaks in the water network and deliver services more efficiently. Around the world, other major cities are also upgrading older water metering technology to enable improvements in customer service and to reduce water losses.

Customers who have participated in new water meter technology trials to date have achieved savings to their water use and their bill through proactive leak identification.

In relation to radiofrequency (RF) waves used by communication technologies, such waves are present around us at all time from natural and man-made sources. Communication technologies previously trialled by water corporations are well within the Australian safety standards and likely to produce less than one twentieth of the RF emitted by a mobile phone.

There are differences between electricity smart meters and the meter and communications technology that water utilities are trialling. This includes being run on battery and communicating much less often at a frequency likely to be even less than a tenth of that measured by an electricity smart meter. Independent testing of the meters is being conducted and this will continue to be undertaken during trials and prior to any broader transition across the meter network.

Any plans for a digital water meter rollout would need thorough assessment and consideration. Trials won't progress to wide rollouts until these assessments are complete, and customer value, benefit, and economic viability is assured. The support of customers and Victorian Government approval is required prior to any broad introduction of new digital water metering technology.

Water corporations undertook extensive customer engagement in the development of their price submissions to set the services and prices they would deliver between 2018-23. This included seeking customer input around potential use of new meter technologies and the early detection of water leaks this could enable. This engagement is continuing through customer research and trials, which are supported by information on water corporation websites. The Victorian Government is regularly briefed on the progress of digital meter trials, including customer feedback and business case considerations.

If you would like more information about this matter, please call [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Thank you for raising this matter with the Minister.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]