Executive summary

The *National performance report 2017–18: urban water utilities* (2018 Urban NPR) compares the performance of 80 utilities and councils (utilities) and five bulk water authorities providing urban water services to over 20 million people across Australia. The 2018 Urban NPR is published by the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) with information provided by utilities across Australia's States and Territories. The report is the thirteenth in the series, and the fifth to be produced by the Bureau.

Part A of the report provides commentary and analysis for key indicators. Part B of the report contains data for the full set of 166 indicators reported on by utilities and bulk water authorities for all reporting years.

Residential water use stable despite dry and warm conditions

Residential water use across the nation was relatively stable, with only a **4** per cent increase compared to 2016–17, and only a 0.03 per cent increase over the long-term average. However, some regions, especially New South Wales, reported a greater increase in residential water use due to drier and warmer weather. In contrast, the southwest of Western Australia experienced above-average rainfall for **some months of** the year, resulting in lower residential water use in the Water Corporation regions of southwest Western Australia.

Typical water bills steady

While nationally the typical residential bill was steady, dry and warm conditions were reflected in the typical residential water bills for New South Wales utilities: only two New South Wales utilities reported median bills lower than previous years. Only three New South Wales utilities reported median bills lower than their four-year average.

Also notable was the increase in typical residential bills for all Western Australian Water Corporation services areas, despite the decrease in consumption. This increase is most likely due to the State Government's decision to increase water, sewerage and drainage charges for the Water Corporation, Aqwest–Bunbury Water Corporation (W) and Busselton Water (W) by 6 per cent.
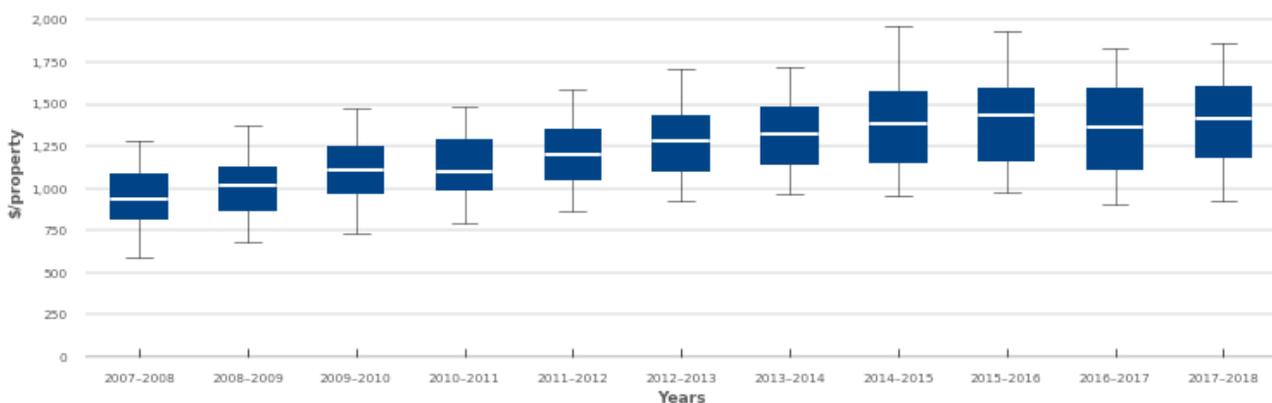

Figure 1   Typical residential bill: water supply and sewerage ($), 2007–08 to 2017–18.

For more about bills see Chapter 4 Pricing and Tables A3 and A4, Appendix A.

Surface water relied on to meet increased demand in all major urban centres

The total water supplied to urban systems increased by 9 per cent for the major urban areas. In all major urban areas, increased surface water abstraction was necessary to meet increased demand. In Sydney, this increase in surface water abstraction combined with low rainfall resulted in a 25 per cent drop in storage levels at 30 June 2018 compared to 30 June 2017.

Recycled water production increased significantly in Melbourne, from 33 to 42 GL, due to recent investments by Melbourne Water and South East Water in their recycled water production capacities. Melbourne reported a large drop in desalination production, from 46 GL in 2016–17 to the minimum order of 15 GL in 2017–18. This minimum is in place to allow an ongoing supplemental source of water for Melbourne's storages and a buffer against drought.

Perth relied on surface water sources to meet the majority of its increased water supply demand, with groundwater and desalination sources supplying roughly the same as last year. However, due to increased rainfall, Perth storages increased by 299 GL.

Water main leaks and breaks stable

Nationally, the number of water main breaks per 100 km of mains was stable, with a 1 per cent decrease compared to last year. Despite the warm and dry conditions centred on New South Wales, only 50 per cent of New South Wales utilities reported an increase in main leaks and breaks compared to their 4-year average.

Notably, 12 out of 19 Queensland utilities reported a decrease compared to 2016–17, and 17 out of 19 Queensland utilities reported a decrease in breaks and leaks per 100 km compared to their four-year average. This result probably reflects a gradual pay-off from ongoing investments in renewals and leakage management.