

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Monday, 7 September 2020

ZERO TOLERANCE TO WATER THEFT IN VICTORIA

The Victorian Government is continuing to lead the way in water compliance and management – strengthening the state’s zero-tolerance approach to water theft to ensure a level playing field for all water users.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville today accepted recommendations from an independent review into water theft compliance measures – providing a big boost to water market transparency.

In May, the Minister appointed Des Pearson to undertake the comprehensive independent review ensuring Victorian irrigators and water users have a robust compliance and enforcement system, with checks and balances in place that helps maintain - and continue to build - confidence in the market.

Victoria has a strong track record when it comes to compliance and the review found that most irrigators and water users were already doing the right thing.

While compliance levels were relatively high and processes were already in place to identify and manage water theft – the review identified several areas where compliance and enforcement approaches could be further strengthened to provide consistent and quick resolutions.

The report set a clear target for rural water corporations to reduce existing rates of water theft, currently up to 3.6 per cent of the rural water volume, to less than 1 per cent. To reach the 1 percent target new regulations are now in place that enable water corporations to issue on-the-spot fines to water users for water theft.

Better communication will ensure water users know when their account is running out, and the timing of enforcement processes will be improved, so that large volumes can’t be pumped when accounts are negative.

Other changes include rural water corporations undertaking more rigorous management and monitoring of their compliance and enforcement functions, along with finalising metering action plans and addressing enforcement issues which inhibit on-ground compliance.

There will also be improved and timely risk-based reporting on compliance and enforcement provided to water corporation boards and the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning. Mr Pearson will return in July 2021 to evaluate and report on implementation of the recommendations.

The actions build on new legislation that came into effect in October last year that increased the maximum fine for intentional water theft to \$990,000 for companies and \$198,000 for individuals. The legislative change also allows water corporations to suspend or cancel licences for water theft.

Details of the Compliance and Enforcement Review can be found at <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/water-for-agriculture/taking-and-using-water/non-urban-water-compliance-and-enforcement-in-victoria>

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

“Victoria is a leader in compliance and water management – particularly in the context of the Murray Darling Basin over recent years – and we will continue to lead the way.”

Media Contact: Nikki Mott 0416 311 214 | nikki.mott@minstaff.vic.gov.au

“Water theft is not a victimless crime, and with limited water to go around in recent times, these changes will benefit the entire water market.”