

# Fact sheet: Service charges on your vacant land

Western Water welcomes you to our service region. This information will assist your understanding of the water and wastewater service prices that are applicable to your new property. All property owners are required to pay a fixed charge for the provision of these services, however a usage charge is applicable only to water consumption.

## Fixed charges

Western Water charges a service fee to all customers owning land that can be serviced by our infrastructure. Even if you do not connect to our water and/or sewerage system immediately, you are still responsible for contributing towards the upkeep of assets that have the capacity to service your property in the future.

### Why do I pay for a service that I don't receive?

Your vacant block of land has access to water and possibly wastewater services. By having access to these services, your land is worth more in resale value.

When you choose to connect, you will not be required to pay to have the reticulation system (the pipes and pumps that service your property) extended to include your property (although you will have to pay private connection costs). Consequently, even though you do not currently use the system, you do benefit from it being there and are therefore required to contribute to the maintenance of the system.

### We don't pay a fixed charge for electricity or gas until we connect. Why do we pay for water?

The infrastructure costs associated with the provision of water and wastewater services are higher than those associated with electricity or gas. Water and wastewater services each need a separate piping system and as most systems rely on gravity to move the water and wastewater, they need to be designed with a high degree of precision.

If all customers don't share the fixed costs associated with the service, then those actually using the service will unfairly subsidise owners who receive the benefit of higher land values associated with access to this service.

### Why should we pay vacant land charges at Western Water when people living in Melbourne don't?

Some of the larger water companies do not charge fees on vacant land. They can afford to do this, given their large customer base, which absorbs the costs associated with unconnected land.

Western Water however, would need to increase the cost of water to our connected customers to carry maintenance of the system for the unconnected blocks of land. We believe that this subsidy would be inequitable.

### Can Western Water legally levy this charge?

Western Water has the power to levy a service charge on all serviced properties as defined by Sections 144 and 259 of the *Water Act 1989*.

### Do any other water companies levy service charges on vacant land?

Yes, in fact most rural urban water businesses apply service charges to vacant land.

## Usage charges

Western Water charges an amount per kilolitre for all water consumed on your property. A meter on your property measures the amount of water consumed, which is read every four months. Your water account shows you how much water you have used in the current four-month cycle and also for the most recent cycles.

### Why are water meters only read every four months?

Western Water reads meters on a four-monthly cycle. You receive three water accounts each year, usually within two weeks of your meter being read.

It takes Western Water thirteen weeks to read the meters for all properties in our service area. If we were to move to a quarterly billing system (ie four water accounts each year as per most electricity and gas companies), our cost of meter reading would increase, which would subsequently be passed onto our customers.

### How do I know the meter is accurately measuring my water consumption?

From time to time, Western Water will test the meter at your property. We will replace the meter periodically at our expense to ensure it continues to be accurate.

*continued over page*

If you would like the meter at your property tested, we will do so within ten working days of your request. For more information on meter testing, please refer to Western Water's Customer Charter.

### **Why doesn't Western Water levy a usage charge for wastewater?**

A number of water businesses do include a sewer usage charge on water accounts. It is extremely difficult and expensive to connect meters to sewer discharge from a property, so the charge is often an estimate of the discharge to sewer based on actual water consumption.

This estimation system is difficult to administer as not all properties have the same proportion of water intake that goes to sewer, for example, a small flat compared to a house with a large garden.

### **Current charges**

Western Water's current water and wastewater service prices are available by calling our customer relations team on 1300 650 425 or from our website [www.westernwater.com.au](http://www.westernwater.com.au)

### **For further information**

**Contact Western Water on 1300 650 425  
or visit our website at [www.westernwater.com.au](http://www.westernwater.com.au)**