

Scope

This policy applies to all Pacific Link Housing Limited (PLH) tenants except those living in short-term crisis accommodation, including refugees.

Purpose

The Water Charges Policy outlines tenants' responsibilities for payment of their water usage charges and how PLH recovers costs for water usage in a transparent and consistent manner that complies with Section 139 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (RTA) and the relevant Ministerial Guidelines for Water Charging in Community Housing.

Water Usage Charging Methods

Properties with Separate Water Meters

PLH will charge tenants who live in properties that are water efficient (as defined by the RTA) with separate water meters for the actual water usage as per the invoice received from the Water Authority. In accordance with the Ministerial Guidelines, a separate water meter must be readily accessible for reading by the Water Authority and generate an individual water account. If a water meter is not accessible for reading by the Water Authority and does not generate an individual water account, PLH will charge the tenants as if it is a shared meter dwelling. The water meter reading is recorded on the Property Condition Report at the start of the tenancy.

Water charges are added to the tenant's non-rent account each water billing cycle, generally quarterly. Any over or under charging from the Water Authority eg where meters are faulty, or other billing problems will be adjusted in the tenant's account.

Properties with Shared Water Meters

Where the water meter for a property is shared or there is no water meter, and PLH pays for water usage, PLH will charge a proportion of the total property water cost to each tenant calculated according to number of people living in a household. The proportion will be reviewed annually or on request by a tenant where the number of household members changes. As it is impossible to determine an exact usage charge for shared meters, the water charge is considered the tenants' contribution towards water usage costs only and is not intended to reflect their individual water usage. PLH will ensure that the total charges to all the tenants combined do not exceed the total water bill received from the Water Authority for a period. If the total amount paid by all tenants exceeds the total bill from the Water Authority for that period, PLH will reimburse tenants for any amount overpaid.

Common Area Water Usage

PLH will pay the water usage for all common areas where separately metered. In properties with a shared water meter, PLH will ensure that a portion of the water bill is allocated towards the common area usage.

Payment of Water Usage Charges

Water charges are added to tenants' accounts quarterly after the allocation of the Water Authority's bill has been calculated. Tenants can either pay their water usage in a lump sum or can opt to pay a regular amount each week or fortnight towards their water charges. Any payments for water must be specified as water payments on the payment record. If a water charge remains unpaid for more than 21 days from the date it is charged to the tenant's account, PLH will commence arrears collection procedures and may take action through the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) in accordance with PLH's Arrears Policy.

Where tenants are having difficulty in making payments, they should contact PLH to discuss their circumstances and arrangements for payment plans. Overdue water charges may only be deducted from a tenant's rent in advance with the tenant's written permission.

Exemptions

PLH may consider granting exemptions to tenants with separate water meters if:

- The tenant or a household member is on home based dialysis and/or;
- The tenant or a household member has a medical condition or disability that requires them to use significantly more water than usual.

In these circumstances documentary evidence of a tenant or household member being on home based dialysis or a medical condition or disability, must be provided to support any application for exemption. Exemptions will be credited to the tenant's account at the end of each quarterly billing cycle.

PLH will not charge water for tenants in crisis accommodation, including refuges, in recognition that this is a short term housing option and not general social housing.

Water Usage Charges During Absence

There are no exemptions or allowances for tenants who are temporarily away from their properties. An absence from the property will in any case be reflected in a lower water bill through lower usage.

Tenants Transferring or Exiting PLH services

If a tenant is transferring to another property or exiting PLH services, PLH will charge for water usage up to the end of the tenancy, calculated on the water meter reading at the end of the tenancy or a prorata estimate based upon the previous quarter's actual water bill.

Complaints and Appeals

If a tenant is not satisfied with a service provided by PLH or does not agree with a decision it has made in relation to water usage charges, they should first discuss their concerns with their Housing Manager. If they are still not satisfied they can ask for a formal review. Refer Complaints and Appeals Policy.

Craig Brennan

Craig Brennan, CEO May 2019