



BUSSELTON WATER

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Our ref: OL6-04
Your ref:
Enquiries:

4th November 2016

Ms Nicola Cusworth
Chair
PO Box 8469
Perth BC WA 6849

Dear Ms Cusworth,

RE: Consultation Paper for Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013

Busselton Water would like to express its appreciation for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed amendments to the *Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2013*. From an overall point of view, the Water Services Code has worked smoothly since commencement in November 2013.

Our comments on the 56 issues raised are provided and I also request that Clause 4 of the Code be amended to remove the inconsistency with definitions in the Water Services Act 2012. While we support the principle that tenants should be afforded the same rights as owners, while there is no legislative provision for removal of a water service, it is critically important that debt liability remains with the property and ultimately the "land owner".

We look forward to participating in the remainder of the review process and I request you direct any queries regarding Busselton Water's responses to Acting Team Leader Business Services,
on!

Yours faithfully,



Mr Chris Elliott
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Issue 1

Proposal To amend clause 1 by replacing “2013” with “2017”.

BW: Agree

Issue 2

Proposal To amend clause 2 for the Code to come into operation on 1 July 2017.

Comment sought

- A. Should any of the proposed amendments in this Consultation Paper take effect after 1 July 2017?

- B. If so, which amendments should commence later and when should those amendments commence?

BW: This date is dependent upon any changes that would require lead-time for system or organisation changes

- 4.4 Clause 12(1) – Information on bills
- 4.8 Clause 12(2) – Information on bills: price of drinking water
- 9.4 Variation of Tariffs
- 9.5 Service Standard Payments

Issue 3

Comment sought

- A. Currently, the Water Code applies to all customers. Should application of the Water Code be limited to certain customers only?

- B. If so, to which customers should the Water Code apply?

BW: All customers should be covered by the code excluding customers with services by agreement contracts.

Issue 4

Comment sought

- A. Currently, the Water Code applies to all licensees. Should the Water Code differentiate between certain licensees?

- 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?

- B2 If so, should these licensees simply be exempt from some of provisions of the Water Code, or should one or more service standards be amended?

BW: The Water Code should apply to all licensees for regulated water and wastewater services

Issue 5

Comment sought Should the Water Code apply to the provision of irrigation or drainage services?

BW: The Water Code should apply to irrigation & drainage services

Issue 6

Comment sought

- 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.
- 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.
- 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?

BW: All customers should be covered by the code only customers with services by agreement contracts should be excluded.

Issue 7

Comment sought 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)?

BW: The current code provision is satisfactory.

Issue 8

Comment sought Should the maximum interval between bills for usage be reduced to three, or alternatively four, months?

BW: Recommends a maximum of 4 month billing cycle frequency.

Issue 9

Comment sought Should licensees be required to read a customer's water meter at least once every 12 months?

BW: Agrees a minimum reading requirement of once every 12 months.

Issue 10

Proposal To require a licensee to include the following additional information on each bill:

- information about assistance for customers experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship;
- for bills issued to residential customers, information on the availability of interpreter services;
- the total amount of any payments made by the customer since the previous bill was issued;
- a telephone number for complaints;
- the Freecall telephone number for the Energy & Water Ombudsman WA; and
- a 24 hour telephone number for faults and emergencies.

BW: Endorses all additional information excluding, the free call number to Ombudsman Office. The Ombudsman contact information is available via customer commitments document and such code changes would reduce the opportunity to resolve complaints and or enquiries at a lower level.

Issue 11

Comment sought Should each bill have to specify the charges payable for each of the water services provided by the licensee?

BW: Agree, specification of charges payable

Issue 12

Proposal 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).

BW: Agree with publication of interest charges or late payment of the water invoice

Issue 13

Comment sought Should a licensee be required to include the meter reading on a customer's bill (where available)?

BW: Agree with publication of meter reading records on the water invoice

Issue 14

Comment sought

- 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. 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)?

BW: This has merit, however these changes would have to be subject to adequate delivery timeline and funding for necessary software upgrades (potentially 2-3 years)

Issue 15

Proposal 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.

BW: Agree with publication of comparative records on the water invoice

Issue 16

Comment sought 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?

Proposal

- A. To clarify that clause 12(3)(a) to (d) only applies to bills for usage for a metered water service.
- B. To clarify that clause 12(3)(c) only applies to bills based on an estimate.
- 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 & Water Ombudsman WA's Freecall telephone number.

BW: Agree that clauses 12(3)(b), (c) and (d) be retained as is

Issue 17

Comment sought Should the 12 month limitation on recovering an undercharge only apply where the undercharge is a result of an error by the licensee?

BW: Agree with 12 month recovery limitation

Issue 18

Proposal To require a licensee to credit an overcharged amount to a customer's account if the licensee has not received instructions from the customer.

BW: Agree, when overcharging has been identified, credit customer account the overcharge amount

Issue 19

Proposal To require a licensee to offer Centrepay as a bill payment method only to residential customers

BW: Believe the current code provision is satisfactory.

Issue 20

Comment sought Should the requirement to offer direct debit as a payment method be removed from the Water Code?

BW: No, believe the current code provision is satisfactory.

Issue 21

Comment sought 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?

BW: Believes the current code provision is satisfactory and internal business rules for registration are adequate.

Issue 22

Comment sought

- 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. If so, what additional protection should be provided to water customers?

BW: No, customer experiencing payment difficulties should be covered with in the organisations Financial Hardship Policy (FHP)

Issue 23

Comment sought Should licensees be allowed to charge fees or interest on payment plans offered to customers experiencing payment difficulties?

BW: Yes, customer experiencing payment difficulties are liable for overdue interest penalties only customers under financial hardship should be provisioned for interest free arrangements

Issue 24

Proposal To amend clause 25(2) by requiring a licensee to offer a customer experiencing payment difficulties a payment plan or other arrangement.

BW: No, customer experiencing payment difficulties should be covered with in the organisations Financial Hardship Policy (FHP) not Water Codes

Issue 25

Comment sought Should licensees be required to review their financial hardship policies if directed to do so by the ERA?

BW: Agree

Issue 26

Proposal To require a licensee to consult with relevant consumer organisations when developing their initial financial hardship policy.

BW: Agree

Issue 27

Proposal To require a licensee to submit an amended financial hardship policy to the ERA for its approval.

BW: Agree

Issue 28

Comment sought

- A. Should the content requirements for financial hardship policies remain in the Water FHP Guidelines, or be moved to the Water Code?
- B. Should a sub-set of the content requirements for financial hardship policies be moved from the Water FHP Guidelines to the Water Code?
- C. Should financial hardship policies include any information in addition to what is currently required under the Water FHP Guidelines?

BW: Financial Hardship Policy (FHP) should remain in the guidelines rather than the codes

Issue 29

Proposal To move the requirement for licensees to comply with the Water FHP Guidelines from the water licence template to the Water Code.

BW: Financial Hardship Policy (FHP) should remain in the guidelines rather than the codes

Issue 30

Comment sought

- 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. 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?

BW: Believes the current Financial Hardship Policy provision is satisfactory and should remain in the guidelines rather than the codes

Issue 31

Proposal To require a licensee to offer a customer experiencing financial hardship a payment plan or other arrangement.

BW: Believes the current Financial Hardship Policy provision is satisfactory and should not be with the codes.

Issue 32

Proposal 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.

BW: Current internal business rules and Financial Hardship Policy provision are satisfactory

Issue 33

Proposal To include the words 'as to whether or not' in clause 29(c) so it is consistent with the wording of clause 29(b).

BW: Agree

Issue 34

Proposal

- A. To require a licensee to give a customer a reminder notice prior to taking action for non-payment of a bill.
- B. To require a reminder notice to include the following Information:
 - the licensee's telephone number for account, payment and general enquiries; and
 - advice that a licensee may assist if the customer is experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship.

BW: Agree

Issue 35

Proposal

- A. To require a licensee to give a customer written notice of its intention to reduce the customer's water supply.
- 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.
- C. To require a restriction notice to include the following information:
 - the matter giving rise to the impending reduction;
 - the earliest date the licensee may reduce the customer's water supply;
 - the existence and operation of the licensee's complaint handling process;
 - the existence and operation of the water ombudsman, including the Freecall telephone number for the water ombudsman; and
 - the applicable restoration procedures, including any costs for restoring the customer's supply.

BW: Agree

Issue 36

Proposal To amend the wording of clause 32(c) so it is consistent with the wording of clause 32(b).

BW: Agree

Issue 37

Proposal 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.

Comment sought

- A. Should the prohibition on reducing the rate of flow of drinking water be extended to anytime on a Friday?
- B. Should the prohibition on reducing the rate of flow of drinking water be extended to after 3pm Monday to Thursday?

BW: Agree with both amendments

Issue 38

Comment sought

- 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. 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?

BW: Agree with both amendments, restriction should not be undertaken during complaints resolution process.

Issue 39

Comment sought

- 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?
- E. If so, what should that definition be?
- 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 addresses?
- H. If so, how much notice should be provided?
- I. Should a licensee be required to contact customers who require a life support machine as soon as possible in the event of an unplanned interruption?

BW: Agree with all point except dot point (I) due to management of unplanned outages can be challenging to coordinate such specific customer group

Issue 40

Comment sought 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?

BW: Agree

Issue 41

Comment sought 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?

BW: Agree

Issue 42

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

BW: Agree

Issue 43

Proposal

- 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.
- 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.

BW: Agree

Issue 44

Comment sought

- 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?
- B. If so, should a licensee be required to provide the customer with the Energy and Water Ombudsman WA's Freecall telephone number?

BW: Agree

Issue 45

Comment sought

- 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. 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?

BW: Current code provision is satisfactory and internal business rules for the management of complaints resolution are adequate

Issue 46

Comment sought

- A. Should the Water Code specify when a complaint is considered to have been resolved?
- B. If so, should it only relate to certain complaints (for example, complaints relating to non-payment)?

BW: Internal business rules for the management of complaints resolution are adequate and should not be within the code

Issue 47

Comment sought Should a licensee be prevented from recovering an amount of money that is in dispute until such time that the dispute has been resolved?

BW: Current code provision is satisfactory and internal business rules for the management of recovery actions are adequate

Issue 48

Proposal

- 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.

Comment sought 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?

BW: Agree

Issue 49

Proposal 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.

Comment sought How many days should customers be given to inform the licensee whether or not they accept a payment plan?

BW: 5 business days

Issue 50

Comment sought Should licensees be required to make electronic copies of the Water Code available on their website?

BW: No, however a link to the State Law Publisher should be available on the utilities website..

Issue 51

Comment sought Should licensees be required to have a policy that deals with minimising the impact of bursts, leaks, blockages and spills?

BW: Agree, however this policy must be separate for water and sewer

Issue 52

Proposal

- A. To require a licensee to provide at least 48 hours' prior notice of a planned interruption.
- 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.

BW: A minimum prior notification for planned interruption has merit, however sometime this not practicable and may delay works.

Issue 53

Comment sought 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?

BW: Agree

Issue 54

Comment sought 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?

BW: No, new tariff charges are effectively conveyed to customers via normal business customer consultation process and any increase tariff charges are communicated and published sufficiently by the corporation via Website, Gazette and News Media.

Issue 55

Comment sought

- A. Should service standard payments be introduced into the Water Code?
- B. If so, which service standard payments should be included in the Water Code?
- C. Should licensees be given until 1 July 2018 to implement those service standard payments?
- D. Should licensees only be required to make payment upon application by an eligible customer?
- E. Should licensees be required to advise their customers at least once a year of the service standard payments available?

BW: No, costs to establish and administer such standards would alternately cost the customer more and would not improve organisation efficiency.

Issue 56

Comment sought

- A. Should the Water Code include restrictions on when a licensee can charge interest and/or late payment fees?
- B. If so, what should those restrictions be?

BW: No, interest charges are a gazetted prescribe fee for all overdue charges excluding customers Financial Hardship.