

# Water Account Adjustment (Concealed Leak) Policy

## 1 Purpose

This policy establishes and clarifies all terms, conditions and processes associated with customer requests for reductions to water accounts due to concealed water service leaks.

## 2 Policy

Once water has passed through a water meter connected to a property, it becomes the legal responsibility of the property owner. The City of Coffs Harbour (City) has no obligation to adjust water accounts affected by leaks in private plumbing.

### 2.1 When The City will consider account adjustments

To assist customers with unexpectedly high water accounts caused by genuinely concealed leaks in private plumbing, The City will consider applications for water account adjustments under the following circumstances:

1. The property is not currently under water restriction for the non-payment of previous water accounts.
2. The concealed water service leak was not readily visible or apparent (i.e. below ground, under a concrete slab, in a wall cavity, no surface dampness, etc.).
3. The property was occupied at the time the leak occurred.
4. The concealed water service leak was repaired by a licensed plumber in a timely and effective manner to minimise water loss. Repairs must be completed within 14 days of a water account being issued or the customer becoming aware of a possible water leak via City notification. A customer is deemed to be notified by The City of a possible water leak on:
  - a) the day a City Officer leaves a "High Water Usage Advice" card or similar notification at the property, or
  - b) the day a City Officer contacts the property owner (or managing agent) via telephone or email.
5. The concealed water service leak must cause an increase of 50% or more to the property's average water usage (average water use will generally be determined using three (3) previous equivalent billing periods).

Full discretionary decision-making authority to approve a water account adjustment which does not meet the requirements of this policy remains with the Director of Business Services.

### 2.2 Limit of account adjustments

1. Residential properties will be eligible for one (1) water account adjustment per ownership over a five (5) year period.
2. Non-residential properties will be eligible for one (1) account adjustment per ownership over a ten (10) year period.

## 2.3 Applying for an account adjustment

To apply for a water account adjustment, customers must submit an Application for Water Account Adjustment (Concealed Leak) Form within 21 days of the repairs being completed stating:

1. The date the occupier (or property owner/managing agent) of the property became aware, or was notified, of a possible water leak at the property.
2. The date a licensed plumber was engaged to locate and repair the leak.
3. The applicant understands and accepts that no further requests for account adjustment will be considered for the property for a minimum period of either five (5) years (if the property is residential) or ten (10) years (if the property is non-residential).
4. The applicant grants permission for City Officers to conduct an inspection of the property to verify that the water service leak was of a concealed nature and that repairs meet required standards (if The City requests such an inspection).

The application must be supported by a copy of the licenced plumbers' invoice which clearly certifies:

1. The date the water service leak was repaired
2. The location of the concealed water leak and the reason why the leak was not readily detectable (providing photographic evidence to The City if requested)
3. The repair was completed to meet AS/NZS 3500 standards.
4. The entire water service at the property was inspected and meets AS 3500 standards. Specifically, this means that a pressure test was conducted on the water service with no further leaks found at the property, as per AS/NZS 3500.1 *"Water services shall not show any leakage when subjected to hydrostatic pressure of 1500 kPa for a period of not less than 30 minutes"*.
5. The likely cause of the water leak
6. The water meter reading immediately after the repair had been completed

If an application for water account adjustment is not approved, the customer will be advised in writing and granted a further 30 days from the date of this advice to either pay the account in full or enter into a suitable payment arrangement.

If an application for water account adjustment is approved, the customer will be advised in writing that payment of the adjusted account is required in full within 30 days of this advice.

## 2.4 How accounts will be adjusted

Approved water account adjustments will be calculated using the following provisions:

1. 50% of the difference between the water usage recorded on the water account issued immediately prior to the concealed water service leak being repaired and the average water usage for the property (average water usage will generally be determined using three (3) previous equivalent billing periods).
2. For non-residential properties where a concealed water leak has also increased sewer and trade waste usage charges, but where the water loss was not deemed to be entering The City's sewer system, the adjustment to sewer and trade waste usage charges will be 100% of the difference between the charges recorded on the water account issued immediately prior to the concealed water leak being repaired and the average of these charges (average sewer and trade waste usage will generally be determined using three (3) previous equivalent billing periods).
3. For non-residential properties where a concealed water leak has also increased sewer and trade waste usage charges and the water loss was deemed to be entering The City's sewer system, the adjustment to sewer and trade waste usage charges will be 50% of the difference between these charges recorded on the water account issued immediately prior to the concealed water leak being repaired and the average of these

charges (average sewer and trade waste usage will generally be determined using three (3) previous equivalent billing periods).

### 2.5 When an application for a water account adjustment will not be considered

An application for water account adjustment will not be considered:

1. If the Application for Water Account Adjustment (Concealed Leak), the plumbers invoice or any other required documentation is found to be incomplete or false.
2. For leaking fittings, fixtures or water using appliances including, but not limited to:
  - a) Taps
  - b) Toilets
  - c) Hot water systems (including solar)
  - d) Irrigation systems
  - e) Rainwater tanks or associated valves
  - f) Air conditioners
  - g) Dishwashers
  - h) Washing machines
  - i) Fridges
  - j) Water features
  - k) Swimming pools or spas
3. For a leak caused by wilful, accidental or negligent damage to a water service.

### 2.6 Exclusions from account adjustments

The City will not reimburse or make any contribution towards associated plumbing costs for either the location or repair of a concealed water service leak.

## 3 Definitions

**Water Account:** an account issued by The City for water related usage charges. Non-Residential properties are also charged for sewer and trade waste usage charges via the Water Account where these services are applicable.

**AS/NZS 3500:** Australian & New Zealand Standards 3500.1: Plumbing and Drainage. Published document setting out specifications and procedures designed to ensure products, services and systems are safe, reliable and consistently perform the way they were intended.

## 4 Key Responsibilities

Position	Directorate	Responsibility
Mayor	Council	To lead Councillors in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and guidelines.
General Manager	Executive	To lead staff (either directly or through delegated authority) in their understanding of, and compliance with, this policy and guidelines.
Directors	All Directorates	To communicate, implement and comply with this policy and related guidelines.
People Leaders	All Directorates	To plan, action, communicate, implement and comply with this policy and related guidelines as it impacts your areas of responsibility.
All City workers	The City	To comply with this policy and related guidelines.

## 5 References

- AS/NZS 3500: Australian & New Zealand Standards 3500.1: Plumbing and Drainage

## 6 Details of Approval and Revision

- Approval date:** 9/02/2023
- Responsible Group:** Water and Waste Services
- Responsible Section:** Water and Sewer
- Superseded policies/procedures:** N/A
- Next review date:** 28/08/2025

### Table of amendments

Amendment	Authoriser	Approval ref	Date
After review the following amendments we made: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 point 2 - added “no surface dampness” to examples of concealed leaks</li> <li>2.1 point 4(b) - added email</li> <li>2.5 point 1 - Added will not consider an adjustment if plumbers invoice is incomplete or false</li> <li>Updated References and added AS 3500</li> </ul>	Council	2023/5	09/02/23