

## 103 Water Charges Policy

### 1. Policy

Link Housing requires tenants living in properties owned or managed by Link Housing to pay water usage charges in accordance with an invoice received from the Water Authority.

Each property incurs charges for water in two categories, fixed and usage charges. Fixed charges include water supply, sewerage and storm water charges. Link Housing pays for these costs in total and they are not passed on to tenants. Usage charges relate to the amount of water used by the household.

The intent of this policy is to explain how water usage charges are calculated.

### 2. Definitions

- **Separate Water Meter-** This is where a water meter is readily accessible for reading by the Water Authority and generates an individual water account.
- **Shared Water Meters –** This is where a single water meter is used for multiple properties or where individual water meters are located inside the dwelling but are inaccessible to read. The water usage charge will be managed as though it was a shared water meter dwelling as per 4 b) of this policy.

### 3. Scope

This policy applies to tenants living in properties where:

- There is a separate water meter on the property and Link Housing is invoiced for water usage,
- There is a shared water meter on the property and Link Housing pays a water usage account, and/or,
- The water meter is located inside the dwelling but is inaccessible for reading.

### 4. Calculation of water charges

#### a) Social Housing Management Transfer Tenants

Public housing tenants who transferred to Link Housing on 3rd December 2018 will pay either a 'percentage water charge' or an 'actual water charge'. This is determined by whether the property has a shared or a separate water meter. For tenants on shared water meters, the weekly water charge is based on a percentage of weekly rent, less Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). It is capped at \$8.95 per week. If the household lives in a separately metered property tenants pay for the water they use.

All tenants who have transferred are required to pay their water usage in advance just like rent payments. Water charges are reviewed and recalculated regularly. Where there are changes to a water charge, Link Housing will advise tenants with the details.

## **b) All Other Link Housing Tenant**

### **i. Properties with separate water meters**

Link Housing will charge tenants for their water usage in accordance with an invoice received from the Water Authority. Water charges invoices will be sent to the tenant and added retrospectively to the tenant's account following each water-billing cycle.

### **ii. Properties with shared water meters**

Link Housing will pay for the estimated water usage for all common areas. Link Housing will deduct 5 percent off the total water usage bill for the property before charging the remainder of the costs to the tenants sharing the property.

Water usage charges will be levied on the number of people per household. For example, if you live in a block of units and there are a total of 20 people living at that block, the bill, after the 5 percent deduction for common area usage, will be divided by 20, and then be multiplied by the number of people in the household.

The water usage charge for new tenants will be adjusted to reflect the tenant's predicted water use from the commencement of tenancy. Shared water meter rates will be charged for the days in residence.

Where significant change in water usage has occurred at each site that is unexplained Link Housing may investigate to ensure there are no leakages at the site.

## **5. End of tenancy**

Tenants who leave their home are required to pay any water charges outstanding at the end of the tenancy, adjusted as at the termination date.

## **6. Allowances**

Households that due to special circumstances require considerably higher amounts of water than similar sized households may be entitled to a special water usage allowance, for example;

- where the tenant or an approved household member is on dialysis, or
- has a health condition or disability which means that they need to use significantly more water than normal, and/or
- households with more than six approved household members.

To be eligible for special water usage allowance, the tenant will need to provide written evidence that the tenant or approved household member:

- Has a health condition or disability that necessitates the use of significantly higher amounts of water than Link Housing considers normal for a similar sized household and the reason/s why this necessitates a higher water usage

The special allowance will be 100 kiloliters every three months and will be deducted prior to bills being sent for payment.

## 7. Adjustments

Link Housing may adjust water charges on tenant's accounts in exceptional circumstances such as burst water pipes or undetectable leaks, where the tenants are not at fault or had no way of detecting that a leak existed.

Link Housing may also make adjustments to households where one household in a complex, because of special circumstance, needs to use more water.

## 8. Payment of water usage charges

A tenant may pay for their water usage charges in full on receipt of a debit note from Link Housing. Where a tenant chooses to do this, it must be paid within 21 days from receipt of the water bill.

A tenant may also elect to pay an amount towards water charges each week/fortnight. Tenants experiencing payment difficulties may approach their housing manager to discuss payment options.

Tenants may also choose to make regular payments through Centrepay. A minimum of \$10 per fortnight is to be deducted using this payment method. Tenants may contact Link Housing for a Centrepay Deduction Form to utilise this method.

If a water usage charge remains unpaid for more than 21 days, or no suitable payment arrangement has been recorded, Link Housing may take action through the NCAT to recover the unpaid water usage charges.

## 9. Temporary absence from property

There is no exemption from water usage charges or allowances for tenants who are temporarily away from their homes.

## 10. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* (Section 139)
- Community Housing Water Charging Guidelines - NSW
- Centrepay Procedural Guide for Business v5 – 1 August 2019

## 11. Privacy and confidentiality

Link Housing will keep applicants', tenants' and residents' information and feedback confidential, in line with privacy laws and standards.

## 12. Complaints and appeals

A tenant who is not happy with a decision made by Link Housing or who believes that Link Housing has not followed this policy can complain or appeal using the complaints and appeals policies. These can be obtained from [www.linkhousing.org.au](http://www.linkhousing.org.au) or by phoning Link Housing on 9412 5111.

Tenants may also request Link Housing to contact the [Energy and Water Ombudsman](#), where there is a dispute regarding the metered service.