

	<b>EXCESSIVE WATER USAGE REDUCTION ALLOWANCE FOR BREAKAGES</b>
	<b>Strategic</b>

**1. Purpose**

To clarify the financial assistance Warrumbungle Shire Council may provide for excessive water bills as a result of an undetected water leak.

**2. Objectives**

This policy provides for an allowance for excessive water usage which may be provided to residential landowners when a breakage occurs that is beyond their control or would cause excessive water usage accounts that are inconsistent with the previous bill levels for the same owner on the same property.

**3. Scope**

This policy applies to residential property owners and water consumers.

Council recognises that in certain circumstances a water consumer may incur a significant water bill due to the unforeseen circumstances of an undetected water leak.

This can place unreasonable financial pressure on a consumer’s finances as the resultant excess water bill represents an amount owing to Council that was unplanned for and may adversely impact the monies available for a person’s day to day living.

In recognition of these matters Council may grant financial assistance to residential property owners experiencing substantially higher than normal water consumption charges due to an undetected water leak based on the guidelines detailed below.

The intent of this policy is to set out the process of providing clear and concise guidelines on seeking consideration of a reduction in respect of a water consumption charge, due to:

- An unapparent plumbing failure,
- Only water consumption over and above ‘normal’ water consumption for the same period based on previous years will be considered.

**4. Associated Legislation and Documents**

<b>ASSOCIATED POLICIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service Charter</li> <li>• Complaint Handling Policy</li> </ul>
<b>ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i></li> </ul>
<b>ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Local Government and NSW Ombudsman <i>Practice Note No. 9 – Complaints Management in Councils</i></li> <li>• WSC Complaint Handling Procedures</li> <li>• NSW Ombudsman (2012) <i>Managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Manual</i></li> </ul>

## 5. Definitions

Term	Definition
Undetected water leak	Water leaking from plumbing that is hidden from view and would generally be behind walls or underground. Obvious water leaks in paddocks, yards and gardens are generally detectable by finding lush grass or boggy ground from visual inspection.

## 6. Background

A property owner is responsible for all water usage which is recorded on the water meter/s located on their property.

A number of rate payers have requested that Council forego excess water charges due to faulty equipment.

Council understands that in some cases, the faulty equipment was the responsibility of Council to maintain and on those specific occasions on the advice of appropriate staff may consider a reduction or reversal of the account.

Due to aging plumbing, property owners may experience failures in pipes causing water to be lost from plumbing that is behind walls or underground.

These undetected water leaks can sometimes occur over a period of a few months and are either discovered by Council staff in high consumption reporting, when the water meter is read for quarterly water billing, or when a larger than usual water bill is received by the consumer.

Council recognises that in certain circumstances it may be reasonable to consider financial assistance and this policy helps to ensure that any decisions in respect to assistance are made on a consistent and equitable basis.

## 7. Conditions and Criteria

### 7.1 Conditions

The policy applies to residential property owners seeking a reduction for an undetected leak on their property. The following conditions apply:

- All requests must be in writing on the Customer Requests and Complaints Application Form.
- A request for reduction must be received within a reasonable timeframe from the date that the leak was discovered or within 60 days of receipt of the consumption account.
- All leaks must be repaired and proof of the breakage in infrastructure will need to be substantiated by the way of a tradesman's account showing the date of repairs and/or supply of goods.
- That only one bill reduction be allowed for the one property under the current owner.

### 7.2 Criteria

If an application is received in writing for Council to determine an account as showing excessive water usage due to damage to infrastructure on the property owner's side of the meter, the following criteria apply:

- The leakage must have been significant and undetectable. Significant leakage is determined if the water usage for the quarterly billing period in question is greater than 100 kilolitres and is 1.5 times greater than the previous four quarters daily average usage.
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### 7.3 Assessment

The following steps will apply in assessing applications for reductions related to undetected leaks:

- An assessment will be made of the applicant's average consumption for the period that the leak occurred.
- The average consumption is calculated by averaging the previous four billing periods or previous four equivalent seasonal billing periods depending upon the usage pattern that is evident. The most consistent record is used to calculate the average used.
- Based on the difference between the average consumption and the water account for the period of the breakage, a 50% reduction will be applied to the account up to a maximum of \$300.
- In cases where an applicant has a pensioner/concession discount, a full reduction of the difference between the average consumption and the water account for the period of the breakage may be considered up to a maximum of \$300.
- Council officers with appropriate delegated authority may approve reduction applications in accordance with the criteria set out in this policy.

### 8. Exclusions

Council will not consider a reduction in the following circumstances:

- Situations where the leak is visible.
- Leaks not repaired by a licensed plumber.
- Plumbing that is not compliant with government regulations.
- Vacant land.
- If a consumer is negligent in failing to take action to repair a leak, no adjustment will be made for water lost due to this inaction.

### 9. Responsibilities

#### 9.1. Council

- Shall review the Policy from time to time to ensure it complies with the Legislation and is achieving the Council's intent.

#### 9.2. Staff

- Shall implement and carry out the actions listed in the Policy, Guidelines and Procedures.
- Shall include details of any water use write-offs in the Annual Report.

### 10. Getting Help

The staff member/s that can assist with this policy:

Position: Chief Financial Officer

Department: Corporate and Community Services

### 11. Version Control

Review date: By September 2024

Officer responsible for review: Chief Financial Officer

Policy Name	Version	Resolution	Date
Excessive Water Usage Reduction Allowance for Breakages	1	235/1920	12 December 2019
Excessive Water Usage Reduction Allowance for Breakages	2	184/2223	8 December 2022