

Preparing a Customer Service Standard

Service providers who do not have a contract with their customers for the supply of water or sewerage services (a service contract) must prepare customer service standards. This is to ensure that customers who do not have a contract are protected by standards relating to the supply of their water.

Furthermore, service providers must also review their Customer Service Standards at least every 5 years.

The requirements for preparing and finalising a customer service standard is stated in section 115 of the *Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008* (the Act). The following four steps outline what needs to be done to meet the requirements of the Act.

Step 1: proposed customer service standards

Develop a proposed customer service standard that must include:

- targets for the level of service
- the process for service connections, billing, metering, accounting customer consultation, complaints and dispute resolution.

Under section 117 of the Act service providers must comply with the customer standard when supplying services to their customers.

The standards set will generally relate to the whole system i.e. they are standards the service provider will achieve across the entire registered service as distinct from standards set for individual schemes.

However, performance reporting of some KPIs for customer service standards are at a scheme level.

Step 2: consultation

The proposed customer service standard must be published on the internet so that customers and other interested parties can view it and make submissions about the proposed customer service standard. The service provider must state the period within which submissions will be accepted.

Step 3: final customer service standard for newly registered service providers

All submissions made about the proposed customer service standards must be considered.

The final customer service standard must be prepared within 6 months after the commencement of the drinking water or sewerage service.

The final customer service standard must be published, made available for inspection and/or purchase at the office of the service provider.

Step 4: review

Service providers must (s120 of the Act) review the customer service standards at least every 5 years. If during a review of the customer service standard, the service provider decides to amend the content of the standard, they must follow the process for preparing a customer service standard as stated in section 115 of the Act.

The revised customer service standards must be published within 6 months of the review.

The outcome of the review and how matters arising have been addressed must be included in your Drinking Water Service Annual Report for that financial year (refer to section 142 of the Act).

Note: numerous examples of acceptable Customer Service Standards can be found on the internet.

Examples of possible targets

Interruptions	Number of connections experiencing planned interruptions/Per 1000 connections per year: TARGET <20
Incidents	We will respond to all incidents relating to drinking water within one hour
Mains breaks	Sewer main breaks and chokes/Per 50km per year: TARGET <5

Examples of possible processes

Service connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to apply for a new service connection including how long it may take to get that connection (for example, 15 days for a 20mm water service; 20 days for a sewerage connection); fees for connection; relevant contacts • restoration of an existing or disconnected water service including how long it may take to get that connection; fees for connection; relevant contacts • special needs customers
Billing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basis for bill (for example, meter reading, estimation, levy (such as for irrigation supplies)) • time between reading/estimation and forwarding of bill • charging regime—metered and unmetered; fixed and usage charges • billing cycle— when and how bills are sent • information on the bill • under- and over- charging • final accounts if moving house • relevant contacts
Metering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meter installation/connection for example, option to have it, time for application to installation • meter difficulties and replacements • process and access for meter reading • relevant contacts

Customer consultation

- consultation about the level of service standards; involvement of customers in service planning—for example, customer committees; customer surveys
- publishing results of any review of standards and/or progress against standards
- contact details for service difficulties, emergencies, account and general inquiries
- notice for planned interruptions—for example, 'if we have to carry out planned work which involves interruption your water supply for more than one hour, we will let you know at least X hours in advance of when the interruption will happen and when we expect the supply to be restored"

Complaints

- avenues for making complaints, such as phone, email or letter
- how those complaints will be dealt with—including how contact details for complaints are provided; complaints are dealt with in an area independent from the area which is the subject of the complaint; complaints are acknowledged promptly and dealt with expeditiously (target times); the complainant is informed of processes, time for reaching decision, decision reached and reasons for the decision and any further redress available
- complaints should be dealt with first by the provider directly and then, if necessary, referred to in mediation or arbitration
- response time for complaints
- if dispute resolution required— process such as mediation
- who may make a complaint—for example, property owner or tenant.