

Scope

This policy outlines tenants' rights and responsibilities for payment of their water usage charges and applies to all properties managed by Pacific Link Housing Limited (PLH) except short-term crisis accommodation, including refuges.

Principles

The Water Charges Policy is guided by the following principles:

- Tenants of PLH properties are required to pay for their personal water usage. All tenants are to be provided with this Policy at time of lease sign-up and as requested. The Policy is also available on PLH's website.
- PLH is responsible for meeting all other water costs, including water connection charges, sewerage and water usage in common areas. A common area for water charging purposes is an external garden, lawn or driveway area that is available for the use and enjoyment of all tenants.
- PLH recovers costs for water usage in a fair, transparent and consistent manner that complies with Section 139 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (RTA) and the relevant NSW Community Housing Water Charging Ministerial Guidelines.
- PLH will provide tenants with information at the commencement of, and during, their tenancy on water saving tips and will encourage tenants to report leaks or faults promptly to minimise water wastage.

Water Usage Charging Methods

Water charges are added as a separate item on tenants' non-rent accounts, generally quarterly, as Water Authority invoices are received, or six monthly from PLH contractor meter readings.

Properties with Separate Water Meters

For tenants who live in properties that are water efficient (as defined by the RTA) with separate water meters, PLH will charge the amount on the invoice received from the Water Authority (or PLH's contractor reading) and will provide a copy of that invoice to the tenant.

The water meter reading is recorded on the Property Condition Report at the start and at the end of the tenancy so that only actual usage is charged in the first and last invoices.

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 first make an allowance of 10% for common area usage and then charge a proportion to each tenant calculated according to the number of people living in each household. To ensure continuing fairness of this approach, each household's share will be reviewed annually or on request by a tenant where the number of household members changes. PLH's method of apportionment ensures that the total charges to all the tenants combined do not exceed the total water bill received from the Water Authority. Tenants are provided with a Factsheet on Shared Water Meter Calculation on commencement of their tenancy. The apportionment method used by PLH represents best practice as set out in the Ministerial Guidelines.

Payment of Water Usage Charges

Tenants can either pay their water usage:

- in a lump sum (payable within 21 days of date of invoice) 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, 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.

Problems with Water Authority Bills

PLH adopts a proactive approach in reviewing Water Authority invoices and will contact tenants where there are large variations from historic levels of usage to discuss and identify situations such as leaks, faulty meters or misuse or overuse of water. PLH will adjust water charges on tenants' accounts, based on evidence, in cases of under/over-charging from the Water Authority arising from problems with faulty water meters or other billing problems (e.g. under-reads, bill estimates and high bills due to leaks and faults).

Water Leaks

Tenants are required to report water leaks to PLH immediately and to advise of any delay in a water leak being fixed by Water Authority/Council. Tenants may be responsible for water usage charges if a leak is not reported as soon as reasonably possible.

Exemptions

PLH may consider granting exemptions or allowances 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 written evidence of a tenant or household member being on home based dialysis or a medical condition or disability, must be provided. Allowances will be credited to the tenant's account at the end of each quarterly billing cycle.

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.

Complaints and Appeals

If a tenant has a concern over an aspect of their water usage charge, they should first contact PLH. For example, tenants may want to:

- discuss how the charge is calculated
- report a leak or advise of a delay in the water leak being fixed
- query or dispute a water meter reading
- apply for an exemption (if relevant) or an allowance.

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. The Ministerial Guidelines state that a tenant cannot appeal being charged for water or the amount they are charged. Tenants may only appeal if they believe that PLH's Water Charges Policy has not been applied properly or if they do not agree with PLH's decision about an exemption.

For information on how to make a complaint refer to PLH's Complaints and Appeals Policy.

Policy Owner	Executive Manager, Tenancy & Support Services
Approval Authority	Board
Approval Date	July 2022
Next Review	July 2025
Website published	Yes