

**Submission from John F. Davenport on:**

**Water Licence Review 2016**

Background:

My family owns property in the Shire of Kalamunda and I reside at 39 Walnut Road, Bickley, a property owned since the early 1970's and which has a residence built in 1973/74. During my time at Walnut Road I have experienced recurring problems with plumbing and water appliances ie; fractured copper pipes and hot water tanks in a solar hot water system. On these occasions I have employed a plumber to repair the problem.

In September of 2012 I discovered a leak in the copper pipe leading from the meter to the house. My plumber advised that I contact the Water Corporation as the pressure was at the extreme end of that allowable for a service. I did so and the Water Corporation installed a pressure reduction valve on my side of the meter.

On Sunday 12 January 2014 I returned home to hear the sound of rushing water which was traced to fractured pipes under the enamel bath in the family bathroom. Again I contacted the Water Corporation and they determined that their pressure reduction valve had failed and my plumbing system was being subjected to pressure close to 3 times that allowable. The cost of repairing the fractured pipes and remedial work reinstating the bathroom was close to \$20,000.

During this process I was told by Water Corporation staff that under their 'operating licence' issued by the Economic Regulation Authority they had received an exemption to supply water at acceptable pressure in many areas of the hills. I was dumbfounded by this revelation as I had never been informed by either the ERA or the Water Corporation that my property lay in an area designated as 'high water pressure', and as a result had never received any official advice as to the means to circumvent this and so prevent damage to my plumbing systems.

I enquired of my friends in the wider hills area if they were aware their properties were subjected to excessive high water pressure or had received any notification of such, and in all cases my enquiries were met with a negative! Many, however, spoke of similar problems with their household plumbing systems as I had experienced.

I undertook to research the problem and discovered the 'Operating Licence' issued to the Water Corporation by the ERA. The licence appears to have been first issued under the Water Services Licensing Act 1995 and that the first licence was issued after June 1996 by the then Office of Water Regulation. The ERA took over this role effectively on 19 March 2004.

When I looked into 'Schedule 3: Performance Standards' listed under 'Potable Water System' there is a section detailing requirements for pressure and flow standards and in 2.1 of that section sets out a list of areas detailed as exempt from the pressure standards. In this 'Pressure & Flow Exemption Schedule' is a list of hills districts and the total number of services so exempt. Some 2074 hills properties are listed in an area from Mundijong to Chidlow, some 54 percent of all properties listed. On the 11 February 2014 I wrote to the ERA seeking further information about the details in the list,

how they were complied etc etc. Essentially the reply (dated 25 February 2014) from the then Chairman of the ERA, Mr Lyndon Rowe, fobbed off my enquiry but did confirm the listing had been inherited from the Office of Water Regulation and that the exemptions 'were included in the Licence when the Authority took over the responsibility for water services operating licences in 2003.'

Apparently then no one at the ERA, at the time they took over the responsibilities from the Office of Water Regulation, did any due diligence examination as to the veracity of the list or bothered to assess the implications of their decision on the customers affected by this decision, or ascertained whether the ERA or the Water Corporation could be legally liable under these provisions incorporated into the operating licence for resulting property damage.

I may point out that all successive lists remain identical despite a decade passing and with the progress of the State's population necessitating greater urbanisation through subdivision! So essentially the data in this list is erroneous.

As a result of this letter from the Chairman of the ERA and further exchanges with the Assistant Director (Licensing) Mr Rasmus Moerch which did not progress my query I then lodged a complaint (dated 5 August 2014) with The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations. This complaint then filtered through to the ERA and the Water Corporation as a result of the intervention of the Assistant Director of Early Resolution from the Ombudsman's Office. This has led to some discussions between the two bodies and two meetings between myself and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (another interested party in this matter) and Water Corporation [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

During those meetings the following subjects pertinent to this issue were discussed:

- Proposed maps and search functionality:** After the first meeting [REDACTED] confirmed in a subsequent letter detailing our discussions: 'I acknowledge your view that the Water Corporation should seek ways to inform current customers whose properties are in a location that is subject to water pressure exemption. I further acknowledge your view that arrangements should be in place to advise prospective purchasers of a property of the water situation at the property regarding the water pressure exemption status of the property. These matters will be the subject of a review within Water Corporation and subsequent discussion with the ERA who administer the Operating Licence'  
At a subsequent meeting held on 23 February 2015, [REDACTED] confirmed 'maps have been produced that allow customers to identify if their properties are impacted by high pressure. The search functionality is intended to allow for customers to search by their account number to identify if their property is subject to high water pressure..... The proposed notification of new customers is planned to be through the Landgate Property Interest Report.'
- Notification at Purchase:** [REDACTED] and I suggested in the interest of information dissemination that the first account received by a new property owner should include a notice informing the customer of the status of their property as to high water pressure and referring them to the Landgate site for further information.

3. **Existing Customers:** We further suggested that once a year included with the Water Corporation's 'Water Use and Service Charge Account' that all customers similarly affected receive the notice as in 2. above.
4. **Plumber's Licensing Board:** This matter was discussed and I was asked to contact this body with my experiences with high water pressure and the failure of many brands of pressure reduction valve to cope with this problem. I did this on 25 May 2015 (copy enclosed). [REDACTED] also met with the Board and a subsequent reply from the Board dated 4 June confirmed that the Building Commission is drafting a technical note on this subject and will distribute it to all plumbers and industry stakeholders.
5. **Operating Licence:** The officers from the Water Corporation confirmed in [REDACTED] email to me of 11 February 2015 that 'we intend to have discussions with the ERA on the need for changes to the Operating Licence'

At these meetings the matter of the Water Corporation's annual service charge of \$218.05 was raised as this is a charge for a standard service, but those customers receiving high water pressure are NOT receiving a standard service; they are receiving a service which potentially causes damage to their plumbing systems and appliances. It was proposed by [REDACTED] and myself that the Corporation should reimburse the customer the amount of \$250 where installation of a pressure reduction valve is proved by a current paid plumbers bill. This should not be a 'one-off' payment as these valves need replacing every 3-5 years.

Given the above, my **submission** is that Schedule 3, section 2.1 be amended to:

'Exemptions from the flow and pressure standards set out in section 1 of this Schedule are provided for the areas detailed in the following table **Provided** that the Water Corporation fulfils the following:

1. That at each review of the 'Water Service Operating Licence' the list detailing the areas affected, that is section 2 Potable Water System- Pressure and Flow Exemption subsection 2.1 be updated to reflect the present situation.
2. At each review updated land maps showing the current areas affected by high water pressure be lodged with Landgate for inclusion in the Landgate 'Property Interest Report'
3. That in the first account sent to new land purchasers (ie: new customers to an address) in the affected areas, a letter be included explaining that their property is subject to high water pressure and referring them to the Landgate 'Property Interest Report' and informing them of any reimbursement offered for pressure reduction valve installation..
4. That a similar letter be included annually in Water Corporations 'Water Use and Service Charge Account' to affected customers and that this letter refer customers to the Landgate 'Property Interest Report' and advising them of any reimbursement offered to assist with the installation of pressure reduction valves .
5. That the Plumbers Licensing Board be updated with the revised maps detailing the areas affected by high pressure as and when they become available.
6. That a reimbursement of \$250 per installation of a pressure reduction valve, proved by the submission of a paid plumber's bill, be available to affected customers. That this reimbursement be on an ongoing basis to cover the cost of future pressure reduction valve

replacements. That the amount of this reimbursement be reviewed at each Water Licence review date.

P.O.Box 212

Kalamunda, WA 6926

25 May 2015

The Executive Officer

Plumber's Licensing Board

Level 1, 303 Sevenoaks Street,

Cannington, WA 6107

Dear Sir/Madam,

I understand the Plumber's Licensing Board has been in discussion with [REDACTED] from the Water Corporation over the issue of high water pressure in some 2200 properties in the hills area and that this issue is to be discussed by your Plumbers Technical Advisory Committee.

This issue was raised by me with the Water Corporation as a result of my plumbing suffering catastrophic damage in January of 2014 caused by the failure of a Water Corporation installed Pressure Reduction Valve that was fitted on my side of the water meter. My plumber, [REDACTED] advised me to contact the Corporation and report this problem.

An employee from the Water Corporation confirmed that the pressure at my property read as high as 145 flux. [REDACTED] from the Corporation organised a Water Corporation contractor, [REDACTED], to attend and replace the PRV. This contractor attended approximately twice each time fitting a new PRV which then failed; the first within 24 hours and the next within a week.

At that point I asked my plumber, [REDACTED] what type of PRV his team used in the hills. I was told that in his experience the PRV's being fitted were unable to withstand the high pressures in the hills area and he suggested the contractor try a Radiance PRV RMC Type PRV 020 DN 20. This new PRV installed as a third replacement by [REDACTED] has now been installed for 14 months and is still operating satisfactorily.

My reason for contacting you is to suggest that, as plumbing contractors attend jobs in the hills from all over the metro area, not all are familiar with the problem of high water pressure from the mains and it is therefore important that: 1. They be made aware of this problem and its potential to cause damage to both plumbing systems and water appliances. 2. That experience shows that only the Radiance PRV seems to be able to cope with these water pressure extremes.

Can I request that my case be made available to the Advisory Committee and I suggest you contact [REDACTED] if you require or your advisory committee requires further information.

Yours faithfully,

John F. Davenport,

39 Walnut Road, Bickley