

# **Guidelines for issuing a rate notice or account for the supply of water to residential premises: For water service providers outside South East Queensland**

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# 1. Introduction

These guidelines are made pursuant to section 571 of the *Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008* (the Act).

It is a requirement under section 138 of the Act that a rate notice or account issued by the water service provider, or the related local government, for the supply of water to residential premises, must comply with guidelines made by the regulator.

Section 138 of the Act applies only to a service provider who provides a retail water service to residential premises and where the supply of water is measured and charged by the service provider.

These guidelines aim to ensure residential water users are fully informed about their water usage and can therefore better manage water consumption. In addition, these guidelines will provide customers with standardised information from their service provider in relation to their water consumption.

It is intended that a consistent billing method be introduced across Queensland and Australia, as outlined in the National Guidelines for Residential Customers' Water Accounts 2006 (the National Guidelines).<sup>1</sup>

Water accounts that are informative, particularly through the provision of graphic and comparative data, have proven useful in promoting awareness of water consumption and educating water users about the importance of water savings measures.

The Act is administered by the Department of Energy and Water Supply (DEWS). The chief executive of DEWS is the regulator under the Act.

The Act can be accessed on the Legislation website at [www.legislation.qld.gov.au](http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au).

## 1.1 Purpose

Pursuant to section 138 of the Act, these guidelines apply to service providers **outside** the South East Queensland (SEQ) region. See the glossary for the definition of SEQ region.

Service providers within the SEQ region, that are not captured by these guidelines include:

- Councils
- ex-Allconnex Councils (City of Gold Coast Council, Logan City Council, Redland City Council)
- Distributor Retailers (i.e. Unitywater, Queensland Urban Utilities)

## 1.2 Aim

These guidelines have been developed to provide information to service providers who supply water to residential premises about the inclusion of standardised information on issued rate notices or accounts.

They also specify standardised rate notice or account content and regular billing cycles for service providers. Customer rate notices or accounts provide a good opportunity to further involve customers in water conservation and enables them to monitor their water use.

The objective of these guidelines is for the service provider to encourage customers to save water by providing them with meaningful information about how their water usage compares with other customers, with the goal of triggering a reduction in water use.

Some of the regulator's requirements are mandatory as they are legislative requirements of the Act. In these cases, the guidelines will use the word 'must'. The service provider must address the requirement

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<sup>1</sup> The National Guidelines for Residential Customers' Water Accounts 2006 can be found at the National Environment Protection Council website at [www.scew.gov.au](http://www.scew.gov.au).

in the manner prescribed. It is their responsibility to ensure the mandatory legislative requirements of the Act are met.

In other cases, the regulator's requirements are not mandatory. If the requirement is not mandatory, the word 'should' is used, meaning service providers can follow the guideline suggestion if they choose, or alternatively choose their own methods or information for achieving requirements.

The explanatory material in these guidelines is indicative of the Act's aims, but the service provider may also choose to look at other information that supports the Act's aims, such as best practice industry standards or other relevant information.

### **1.3 Application**

Pursuant to section 137 of the Act, these guidelines apply if all of the following criteria are met:

- a water service provider or related local government provides a retail water service to residential premises
- the supply of water to the premises is measured and charged by the water service provider, or related local government only in relation to the premises
- the premises are not common property under the *Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997* or the *Building Units and Group Titles Act 1980*.

Section 138 of the Act requires that a rate notice or account issued by the service provider for the supply of water to the residential premises, must comply with the guidelines made by the regulator and may state both of the following:

- the frequency at which a rate notice or account must be issued for the supply of water to residential premises
- the type of information to be included in the rate notice or account about the volume of water supplied to the premises during each billing period.

A rate notice or account issued by the service provider must comply with guidelines made by the regulator despite the requirements for levying rates under the *Local Government Act 2009*.

See the Glossary section of these guidelines for the definitions of rate notice, residential premises and related local government.

### **1.4 Roles and responsibilities**

Pursuant to section 138 of the Act, a rate notice or account issued by a service provider or related local government for the supply of water to residential premises for an area outside the SEQ region must comply with these guidelines made by the regulator.

Water service providers need to ensure their systems have the capability required prior to the legislative timeframes. A new service provider (first registered after 16 November 2007) must comply with these guidelines within one year of being registered as a water service provider<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See section 606 of the *Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008*.

## 2. Requirements for rate notices or accounts

### 2.1 Consistency

Consistent with the National Guidelines, future standardised rate notices or accounts must include the following (see Part 1(a) in Appendix 1 of these guidelines for a full summary):

- graphical and numerical information on water consumption for the current period compared to the previous billing period
- comparisons of average daily water consumption with the same billing period in the previous year
- the local area residential average for the current period, based on postcode/suburb. Small water service providers do not have to provide this information
- litres (L) as a unit of measure on a daily comparative basis, expressed as L/day.

### 2.2 Other information

In addition to providing comparative data to assist customers in determining whether their water usage is excessive, guidance should be provided on what they can do to save water (see Part 1(b) in Appendix 1 of these guidelines). In such cases, messages focusing on reduced consumption should be included in the rate notice or account.

Typical messages about water savings include:

- benefits of greywater use in gardens
- the importance of checking for and repairing leaks
- topping up pools with rainwater
- benefits and process of reusing water from indoors to clean outside
- kitchen water saving tips—using the kitchen plug instead of running water
- bathroom water saving tips—taking shorter showers
- laundry water saving tips—using the washing machine less by doing larger loads
- information on available programs that will help customers save water—for example, government rebates.

Water service providers should also consider trigger messages for high-use customers. For example, for customers whose water consumption is twice the average for that suburb, a garden message should be automatically displayed on the rate notice or account encouraging compliance with specific watering times.

A leak detection message should be displayed urging the resident to check their property for leaking taps and pipes in cases where water consumption is twice the amount for the corresponding period in the previous year.

### 2.3 Frequency

In conjunction with graphical and comparative data on water consumption, regular issuing of rate notices or accounts is expected to produce optimum results in reducing water consumption. This is because residents receive timely data and can better manage their water use. However, it is recognised that not all service providers will have the capacity to increase rate notice or account frequency, at least in the short term.

The frequency at which rate notices or accounts are currently issued by service providers across Queensland varies. Local government providers generally levy the utility charge for water at the same time as other rates are levied—that is, annually, half-yearly or quarterly. While the charge for water is generally levied at the same time as other rates, it could be levied separately and at a different time to the general rates payment notice.

Non-local government providers are currently able to issue accounts at the frequency that suits their business needs and their customer service standards. Ideally, all service providers should be issuing rate notices or accounts four times a year.

The minimum standards for rate notice or account frequencies that must be applied and implemented, according to the size of the water service provider or related local government are detailed below.

<b>Size of water service provider or related local government</b>	<b>Rate notice or account frequency for a financial year</b>
Small	Annually
Medium	Half-yearly
Large	Half-yearly

Note that these are minimum standards only and service providers are encouraged to issue rate notices or accounts on a quarterly basis when possible as this is considered best practice.

# Glossary

## Terms used in these guidelines

### National Guidelines

The National Guidelines for Residential Customers' Water Accounts 2006

## Terms defined under the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008

### billing period

A period during which the water service provider measures the volume of water supplied to the customer's premises for the purpose of charging for the water.

### large service provider

A retail water service or sewerage service provider with more than 25 000 connections to a registered service.

### medium service provider

A retail water service or sewerage service provider with more than 1000 but not more than 25 000 connections to a registered service.

### rate notice

A rate notice issued under the Local Government Act.

### regulator

The chief executive of the Department of Energy and Water Supply.

### related local government

A local government that charges for the supply of water for a retail water service if the retail water service is provided by a water service provider who is not the local government.

### residential premises

Premises used ordinarily for a residential purpose.

### retail water service

A water service that is the reticulation of water in a service area for a water service. The term does not include an irrigation service or a bulk water service in any area or the supply of recycled water in any area.

### service area

An area declared under section 161 of the Act for either or both of the following:

- a retail water service to customers
- a sewerage service to customers.

### SEQ region

See the *Water Act 2000*, section 341 - the SEQ region includes the local government areas of Noosa Shire, Sunshine Coast, Somerset, Moreton Bay, Lockyer Valley, and Scenic Rim regional councils, as well as Ipswich, Brisbane, Redland, Logan and Gold Coast City councils.

### small service provider

A retail water service or sewerage service provider with 1000 or less connections to a registered service.

### water service provider

A person registered under Chapter 2, part 3, of the Act as a service provider for a water service.

## Appendix 1: Information requirements for standardised rate notices or accounts

Pursuant to section 138 of the Act, a rate notice or account issued by the water service provider or the related local government must comply with these guidelines.

Part 1(a) of Appendix 1 of these guidelines states the types of information to be included in the rate notice or account regarding the volume of water supplied to the residential premises—located outside the South East Queensland region—during each billing period.

Part 1(b) of Appendix 1 of these guidelines outlines some examples of the types of information that should be included on a water rate notice or account. These are in addition to the requirements of Part 1(a) of Appendix 1 of these guidelines.

<b>Part 1(a) Information</b>	<b>Details that must be included on a water rate notice or account</b>
Type of form	Rate notice to owner
Property details	Property address
Water usage period	Date period commenced and concluded
Days in period	Number of days in billing period
Meter readings	Current and previous meter readings
Total water consumption	Total volume of water used in kilolitres (1 kilolitre = 1000 L)
Daily average	Average daily consumption during the period (calculated by dividing the total consumption for the quarter by the number of days in the meter reading period)
Comparative data	Graphical and numerical information of average daily consumption for the current period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compared to the previous billing period</li> <li>• compared to the same billing period in the previous year</li> <li>• compared with the local area residential average for the current period, i.e. based on postcode/suburb. Small water service providers do not have to provide this information</li> <li>• in litres (L) as a unit of measure on a daily comparative basis, i.e. L/day</li> </ul>
<b>Part 1(b) Other information</b>	<b>Examples of what should be included on a water rate notice or account</b>
Ways to reduce water consumption	Tips and advice on how to reduce the volume of water used at the premises including any programs and other initiatives to manage water consumption.
Trigger messages	Example messages include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for customers whose water consumption is twice the average for that suburb, a garden message should be automatically displayed on the rate notice or account encouraging compliance with specific watering times outside of the middle of the day</li> <li>• for customers whose water consumption is twice the amount for the corresponding period in the previous year, a leak detection message should be displayed urging the resident to check their property for leaking taps and pipes</li> </ul>
Information on restrictions	Information on any applicable water restrictions