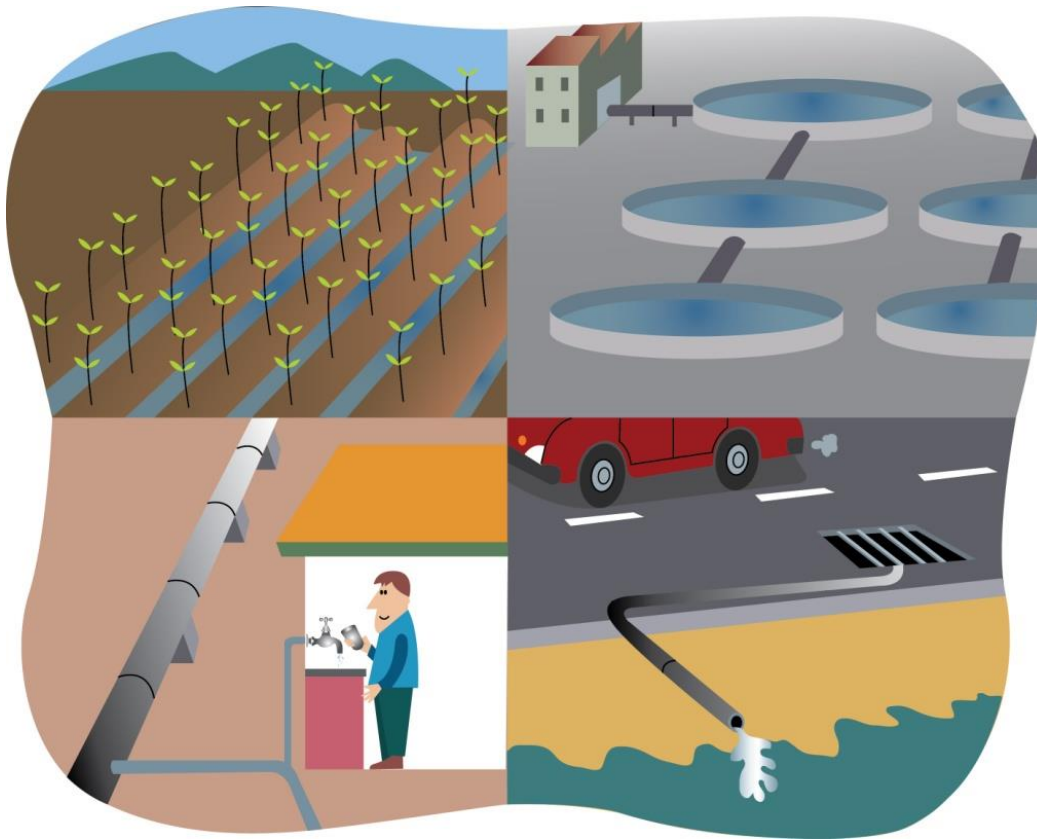


# On tap: A guide for water customers

## The Basics

In Western Australia, there are over 30 licensed water service providers providing one or more types of water services including water supply (potable or non-potable water), sewerage, irrigation and drainage services. Some providers are licensed for more than one type of service.



The Water Corporation is the largest water service provider in Western Australia servicing metropolitan and regional areas. The major potable water service providers are the Water Corporation, Busselton Water, Aqwest (Bunbury Water), Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd and Rottnest Island Authority.

Local government authorities provide sewerage services and/or non-potable water services in regional areas. Of all the local government authorities providing a water service, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder is the largest sewerage service provider.

A small number of other providers run irrigation systems or provide potable water and/or sewerage services to residential estates.

## **Economic Regulation Authority**

The ERA is the regulator of licensed providers of gas, electricity and water services. It issues licences, enforces and monitors compliance with licence conditions and legislative requirements. It also has the responsibility to administer, review and amend the *Water Services Code of Conduct (Code)*.

### **The Water Services Code of Conduct**

The Code prescribes a set of minimum customer service standards and requirements that water service providers have to comply with.

It applies to each provider of water supply, sewerage, irrigation and drainage services.

You are considered a 'customer' under the code provided that you are:

- an owner of the land to which the water services are provided;
- an occupier of the land to which the water services are provided who is authorised by an owner to receive bills for the water services; or
- any other person, such as a property agent who is authorised by an owner of the land to which water services are provided to receive bills for the water services.

## Contracts and connections

The code applies to residential and non-residential customers. Some customers have contracts with conditions that set standards that are different from the code. In these cases, the contract standards prevail over the code.

A provider is required to provide a water service to those customers entitled to the service.



A provider is also required to connect your property to an existing main within 10 business days provided you have complied with all requirements including payment of fees before a connection is made. This applies to all metered water supply services to an existing main comprising 20 mm water supply pipes.

A provider is required to provide information publicly on conditions of connection.

# Bills

There are two types of water charges, quantity and non-quantity charges. Quantity charges are based on the amount of water used, and are usually measured by a meter. Non-quantity charges (for example, sewerage or drainage charges) may be charged according to land value or a fixed charge.

A provider must issue a bill for non-quantity charges at least once every 12 months and a bill for quantity charges at least once every six months. A bill for quantity charges may be based on a metered reading to determine the quantity of water supplied, or if a meter reading is not possible (for example, if it has failed), a provider may estimate the amount.

## Requested meter reading

You can request a special meter reading to determine outstanding charges for a period that is not the same as the usual billing cycle. This may be the case when you or your tenant is moving out of a property. You can request a special meter reading to determine the outstanding charges. A meter reading fee will apply.



## Sending bills

You can request a bill to be sent to the address where the water service is provided or to another address you have nominated.

## Information on bills

Information that a bill must include comprises:

- the customer's name;
- account number;
- the address of the place in respect of which water service provided;
- any other address nominated by the customer for sending the bills;
- the day on which the bill is issued;
- charges payable;
- the water service or services for which the charges are payable;
- the date when payment is due;
- the nature and amount of concession, discount or rebate;
- the amount of interest or fees charged for late payment of outstanding amounts;
- the amount of any arrears or credit standing to the customer's name;
- the options for payment that are available to the customer;
- the provider's website address;
- a telephone number for account, payment and general enquiries;
- contact details for account, payment and general enquiries for use by customers with hearing and speech impairment;
- a statement that refers to the provider's website that contains information about estimates, meter reading and testing, complaints and review.



The bill must also include information about the basis of an estimated bill, requesting a meter reading, requesting a meter test, reviewing the bill and complaints about the bill.

## Estimated bills

If a bill is based on an estimate, you can request an explanation from the provider about the basis of and the reason for the estimate.

If a provider bases a bill upon an estimate and later receives a meter reading, an adjustment on the next bill must be made to take into account of the actual meter reading.

If you have a dispute with a provider over an estimate on which a bill is based, you are entitled to a meter reading and a revised bill upon request provided applicable fees are paid.

## Review of a bill

You are entitled to have your bill reviewed. A provider must have a review procedure that includes:

- a process for requesting a meter reading or testing
- the provider's obligations if it is found that you have been undercharged or overcharged
- your right to make a complaint if unsatisfied with the outcome of the review.

A provider is required to provide you with the outcome of a review as soon as practical or within 15 business days from the time you requested a review of the bill.

If you have been undercharged, a provider can only recover a charge from you for the water services provided in the 12 month period from the time when you were informed of the undercharging. You must be allowed to repay through a repayment plan and interest or late payment fees must not be charged on an undercharged amount.



If you have been overcharged, a provider must within a 15 business day period of becoming aware of the overcharging credit your account and immediately notify you. A provider can also recommend options of how you can be refunded for the overcharged amount.

### **Leaks**

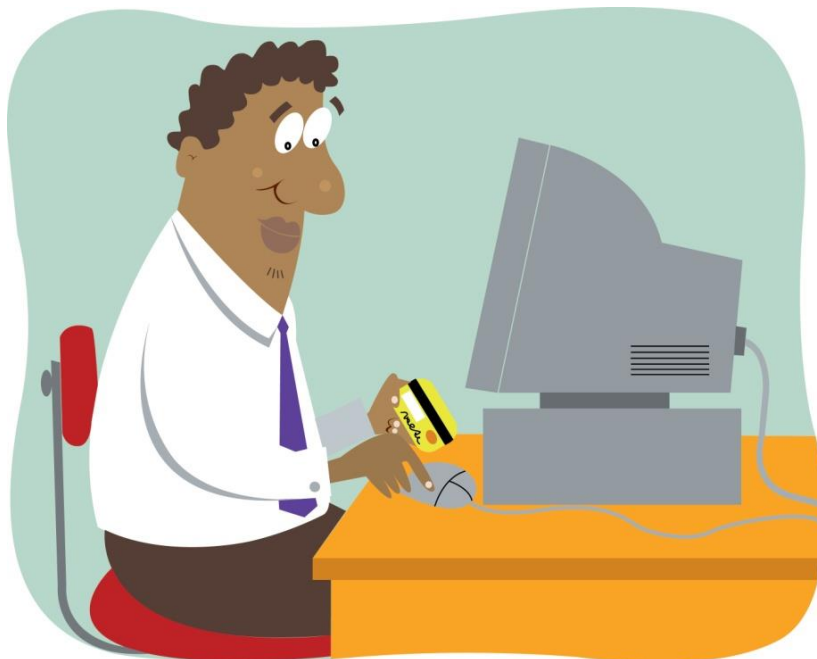
A provider must have a publicly available written policy, standard, policy or guidelines in relation to the granting of a discount if a detected leak has occurred.

### **Payment methods**

You are entitled to 14 days to pay a bill and may choose from a number of payment options:

- direct debit
- Centrepay
- internet
- telephone
- post

If you are paying a bill by direct debit, the provider must seek consent either in writing or verbally from the account holder and the customer who can be yourself or another person you have nominated. The provider must inform you of all the fees and charges associated with each payment option.



You can also make payment in advance towards a future bill. A provider does not have to credit interest to the amount paid in advance.

If you are unable to pay a bill due to absence or illness you can also request a bill to be redirected to another person at no charge.

# Financial hardship and assistance

## Financial Hardship Policy

A provider is required to publish a financial hardship policy that outlines the assistance and support that it can provide to customers who may not have the financial capacity to pay their water bills.

If you are having difficulty in paying water bills a provider can assist you. The type of assistance available will depend on your situation and you will need to be assessed by your provider.

- If you cannot pay due to *payment difficulties*, you are experiencing financial disadvantage that is not likely to be on-going, such as an unexpected event or crisis. Under these situations, a provider must offer you a payment plan or other arrangements under which you are given more time to pay the bill.
- If you cannot pay due to *financial hardship*, you are experiencing more than short-term financial disadvantage in which your ability to meet basic living needs is adversely affected, such as food and rent. A provider must offer you an interest-free and fee-free payment plan or other arrangement under which you are given more time to pay the bill. Further, a provider must consider a reduction in an amount you are owing and review and revise your payment plan as appropriate.

You should contact your provider for an assessment to determine what is the best way to address the situation you are in and receive appropriate assistance.

If you are not the owner of the property (for example a tenant or occupier), a provider will advise the owner regarding the proposed payment arrangement prior to its commencement.





## **Debt collection**

A provider must not commence or continue proceedings to recover a debt if you are complying with a payment plan or being assessed by the provider in determining if you are experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship.

## **Reducing the Rate of Flow**

A provider may restrict water supply if water service charges remain unpaid for 30 days after they become due. However, a provider must use its best endeavours to inform you of its intention to do so prior to restriction by contacting you in person, by phone or electronic means.



There are situations under which restriction cannot occur if:

- the amount owing is less than \$200;
- you are being assessed by a provider to determine if you are experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship;
- you have made a complaint in relation to water services charges that is not resolved;
- after 3pm on a Friday or anytime on a Saturday, Sunday public holiday or the day before a public holiday;
- the occupier is a tenant and the owner is liable to pay the amount owing;
- you need water to operate a life support machine or have been assessed by the provider as requiring water for a special need.

A provider must not reduce the rate of flow of a water supply to less than 2.3 litres each minute.

**Restoration of water supply**

If your water supply has been restricted, a provider must restore the supply of water if you have paid the amount owing or entered into an arrangement satisfactory to the provider for the payment of amount owing. In addition, a reconnection fee will apply.

Once all the requirements are satisfied, the provider must restore your water supply in accordance with the maximum timeframes provided as follows:

Water Corporation (metropolitan region) and other providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• next business day if your request is received by the provider before 3pm</li><li>• within 2 business days if your request is received after 3pm</li></ul>
Water Corporation (outside of metropolitan region)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• within 2 business days if your request is received before 3pm</li><li>• within 3 business days if your request is received after 3pm</li></ul>

# Complaints

A provider must have a written procedure to investigate and resolve customer complaints relating to water services provision. A provider is required to resolve a complaint within 15 business days starting from the day a complaint was received.



You can seek a review of a decision or complaint by the [Energy and Water Ombudsman](#).

# Information and Communication Services

## Services to be provided without charge

You are entitled to the following services on request and at no charge:

- information services for customers with hearing or speech impairment;
- interpreting services;
- a large-print version of any of the provider's publicly available documents.

In addition, a provider must make a range of information publicly available including:

- fees and charges;
- bill payment methods and applicable fees and charges associated with each payment method offered;
- exemptions, discounts, rebates and concessions available;
- planned and unplanned interruptions of water supply.
- Bill estimation, metering reading and review of a bill.



Information on service and performance standards can be found in individual licences [here](#).

## Useful Contacts

Energy and Water Ombudsman	08 9220 7588 <a href="http://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/ewowa">www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/ewowa</a> <a href="mailto:energyandwater@ombudsman.wa.gov.au">energyandwater@ombudsman.wa.gov.au</a>
Department of Commerce General Consumer Protection	1300 30 40 54 <a href="http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer%20protection">www.commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer protection</a> <a href="mailto:consumer@commerce.wa.gov.au">consumer@commerce.wa.gov.au</a>
Financial Counselling Helpline	1800 007 007 <a href="http://www.financialcounsellors.org">www.financialcounsellors.org</a>