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### **Hunter Water's flexible services meet customers' evolving needs**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has seen an increase in Hunter Water customers opting for online services and contactless ways to seek general support, lodge applications or to pay their bills.

After temporarily closing its regional support centres at Maitland and Speers Point in response to the pandemic, Hunter Water has continued to provide highly valued customer experiences via face-to-face, online, and over-the-phone services.

The success of these services, and the repurposing of office space by Maitland City Council, prompted the organisation to assess the ongoing operations of its regional centres.

Hunter Water now confirms that it will not reopen the two regional centres.

Executive Manager Customer Services, Keiran Smith, said the organisation had considered how the permanent closures would impact its customers and workforce.

"Hunter Water provides drinking water, wastewater, recycled water and some stormwater services to a population of almost 600,000 people in homes and businesses across the Lower Hunter. Prior to COVID-19, our Maitland and Lake Macquarie Support Centres regularly served less than one per cent of our customers.

"We have written to the 350 customers who have a history of regularly visiting our regional centres to make payments prior to COVID-19.

"While we recognise that all of these customers have found other ways to engage with Hunter Water since COVID-19, we would like to ensure they understand these closures are now a permanent arrangement and provide them with options for the future.

"Importantly, there are no job losses as a result of this decision to not reopen our Maitland and Lake Macquarie Customer Support Centres as our staff will continue to deliver their high standard of service from our Newcastle-based Support Centre to service our growing online channels," said Mr Smith.

Mr Smith added Hunter Water was eager to enhance its customers' experiences by meeting their evolving needs.

"While many of our customers prefer instantaneous digital services, we understand that we have some customers who still prefer face-to-face interactions.

"We will continue to provide face-to-face options to support more complex needs, and online services for routine transactions," said Mr Smith.

Face-to-face services will continue to be provided at Hunter Water's Customer Support Centre in Newcastle, from 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, while the organisation's successful 'Bring Your Bill' days will be expanded across the region.

Customers can continue to pay their bills by visiting any Australia Post office (144 face-to-face locations across the Lower Hunter), going to Hunter Water's website at [www.hunterwater.com.au](http://www.hunterwater.com.au), using its live web chat services, or by contacting the Newcastle-based call centre on 1300 657 657.

An increasing number of development-related applications are now being made via Hunter Water's self-service portal, replacing paper plans. Today, more than 99 per cent of applications submitted to Hunter Water are completed online, while eBilling and an enhanced developer app are also on the way.

**Hunter Water media line: 4979 9669 | [media@hunterwater.com.au](mailto:media@hunterwater.com.au)**