



# DRAFT Management of Undetected Water Leaks Policy

MSC044E

## Authorisation Details

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Community Strategic Plan Goal	6. Collaborative and responsive leadership that meets the expectations and anticipates the needs of the community		
Community Strategic Plan Strategy	6.2: Ensure Council is well managed, appropriately resourced, effective, efficient, accountable and responsive to its communities and stakeholders		
Delivery Program activity	6.2.1 Maintain a strong focus on financial discipline to enable Council to properly respond to the needs of the communities it serves		

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# 1 Policy Objective

To provide financial relief under certain circumstances to the owner/occupier of a property, in situations where high quarterly water consumption has been registered through the meter, due to circumstances judged by Council to be beyond the control of the owner/occupier to detect.

## 2 Policy Statement

- There is no provision in the Local Government Act, 1993 to reduce water accounts due to water leaks in private water services. Once water has passed through any meter it becomes the responsibility of the landowner.
- This Policy is intended to provide some financial relief for customers who have experienced a sudden increase in water consumption due to circumstances that were not reasonably foreseeable.
- Financial relief under this policy would only be available under certain circumstances where all the criteria as outlined in “2.2 Criteria for Financial Relief Due to Concealed or Undetectable Water Leaks” are met.
- The Policy is also intended to serve as a means of good public relations by providing “one off” assistance where a significantly higher quarterly usage account has been incurred through circumstances beyond the owner’s/occupier’s control.

### 2.1 Regarding Procedural Fairness

It should be noted that this policy applies to a narrow set of criteria and should not be enacted in cases where an owner/occupier could reasonably have detected and repaired a water leak on premises before incurring an increased water charge.

Currently Council will notify customers in writing if there is a radical increase in consumption. The meter reading is verified with a photograph at the time of reading or is checked either by the water meter contractor or Water and Waste operators. If the reading is incorrect the account is issued using the corrected reading. If a functional problem with the meter is suspected, it is replaced. Any customer can apply to have the meter tested at their cost, which if faulty is reimbursable.

### 2.2 Criteria for Financial Relief Due to Concealed or Undetectable Water Leaks

Council will only give consideration to adjusting the water and (where applicable) non-residential sewerage account for a property due to a high quarterly water meter account under the following circumstances:

- a) The defect causing the associated high water meter reading must be such that it is not readily visible or apparent and could be reasonably judged by Council as not being detectable. If leakage is visible as ground surface moisture or water flow, it is detectable and ineligible for financial relief.
- b) An undetectable leakage which is not visible to the owner/occupier, is defined as a pipeline or connection break in the ground or under concrete slabs, between a Council owned and operated meter and the main building. It does not include leaks from internal building service lines, appliances or irrigation systems.
- c) The quarterly consumption is more than double the average consumption for the corresponding period over the previous three (3) years,

- d) The applicant must be the owner, part owner or the person liable for the water charges for which the application applies,
- e) The application for adjustment of the affected account must be received within 30 days of the issue of the water and where applicable, non-residential sewerage account;
- f) Only one claim per property, per ownership will be considered where ownership is taken as being full or part ownership of that property;
- g) In order to be eligible for the account adjustment, the property owner/occupier shall make best efforts to:
- Advise Council about the issue within five (5) days of the problem being identified;
  - Provide documentary evidence within a further fourteen (14) days confirming that immediate and effective action has been taken to rectify the problem;
  - Provide a written statement from a licenced plumber stating the reasons why the leak was not detected or could not have been detected;
  - Complete the Undetected Leaks Application Form including supporting documentation as noted on the form.
- h) The Management of Undetected Water Leaks Policy does not apply to leaks from private water pipelines that occur outside the property boundary.
- i) If Council notifies an owner/occupier about any leakage, such leakage is considered detectable and ineligible for financial relief under this Policy.
- j) Claims will not be considered for assistance if:
- They are the result of a second occurrence at the same property and by the same owner(s) regardless of whether it is a related event or separate concealed leak.
  - Involve loss of water from faulty fixtures or fittings such as appliances (for example, but not limited to dishwashers, plumbed fridges, pumps, hot water systems, pressure relief valve, float valves, solar panels, taps, cisterns and other water fittings).
  - Involve a leak caused directly by way of accidental or wilful damage or human error.
  - Do not contain documentation or meet the terms of an eligible claim.

The maximum adjustment allowed will be 50% of the difference between the usage on the affected account and the average consumption for the corresponding period for the past three (3) years, or from change of ownership if occurred within a shorter period. The adjustment will only be made if all other water and sewerage charges have been paid in full at the time the determination is made. The minimum adjustment for water and non-residential sewerage charges (where applicable) combined shall be \$200 and the maximum adjustment \$2,000.

The Director of Corporate Services or Chief Financial Officer are authorised to approve applications for financial relief under the terms of this policy.

Where financial assistance is granted, the applicant will be advised that payment of the amended account is required within 30 days of the date of the advice.

If financial assistance is not granted the applicant will be advised in writing and be given a further 30 days from the date of the advice to pay the account. There are no grounds for appeal as financial relief is discretionary and subject to satisfying the above criteria.

If the concealed leak has caused the usage to exceed the 350 kilolitre first step tariff, all future accounts in that financial year will be charged at the higher kilolitre rate.

Council may allow customers that do not meet criteria and are ineligible for an adjustment to enter into a payment arrangement for payment of the high account. Any arrangement will require all future accounts to be paid in full by the due date. Council may consider waiving interest charges if the payment arrangement conditions are met.

### 3 Related Documents

Undetected Leaks Application Form (pending)

### 4 Version History

This section identifies authors who reviewed the Policy and the date that it became effective.

Version No.	Date changed	Modified by	Amendments/Previous adoption details
1	9/2/2015	Council	Adopted by Council 9 February 2015, minute no 20
2	24/4/2023	Water Billing Officer	Policy reviewed and updated and Policy title changed from "Water Management Policy Undetected Water Leaks" to "Management of Undetected Water Leaks Policy"