



Media Statement

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ERA proposes changes to water code to improve customer safeguards

Proposed revisions to the *Water Services Code of Conduct* will improve safeguards for customers, particularly those experiencing financial hardship.

In its draft decision, the Economic Regulation Authority (ERA) explains the amendments it proposes to make to the code.

Customers with concessions are entitled to a rebate for both fixed and usage water charges.

In reviewing the code, the ERA became aware that the Water Corporation's concession customers lose their fixed charges rebate if they do not pay their bill within 50 days of the date it was issued.

ERA chair Nicky Cusworth said these rebates were important to ensure that water was affordable for all customers.

"The ERA is concerned that customers who are already financially stressed are being penalised when they lose the fixed charges rebate on an overdue bill," she said.

The Water Corporation gives customers approximately 20 days to pay their bill, but this can be extended to a maximum of 50 days if they ask for more time to pay.

"Setting a fixed time to pay a bill does not take into account the customer's capacity to pay, or their consumption history," Ms Cusworth said.

"The 50 days offered by the Water Corporation may not be enough for those experiencing financial hardship."

The ERA proposes to amend the code to give customers experiencing financial stress the right to pay their bill under a payment plan.

"Agreeing an appropriate payment plan will allow customers to retain the rebate for fixed charges providing they comply with the plan," Ms Cusworth said.

The ERA is seeking comments on whether the code should require licensees to take into account a customer's capacity to pay and consumption history when setting the terms of a payment plan.

Under other proposed changes, bills will include more information on how the bill is calculated (including water use), assistance for customers in financial hardship, and useful contact telephone numbers.

Customers will be entitled to receive a usage bill based on an actual meter reading at least once every 12 months.

“Requiring a meter reading once a year will reduce the risk of customers accumulating debt caused by underestimating water usage,” said Ms Cusworth

To read the proposed revision of the code and make a submission to the ERA go to the website at www.erawa.com.au/home.

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