

Author name: Name suppressed

Date of submission: Friday, 29 November 2024

Your submission for this review:

I am writing to express my deep concerns regarding the proposed price increases and investment plans outlined by Sydney Water and WaterNSW. As a general residential customer, the implications of these proposals on household budgets are alarming, especially considering the already significant financial strain that many Australians are experiencing due to the rising costs of living. Sydney Water Proposal: The proposed 18% increase in water bills for the upcoming year, followed by further increases of 7% annually, plus inflation, is a cause for great concern. Water is an essential service, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for many households to keep up with such substantial price hikes, particularly after the recent surge in energy prices. The proposed increase in the fixed service charge, which would affect all customers regardless of their water usage, further exacerbates the problem. For households with low water usage, this could result in disproportionately high bills, effectively punishing those who are already making efforts to conserve water. I fully appreciate the importance of investing in infrastructure to ensure the continued delivery of safe, reliable, and sustainable water services. However, these significant price increases should not fall solely on the shoulders of residential customers, especially when the financial pressures on everyday Australians are already overwhelming. With rising energy bills and the growing cost of living, it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the demands of basic utilities, and water should not become another burden that people cannot afford. Given the critical nature of water as a fundamental service, I believe it is essential that the funding for necessary infrastructure improvements and service enhancements be provided through alternative means, such as federal government support, rather than through steep price increases. The federal government must recognize the importance of ensuring affordable access to water, just as it has prioritized the cost of energy. Without such support, the proposed increases would cause immense hardship for families and individuals who are already struggling with the rising costs of essential services. WaterNSW Proposal: Similarly, I am concerned about the proposed 14% annual bill increase for bulk water customers, which will likely have downstream effects on residential water charges. The significant increase in capital expenditure, particularly for the Warragamba Dam Resilience project and the E-flows initiative, while undoubtedly important, should not result in such a substantial financial burden for consumers. While I understand that investments in infrastructure are necessary, it is unreasonable to ask customers to absorb these costs through continued price hikes. The proposed increase in operating expenditure by 15.7% is also troubling, especially considering the ongoing challenges facing Australian households. As mentioned, with energy costs rising significantly, the last thing many families need is another essential utility becoming unaffordable. The combination of energy and water price increases, both of which are essential to our daily lives, would be a double blow to already struggling households. Water, in particular, is a vital component of life, and for many people, an increase in water bills could be the tipping point that makes daily living even more difficult. It is no longer tolerable to ask customers to bear the burden of funding large-scale infrastructure projects through continual price hikes. Instead, I believe it is time for the federal or state government to step in and provide adequate funding to support the necessary upgrades to water infrastructure. As we have seen with energy policy, governments can and should invest in ensuring that essential services remain affordable for all Australians. It is critical that water services remain affordable, and the government should consider how to reduce the financial strain on customers, particularly in times of economic hardship. I respectfully urge Sydney Water and WaterNSW to reconsider the magnitude of the proposed price increases and to explore alternative funding solutions, such as federal support, to cover the costs of necessary investments. Without such support, these increases will place unbearable pressure on households, particularly those already struggling with the rising cost of living. Thank you for your consideration of my concerns, and I trust that both Sydney Water and WaterNSW will prioritise the affordability and sustainability of water services for all customers.