

# Fact Sheet: Service charges on your vacant land

All property owners who have Western Water's services available to them are required to pay a service availability charge, even on vacant land. Water usage charges will apply once your property is connected, a water meter is fitted and water is used.

## Service availability charges

Western Water charges a service availability fee for all properties that can be serviced by our water, recycled water and/or sewer pipelines.

If your property is not yet connected to our water, recycled water and/or sewer services, but is able to access our pipe network, the property is assessed as a serviced property under Sections 144 and 259 of the Water Act 1989 and service availability charges apply for each service available to the property.

## Why do I pay for a service I don't use yet?

Western Water owns and maintains over 2700 kilometres of water, recycled water and sewer pipelines which are similar to the shared community resources provided by Councils, such as footpaths and roads. Therefore, like council rates, water and sewer service charges are applied to vacant land to help provide and maintain these high quality resources for our whole community.

Western Water also needs to maintain the pipes, valves, pumping systems and other infrastructure to ensure all services are available when a customer wishes to connect.

Having access to Western Water's services significantly improves the value of your property, much like having access to Council assets.

If service charges did not apply to vacant land, many of the costs of installing and maintaining the system would still be present and additional fees would need to be levied on other customers. Spreading the cost across our entire customer base and charging all customers who either directly access, or have the value of their property improved by having access to these services, is a more equitable approach.

## Why don't the metropolitan water retailers charge for vacant land?

Western Water services a large geographical area with a diverse and growing population. Some of the services we provide must run past vacant land in order to reach more populated areas. The costs of providing and maintaining infrastructure to this sparse area are higher compared to the more densely populated centres with lower growth rates.



## Why don't I pay a service charge for electricity or gas until I connect?

Electricity and gas companies each provide only a single service to your property, whereas Western Water may provide up to three (water, sewer and, in some cases, recycled water). Each of the services we provide requires a separate network of pipes which must be constructed with a high degree of strength and precision to ensure they can transfer large quantities of heavy water under pressure.

The costs of installing and maintaining water infrastructure such as pipes, pumps and storages, along with the costs of pumping the water, is considerably higher than the costs associated with transferring gas or electricity.

## Why are Western Water's service charges for sewer services higher than the metropolitan water retailers?

A few Victorian water retailers, including the Melbourne metropolitan water retailers, charge customers both an annual sewerage service charge and a sewage disposal charge. The sewage disposal charge is based on an estimate of discharge from each individual property into the sewer system.

As the process of raising a charge based on estimated sewer usage is complicated and may be difficult to understand, Western Water has chosen to apply only an annual sewer service charge which takes into account the costs of maintaining pipe infrastructure and treating sewage.

It is important to note that our annual service charges are split over three bills per year, whereas the Melbourne metropolitan water retailers bill four times annually. Western Water reads meters every four months, instead of every three months, allowing us to keep costs, which would otherwise be passed onto our customers, lower. However, should you wish to pay lower charges more frequently, we can arrange this for you.

Western Water operates seven recycled water treatment plants to service the towns in our region - considerably more than the metropolitan companies. We also operate wastewater transfer pipelines between a number of these towns. This system allows us to recycle over 85% of the sewage we receive as recycled water, saving large amounts of drinking water.

Recycled water also requires a higher treatment level to ensure the quality of the water is fit for use.

Operating all these systems is comparatively more expensive than treatment of metropolitan wastewater which is mostly discharged to Port Phillip and Westernport Bay.

## What do I need to do to connect my property?

When your property is ready to be connected to Western Water's pipeline network you, or your plumber, will need to complete a "Water Tapping - Sewer Application" form available from [www.westernwater.com.au](http://www.westernwater.com.au) or by contacting by Western Water's Property Services Department on **1300 650 422**. Standard fees apply to new connections. For information on current connection costs please contact Western Water.

### Further information

For further information on charges to your vacant land, please contact Western Water on **1300 650 422** or visit [www.westernwater.com.au](http://www.westernwater.com.au)

