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**From:**  
**Sent:** Friday, 4 November 2016 3:29 PM  
**To:** publicsubmissions  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** Consultation Paper for Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013  
**Attachments:** FILE NOTE AQWEST RESPONSE TO WATER SERVI~ODE) 2016 REVIEW - AS SUBMITTED TO ECONOMIC REGULATION AUTHORITY (ERA) 04112016.PDF

Good Afternoon

Aqwest would like to thank the Economic Regulatory Authority for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed amendments to the Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013.

A copy of Aqwest's responses to proposals and comments sought is attached.

Specific areas of concern identified by Aqwest in the proposed amendments to the Water Code include:

1. Ensuring debt liability continues to remain with the property and ultimately the "land owner".
2. The proposed introduction of Service Standard Payments
3. The transfer of Financial Hardship Policy content into the Water Code.
4. Increasing the amount of prescribed information required on customer bills

We consider the Water Code has been operating effectively since its commencement in November 2013 and does not require major changes.

Aqwest looks forward to participating in the remainder of the review process.

Please contact Mr Joe Smith, Manager Finance and Administration on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] should you have any queries regarding this submission.

**Gary Hallsworth**  
Acting Chief Executive Officer

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## Response to Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013 (Water Code) 2016 Review

<b>Submitted by</b>	Aqwest (Bunbury Water Corporation)
<b>Date</b>	4 November 2016
<b>Aqwest contact</b>	Mr Joe Smith 0438909510

<b>Issue 1</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To amend clause 1 by replacing “2013” with “2017”.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 2</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To amend clause 2 for the Code to come into operation on 1 July 2017.
<b>Comment sought</b>	a) Should any of the proposed amendments in this Consultation Paper take effect after 1 July 2017?
<b>Aqwest</b>	This would be dependent on what changes are made. Consideration should be given for the implementation of any enhancements, system changes etc
<b>Comment sought</b>	b) If so, which amendments should commence later and when should those amendments commence?
<b>Aqwest</b>	refer comment 2a

<b>Issue 3</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	a) Currently, the Water Code applies to all customers. Should the application of the Water Code be limited to certain customers only?
<b>Aqwest</b>	The code should apply to all customers except “Service by Agreement” customers.
<b>Comment sought</b>	b) If so, to which customers should the Water Code apply?
<b>Aqwest</b>	refer comment 3a

<b>Issue 4</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	a) Currently, the Water Code applies to all licensees. Should the Water Code differentiate between certain licensees?
<b>Aqwest</b>	The Code should apply to all licensees.
<b>Comment sought</b>	b1) If so, on what basis should the Water Code differentiate between licensees? For example, on the basis of the location of the licensee’s customers or the number of connections supplied by the licensee?
<b>Aqwest</b>	refer comment 4a
<b>Comment sought</b>	b2) If so, should these licensees simply be exempt from some of the provisions of the Water Code, or should one or more service standards be amended?
<b>Aqwest</b>	refer comment 4a

<b>Issue 5</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	Should the Water Code apply to the provision of irrigation or drainage services?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No comment

<b>Issue 6</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	<p>A. Should clause 5 be amended to only apply to business customers? In this case, licensees and business customers could continue to contract out of all of the provisions of the Water Code. Licensees and residential customers would not be able to contract out of provisions of the Water Code.</p> <p>B. Should clause 5 be amended to only apply to certain provisions of the Water Code? In this case, licensees and both business and residential customers could only contract out of specific provisions of the Water Code.</p> <p>C. Should clause 5 be amended so that licensees and business customers can contract out of all provisions of the Water Code, whilst licensees and residential customers can only contract out of specific provisions of the Water Code?</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	The code should apply to all customers except "Service by Agreement" customers.

<b>Issue 7</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	Should licensees who send usage bills for drinking water be required to issue a fixed charges bill at least once every six months (or more often if the billing cycle is changed, see issue 8)?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No changes recommended.

<b>Issue 8</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	Should the maximum interval between bills for usage be reduced to three, or alternatively four, months?
<b>Aqwest</b>	<p>Aqwest currently has a four month interval between billing for usage. Aqwest does not recommend this be reduced.</p> <p>More frequent billing could be linked to the uptake of smart metering technologies that would reduce the cost of meter reading and the uptake of electronic billing that would reduce the associated increase in printing and postage costs from more frequent billing.</p>

<b>Issue 9</b>	
<b>Comment sought</b>	Should licensees be required to read a customer's water meter at least once every 12 months?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 10</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to include the following additional information on each bill: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>information about assistance for customers experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship;</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree
<b>Proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>for bills issued to residential customers, information on the availability of interpreter services;</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree
<b>Proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the total amount of any payments made by the customer since the previous bill was issued;</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. This adds unnecessary detail to the bill. Care needs to be taken to ensure standard complex bills (including adjustments, multiple payments etc) can be delivered without requiring more than one A4 page.
<b>Proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a telephone number for complaints;</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree
<b>Proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Freecall telephone number for the Energy &amp; Water Ombudsman WA; and</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. Promoting the Energy & Water Ombudsman on the bill seems at odds with the Energy and Water Ombudsman's advice to customers that they should contact the water services provider first. The Freecall telephone number for the Energy & Water Ombudsman WA is already promoted to customers as part of the internal complaints procedure.
<b>Proposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a 24 hour telephone number for faults and emergencies. Refer comment - Issue 44</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 11</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should each bill have to specify the charges payable for each of the water services provided by the licensee?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 12</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to include a statement on the bill that interest charges or late payment fees may apply (if the licensee charges interest or late payment fees for outstanding amounts).
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 13</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should a licensee be required to include the meter reading on a customer's bill (where available)?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 14</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should each bill from a licensee that has different tariffs based on consumption have to include the applicable tariff(s) for the water services provided?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. Should each bill from a licensee that has different tariffs based on consumption specify when a customer will move to a higher tariff, or revert back to the lowest tariff (that is, the anniversary date of the customer's billing year)?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree. Note this enhancement may need consideration past 1 July 2017.

<b>Issue 15</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To clarify that a bill must include information, where available, about the customer's water usage compared with the customer's usage for the previous account period, and for the same period last year.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 16</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should clauses 12(3)(b), (c) and (d) be retained as is; amended to require less detailed information to be included on the bill; or deleted?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree clauses 12(3)(b), (c) and (d) can be amended to require less detailed information to be included on the bill.
<b>Proposal</b>	<p>A. To clarify that clause 12(3)(a) to (d) only applies to bills for usage for a metered water service.</p> <p>B. To clarify that clause 12(3)(c) only applies to bills based on an estimate.</p> <p>C. To delete clause 12(3)(f) if the ERA decides that all bills should include the licensee's telephone number for complaints and the Energy &amp; Water Ombudsman WA's Freecall telephone number.</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A, B and C.

<b>Issue 17</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should the 12 month limitation on recovering an undercharge only apply where the undercharge is a result of an error by the licensee?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No comment.

<b>Issue 18</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to credit an overcharged amount to a customer's account if the licensee has not received instructions from the customer.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 19</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to offer Centrepay as a bill payment method only to residential customers
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 20</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should the requirement to offer direct debit as a payment method be removed from the Water Code?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree - the requirement to offer direct debit as a payment method should not be removed.

<b>Issue 21</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be required to obtain the express consent of the holder of the account to be debited before receiving a bill payment by direct debit?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. Current practice of accepting direct debit account on presentation is acceptable.

<b>Issue 22</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should additional requirements be included in the Water Code regarding the process a licensee must follow when assessing whether or not a customer is experiencing payment difficulties?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree – Licensees have processes for dealing with customers with payment difficulties and in financial hardship.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If so, what additional protection should be provided to water customers?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer comment 22A.

<b>Issue 23</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be allowed to charge fees or interest on payment plans offered to customers experiencing payment difficulties?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 24</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To amend clause 25(2) by requiring a licensee to offer a customer experiencing payment difficulties a payment plan or other arrangement.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree – the management of payment difficulties should not be prescribed in the Water Code.

<b>Issue 25</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be required to review their financial hardship policies if directed to do so by the ERA?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 26</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to consult with relevant consumer organisations when developing their initial financial hardship policy.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 27</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to submit an amended financial hardship policy to the ERA for its approval.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 28</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	<p>A. Should the content requirements for financial hardship policies remain in the Water FHP Guidelines, or be moved to the Water Code?</p> <p>B. Should a sub-set of the content requirements for financial hardship policies be moved from the Water FHP Guidelines to the Water Code?</p> <p>C. Should financial hardship policies include any information in addition to what is currently required under the Water FHP Guidelines?</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Financial Hardship Policy guidelines should not be incorporated in the Water Code. The current arrangement provides more opportunity to tailor individual hardship policies (still approved by ERA). – without requiring a change in the code.

<b>Issue 29</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To move the requirement for licensees to comply with the Water FHP Guidelines from the water licence template to the Water Code.
<b>Aqwest</b>	No comment.

<b>Issue 30</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should additional requirements be included in the Water Code regarding the process a licensee must follow when assessing whether or not a customer is experiencing payment difficulties?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree – the management of payment difficulties should not be prescribed in the Water Code.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. Should additional requirements be included in the Water Code regarding the assistance a licensee must offer customers in financial hardship? For example, should licensees have to offer a customer a choice between a payment plan and other arrangement; should licensees be required to take certain matters into account when setting a payment plan; and should licensees be required to provide certain information to customers about their payment plan?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Financial Hardship Policy content should not be incorporated in the Water Code.

<b>Issue 31</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to offer a customer experiencing financial hardship a payment plan or other arrangement.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Financial Hardship Policy content should not be incorporated in the Water Code.

<b>Issue 32</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To require a licensee to review a payment plan upon a customer's request. If the review demonstrates that the customer is unable to meet its obligations under the existing payment plan, the licensee must revise the payment plan.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree – no requirement for this to be prescribed in the Water Code.

<b>Issue 33</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To include the words 'as to whether or not' in clause 29(c) so it is consistent with the wording of clause 29(b).
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 34</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	<p>A. To require a licensee to give a customer a reminder notice prior to taking action for non-payment of a bill.</p> <p>B. To require a reminder notice to include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the licensee's telephone number for account, payment and general enquiries; and</li> <li>• advice that a licensee may assist if the customer is experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship.</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to points A and B.

<b>Issue 35</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	<p>A. To require a licensee to give a customer written notice of its intention to reduce the customer's water supply.</p> <p>B. To require a licensee to give a restriction notice to a customer at least 7 days before the licensee intends to reduce the customer's water supply.</p> <p>C. To require a restriction notice to include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the matter giving rise to the impending reduction;</li> <li>• the earliest date the licensee may reduce the customer's water supply;</li> <li>• the existence and operation of the licensee's complaint handling process;</li> <li>• the existence and operation of the water ombudsman, including the Freecall telephone number for the water ombudsman; and</li> <li>• the applicable restoration procedures, including any costs for restoring the customer's supply.</li> </ul>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to points A, B and C.



<b>Issue 36</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To amend the wording of clause 32(c) so it is consistent with the wording of clause 32(b).
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 37</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To clarify that a customer's rate of flow of drinking water may not be reduced at any time on weekends, public holidays and the day before a public holiday.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should the prohibition on reducing the rate of flow of drinking water be extended to anytime on Friday?  B. Should the prohibition on reducing the rate of flow of drinking water be extended to after 3pm Monday to Thursday?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A and B.

<b>Issue 38</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should the term 'complaints' in clause 32(e) only relate to complaints made to the licensee, or also include complaints made to an external dispute resolution body?
<b>Aqwest</b>	The term 'complaints' should include complaints made to an external dispute resolution body.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If clause 32(e) is amended to specifically refer to complaints made to an external dispute resolution body, should restriction only be allowed if the external dispute resolution body has notified the licensee of the complaint?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No restriction should be allowed if the account is subject to a complaint with an external dispute resolution body.

<b>Issue 39</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should a licensee only be precluded from reducing a customer's rate of flow of drinking water if the customer has notified the licensee that the customer requires water to operate a life support machine  B. Should a licensee be obliged to register customers who require a life support machine?  C. If so, should the Water Code also provide for a deregistration process?  D. Should the Water Code include a definition of a life support machine?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A, B, C and D.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	E. If so, what should the definition be?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No comment.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	F. Should the Water Code include protections for persons, other than the customer, who reside at the customer's address and require a life support machine?  G. Should a licensee be required to provide customers who require

	a life support machine with written notice of planned interruptions to supply at the supply address?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to F and G.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	F. If so, how much notice should be provided?
<b>Aqwest</b>	The same notice given to a standard customer.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	I. Should a licensee be required to contact customers who require a life support machines as soon as possible in the event of an unplanned interruption?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

#### Issue 40

<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should a licensee be precluded from reducing a customer's rate of flow of drinking water on a day there is a total fire ban in the local government area in which the customer is located?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

#### Issue 41

<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be prevented from reducing the rate of flow of drinking water if a customer has applied for a concession or grant and the licensee has not yet made its decision?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

#### Issue 42

<b>Proposal</b>	To replace the reference in clause 35(2) to AS ISO 10002-2006 with AS/NZS 10002-2014.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

#### Issue 43

<b>Proposal</b>	<p>A. To delete the requirement that a licensee's complaints procedure must state that a customer may, but does not have to, use the licensee's complaints procedure before or instead of the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA's procedures.</p> <p>B. To delete the requirement that a licensee's complaints procedure must set out the benefits to the customer if the customer chooses to use the licensee's complaints procedure before or instead of the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA's procedures.</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A and B.

#### Issue 44

<b>Comment Sought</b>	<p>A. Should a licensee be required to advise the customer of their right to raise their complaint with the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of the licensee's process?</p> <p>B. If so, should a licensee be required to provide the customer with the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA's Freecall telephone number?</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A and B.

<b>Issue 45</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should a licensee be required to have in place an escalation process which allows a customer to request that their complaint be considered by a senior employee?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. This should not be prescribed. Licensees should manage and assess complaints internally. As per issue 44, licensees are required to advise the customer of their right to raise their complaint (including about the complaints management system) with the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If so, should a licensee be required to advise customers, when responding to a complaint, of their right to have their complaint considered by a senior employee?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 45A.

<b>Issue 46</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should the Water Code specify when a complaint is considered to have been resolved?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. This does not need to be included in the Code.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If so, should it only relate to certain complaints (for example, complaints relating to non-payment)?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 46A.

<b>Issue 47</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should a licensee be prevented from recovering an amount of money that is in dispute until such time that the dispute has been resolved?
<b>Aqwest</b>	A licensee should be prevented from recovering an amount of money that is the subject of an unresolved complaint.

<b>Issue 48</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. To clarify that personal account information includes a customer's billing and usage data.  B. To clarify that information provided under clause 36(2) must be provided free of charge
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A and B.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be allowed to charge for the provision of billing and usage data if the data relates to a period over two years prior to the date of the request?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree

<b>Issue 49</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	To clarify that a customer who has been offered a payment plan should only have their water supply reduced if the customer has failed to accept the plan within a prescribed timeframe.
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	How many days should customers be given to inform the licensee whether or not they accept a payment plan?

<b>Aqwest</b>	Seven calendar days.
<b>Issue 50</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be required to make electronic copies of the Water Code available on their website?
<b>Aqwest</b>	An alternative would be to require the licensees to provide a link to the State Law Publisher website where the latest Water Code is published.

<b>Issue 51</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be required to have a policy that deals with minimising the impact of bursts, leaks, blockages and spills?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 52</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	<p>A. To require a licensee to provide at least 48 hours' prior notice of a planned interruption.</p> <p>B. To allow licensees to provide notice of a planned interruption by post, television or radio, in a newspaper circulating in the affected area, or via electronic means.</p>
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree to A and B.

<b>Issue 53</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should a new clause be included in the Water Code which requires a licensee to establish a 24 hour telephone number for faults and emergencies?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree.

<b>Issue 54</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	Should licensees be required to advise their customers of tariff changes as soon as practicable, but no later than on the customer's next bill?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. The bill should not be the prescribed means by which licensees must advise customers of tariff changes. Comments on issue 10 are relevant. Licensees should be able to advise customers by publications on-line website and social media.

<b>Issue 55</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should service standard payments be introduced into the Water Code?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Disagree. The code is too new for such a scheme to be introduced. Current service standards are high. Disagree service standard payments would be the driver for improved customer service. Note penalties already exist in the Ombudsman scheme.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If so, which service standard payments should be included in the Water Code?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 55A.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	C. Should licensees be given until 1 July 2018 to implement those service standard payments?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Agree – If the payments were introduced, implementation should not be

	until at least 1 July 2018
<b>Comment Sought</b>	D. Should licensees only be required to make payment upon application by an eligible customer?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 55A.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	E. Should licensees be required to advise their customers at least once a year of the service standard payments available?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 55A.

<b>Issue 56</b>	
<b>Comment Sought</b>	A. Should the Water Code include restrictions on when a licensee can charge interest and/or late payment fees?
<b>Aqwest</b>	No. A licensee can charge interest and/or late payment fees except for cases of financial hardship or while account is subject to a complaint.
<b>Comment Sought</b>	B. If so, what should those restrictions be?
<b>Aqwest</b>	Refer 56A.