

## **6.2. CONCEALED LEAK FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY**

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**DEPARTMENT** Finance and Corporate Services

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Council adopts the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy**

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### **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. This will cause increases in the cost of water usage for residents. Where Council becomes aware of a large increase in a property's consumption through the meter reading cycle, action is taken to try to contact the resident. However, it is the property owner's responsibility to monitor their water usage.

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 and it was last reviewed on 29 March 2022.

The Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy wording has been queried on a couple of occasions regarding the wording 'increase in water consumption' and the wording has been updated slightly for clarity. The updated policy draft was workshopped with Councillors on 6 June 2023.

It is noted the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy will likely be repealed in the near future due to the introduction of Smart Water Meters.

### **PROPOSAL**

That Council adopts the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy

### **FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy is already being implemented. The policy may result in a reduction of the revenue earned by Council for water usage and this reduction in revenue has been taken into account in devising Council's annual budget. Moving forward, the policy will not apply where Smart Water Meters have been installed.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no risk management implications arising from the re-adoption of the Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy. Minor changes to wording do not increase risks for Council.

## SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- Economic:** A reduction in revenue was 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.*

### Operational Plan 2023-2024 Actions:

New project arisen during the financial year.

## 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:** Councillor Workshop held 6 June 2023, and the Rates team.

**External:** Nil.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil.

## ATTACHMENTS

1. Concealed Leak Financial Assistance Policy [**6.2.1** - 3 pages]

## 74. CONCEALED LEAK FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

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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 water 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 per ratepayer per property for the billing period must be greater than 150 kilolitres in comparison to the prior billing period.
8. A smart meter is NOT 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 to grant financial assistance is at Council's discretion for circumstances outside of the above criteria.

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, or whenever legislation changes, or at the direction of the Chief Executive Officer.

## Policy Details

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

**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)*