

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

Water Usage charges policy

Policy section: 1.0

Policy: 1.2.5

Section name: Establishing and maintaining tenancies

Document name	Water usage charges
Applicability	Mission Australia Housing
Authorisation	Senior Management Team
Policy date	January 2016
Document version	Version 3
Policy owner	National Operations Manager
Review date	January 2019

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To outline the situations in which Mission Australia Housing (MAH) will require tenants to pay for their water usage.
- 1.2 To outline the situations in which tenants will be exempt from paying water usage charges.
- 1.3 To outline processes used by MAH to calculate water usage charges and to assist tenants to pay for their water usage and other tenancy related costs.

2 Related policies

- 2.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the:
 - 2.1.1 [Start of Tenancy Policy](#), which outlines requirements for new tenancies with MAH.
 - 2.1.2 [Debt Management Policy](#), which provides guidance on MAH's tenant debt management processes.

3 Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to staff responsible for managing tenants and properties of MAH.

4 Guiding principles

- 4.1 MAH adheres to state based residential tenancy and rooming accommodation legislation in its water charging processes.
- 4.2 MAH installs water saving devices in its properties where possible as part of its asset maintenance procedures.
- 4.3 Tenants are informed of charges relating to their tenancy, including water usage charges where relevant, at the start of their tenancy.
- 4.4 MAH works with tenants to support them to pay charges relating to their tenancy.
- 4.5 Tenants are given opportunities to appeal organisational decisions in order to ensure fair and transparent outcomes.
- 4.6 MAH upholds accountability and transparency through its record keeping practices.

5 Policy

5.1 Water meter categories

- 5.1.1 Water meters in MAH properties generally fall into the following three categories:
 - Properties with **individual water meters** (e.g. houses or villas)
 - Properties with **shared water meters**, where individual unit usage is not shown on the water bill (e.g. some apartment buildings)
 - Properties with individual water meters as well as a shared meter which measures the total water usage for the complex. The bill from the water authority for these properties will usually be based on a reading of the shared meter, even though individual unit usage is determinable.

5.2 Tenants who will be charged for water usage

- 5.2.1 Tenants of social and affordable properties with individual meters in New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland will generally be charged for water usage as per bills received from water authorities.

Note: MAH's water charging policy for social housing in Tasmania is generally consistent with Housing Tasmania's water charging policy.

- 5.2.2 Tenants of social and affordable properties in New South Wales with shared meters will be charged a proportion of the total property water bill according to the number of bedrooms and number of household members in their unit as per the methodology in [6.2](#) of this policy.
- 5.2.3 Tenants of social and affordable properties in New South Wales with individual unit meters, but where the water authority provides a bill based on the shared meter reading, will be charged as per the shared meter methodology as per [6.3](#) of this policy.

- 5.2.4 Tenants who are absent from their property temporarily and who are usually charged for water usage will be required to pay water usage charges in their absence. Tenants who are absent from their property for extended periods will generally be required to pay for their water usage unless there are exceptional circumstances as per the [Absence from Dwelling Policy](#).

5.3 Tenants who will not be charged for water usage

- 5.3.1 Tenants of properties with shared meters in Queensland and Tasmania will not be charged for water usage where individual usage cannot be determined.
- 5.3.2 Tenants in **crisis accommodation** will not be charged for water usage.
- 5.3.4 Where a property does not contain a water meter, or where MAH is not billed for water usage, tenants will not be charged for water usage.

5.4 Water usage allowances

- 5.4.1 Senior Managers may, subject to evidence, discount or remove water usage charges in exceptional circumstances. Examples of such circumstances include:
- Where tenants or household members require more water than usual due to a medical condition or disability (for example tenants or household members on dialysis).
 - For larger families requiring more water than usual.

5.5 Water payments

- 5.5.1 All tenants who are required to pay for water usage will be encouraged to make regular payments towards their water usage alongside their rental payments.
- 5.5.2 MAH will issue water usage invoices to applicable tenants within 14 days of receiving a water bill.
- 5.5.3 Payment will be due within 30 days of receiving the invoice.
- 5.5.4 Staff will work with tenants who experience difficulty paying for their water usage and where required will seek to enter them into a payment plan and connect them with support services as per the [Debt Management Policy](#).
- 5.5.5 MAH may, where tenants refuse to pay for their water usage, seek to recover costs through state based civil proceedings as per the [Orders and Warrants Policy](#) or claim part or all of a bond as per the [Bond Payment Policy](#).

5.6 Appealing water charges

- 5.6.1 Staff will inform tenants of their right to appeal organisational decisions as per the [Appeals Policy](#).

5.7 Record keeping

- 5.7.1 Staff will store all information relating to a tenancy's water usage in the tenancy management system.

6 Water usage charging

6.1 Water usage charging for properties with individual meters

- 6.1.1 On receipt of water bills from water authorities for properties which are individually metered, Accounts Payable staff will process the bills and housing staff will send to applicable tenants:

- an MAH Tax Invoice;
- a copy of the original bill; and
- a covering letter specifying bill charges, payment options and a payment due date within 30 days of the date specified on the covering letter.

- 6.1.2 A reminder letter will be sent to tenants who do not pay for their water within the 30 allocated days. This letter will specify further actions which may be taken should the invoice not be paid.

6.2 Water usage charging for properties with shared meters in NSW

- 6.2.1 For properties in New South Wales with **shared meters**, tenants will be charged a proportion of the total water usage bill according to the number of bedrooms and number of household members in their unit.

- 6.2.2 On receipt of water bills from water authorities, Accounts Payable staff will process the bills.

- 6.2.3 To ensure that tenants will not be charged for water usage in common areas, 10% will be deducted from the water usage bill and paid by MAH.

- 6.2.4 Housing staff will then send tenants:

- an MAH Tax Invoice showing amount owing;
- a covering letter specifying water usage charges, payment options, and a payment due date within 30 days of the date specified on the covering letter.

6.3 Water usage charging for properties with both shared and individual meters in NSW

- 6.3.1 Properties in New South Wales with individual meters and a shared meter, but where the water authority only takes a reading of the shared meter, will be charged as per the shared meter methodology in [6.2](#).

7 Definitions

Crisis accommodation is short term accommodation (usually 3 months or less) for people experiencing homelessness or people at risk of homelessness.

Individual meter: a water meter which only measures the amount of water that is used by one unit or residential property.

Shared meter: a water meter which measures the entire amount of water that has been used by two or more units. Some states, such as Tasmania and Queensland, do not permit water usage to be charged to tenants in properties with a shared meter where their individual water usage cannot be clearly determined.

Water usage charge: any water cost which a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay. A water usage charge is generally reasonable where: a lease or rooming accommodation agreement stipulates that water must be paid by a tenant; where usage can be determined; and where a property is water efficient.