

Executive summary

The *National performance report 2018–19: urban water utilities* (2019 Urban NPR) compares the performance of 80 utilities and councils (utilities) and five bulk water authorities providing urban water services to over 23 million people across Australia. The 2019 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 fourteenth in the series, and the sixth 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.

Urban water use steady after another warm and dry year

Rainfall during 2018–19 was below average or very much below average for most of Australia, except for northern Queensland. This followed similarly dry conditions for southeastern Australia during 2017–18. The 2018–19 year also saw record high or very-much-above-average temperatures for most of Australia, with the 2018–19 summer being the warmest on record. Given the continued warm and dry conditions in 2018–19, water use in major urban centres was very similar to 2017–18.

Increased production of desalination, except for Perth

Almost all urban centres that have desalination plants increased the volume of supply compared to 2017–18. This was in response to lower water availability. The exception was Perth, where the volume sourced from desalination decreased by 40 per cent compared to the previous year. Consecutive years of high flows into Perth's storages has meant surface water could be used as a major source of supply in 2018–19. For the first time in several years, Perth's desalination plants were not required to run at near full capacity.

Typical water bills steady

For a third consecutive year, residential bills have remained steady with a national increase of 1 per cent since 2017–18 despite the country being the driest since 1969–70 and having the fifth driest year on record. There was variation between the States and Territories with Western Australian utilities reporting an increase of 3.9 per cent from 2017–18 and the Australian Capital Territory reporting a decrease of 4.0 per cent.

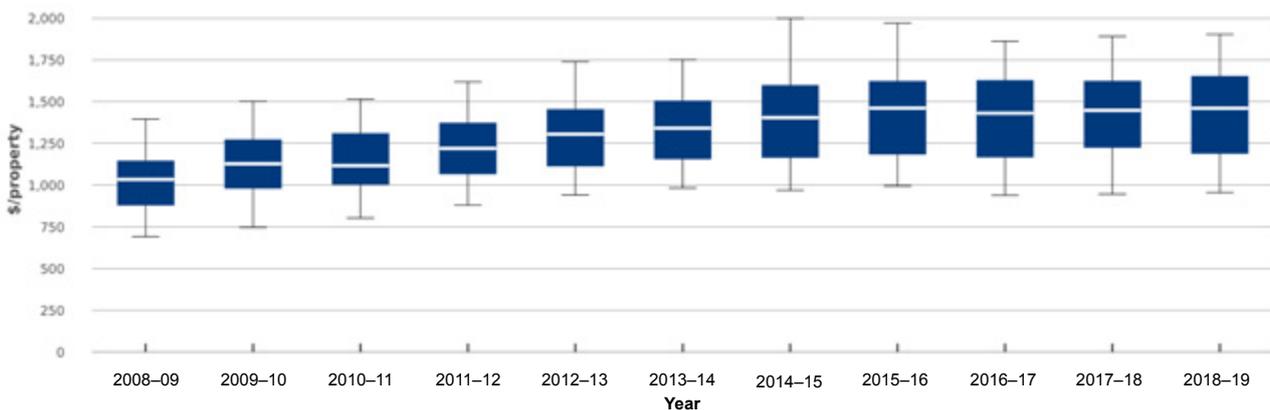


Figure 1 Typical residential bill: water supply and sewerage (\$), 2008–09 to 2018–19.

Increased capital expenditure on sewerage offsets a decrease in expenditure in the water supply system

In real terms, total capital expenditure on water supply and sewerage services by utilities increased by 5 per cent (\$187.8 million) from 2017–18. This was mainly driven by investments made by the Major water utilities. On a per property basis, all utility groups increased expenditure on the sewerage network. These increases have, however, been partly offset by the decreases the utility groups (except the Major utility group) have made in capital expenditure on water networks.