

Approval of Water Corporation Customer Service Charter

24 June 2009

Economic Regulation Authority



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

DECISION

The Economic Regulation Authority (**Authority**) approved both the complete version and summary version of the Water Corporation Customer Service Charter (**charter**) for water supply, sewerage and drainage services on 24 June 2009.

REASONS

The Authority has reviewed the charter against the requirements of the Water Corporation's Operating Licence 32 (**licence**) and notes the following:

Existence

Schedule 3, clause 2.1 of the licence states that the licensee must have in place a charter that accords with the Authority's Customer Service Charter Guidelines (**review guidelines**).

Schedule 3, clause 2.7 of the licence requires that the Water Corporation undertake a review of the charter at least once in every three year period. Furthermore, clause 6.1 of the review guidelines requires the licensee to undertake a review process, at regular intervals and within the required timeframe.

The previous charter was approved by the Authority on 11 April 2007.

The reviewed charter was due for review by 11 April 2010. For operational reasons, the Water Corporation elected to submit the reviewed charter on 20 May 2009. The Authority understands that future charter reviews will be undertaken every three years.

The Secretariat of the Authority provided feedback to the Water Corporation regarding the charter which resulted in the Corporation submitting the final summary version on 11 June 2009 and the final complete version on 18 June 2009.

The Authority finds that the Water Corporation has submitted its charter within the required timeframe.

Accuracy

Under clause 6.2 of the review guidelines, the charter must comply with all relevant legislative, code or regulatory requirements and be in line with the standard form contract and/or the licence requirements.

The Authority finds that the principles, terms and conditions, as set out in the charter, are generally consistent with relevant legislation and licence requirements.

Consultation

Clause 6.3 of the review guidelines requires that the licensee engage with customers and/or their representatives in the review process.

The Water Corporation has advised that the charter was provided for comment to the Water Corporation Customer Advisory Council, relevant managers and staff within the Corporation, and the Corporation's On Line Focus Group.

The Water Corporation Customer Advisory Council comprises of up to 12 community representatives from metropolitan and country regions. The On Line Focus Group has a membership of up to 300 customers. Customers who e-mail the Customer Centre with an enquiry are sent a reply e-mail inviting them to join the Focus Group. Membership of the Focus Group is voluntary and members can leave the Focus Group at any time. Members are contacted no more than once a month for their feedback on Corporation issues.

The Authority finds that, on the basis of the information provided, the Water Corporation undertook a sound level of public consultation with regard to the review.

Accessibility

Schedule 3, clause 2.2 of the licence states that the licensee must set out in writing the terms, principles and conditions upon which it intends to provide water services to its customers. Further, Schedule 3, clause 2.3 of the licence requires that the charter be developed in 'plain English' and that it should address all of the service issues likely to be of concern to its customers.

Terms, Principles and Conditions

The Authority finds that the charter generally sets out the terms, principles and conditions upon which the Water Corporation intends to provide water services to its customers.

'Plain English'

The Authority finds that the charter is written in a 'plain English' manner.

Issues likely to be of concern

Although the charter refers to the availability of the Water Corporation's Financial Hardship Policy, the Authority notes that the charter does not explain to customers why and how the policy may be of benefit to them. As a result, some customers that would benefit from the policy may not seek further information regarding the policy.

The Water Corporation has advised that separation of the Financial Hardship Policy into individual elements creates the possibility of an element being viewed in isolation, which may lead to confusion, and result in the scope and intent of the policy being incorrectly conveyed.

The Water Corporation noted that the Corporation encourages customers to call to discuss their financial situation. During these discussions the Corporation would confirm that the customer is aware of the policy and offer to send them a copy, should they not have access to the internet.

The Authority finds that the charter is generally consistent with the licence provision in covering all of the service issues likely to be of concern to the Water Corporation's customers.

LYNDON ROWE
CHAIRMAN

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