

## Retail Water Customer Account Assistance

Approved by Council: 17/08/2022

To provide a framework with uniform and transparent rules for the assessment and determining of requests for account assistance.

Safety

Teamwork

Accountability

Respect

### Background

Council recognises that there are circumstances where our retail water customers may need assistance to meet their responsibility of paying their water account. The objective of this Policy is to ensure uniform and transparent rules for providing account assistance. This Policy establishes the circumstances in which assistance will be provided, while applying the principles of fairness, integrity and confidentiality.

### Policy statement

The *Local Government Act 1993* allows Council to provide account assistance to its customers as needed. Council has determined that it will voluntarily provide the following account assistance to its retail water customers:

- Payment arrangements, including payment extensions (section 564);
- Writing off or reducing interest (section 564 and 567);
- Extension of pensioner concession to avoid hardship (section 577);
- Granting of financial assistance due to a natural disaster event (section 356);
- Granting of financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak or for the use of water dependent medical equipment (section 356); and
- Abandonment of pensioner rates and charges due to a concealed or undetected water leak (section 582).

#### 1. Payment arrangements, including payment extensions

- 1.1. It is Council's practice to provide customers with payment extensions and payment arrangements of due dates in the first instance. However, where this is inappropriate, Council will consider other forms of assistance, as outlined in this Policy.

#### 2. Writing off or reducing interest

- 2.1. There are two circumstances in which Council will write off or reduce interest:
  - 2.1.1. Where the customer is compliant with a payment arrangement; and
  - 2.1.2. Where the payment of accrued interest would cause the customer hardship.

#### 3. Extension of pensioner concession to avoid hardship

- 3.1. Where Council considers it appropriate in the circumstances to avoid hardship, Council may extend that annual pensioner concession rebate of up to \$87.50 to an individual living with a pensioner who would otherwise be ineligible.

#### **4. Granting of financial assistance – concealed or undetected water leak**

- 4.1. Council has determined that a customer may be eligible for financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak if:
- 4.1.1. The customer is solely or jointly liable for the water charges; and
  - 4.1.2. The recorded consumption for the quarter in which the leak occurred is in excess of 500kL; and
  - 4.1.3. The leak was above 200% of the daily average usage for the previous four (4) quarters; and
  - 4.1.4. The leak was repaired in accordance with the relevant Standards; and
  - 4.1.5. A licensed plumber has completed Council's 'Water Use Audit Report' and returned to Council.
- 4.2. The financial assistance that may be provided is calculated as follows:

|   |
|---|
| $[(\text{Recorded consumption for the period}) \text{ less } 500\text{kL base consumption amount}] \times 75\%$ |
|---|

- 4.3. This assistance is only available to customers once per property, per ownership.
- 4.4. Council will not accept an application more than 60 days after the original due date of the water account that relates to the period of the concealed or undetected leak.
- 4.5. Property owner contact details will be forwarded to Council's Demand Management section who may contact the property owner about water saving initiatives.
- 4.6. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget.

#### **5. Granting of financial assistance – water dependent medical equipment**

- 5.1. Council may provide a rebate of up to 200kL per rating year to customers who require the use of home-based haemodialysis or other water dependent health care equipment.
- 5.2. This assistance is available to customers for the duration of the use of home base haemodialysis or other water dependent health care equipment, provided that this confirmed by a registered medical practitioner every rating year.

#### **6. Granting of financial assistance – Natural disaster event**

- 6.1. Council may, in its discretion, agree to financial relief in the form of adjusting water charges where a Natural Disaster (as declared by the Federal Government) could reasonably be considered to have contributed to an excess water use reading/charge.
- 6.2. Financial relief will be assessed based on a historical water consumption comparison. Water charges will be adjusted to reflect the customers usual water usage.
- 6.3. Council staff will identify properties impacted by a natural disaster event and will apply 6.2 above to determine eligibility.

#### **7. Abandonment of pensioner rates and charges – concealed or undetected water leak**

- 7.1. Council has determined that a customer may be eligible for financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak if:
- 7.1.1. The property is the customer's sole or principal place of living; and
  - 7.1.2. The customer is solely or jointly liable for the water charges; and
  - 7.1.3. The recorded consumption for the quarter in which the leak occurred is in excess of the base consumption (kL) threshold for pensioners, calculated as follows:

|  |       |   |  |
|--|-------|---|--|
| Age pension amount (\$): single, including maximum pension supplement and energy supplement (per week) | x     | = | base consumption (kL) threshold for pensioners |
| National minimum wage amount (\$) (per week)   | 500kL |   |  |

and

- 7.1.4. The leak was above 200% of the daily average usage for the previous four (4) quarters; and
- 7.1.5. The leak was repaired in accordance with the relevant Standards; and
- 7.1.6. A licensed plumber has completed Council's 'Water Use Audit Report' and returned to Council.

7.2. The financial assistance that may be provided is calculated as follows:

|   |
|---|
| $\frac{[(\text{Recorded consumption for the period}) \text{ less the base consumption threshold for pensioners amount}]}{75\%}$ |
|---|

- 7.3. This assistance is only available to customers once per property, per ownership.
- 7.4. Council will not accept an application more than 60 days after the original due date of the water account that relates to the period of the concealed or undetected leak.
- 7.5. Property owner contact details will be forwarded to Council's Demand Management section who may contact the property owner about water saving initiatives.
- 7.6. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget.

## Contact officer

Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.

## Related documents

### Policies

[Pensioner Concession.](#)

[Privacy Management.](#)

Debt Management and Financial Hardship

### Legislation

*Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.*

*Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002.*

*Local Government Act 1993.*

*Local Government (General) Regulation 2021.*

*Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.*

*Social Security Act 1991.*

*Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986.*

### Other

[Retail Water Customers' Account Assistance application form](#)

[Retail Water Customers' Account Assistance Guidelines.](#)

[Water Use Audit Report.](#)

| Office use only | File no.: <a href="#">D21/445</a>  | Next review date: 1 year |                |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------|----------------|
| Version         | Purpose and description  | Date adopted by Council  | Resolution no. |
| 1.0             |  | 18/03/2015               |                |
| 2.0             |  | 06/05/2015               |                |
| 3.0             |  | 19/09/2018               | 88/18          |
| 4.0             | FOR PUBLIC EXHIBIT - Amended to include provision for excess water charges connected to a natural disaster | 17/08/2022               | 50/22          |
| 4.1             | Revised policy deemed adopted following 28 days public exhibit during which no submissions were received.  | 17/08/2022               | 50/22          |

