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## Media Release

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### Tasmania's water corporations launch major water meter push

Tasmania's three water corporations today announced that the installation of 73,000 new residential water meters and 88,000 replacement residential water meters would commence in January 2011. More than 5,000 water meters for commercial and industrial customers will also be installed.

The massive project is expected to take around 18 months, with the residential component valued at \$54 million.

The statewide project is partially funded by a \$10 million grant from the Australian Government's *Water for the Future* initiative through the National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns Program.

The project represents Australia's largest single roll-out of new water meters in recent decades and Hobart is the last capital city in the nation to be fully metered.

The Chairman of the Tasmanian Water and Sewerage Corporations, Geoff Willis, said that the project was one of many large investments in water infrastructure which will benefit customers for many years.

"Water meters are essential tools for measuring water use," Mr Willis said. "However, their value goes far beyond their simple purpose of measuring water. Water meters will underpin fair pricing for everyone, help property owners detect water leaks, and with less water wasted, the corporations can postpone expensive infrastructure projects and make major savings for their customers.

"In fact, Southern Water has estimated that it is likely to see a fall of more than 20 per cent in water consumption in greater Hobart, one of Australia's 'thirstiest' cities – an amount which will lead to huge cost savings, environmental benefits and service level improvements," he said.

Mr Willis said that as part of the water pricing reform process currently underway, new meters need to be installed by 1 July 2012 – when a new pricing approach takes effect.

"Unless all Tasmanians have water meters, we cannot apply fair and equitable water pricing to all customers within each region," he said. "This inequity has understandably created a lot of angst in the community, particularly in southern Tasmania where 62,000 residential properties require a meter.

“In the north and north-west, there are small townships and CBD areas which miss out on the benefits their metered neighbours have,” he said.

“However, under the new pricing approach from 1 July 2012, everyone’s water will be calculated in the same way – with a fixed charge to cover the cost of infrastructure including dams, reservoirs and pipes, and a separate fee for the water that’s used on each property, covering water extraction, pumping and treatment costs.

Southern Water, Ben Lomond Water and Cradle Mountain Water confirmed that customers will not be charged an upfront or separate fee for new or replaced meters. Each corporation’s project cost will be absorbed into fixed charges over the life of the meters – around 15 years.

According to the water corporations, the benefits of water meters are significant:

- The introduction of water meters will lead to an overall decrease in consumption – both from behavioural change and leakage detection. Southern Water predicts water savings of more than 20% - a typical outcome seen in mainland cities when meters have been introduced.
- Major savings in water use leads to reduced costs in sourcing, treating and pumping water. With reduced stress on water systems, major upgrades and augmentation projects for plants and pipes can be postponed for many years – a process which helps keep water prices lower for customers.
- As the water corporations introduce more detailed water accounts in 2011/12, meters ensure that customers can be informed about their water use, consumption patterns and alerted to possible water leaks in their property.
- The environmental benefits mean that lower water use means less impact on the environment at both ends. Once poured or flushed away, water undergoes expensive treatment before it is released back into the environment.

As well as installing new meters, the project will also investigate and update 101,000 aged meters to ensure consistent accuracy levels. Ben Lomond Water and Cradle Mountain Water will rapidly move to replacing aged meters in 2011, while Southern Water will first install new residential meters, then commercial and industrial, before moving to replace aged meters from 2012.

“Water meters generally last around 15 years, and as they move beyond their life span, they can become inaccurate,” Mr Willis said.

In the north and the north west of Tasmania where the majority of properties are metered, the major task is in upgrading old meters and incorporating new technology.

After detailed analysis, Southern Water, Ben Lomond Water and Cradle Mountain Water have selected Automated Meter Reading technology (AMR) to be attached to the water meters. This technology means that meters can be read remotely from the street.

A test pilot of 24 properties in New Town fitted with new AMR meters cut reading times from 22 minutes to four minutes.

“Even meter reading costs will be reduced and the system is being designed for future technological advances,” Mr Willis said.

Water Metering Tasmania is a statewide team established by the three corporations and based at Southern Water. As well as responsibility for the project planning and design, Water Metering Tasmania is also utilising Onstream services for the procurement of meters and stakeholder engagement. It will also install the meters in southern Tasmania. Ben Lomond Water and Cradle Mountain Water will install and upgrade their own meters utilising the cost benefits provided by Water Metering Tasmania’s centralised purchasing and arrangements.

**ENDS**

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