



Policy

79 WATER AND SEWER SUPPLY POLICY

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Strategic Outcome: Good government

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Responsible Officer: Director Corporate Services

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Berrigan Shire Council provides urban water supply to the towns of Barooga, Berrigan, Finley and Tocumwal. It is important the process of connecting and billing for this service is conducted in a fair, rational and transparent manner, while protecting the interest of the Council and the broader community.

2. PURPOSE

This Policy provides guidance to the Council and Council staff regarding:

1. The process of applying and connecting to the urban water supply.
2. Access to, and replacement of, water meters
3. Meter reading and water billing
4. Responsibility for water consumption charges
5. Resolution of disputes, billing and meters

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all connections to the Council's urban water supply service.

4. OBJECTIVE

This policy is developed to assist the Council with Delivery Plan Objective 2.2.2.3:

Coordinate Council investments, financial management, financial operations and processing.

5. DEFINITIONS

Water Consumption Notice: Each individual water supply shall be metred and billed in accordance with Councils fees and charges policy.



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6. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Connection

6.1.1 Conditions

A property charged the Water Access Charge as per the Council's Revenue Policy is entitled to connection to the Council's water supply.

This connection will be provided on application, subject to the following conditions:

1. Connection fees for water supply will be borne by the applicant;
2. The Council will not guarantee supply pressure or volume levels;
3. Each individual water supply shall be metered and rated in accordance with Council's Revenue Policy;
4. One standard 20mm water meter and a meter cover – or two if on a dual supply with up to 12 metres of 20mm pipe length per supply – will be supplied to each property connected to the water supply. Any cost for the extension of services will be borne by the applicant. After this initial charge, the Council will meet the cost of meters replaced as a result of wear or age.
5. Property owners may be responsible for the cost replacing meter(s) and/or meter cover(s) as a result of theft, random vandalism damage or malicious damage. This will be determined by Council on a case-by-case basis.
6. Council will not be responsible or liable for any damage to water supplies infrastructure beyond the property boundary, other than the repair and replacement of the actual water meter.
7. Any Water Consumption Notice appeals relating to the actual meter will only be considered if the meter is damaged, faulty or leaking. Damaged or leaking pipes from the last connection on the property side of the meter are the responsibility of the property owner;
8. Any other properties requesting service shall be considered on the basis of practicality, economic and social need, together with Local Environment Planning Guidelines;
9. All fees and charges associated with the connection, servicing and supply of water is specified in Council's Revenue Policy.



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6.2 Owners and Tenants

6.2.1 Liability of Water Consumption Charges

The *Local Government Act* 1993 and Regulations and the *Water Management Act* 2000 makes **the property owner liable for all water consumption charges**.

Any agreement between the property owner/landlord and the tenant/lessee is a private matter between these parties and does not prejudice Council's right to charge, and take the necessary steps to recover from, the owner for water consumption.

6.2.2 Readings for Tenants/Agents on Leased or Tenanted Properties

Agents or landlords may request a private meter reading from the Council on leased or tenanted properties provided the applicable fee is paid.

This reading will be for the private use by the agent and/or landlord, for their own calculation of water usage and charging for incoming and outgoing tenants, and will not be applied to the Council's own meter usage for that particular property. The applicable fee is set out in Council's Annual Fees and Charges.

6.3 Strata/Community Title Development

6.3.1 Water Meters

For existing developments, Council will place one water meter on each of the filtered water and unfiltered water (whichever is available), at the front of the strata/community sub-division for the purposes of determining water consumption.

Where practical, Council may provide water meters for each individual unit at the corporate boundary, or if it is practical and at no greater cost, Council may install meters outside each individual unit. This will be at the discretion of the Council's Environmental Engineer.

For new strata/community developments, a water meter for each supply (filtered and unfiltered) must be installed outside each individual unit.

6.3.2 Common ground

Council will supply water to the common ground of a strata/community-titled development on the condition that:

1. The cost is borne by the developer/owner.



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2. That the supply will be subject to annual water and consumption charges or any other rates and charges that may be applied from time to time and as outlined in Council's Revenue Policy.

Alternatively, the Council may supply meters – at a market price – to the body corporate to fit beyond the Council's water meter to allow the body corporate to allocate its water charges. These meters will not be read by the Council, will not be replaced by the Council, and will not be individually billed.

6.4 Access, readings and estimates

6.4.1 Access to water meters

Property owners and/or residents must ensure safe and clear access to water meters. This includes, but is not restricted to:

1. Restraining dogs and other animals,
2. Access through locked gates or fences,
3. Clearing overhanging trees, branches, and shrubs near and around water meters,
4. Removal of any obstacles, debris, or any inappropriate covering that may obstruct a clear and safe path to the meter.

The Council will notify property owners of any problems with access to the meter. If, after this notice has been given, the owner or occupier does not allow safe access to the meter the Council may impose a fine or charge, or discontinue supply.

6.4.2 Readings

The Council will read meters for billing purposes at a frequency dictated in the Council's Revenue Policy.

As far as practicable, each reading period in a financial year will include the same number of days (to within 5%). The Council will advise owners of the period (in days) covered by the bill

Water consumption notices will be issued and fall due as per the Council's Revenue Policy



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6.4.3 Estimated Readings

Where possible, the Council will endeavor to record a valid reading for every meter for which it intends to send a water notice. This may not always be possible.

Reasons a valid reading cannot be obtained may include, but not restricted to:

1. The meter has stopped registering, as confirmed by the meter not registering after a tap is turned on down the line;
2. The meter display cannot be read e.g. condensation, staining, broken glass, etc.;
3. The meter is significantly damaged;
4. Access to the meter is denied by any legitimate reason.

Where a valid meter reading cannot be obtained at a particular property, Council will initially make contact with the property owner or consumer to gain access to the meter and ascertain the actual meter reading.

If is this not possible – or not practical in the circumstances – the Council will estimate the water consumption for the period.

The estimate will be based on past water consumption and calculated as follows:

1. Identify the most recent valid meter reading (A) and the date it was taken (C)
2. Identify the meter reading taken from the same billing cycle the previous year (i.e. if the most recent valid read was December 2014, the Council will use the reading from December 2013) and the date it was taken (B)
3. An average consumption per day is calculated by the formula

$$\text{Reading (A)} - \text{Reading (C)} / \text{Days between Date (B) and Date (D)} = (E)$$

4. Multiply (E) by the number of days in the billing period to arrive at the estimate.

Where the Council applies an estimate, it does so in good faith on the basis that most people's water use habits do not significantly change from one year to the next. If satisfactory evidence is provided to Council to show that the circumstances have legitimately changed (i.e. installation of a bore, reduction in the number of occupants), the Council will consider a review of the estimate.



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The Council will include a note with the Water Notice advising the owner that an estimate has been applied and the reason for the estimate.

Where actual use (as determined by a valid meter reading) is much larger than the estimate applied by the Council, the Council will allow for an extension of time to pay if requested by the owner.

6.5 Issuing and payment of Water Notices

6.5.1 Small Bills

It is not economic or efficient – for the Council or the Owner – to issue a Water Notices for an amount where the cost of printing, sending and paying the notice is not covered by the amount of the notice.

As such, the Council will not issue a Water Notice where the total amount of the notice is less than \$5.00.

In these instances, the water reading on the property will be adjusted back to the last or previous reading.

On ensuing readings, once consumption exceeds the amount to generate a charge on the account of \$5.00 or more (and not previously been billed), a Water Notice will be generated and issued.

This clause does not apply for interim Section 603 Certificate application readings.

6.5.2 Back Bills

There may be circumstances where the Council has significantly undercharged an owner for water consumption. The Council has an obligation to ensure that all owners pay the appropriate amount for their water consumption, as such reserves the right to send an amended Water Notice (i.e. a “back bill”)

An amended Water Notice will recover no more than nine (9) months of undercharging – e.g. the Council may have undercharged the owner for two years, however it will only recover charges for the 9 months prior to the date of issue of the bill.

If the owner has not taken steps to allow access to the meter, the Council reserves the right to recover the undercharged amount in its entirety.

Owners who have received an amended Water Notice will be granted an payment extension equivalent to the period of time covered by the notice.



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6.5.3 Applications for Hardship

Applications for consideration for reasons of hardship or compassion will be considered as outlined in the Council's Revenue Policy.

Applications for hardship concessions must be made in writing and addressed to the Council's General Manager.

7. RELATED POLICIES OR STRATEGIES

- *Local Government Act 1993*
- *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005*
- *Water Management Act 2000*
- *Berrigan Shire Council Rating and Revenue Policy*
- *Berrigan Shire Council Hardship Policy*
- *User Fees and Charges Policy*