



Saturday 3 February 2024

## Community panel convenes to shape Hunter Water's future services and prices

A representative community panel has convened to help shape the future services provided by Hunter Water to the end of the decade, with indicative prices between 2025 and 2030 shared at today's forum to inform the panel's deliberative process.

Hunter Water develops a pricing proposal to submit to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) every five years that reflects the efficient cost of providing our services. Our next pricing reset is 1 July 2025.

Our customers' and community views are integral to this process to ensure their needs and preferences are considered in our future investment programs and services.

Hunter Water Managing Director Darren Cleary said these forums were the latest in an extensive and ongoing engagement program for the pricing proposal, which has so far included prioritisation surveys, bill simulations and focus groups.

"We're now at the stage where a 40-person representative community panel is seeking to reach a consensus and make trade-offs on a number of different topics over the coming months. This includes service reliability for customers, carbon emissions reduction, water conservation and recycled water.

"These consensus recommendations have the potential to change the amount of money we spend on those investments. Today we've shared indicative prices for customers' bills between 2025 to 2030 to help inform their deliberations on behalf of the Lower Hunter community.

"The costs of providing our essential water and wastewater services are rising, and it is expected that prices will need to increase during this price period to ensure we can continue to deliver reliable, high quality services and secure our region's water future.

"Like other industries, interest rates are one of the contributing factors to these costs, while we also need to invest in upgrading our existing infrastructure and ensure we can meet future growth and demand.

"We anticipate customer bills may rise between 5 to 6 per cent each year over the price period. Compared to a current typical household bill, we estimate our customers will pay around \$170 more each year before inflation. A significant portion of this (an estimated \$90 per year) will contribute to new investments such as the Belmont Desalination Plant, which is a key part in securing the Lower Hunter's water supply for generations to come.

"Importantly, these are indicative prices only. We will continue to engage with our customers and community and finalise our pricing proposal. We are doing everything we can to be efficient and keep our customers' bills as low as possible.

"We've also strengthened our customer support programs, providing a range of assistance and services to help customers manage their bill including flexible payment options with Easy Pay or providing extra time to make a payment," said Mr Cleary.

The typical water and wastewater bill for the owner of a house is currently around \$1,340 per year (excluding stormwater services). More information about Hunter Water's pricing proposal can be found at [www.hunterwater.com.au/pricing](http://www.hunterwater.com.au/pricing)

Chris White | Media line: 02 4979 9669 | [media@hunterwater.com.au](mailto:media@hunterwater.com.au)