



Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013

Easy reference guide

This is an easy reference guide for water customers to understand the new [Water Services Code of Conduct \(Customer Service Standards\) 2013](#).

The guide provides background on the water industry and explains each section of the code in detail.

The water services code of conduct is the first code of conduct for the water industry to be made by the Minister for Water under the *Water Service Act 2012*. It sets minimum service standards and requirements that water services providers have to comply with in order to provide customer protection.

Currently there are a number of customer protection obligations detailed in individual licences issued by the Economic Regulation Authority. Some of these requirements have been transferred to the code and new requirements have been added.

Water industry

In Western Australia, there are 32 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 licensees 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. Currently, there are five potable water service providers and they are the Water Corporation, Busselton Water, Aqwest - Bunbury Water, Hamersley Iron Pty Ltd and Rottnest Island Authority.

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

Economic Regulation Authority

The Economic Regulation Authority is the regulator of licensed providers of gas, electricity and water services. It issues licences, monitors and enforces compliance with licence conditions and legislative requirements. It also has the responsibility to administer, review and amend the code.

What is the water services code of conduct?

Applying the code

The code applies to each water service provider, or 'licensee', that provides water supply, sewerage, irrigation and drainage services.

Water service types	Application of the code
Water supply	The code applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potable water• Non-potable water that is supplied on the basis that the customer is responsible for treating the water to make it fit for human consumption. All other non-potable water supply including the provision of recycled water is excluded.
Sewerage	All
Irrigation	The supply of water to customers other than members of an irrigation cooperative.
Drainage	All

Who is a customer?

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
- 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.

Standard and non-standard services

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

Connecting your water

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

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

Paying for water

Billing for non-quantity and quantity charges

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 licensee can 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 licensee may estimate the amount.

Requesting a 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 are moving out of a property. You can request a special meter reading to determine the outstanding charges. A meter reading fee will apply.

Requesting a bill

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

Some of the information that must be provided with a bill includes:

- the customer's name
- the address of the place in respect of which water service is provided
- any other address nominated by the customer for sending of bills
- charges payable
- the water service or services for which the charges are payable
- the nature and amount of any concession, discount or rebate

- the amount of interest or fees charged for late payment of outstanding amounts
- the amount of any arrears or credit in the customer's name
- the options for payment that are available to the customer
- the licensee's website address and contact details
- contact details for account, payment and general enquiries for use by customers with hearing and speech impairment
- a statement that refers to the licensee's website that contains information about estimates, meter reading and testing, complaints and review.

Estimated bills

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

If a licensee 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 licensee 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 licensee must have a review procedure that includes:

- a process for requesting a meter reading or testing
- the licensee'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 licensee 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 licensee 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 licensee must within a 15 business day period of becoming aware of the overcharging credit your account and immediately notify you. A licensee can also recommend options of how you can be refunded for the overcharged amount.

Leaks

A licensee must make its written policy, standard or guidelines publicly available in relation to the granting of a discount if a leak has occurred.

Payment for water services

Payment methods

You are entitled to 14 days to pay a bill and may choose from a number of payment options. Payment options must include any of the following:

- direct debit
- Centrepay
- internet
- telephone
- post.

If you are paying a bill by direct debit, the licensee 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 licensee 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 licensee 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.

Assistance for customers experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship

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

- If you cannot pay due to *payment difficulties*, that is if you are experiencing short-term financial disadvantage such as an unexpected event or crisis; under these situations, a licensee 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*, that is if 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 licensee 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 licensee must consider a reduction in the amount you are owing and review and revise your payment plan as appropriate.

You should contact your licensees for an assessment to determine 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, tenant or occupier), a licensee will advise the owner the proposed payment arrangement prior to its commencement.

Financial hardship policy

A licensee is required to make publicly available its financial hardship policy. The policy outlines the assistance and support that it can provide to customers who may not have the financial capacity to pay their water bills.

Debt collection

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

Reducing the rate of flow

A licensee may restrict water supply if water service charges remain unpaid for 30 days after they become due. However, a licensee 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.

The situations under which restriction cannot occur are:

- the amount owing is less than \$200
- you are being assessed by a licensee 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 licensee as requiring water for a special need.

A licensee 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 licensee must restore the supply of water if you have paid the amount owing or entered into an arrangement satisfactory to the licensee for the payment of amount owing. In addition, a reconnection fee will apply.

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

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

Making a complaint about your water services

A licensee must have a written procedure to investigate and resolve customer complaints relating to water services provision. A licensee 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 Water Ombudsman. It should be noted that the Water Ombudsman will commence operations on 1 January 2014. Until then the review and resolution of customer complaints should be referred to the Department of Water.

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 licensee's publicly available documents

In addition, a licensee 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 published on the Economic Regulation Authority's website at www.erawa.com.au/licensing/water-licensing.

Useful contact information

Customer enquiry

Department of Water Customer complaints (prior to the establishment of the Water and Energy Ombudsman on 1 January 2014)	08 6364 7600 www.water.wa.gov.au WISBcomplaints@water.wa.gov.au
Water and Energy Ombudsman (after 1 January 2014)	1800 754 004
Economic Regulation Authority	08 6557 7900 www.erawa.com.au
Department of Commerce General Consumer Protection	1300 30 40 54 www.commerce.wa.gov.au/consumer-protection consumer@commerce.wa.gov.au
Financial Counselling Helpline	1800 007 007 www.financialcounsellors.org

Major water service providers

Water Corporation	Account enquiries – 13 13 85 Faults, Emergency – 13 13 75 www.watercorporation.com.au
Aqwest - Bunbury Water	General: 08 9780 9500 Emergency: 08 9791 3272 www.aqwest.wa.gov.au
Busselton Water	08 9781 0500 (24 hours) www.busseltonwater.wa.gov.au
City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder	08 9021 9600 www.kalbould.wa.gov.au