

Redesigning your billing experience

Closing the loop

March 2023

Purpose

This document provides a report on community feedback about proposed changes to Greater Western Water's (GWW) billing systems and processes. Community engagement was undertaken in January 2023.

This report 'closes the loop' by reporting back to the community and sharing with you what we heard. It summarises who we engaged, the activities undertaken and the feedback we received. The report also describes how we will support customers through the implementation of the proposed changes.

Background

As part of the integration of the former Western Water and City West Water into GWW, we proposed to align the billing systems and process of the two organisations by bringing all customers to a quarterly billing cycle with 21-day payment terms.

Currently, customers in the former Western Water service region are billed tri-annually with 28-day payment terms. The majority of our customers reside in the former City West Water service region and already receive quarterly billing and 21-day payment terms.

Alignment of our billing practices will enable future plans to deliver a new, improved online customer experience including account management, payment support and customer communications, and help detect any faults or leaks earlier as we check water meters more often.

Before making any changes, we submitted details of the proposed changes to the Essential Services Commission (ESC). Customer engagement forms a vital part of that submission process.

Engagement objectives

We undertook a consultation process with customers where we sought to raise your awareness of the changes and to seek your feedback in accordance with GWW's Community Engagement Framework. Our engagement objectives were:

- Adopt an 'inform' approach on the IAP2 level of engagement spectrum with the opportunity for you to provide feedback
- Provide our customers with a clear understanding of the changes
- Inform and support affected customers ahead of changes
- Review and consider all of your feedback before making our submission to the ESC
- Engage/inform financial support services for feedback and to help target vulnerable customers
- Demonstrate meaningful engagement.

Engagement tools – how we engaged

Engagement activities were planned and delivered to achieve the engagement objectives stated above. Engagement was undertaken through GWW's YourSay platform where a dedicated page was created.

The page provided you with information about the changes, what this means for you and what benefits you can expect.

You were given the opportunity to engage with us and provide feedback or ask questions via the following four methods outlined on the YourSay page:

- Complete an online survey
- Submit a question via the question and answer section where the project team could respond directly to queries received
- Email GWW via engagement@gww.com.au
- Phone our customer contact centre on 13 44 99.

The engagement period was just over two weeks opening on Friday 6 January and closing at 12pm on Monday 23 January 2023.

Communications – who we reached

We used a range of communication methods to reach our impacted customers so anyone who was interested could provide feedback via the YourSay webpage.

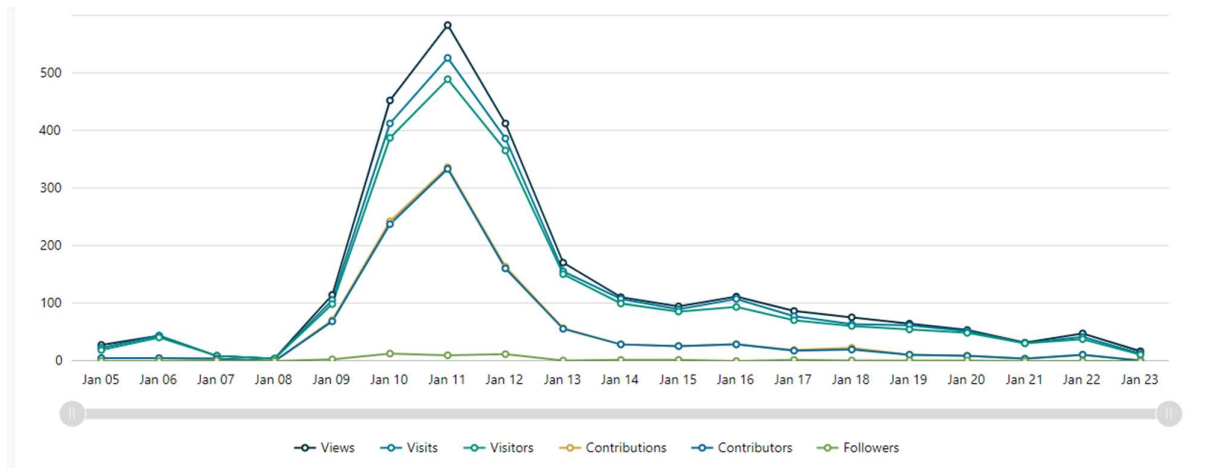
Over the consultation period, our communications activities included:

- Email campaigns sent to:
 - 55,760 customers and stakeholders in the impacted area
 - 388 GWW YourSay online engagement platform subscribers
- Paid social media campaign targeting impacted towns and suburbs
- Dedicated project web page on the GWW corporate website
- News item on the GWW corporate website
- Internal channels (many GWW employees are also customers) – GWW intranet and Yammer.

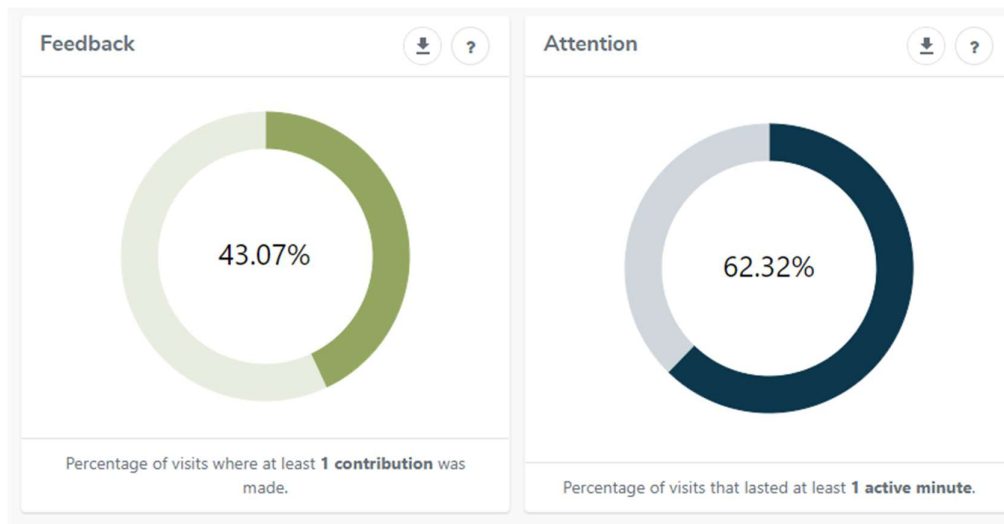
Engagement reach and participation

We received a strong response over the survey period with customers engaging in the following ways:

- 28,230 Facebook views resulting in 773 link clicks
- 2,518 views of the dedicated YourSay page
- 1,016 survey responses
- 32 questions asked and answered via the YourSay question and answer feature
- 25 direct email enquiries and responses
- 2 direct phone calls through to customer service



When the page was visited there was a high degree of interaction with 43% of visitors making a contribution either by completing the survey or asking a question. Over 62% of visitors spent at least one minute active on the page.



Engagement outcomes – what you told us

Most of you (97%) told us you understood the change in billing frequency. Additionally, 63% indicated you did not have any concerns about the bill frequency changes.

What are your concerns with receiving bills on a quarterly basis?	Percentage
I have no concerns	62.98%
I am happy with the current frequency and don't want to change	12.24%
My water bills will cost me more annually overall	8.09%
I am concerned the bills will arrive at an already expensive time of year	4.24%
The combinations of a short payment period and more frequent bills will be hard for me to manage	3.26%
I am worried about being able to afford my water bill	2.96%
Other	6.22%
Total	100.00%

Similarly, 96% of you indicated that you understood the change in payment terms with 71% indicating that you did not have any concern with this change.

Do you have any concerns with 21 days to pay your bills?	Percentage
I have no concerns	70.75%
I am happy with the current payment terms and don't want to change	10.95%
The time is too short and I can't pay that quickly	4.88%
The combinations of a short payment period and more frequent bills will be hard for me to manage	4.58%
21 days doesn't work with my current pay cycle	3.98%
Other	4.88%
Total	100.00%

Feedback on changes

You were given the option to provide comments at the end of the survey. We received 731 verbatim comments with the majority (619) of these responding to our question about how we could make these changes simple and easy for people.

We note that 15% of you preferred us not to make this change as you are content with tri-annual bills. We have outlined the additional steps we are introducing to assist you with the changes.

How will we use your feedback

During the engagement period, our team responded to your feedback via email, phone, and direct replies to the questions posted on our dedicated YourSay page. The following table provides details about how we have considered and addressed feedback themes captured through our engagement. In summary, through the transition we will:

- Continue to communicate with you via bills, targeted letter drops, SMS and phone contact and provide you with any required information ahead of implementation
- Ensure that customer service improvements identified throughout the consultation process are considered in our future action plans
- Support you through the transitional period and proactively offer a range of payment options and support for those customers that may experience difficulty paying their bills during this change.

What we heard	What we will do
Some of you are worried about being able to pay your bill in 21 days	<p>In addition to our existing options and support for customers experiencing payment difficulties and concessions available to eligible pension and healthcare card holders, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer a 7-day payment extension to customers who find the change in payment terms challenging • offer a bill-smoothing arrangement allowing customers to spread payments over multiple bills (over a maximum of a 12-month period), and • case manage customers through our Community & Care and Customer Assist teams and make any other necessary arrangements to support them in difficult times. <p>To further support you in adjusting to the changes, we will put in place a 6-month transition period by adjusting the invoice management cycle to allow more time to pay before issuing the final notice to pay.</p> <p>Impacted customers who qualify for an extension can already 'self-serve' and apply their own payment extension in the existing My Water customer portal. We will proactively identify customers who show early signs of potential hardship and provide case management support.</p>
Some of you were concerned that you will pay more overall as a result of an extra bill each year	<p>This is a common question during engagement and we would like to reassure you that the change in the billing cycle will not change the cost of water services or annual network charges. Receiving your bill more often should mean smaller bills as the cost is spread out over four bills instead of three.</p>

<p>You asked us to reassure you that existing flexible payment arrangements will be maintained for those of you currently utilising them.</p> <p>There were also requests asking us to introduce more payment frequency and channel options.</p>	<p>Existing flexible payment arrangements will remain in place for all customers currently utilising these options.</p> <p>You will also have greater flexibility to manage your water bill and choose the payment method and frequency that best suits you when we introduce our new billing system. This will include introducing an opt-in monthly billing service, and as noted above, eligible customers will be able to self-serve payment extension requests.</p> <p>Based on feedback received during the consultation, we will also explore future options for you to set up direct debit payments from a credit card, noting that direct debit is currently available from a bank account.</p>
<p>You have asked for plenty of notice and clear communication about when this change is happening.</p>	<p>We will communicate these changes with you regularly before the proposed changes come into effect on 1 July 2023. In our next customer bill communication, we will confirm the changes and timing of implementation and provide options for you to access more information (via phone and online).</p> <p>Bill messaging will be supported by information on our corporate website, updates to the dedicated YourSay page, customer service FAQ and other communications targeting impacted customers such as social media and email.</p> <p>We're also launching a new functionality to notify customers, either via SMS, email or based on the customer's preferred method of communication, of when their bill is on the way and a reminder ahead of when it is due for payment</p>
<p>Some of you are happy with your current tri-annual bill arrangement and have asked us not to make this change.</p>	<p>We understand this change may be difficult for some customers. As outlined above, we will offer additional financial support above and beyond our existing options for customers experiencing payment difficulty.</p> <p>Changing your bill frequency will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce stress over household finances by making bills smaller and more frequent • help detect any faults or leaks on your property earlier as we check your water meter more often • allow us to streamline our processes so we can focus on giving you the best possible customer service.

<p>Cost of living pressures are real for many of you who are particularly concerned about an extra bill landing when Council rates are due and/or at Christmas.</p>	<p>We will communicate the changes and available support to you well ahead of the first quarterly billing cycle.</p> <p>We will use targeted seasonal and always-on communications to promote payment support messages during challenging times of year for our customers.</p> <p>To ensure messaging about the available support reaches our vulnerable customers, we will continue to work closely with our dedicated Community & Care and Customer Assist teams as well as using our relationships with the local community sector (e.g. financial counselling services) to sensitively promote assistance options.</p> <p>As mentioned above, in addition to our existing options and support for customers experiencing payment difficulties and concessions available to eligible pension and healthcare card holders, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer a 7-day payment extension to customers who find the change in payment terms challenging • offer a bill-smoothing arrangement allowing customers to spread payments over multiple bills (over a maximum of a 12-month period), and • case manage customers through our Community & Care and Customer Assist teams and put in place any other necessary arrangements to support them in difficult times. <p>Additionally, to support our customers in adjusting to the changes, we will put in place a 6-month transition period by adjusting the invoice management cycle to allow customers more time to pay before issuing the final notice to pay.</p>
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Conclusion and next steps

In January this year we asked customers what support they needed to make this change as easy as possible. We have now reviewed and considered all customer feedback and used it to inform our submission to the Essential Services Commission (ESC) on 15 February 2023.

From 1 July 2023, we'll begin the process to move our customers currently receiving their water bills triannually to quarterly billing. Receiving your bill more often should mean smaller bills as the cost is spread out over four bills instead of three and will not add any extra costs to you. Impacted customers will start receiving their quarterly bill from October 2023. You'll have 21 days to pay each bill from the date it is issued.

If you would like any further information or have questions about this change, please email us on engagement@gww.com.au