

5.13. CONCEALED LEAK FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

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DEPARTMENT	Finance and Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Concealed leaks can remain undetected for lengthy periods of time if the property's water meter is not actively monitored by the customer. Where Council becomes aware of a large increase in a property's consumption through the meter reading cycle, we endeavor to try and notify the customer. However, customers must not rely on Council for this information as it is provided, where possible, as a courtesy only.

Council does acknowledge that there are times where excess water consumption charges arise due to a concealed leak where the owner could not reasonably know of its existence.

Council's Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy is provided as a method to provide some relief to customers in this situation, provided they satisfy the conditions outlined in the policy.

Council first adopted the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy on 30 June 2020.

There have been no changes to the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy, other than administrative changes such as date changes.

PROPOSAL

That Council adopts the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy may result in a reduction of the revenue earned by Council for water usage. This reduction in revenue has been taken into account in devising Council's annual budget.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications arising from the introduction of the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: A reduction in revenue of approximately \$20,000 (year ended 30 June 2021 \$19,697) will impact on the operating result of Council. This will be taken into account when devising Council's annual budget. There are no further likely impacts on Council's Economic sustainability.

Environmental: The conditions outlined in the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy are intended to encourage sustainable water usage.

Social: Nil

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

Theme 5 - Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery

Strong governance and financial management are the foundations of the way in which Council will conduct its business and implement the initiatives of the Corporate Plan.

Goal 1 - We will conduct Council business in an open and transparent manner with strong oversight and open reporting.

Goal 2 - We will put the customer at the centre of our service delivery and process improvement as we deliver efficient and appropriate services based on community expectations.

Goal 3 - We will make sound financial decisions by ensuring robust strategic planning, financial management and reporting.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:

Regulator Council has a number of statutory obligations detailed in numerous regulations and legislative Acts. Council also makes local laws to ensure that the Shire is well governed. In fulfilling its role as regulator, Council will utilise an outcomes-based approach that balances the needs of the community with social and natural justice.

CONSULTATION

Internal: Rates Team, Water and Wastewater Team, Management Team, Chief Executive Officer

External: Nil

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil

ATTACHMENTS

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Intent

To establish a policy for the provision of financial assistance regarding water consumption charges in cases of proven concealed leakage.

Scope

This policy is applicable to Douglas Shire property owners with property serviced by a water meter that is not a smart meter. A concealed water leak is an underground water leak in the private plumbing pipework, on the customer's property up to and including where the pipes connect to the water meter, where there are no visible signs of a leak and where an owner or occupant could not be reasonably expected to know of its existence, as determined by Council.

Provisions

High consumption levels identified when water meter reads are conducted are communicated to the customer. However, property owners are responsible for all consumption on their property and should therefore not rely solely on Douglas Shire Council to advise them of an increase in consumption through the meter.

To be eligible for financial assistance, the following conditions must be met:

1. The applicant must be the ratepayer, with the rate notice being issued in the applicant's name.
2. The concealed leak must be repaired by a Queensland Building and Construction Commission licenced plumber, in accordance with the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002, within 28 days of identification of the leak (taken to be from the date Council is informed of the leak or the date that Council informs the owner of excessive water usage, whichever is sooner). Council may undertake meter reads to confirm the repair.
3. The applicant must provide a statement signed by a licenced plumber who repaired the leak certifying that a concealed leak had occurred and was undetectable by the customer.
4. The applicant must provide a licenced plumber's invoice as evidence of suitable repair.
5. Only one application may be granted per ratepayer per property within a four-year period (i.e. four years from the date of approval of the first application for financial assistance).
6. An application for assistance needs to be made, using the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance form within 60 days of the identification of the leak.; or no more than 30 days after the issue of the water usage account for the period affected by the leak.
7. Total additional water consumption for the billing period must be greater than 150 kilolitres in comparison to the prior billing period.
8. No smart meter is installed on the property.
9. The leaks are from water services that meet the current plumbing standards at the time of installation.

10. Water loss is not from:

- Internal pipework, water fittings and appliances including taps, toilets, showers, sinks, hot water systems and appliances with water connections such as dishwashers, washing machines and fridges
- Water tanks that are plumbed to the potable water supply, including solar water heaters and pipework related to such tanks
- External water taps, hoses, sprinklers and irrigation systems
- Swimming pools, spas, ponds and other outdoor water features
- Firefighting equipment and systems
- Construction work, renovations, excavations or similar activities
- Theft, vandalism, and carelessness (e.g. tap/hose left running due to an oversight)
- Vacant land.

Council will provide the following financial assistance:

- Waiver of 50% of additional water usage charged for the water billing period applicable to the leak (one billing period only); Capped at a maximum rebate of \$1,000.
- Additional Water Usage Calculated as: total usage (kilolitres) less average consumption (kilolitres, calculated over 3 prior billing periods); where no prior billing history is available, Council will assess each application on a case-by-case basis.
- The financial assistance entitlement will be applied as a credit to the property owner's outstanding water account. If the water account has been paid in full an EFT refund may be issued upon request.

Special consideration for additional financial assistance may be granted to those ratepayers deemed by Council to be 'vulnerable', including but not limited to: a pensioner ⁽¹⁾, a person with a disability (as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act) and victims of domestic violence.

If Council becomes aware of any ratepayer providing false or misleading information, in order to gain assistance for which he/she would otherwise not be eligible, the agreement with Council will become null and void. Any charges waived, including interest, will be restored to the full amount.

This policy is not retrospective and will apply from the date of adoption.

Related Legislation and guidelines

Water Act 2000

Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008

Plumbing and Drainage Act 2018

Plumbing and Drainage Regulation 2019

Queensland Plumbing Wastewater Code

AS/NZS 3500 Set: 2013 – Plumbing and Drainage Set

Energy and Water Ombudsman Act 2006

Local Government Act 2009

Local Government Regulation 2012

Douglas Shire Council Revenue General Policy

Douglas Shire Council Rates Rebate – Not for Profits Policy

Policy Review

This policy is to be reviewed every four years/whenever legislation changes, or at the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.

Policy Details

Policy Name	Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy
Policy Number	74
Policy Version	2
Document Number	960207
Endorsed by	Chief Executive Officer
Policy Type	Council
Approval Authority	Council
Date Adopted	29/03/2022
Time Period	Four years
Review Date	01/03/2026
Policy Department	Finance and Corporate Services
Link to Corporate Plan	Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery
Revoked/Superseded	

This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

(1) The applicant(s) MUST be the holder(s) of one of the following Queensland cards:

- Centrelink, Pension Concession Card.
- Department of Veterans' Affairs, Pension Concession Card.
- Department of Veterans' Affairs, Repatriation Health Card. (Full Conditions only)