

Approval of Water Corporation

Customer Service Charter for Irrigation Services

12 September 2008

Economic Regulation Authority



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DECISION

The Economic Regulation Authority (**Authority**) has approved the Water Corporation's Customer Service Charter for Irrigation Services (**Irrigation Charter**) on 12 September 2008.

The Irrigation Charter approved pertains to the irrigation aspects of the Water Corporation licence.

The charter pertaining to the water supply, sewerage and drainage aspects of the Water Corporation licence was approved by the Authority on 11 April 2007. The previous Customer Service Charter for the Water Corporation was approved by the Authority on 1 March 2005.

REASONS

The Authority has reviewed the Irrigation Charter against the requirements of the Water Corporation's licence and notes the following:

Existence

Clause 3.3 of the Water Corporation licence states that the licensee must establish a Customer Charter as set out in Schedule 3. Schedule 3 clause 1 states that the Corporation must set out in writing the principles, terms and conditions upon which it intends to provide water services to its customers. Schedule 3, clause 6 of the licence requires that the Water Corporation undertake a review of the charter at least once every two years.

On 16 March 2007, the Water Corporation submitted its reviewed charter pertaining to water supply, sewerage and drainage services to the Authority for approval. The Water Corporation failed to include specific information about its irrigation services in this charter. On 11 April 2007, the Authority approved the charter to the extent it related to the water supply, sewerage and drainage aspects of the Water Corporation water licence and agreed that the Water Corporation was to produce a charter specifically for irrigation customers.

The Water Corporation submitted its Irrigation Charter to the Authority for approval on 30 October 2007. The Irrigation Charter required further amendments and the Water Corporation re-submitted the final version of the charter on 19 August 2008.

The Authority finds that the Water Corporation has submitted its Irrigation Charter for approval within an acceptable timeframe.

Accuracy

Schedule 3, clause 1 states that the Water Corporation must set out in writing the principles, terms and conditions upon which it intends to provide water services to its customers.

The Authority finds that the principles, terms and conditions, as set out in the Irrigation Charter, are generally consistent with relevant legislation and licence requirements.

Consultation

Schedule 3, clause 2(b) of the Water Corporation's licence states that the customer charter "should address all of the service issues that are reasonably likely to be of concern to its customers".

In order to determine the service issues that are reasonably likely to be of concern to its customers, it is generally expected that a licensee would establish a process to determine all relevant service issues that should be addressed in its charter. An example of such a process is consulting with its customers and/or their representatives. The Authority's *Customer Service Charter Guidelines* recognise this as part of its criteria for assessing customer service charter reviews (clause 6.3).

The Water Corporation has advised that the following consultation was undertaken to review the Irrigation Charter:

- input from the Ord Irrigation Co-Operative which is the peak body representing all 114 irrigators; and
- input from Water Corporation experts based in Kununurra which have extensive dealings with the relevant irrigators.

In addition, the Water Corporation has advised that the structure and principles of the Irrigation Charter are based on the charter approved by the Water Corporation Customer Advisory Council.

The Authority finds that, on the basis of the information provided, the Water Corporation undertook a reasonable level of public consultation with regard to this review.

Accessibility

Clause 2 of Schedule 3 of the Water Corporation's licence requires that the charter be developed in 'plain English' and that it should address all of the service issues likely to be of concern to its customers.

'Plain English'

The Authority finds that the accessibility of the Irrigation Charter is generally sound.

The Authority understands that the Water Corporation is able to make the charter available in other formats for people with disabilities and will accommodate requests for alternative formats such as languages other than English as they are able. These initiatives provide further proof of a sound level of accessibility.

Issues likely to be of concern

The Authority finds that the Irrigation Charter is generally consistent with the licence provision in covering all of the service issues likely to be of concern to its customers.

The Authority notes that the Water Corporation has advised that those customers using its irrigation services are generally large use customers all of whom have a contract with the Water Corporation for the supply of irrigation services. Therefore, certain matters (e.g. liability) have not been addressed within the charter as they are already addressed within the individual contracts.

Also, the Authority notes that the Irrigation Charter does not specify the amount of notice that will be provided for planned interruptions. The Water Corporation has advised that, where possible, it does provide advance written notice of planned works. However, occasionally “opportunistic” work is undertaken (e.g. emptying the M1 channel after heavy rainfall to allow the sun to kill off weed growth). In those instances, it would not be practical to provide advance written notice. In addition, the Water Corporation has advised that interruptions for maintenance are less critical for customers within the Ord Irrigation District as its irrigation services are available all-year-round.

LYNDON ROWE
CHAIRMAN

For further information, contact:

Economic Regulation Authority
Perth, Western Australia
Phone: (08) 9213 1900