

**Economic Regulation Authority, Consultation Paper: 2023 Review of the  
Water Services Code of Conduct (Customer Service Standards) 2018**

**Department of Water and Environmental Regulation comments**

<b>Issue No.</b>	<b>Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) comments</b>
1	No objections to the Water Code using the same definition of “complaint” as the Electricity Code and Gas Compendium.
2	Support consistency in the definition of “drinking water” with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the Department of Health Memorandum of Understandings under water service licences, and the removal of clause 4(1)(b).
3A, B, C	The regulatory framework should acknowledge that there will be some situations where water service providers are unable to read meters, despite having made reasonable attempts to do so. DWER has no preference for the method for accommodating this.
4	Support amending clause 15(3)(d) to require each bill to provide the “month” or “day” on which the tariff for water supplied to the customer will revert to the lowest tariff.
5	Support consistency with the gas and electricity codes regarding payments by undercharged customers. However, Clause 32 provisions should be retained in the Water Code to provide exceptions to when interest charges or late payment fees should be applied.
6	Support amending clause 19(2) to include a percentage compliance rate.
7	Support amending clause 20(5) to include a percentage compliance rate.
8	Support amending the Water Code to meet the requirements of the Australian Consumer Law requiring suppliers to provide consumers with a paper bill, unless they have requested or consented to being provided an electronic bill, and prohibiting charging for a bill, including a paper bill. Some clarity on the provisions for electricity and gas customers on this matter would be welcome.
9A, B, C, D	Support amending the Water Code to require licensees to offer a payment plan or other arrangements to all customers, and to make it consistent with the Electricity Code on payment plans and other arrangements.
10A	Support the obligation under schedule 3 clause 1.1.2 of the water licence template (to provide a financial hardship policy) being addressed instead in clause 29 of the Water Code (Financial Hardship Policy).
10B	Support retaining the current requirements to consult with relevant consumer organisations whenever formulating or reviewing a financial hardship policy. Service providers may not be best placed to determine if a review is material; some small amendments may have unforeseen consequences. Consultation with consumer organisations on amendments that are immaterial would be short and simple.
11	Information on an overdue notice regarding the date the unpaid charge became due may be helpful to customers in locating their original bill. This may be important where customers face potential restrictions on their water supply. Billing systems should be able to readily link bills for a particular customer and charge.

12	Support setting a percentage compliance rate on the requirement to resolve a complaint within 15 days. The percentage should be based on the proportion of complex complaints, independently verified.
13	Support retaining the current approach (to inform all customers with complaints of their right to apply to the Ombudsman for a review).
14	Support clarifying and consistency with electricity and gas customers.
15	Support the removal of clause 49)1)(h)(i).
16	Requiring licensees to contact customers with special requirements or needs as soon as possible in the event of unplanned interruptions could be beneficial to customers. However, consultation with water service providers and consumer organisations would help to assess whether the cost/complexity of this amendment would outweigh the benefits.
17	Unsure whether service standard payments should be included in the Water Code, could be useful to have consistency with electricity and gas customers.
18-25	Support the proposed administrative updates and minor changes.