

BP8048 - Credit Management Policy

Document Owner	Executive Manager Customer and Community
Document Author	Credit and Collections Manager
References	<p>Domestic Family Violence Protection Act 2012 (QLD) Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (QLD) South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017 ACCC Debt Collection Guidelines April 2021 Pr9378 - Delegations of Authority Pr10981 - Credit Management Procedure Unitywater website resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Charter • Payment plan options <p>Appendix A - Guidance on Debt and Restriction of Water Flow</p>

1. Policy Statement

Unitywater is committed to the fair and equitable management of the collection process for customers who do not pay their bills or are unable to pay. Unitywater effectively provides customers with credit, by providing a fair and reasonable period in which to pay amounts owing, through a choice of payment methods.

It is Unitywater's intent that all customers experiencing genuine vulnerability and financial hardship continue to have access to essential water services. Hence vulnerability, financial hardship and payment arrangement options are available to customers, demonstrating Unitywater's commitment in this area.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The primary purposes of this policy include:

- Clarifying credit collection policy for Unitywater's customers, team members and contractors;
- Continuing service provision whilst minimising risks associated with fulfilling payment requirements;
- Encouraging customer awareness and use of appropriate payment options and plans to reduce likelihood of non-payment; and
- Providing for those customers suffering genuine vulnerability and financial hardship, including customers experiencing domestic family violence.

3. Policy Scope/Coverage

This policy is applicable to all Unitywater customers. The Credit and Collections Team is responsible for collecting payment for services and applies a range of measures designed to encourage timely payment.

This policy supports Unitywater's requirements outlined in the [South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017](#) by recognising there may be special circumstances where a customer's ability to meet their payment obligations, may be impaired for a period of time.

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4. Roles and Responsibility

Executive Manager Customer and Community is accountable for implementing this policy.

Manager Revenue Assurance, Credit and Collections Manager, Credit Officer, and Credit Collection team are responsible for the approval and management of relevant processes outlined in the Credit Management Procedure (Pr10981).

Customers are encouraged to contact Unitywater as early as possible if they are aware of circumstances that may lead to their inability to pay a bill in full prior to the due date. Early communication is encouraged for customers who are impacted by any form of vulnerability or financial hardship.

All Unitywater team members and contractors are responsible for developing an understanding of how their work functions are affected by this policy.

5. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Account	An account is where financial transactions for a customer take place in relation to a service provided by Unitywater. An account could have multiple owners and multiple bills outstanding.
Bill	Includes Unitywater Water and Sewerage and Sundry bills. Statements issued to a customer with Unitywater charges.
Collection Agent	Agency that acts on behalf of Unitywater to action unpaid overdue amounts
Hardship	Impact on life circumstances as a result of vulnerability.
Interest	Charge raised on an unpaid, overdue invoice amount. Unitywater may charge interest on the overdue charge. The rate of the interest cannot be more than the rate of interest local governments may charge for late payment of rates. The interest must be calculated: (a) on daily rests, and as compound interest; or (b) in another way Unitywater decides if an equal or lower amount will be obtained.
Owner	The organisation or person(s) registered as the owner of land, building or structure connected to Unitywater's infrastructure and where water supply or sewerage services are provided. The owner is liable to pay for services provided at the premises whether or not they occupy the premises or directly benefit from the services provided (also refer to 'Occupier').
Payment Arrangement Plan	A plan for a customer to pay Unitywater by periodic instalments or by an extended due date, all arrears and charges relating to continued use of water and sewerage or sundry services.
Restriction device	Device that can be installed in a water meter to restrict the flow of water to the property.
Vulnerability	A state of financial or other stress that may be experienced by customers from time to time and which may lead to longer term hardship.
Vulnerable Hardship Instalment Plan	A plan for a customer experiencing vulnerability or hardship and pays Unitywater by periodic instalments for all arrears and charges relating to continued use of water and sewerage services.

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Appendix A - Guidance on Debt and Restriction of Water Flow

Our aim is to prevent customers accruing debt on their water and sewerage bills and provide assistance to customers in financial hardship

The aim of this guide is to minimise the circumstances where customers may accrue debts in relation to billed charges for water and sewerage services. The guide explains the customer's and Unitywater's obligations and responsibilities in ensuring timely payment of bills.

Unitywater understands that some customers may experience financial difficulty from time to time which affects their capacity to pay their bill. Unitywater has a range of payment options available to assist these customers.

What is Unitywater's responsibility in debt recovery?

Unitywater complies with requirements as set out in the South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017 for debt recovery and hardship. This means Unitywater will:

- Treat customers fairly and in an equitable manner;
- Provide information to customers about the debt recovery process;
- Hold debts that are in dispute, including pausing interest charges for the duration of the investigation;
- Provide information to customers about the dispute resolution mechanisms offered by the Energy & Water Ombudsman Queensland and the Queensland Ombudsman.

What is the Customer's responsibility in paying their bill?

The registered property owner is solely responsible for payment of the bill in accordance with the South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017.

If a customer fails to pay the bill or negotiate an alternative payment arrangement plan, Unitywater will commence collection activities with the customer, seeking the payment of overdue charges.

It is the responsibility of customers experiencing financial or other difficulties to notify Unitywater of their circumstances so that assistance can be provided.

When assisting customers who are experiencing financial or other difficulties, Unitywater will:

- treat all customers with dignity and respect;
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of each customer's personal and financial circumstances;
- not discriminate against customers experiencing vulnerability, regardless of whether the vulnerability is temporary or long-term;
- not pursue further debt recovery action where a customer has entered a payment arrangement plan and continues to honour the plan;
- ensure payment arrangement plans are offered and administered in a consistent and equitable manner to customers.

Customers may appoint an authorised person to act on their behalf to deal with aspects of their bill including overdue charges.

Unitywater does not manage the debt of tenants or non-owners. Any recovery action will be taken against the registered owner of the property.

What is the process for tenants?

Unitywater expects that the owner or managing agent of a property will pay the bill within the specified payment terms.

Tenants are not considered 'customers' for the purposes of collecting water and sewerage charges. Unitywater does not manage arrangements set up between a registered property owner and a tenant.

Unitywater expects the owner or managing agent of a property will manage their own arrangements with the tenant in accordance with the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008*.

In circumstances where a tenant is unable to contact an owner or management agent, and action regarding an unpaid bill by the property owner would adversely impact the tenant, Unitywater will allow time for the tenant to locate and contact the owner to arrange payment.

Unitywater does not restrict tenanted properties.

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What happens if a Customer does not pay the bill by the due date?

Where payment of the bill has not occurred by the due date, and no payment arrangement has been entered into, Unitywater may take a series of actions to recover the unpaid, overdue amount.

This debt collection process is in line with Unitywater's Credit Management Policy and Procedure.

Interest charges are applied to overdue charges in line with Unitywater's Credit Management Policy and the South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017.

Interest is not applied to overdue debt where the customer is vulnerable or experiencing financial hardship.

What are the debt recovery actions?

Unitywater will action a series of steps as part of the debt recovery process based on the individual customer's past payment history.

Recovery actions may include referral to a collection agent, legal action, or the application of a restriction device at the property. Fees and charges arising from these actions will also be payable by the customer, in addition to the original debt.

What happens if the water supply is restricted?

Where a decision is made to apply a restriction device to a customer's meter, a restriction notice will be issued to the customer providing a minimum of 14 days to arrange payment of the debt.

If the debt remains unpaid, Unitywater will leave a card in the customer's letterbox 72 hours prior to the planned restriction date, providing a customer with a reminder and a further opportunity to pay before the device is installed.

If the debt remains unpaid, the customer's water supply may be restricted to the minimum level necessary for health and sanitation purposes.

Once a restriction device is installed, it can only be removed if the customer paid the debt in full or enters into a suitable payment arrangement plan.

The cost of installing and removing the device will be charged to the customer's account.

Once the debt is paid or a suitable payment arrangement plan has been entered into, the restriction device will be removed within two (2) business days of the payment or arrangement.

What happens if the Customer disputes the account?

If a customer makes a formal complaint and requests a review of their account, Unitywater will investigate the matter in line with the South East Queensland Customer Water and Wastewater Code 2017.

The amount in dispute will be put on hold, with no interest to be applied until the dispute is investigated. Any amounts not in dispute will remain owing and require full payment.

Once the investigation is complete, the customer will be notified of the outcome. The customer has ten business days to respond if they disagree with the outcome and are seeking a further review. At the end of the ten days, if no further review is required, the customer will be provided an additional 14 business days to pay. After the 14 days, if charges are still outstanding then further debt recovery steps including interest accrual will commence.

What happens if the Customer cannot pay their bill?

A customer who faces difficulty in paying their bill should contact Unitywater immediately. Unitywater provides options for customers in genuine financial hardship or vulnerable situations as per the Credit Management Policy.

To assist customers experiencing these circumstances, Unitywater will:

- treat customers with dignity and respect, keeping customer circumstances confidential at all times;
- not discriminate against customers experiencing financial hardship or customers in vulnerable situations;
- assist customers to develop a vulnerable hardship instalment plan so that customers can make manageable payments;
- not take further debt recovery actions where a customer has entered into a vulnerable or hardship instalment plan;
- provide information on water conservation measures, dispute resolution processes available and available payment options;
- advise customers who choose not to enter into a vulnerable or hardship instalment plan (where they meet the criteria) that this will result in normal debt recovery actions restarting;
- be transparent, consistent and fair in the offering and administration of all relevant vulnerability and hardship criteria.