

Policy

Water Account Assistance

Approved by Council: [DATE]

To provide a framework with uniform and transparent rules for eligibility, assessment and determination of requests for water account assistance having regard to the principles of fairness, integrity and confidentiality.

Safety

Teamwork

Accountability

Respect

Background

Rous County Council (Council) recognises that there are circumstances where our retail water customers may have difficulty paying their water account. The objective of this Policy is to ensure uniform and transparent rules for providing assistance to customers for the payment of their water account.

This policy does not apply to recipients of bulk water or commercial use water from Council.¹

Policy statement

The *Local Government Act 1993* allows Council to provide account assistance to its customers. Council has determined that it will voluntarily offer the following account assistance to its eligible retail water customers:²

- Payment arrangements, including payment extensions (section 564);
- Writing off or reducing interest (section 564 and 567);
- Extension of pensioner concession to avoid hardship (section 577);
- Granting of financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak or for the use of water dependent medical equipment (section 356);
- Granting of financial assistance due to a natural disaster event (section 356);
- Abandonment of pensioner rates and charges due to a concealed or undetected water leak (section 582);
- Granting of financial assistance for low-income households or registered not-for-profit organisations who are charged a backflow device management charge to avoid hardship (section 356); and
- Temporary granting of financial assistance for customers affected by the transfer of the Marom Creek Water Treatment Plant (section 356).

1. Payment arrangements, including payment extensions

- 1.1. It is Council's practice to provide customers with payment arrangements and/or extensions of due dates in the first instance. Any proposed departure from that position to utilise other forms of applicable assistance outlined in this Policy will be considered on its merits on a case-by-case basis.

2. Writing off or reducing interest

- 2.1. There are two circumstances in which Council will write off or reduce interest:

¹ For example, constituent councils and commercial water carters.

² References to sections are a reference to that section within the *Local Government Act 1993* unless otherwise stated.

- 2.1.1. Where the customer is compliant with a payment arrangement; and
- 2.1.2. Where the payment of accrued interest would cause the customer hardship.

3. Extension of pensioner concession to avoid hardship

- 3.1. Where Council considers it appropriate in the circumstances to avoid hardship, Council may extend the prescribed annual pensioner concession rebate to an individual living with a pensioner who would otherwise be ineligible.

4. Granting of financial assistance – concealed or undetected water leak

- 4.1. Council has determined that a customer may be eligible for financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak if:

- 4.1.1. The customer is solely or jointly liable for the water charges; and
- 4.1.2. The recorded consumption for the quarter in which the leak occurred is in excess of 500kL; and
- 4.1.3. The leak was above 200% of the daily average usage for the previous four (4) quarters; and
- 4.1.4. The leak was repaired in accordance with the relevant Standards; and
- 4.1.5. A licensed plumber has completed Council's 'Water Use Audit Report' and returned to Council.

- 4.2. The financial assistance that may be provided is calculated as follows:

$[(\text{Recorded consumption for the period}) \text{ less } 500\text{kL base consumption amount}] \times 75\%$

- 4.3. This assistance is only available to customers once per property, per ownership.

- 4.4. Council will not accept an application more than 60 days after the original due date of the water account that relates to the period of the concealed or undetected leak.

- 4.5. Property owner contact details will be forwarded to Council's Demand Management section who may contact the property owner about water saving initiatives.

- 4.6. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget.

<p>4.7 The granting of financial assistance for concealed or undetected water leaks as per Clause 4 above will remain available until close of business 19 December 2025. Applications for financial assistance received after this time and date will not be considered, regardless of the date or period during which the leak occurred or was detected.</p>

5. Granting of financial assistance – water dependent medical equipment

- 5.1. Council may provide a rebate of up to 200kL per rating year to customers who require the use of home-based haemodialysis or other water dependent health care equipment.
- 5.2. This assistance is available to customers for the duration of the use of home-based haemodialysis or other water dependent health care equipment, provided that this is confirmed by a registered medical practitioner every rating year.

6. Granting of financial assistance – Natural disaster event

- 6.1. Council may, in its discretion, agree to financial relief in the form of adjusting water charges where a Natural Disaster (as declared by the Federal Government) could reasonably be considered to have contributed to an excess water use reading/charge.
- 6.2. Financial relief will be assessed based on a historical water consumption comparison. Water charges will be adjusted to reflect the customers usual water usage for that

period.

- 6.3. Council staff will identify properties impacted by a natural disaster event and will apply 5.2 to determine eligibility.

7. Abandonment of pensioner rates and charges – concealed or undetected water leak

- 7.1. Council has determined that a customer may be eligible for financial assistance due to a concealed or undetected water leak if:

- 7.1.1. The property is the customer's sole or principal place of living; and
7.1.2. The customer is solely or jointly liable for the water charges; and
7.1.3. The recorded consumption for the quarter in which the leak occurred is in excess of the base consumption (kL) threshold for pensioners, calculated as follows:

Age pension amount (\$): single, including maximum pension supplement and energy supplement (per week)	x	=	base consumption (kL) threshold for pensioners
National minimum wage amount (\$) (per week)	500kL		

and

- 7.1.4. The leak was above 200% of the daily average usage for the previous four (4) quarters; and
7.1.5. The leak was repaired in accordance with the relevant Standards; and
7.1.6. A licensed plumber has completed Council's 'Water Use Audit Report' and returned to Council.

- 7.2. The financial assistance that may be provided is calculated as follows:

$[(\text{Recorded consumption for the period}) \text{ less the base consumption threshold for pensioners amount}] \times 75\%$
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- 7.3. This assistance is only available to customers once per property, per ownership.
7.4. Council will not accept an application more than 60 days after the original due date of the water account that relates to the period of the concealed or undetected leak.
7.5. Property owner contact details will be forwarded to Council's Demand Management section who may contact the property owner about water saving initiatives.
7.6. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget.

The granting of financial assistance for concealed or undetected water leaks as per Clause 7 above will remain available until close of business 19 December 2025. Applications for financial assistance received after this time and date will not be considered, regardless of the date or period during which the leak occurred or was detected.

8. Granting of financial assistance – Low-income households and not-for-profit organisations

- 8.1. Council has determined that a customer may be eligible for financial assistance to avoid hardship, if –
8.1.1. The customer is solely or jointly liable for the Backflow Device Management Charge and holds a current Commonwealth Government issued –
8.1.1.1. Low Income Health Care Card; or
8.1.1.2. Seniors Health Care Card.

8.1.2. The customer is a not-for-profit organisation –

- 8.1.2.1. Solely liable for the Backflow Device Management Charge;
- 8.1.2.2. Registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC);
- 8.1.2.3. With an annual gross income of $\leq \$50,000$ ³ as evidenced in its financial reports registered with the ACNC.⁴

8.2. Customers eligible for the financial assistance will have their Backflow Device Management Charge reduced to 75% of the standard annual charge.

8.3. This assistance is only available to eligible customers upon application once per year, per property and cannot be applied in conjunction with the assistance under clause 9.

8.4. Council will only accept an application that is lodged during the current financial year. No retrospective applications will be accepted.

8.5. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget.

9. Temporary granting of financial assistance – Customers affected by the transfer of the Marom Creek Water Treatment Plant (MCWTP)

9.1. Council has determined that a customer is eligible for financial assistance to avoid hardship if they were solely or jointly liable for the water account connected to a property identified in Table 1 of Appendix 1 (Eligible Property) as at the date of the transfer in ownership of MCWTP from Ballina Shire Council to Rous County Council (Transfer Date).

9.2. An Eligible Property will become ineligible if its ownership (registered proprietor/s) changes after the Transfer Date.

9.3. The financial assistance will be automatically applied to the water usage charges and Backflow Device Management Charge of the Eligible Property for a period of four (4) years from the Transfer Date.⁵

9.4. The financial assistance will be calculated and applied as follows –

	2024-25	2025-26	Financial Year		
	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Water Consumption Charge					
Forecast Consumption Charge (\$/KL)	3.28	3.54	3.82	4.13	4.46
Proposed Transition charge to transitioned customers (\$/KL)	2.82	3.16	3.54	3.97	4.46
Reduction Rate for eligible customers (\$/KL)	-0.46	-0.38	-0.28	-0.16	0
Backflow Device Management Charge \$196 per annum (23/24)					
Transition charge to new customers (Indexed in line with charge changes)	0	49	98	147	196
Reduction amount for eligible customers (\$/KL)	-196	-147	-98	-49	0

³ Meets the ACNC classification of extra small.

⁴ If the customer's ACNC reporting is not up-to-date and accessible via the ACNC website, the application for financial assistance may be refused.

⁵ Fixed charges (other than the Backflow Device Management Charge) are not eligible for this financial assistance.

10. Granting of financial assistance – Community halls and organisations

- 10.1. A legacy financial assistance arrangement is in place to assist the community organisations listed in Table 1 of Appendix 2 (Eligible Organisations) avoid hardship.
- 10.2. Eligible Organisations will have their retail water facility charge and their Backflow Device Management Charge reduced to 50% of the standard annual charges, respectively.
- 10.3. This assistance is not available to –
- 10.3.1. New customers, or
 - 10.3.2. Eligible Organisations should –
 - 10.3.2.1. A change in control or ownership of the organisation or the property occur,
 - 10.3.2.2. It cease operations, or
 - 10.3.2.3. Should the primary purpose of the organisation change so as to no longer provide a community benefit (determined in the absolute discretion of Council).
- 10.4. Council will not apply this policy where there is no available budget. The assistance does not operate in conjunction with the assistance within this policy under clauses 8 or 9..

Contact officer

Finance Manager.

Related documents

Policies

[Pensioner Concession](#) Guidelines

[Privacy Management](#)

Debt Management and Financial Hardship - [TO BE UPDATED]

Legislation

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009.

Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002.

Local Government Act 1993.

Local Government (General) Regulation 2021.

Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.

Social Security Act 1991.

Veterans' Entitlement Act 1986.

Other

Retail Water Customers' Account Assistance application form - [TO BE UPDATED]

Retail Water Customers' Account Assistance Guidelines - [TO BE UPDATED]

Water Use Audit Report - [TO BE UPDATED]

Office use only	File no.: 172/13	Next review date: 1 year	
Version	Purpose and description	Date adopted by Council	Resolution no.
1.0		18/03/2015	
2.0		06/05/2015	
3.0		19/09/2018	88/18
4.0	Amended to include provision for excess water charges connected to a natural disaster	17/08/2022	50/22
5.0	FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION - Revised policy deemed adopted following 28 days public exhibit during which no submissions were received.	19/06/2024	30/24

6.0	Amended to incorporate financial assistance for low-income households and not-for-profits and customers affected by the transfer of Marom Creek Water Treatment Plant. Sunset clause added for concealed or undetected water leak assistance.	01/04/2025	
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APPENDIX 1

Table 1 – List of Eligible Properties

Meter number	Address	Lot and DP
20W080284	172 Whites Lane	Lot: 22 DP: 786478
20W069956	114 Whites Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 570717
19X000867	108 Whites Lane	Lot: 4 DP: 788808
10W110091	92 Weis Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 918318
21W095589	64 Weis Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 703863
20W069862	85 Weis Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 604877
01W361358	67 Weis Lane	Lot: 2 DP: 618554
19X005019	59 Weis Lane	Lot: 3 DP: 604877
ABG1905490	50 Weis Lane	Lot: 2 DP: 1180774
16X002363	608 Ellis Road	Lot: 3 DP: 709376
09W020100	112 Whites Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 593926
18X000748	64 Weis Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 703863
20W075116	218 Lindendale Road	Lot: 2 DP: 249666
05W882612	226 Lindendale Road	Lot: 3 DP: 249666
07W102621	232 Lindendale Road	Lot: 4 DP: 249666
07W102645	235 Lindendale Road	Lot: 5 DP: 249666
04W722926	174 Lindendale Road	Lot: 3 DP: 548987
16W034397	176 Lindendale Road	Lot: 21 DP: 1017622
20X003962	162 Lindendale Road	Lot: 41 DP: 714042
14X002619	151 Lindendale Road	Lot: 1 DP: 709643
20W075112	163 Lindendale Road	Lot: 2 DP: 709643
20W075240	124 Lindendale Road	Lot: 1 DP: 552711
13W082507	143 Lindendale Road	Lot: 4 DP: 552711
20W075114	138 Lindendale Road	Lot: 3 DP: 552711
20W075002	99 Lindendale Road	Lot: 21 DP: 793805
20W075087	107 Lindendale Road	Lot: 22 DP: 793805
20W075115	125 Lindendale Road	Lot: 23 DP: 793805
20W074980	112 Lindendale Road	Lot: 3 DP: 252220
19W002256	98 Lindendale Road	Lot: 4 DP: 252220
16W034398	17 Lindendale Road	Lot: 1 DP: 202693
04W722925	13 Lindendale Road	Lot: 21 DP: 633733
99A024091	1243 Bruxner Highway	Lot: 237 DP: 755745
99A023767	1243 Bruxner Highway	Lot: 237 DP: 755745
07W065202	223 Lindendale Road	Lot: 1 DP: 249666
20X005295	185 Lindendale Road	Lot: 1 DP: 593963
20W075113	150 Lindendale Road	Lot: 42 DP: 714042
06W978895	1185 Bruxner Highway	Lot: 22 DP: 633733
20W069955	46 Lindendale Road	Lot: 237 DP: 755745
09W004251	25 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 76 DP: 755745
08W028173	32 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 3 DP: 878025
20W075085	60 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 2 DP: 557685
03W567874	91 Weis Lane	Lot: 1 1 DP: 1174149

16W091997	76 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 5 DP: 565409
20W075137	74 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 3 DP: 565409
04W722870	94 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 566987
13X005851	66 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 4 DP: 565409
19D001082	134 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 4 DP: 566987
20W075104	111 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 77 DP: 755745
20W075083	62 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 1 DP: 549448
18W011462	25 Chesworth Lane	Lot: 2 DP:878025
05W882555	104 Norman Jones Lane	Lot: 2 DP: 771060
10W066492	Bruxner Highway	Lot: 24 DP:1059476

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APPENDIX 2

Table 1 – List of Eligible Organisations

Water Meter Id	Property Number	Property Address	Name	Facility Charge Water Tariff
RW1300492-1	11831-10000-0	216 Balraith Lane, Ewingsdale	Cape Byron Rudolf Steiner School	Halls/Reserves 40mm
SM2300177-2	10355-10000-8	500 Eureka Road, Eureka	Eureka Public Hall	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM2300173-5	1.0369-10000-2	450 Eureka Road, Eureka	Eureka Recreation Ground – Crown Land	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM2300167-7	10187-10000-2	24A Bridge Street, Wyrallah	Wyrallah Hall Association	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM2300161-9	11417-10000-2	35 Atfield Street, South Gundurimba	Gundurimba Flood Refuge Reserve	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM2300150-8	12092-10000-2	556 Corndale Road, Corndale	Corndale Hall	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM23001495	11782-10000-9	13 and 15 Old Pacific Highway, Newrybar	Ballina Shire Council	
SM2300075-1	10812-10000-5	47 Coleman Street, Bexhill	Bexhill Public Hall	Halls/Reserves 20mm
SM2300038-5	12001-10000-2	Lot 1 George Street, Tintenbar	Tintenbar School Of Arts	Halls/Reserves 20mm