



# Essential Water

*Customer Charter*

# Who is Essential Water?

**Essential Water is a division of Essential Energy and provides water supply services to over 20,000 people in Broken Hill, Menindee, Sunset Strip and Silverton – and sewerage services to Broken Hill.**

This brochure outlines the responsibilities of customers, contractors and Essential Water in relation to water and sewer services supplied by us in our area of operations.

This brochure is intended as a guide only and is not intended to and does not replace/change/add to legal obligations. It may be amended from time to time.

# What services do Essential Water provide?

## Our objective is to:

- Provide safe reliable drinking water in accordance with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines
- Provide water and sewerage services that meet customers' needs for reliability, environmental protection and performance
- Maintain a water and sewerage system that is safe for the community, customers and employees
- Provide a service for the discharge of trade waste
- Provide a high level of customer service
- Minimise the costs to Essential Water and consequent impacts on pricing for its customers.

Our service area is the most arid in the state, experiencing extreme climatic variations including more frequent drought than coastal areas. Eight years in ten the town water supply is dependent on water sourced from the Darling River and pumped over 116km of pipeline to Broken Hill. These unique operational circumstances combined with drought conditions cause salinity and other water quality problems in the raw water that we must treat.

# What are Essential Water's responsibilities?

## Repairs, maintenance and interruptions

Sometimes we may need to interrupt, postpone, or limit the supply of water or sewerage services to your property for maintenance or other reasons. These interruptions can be planned or unplanned.

### For planned interruptions we will endeavour to provide:

- Residential customers at least two days written notice
- Non-residential customers at least seven days written notice unless you agree to another period
- We will try to ensure that the planned interruption is less than five hours at any one time.

If we need to make repairs that we had not planned for, we will restore the service as quickly as possible. Information on this work will be available on our 24 hour service difficulties and emergencies number **13 20 80** if possible.

If we need to undertake work on, or next to your property, we will aim to leave the affected area in its pre-existing condition wherever possible.

## Sewerage system blockages and overflows

The land owner is required to keep their sanitary drains on their property in good order and free from blockage. If you become aware of a blockage in our sewerage system you should notify Essential Water as soon as possible. We will clear the blockage, although you may be required to pay to the extent that you have contributed to the blockage. If the blockage is in your sanitary drains, you will need to make arrangements to have it cleared by a licensed plumber or drainer at your cost.

We will take all reasonable steps to reduce the incidence of sewage spills on your property due to a failure in our sewerage system. If a spill occurs from our sewer we will try to minimise any inconvenience caused and ensure that the affected area is properly cleaned.

Essential Water may be fined if any of our managed assets fail and cause damage to the environment or a risk to public health. Equally, the public may be fined if they cause damage to Essential Water's assets which may also result in damage to our water supply or sewerage collection processes.

# Is Essential Water responsible for water quality?

Essential Water is committed to providing safe, secure, reliable and high quality water to our customers. Our aim is to incorporate effective water cycle management into everything we do.

To demonstrate our commitment to a safe and secure water supply, to meet our legal obligations and by complying with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines Essential Water will:



- Ensure we meet the needs and reasonable expectations of our customers, stakeholders, regulators and employees
- Comply with relevant legislation, regulations, standards, codes and licences
- Manage water quality at every point, from the source to the customer
- Keep the quality of drinking water levels consistent with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines
- Keep our customers informed of the quality and quantity of their water supply via our annual Drinking Water Quality Report
- Promptly advise the relevant authorities on any public health and risk assessment issues
- Provide our customers with details of Essential Energy's water supply system and drinking water quality management system
- Advise customers on the costs associated with water supply and treatment
- Educate our customers on what effect their household water practices may have on drinking water quality eg. ensuring the use of a licensed plumber, installing backflow prevention devices, etc
- Provide assistance and information to customers needing water for special purposes such as dialysis
- Ensure our customers know what level of service to expect from us
- Research and develop ways to continually monitor, report and improve water quality
- Educate our commercial and industrial customers so they are aware of their responsibilities and what effects their business may have on our water and sewerage systems.

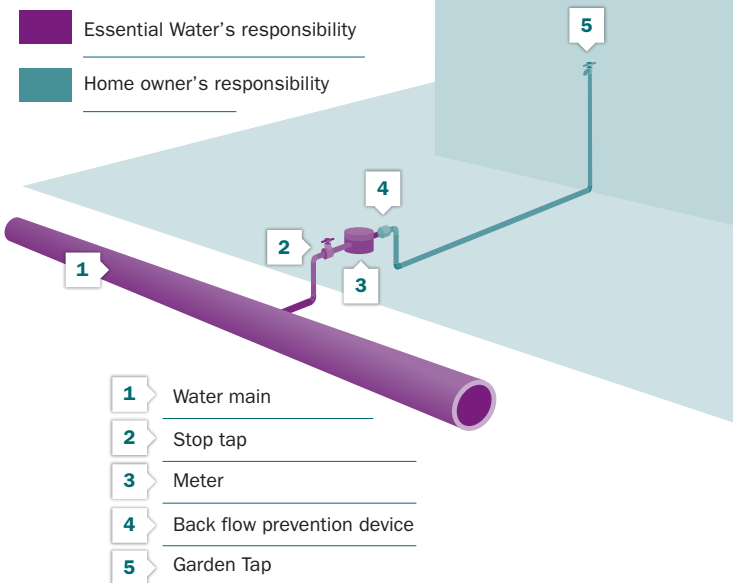
# What are my responsibilities as an owner?

The next section outlines your legal responsibilities in regards to water mains, meters and sewerage systems, as a property owner. The information provided is a guide only, if you would like further information, please call **13 23 91** or visit **essentialwater.com.au**

You may be subject to a fine of up to \$2,200 under the Water Management Act 2000 if you fail to comply with your responsibilities.

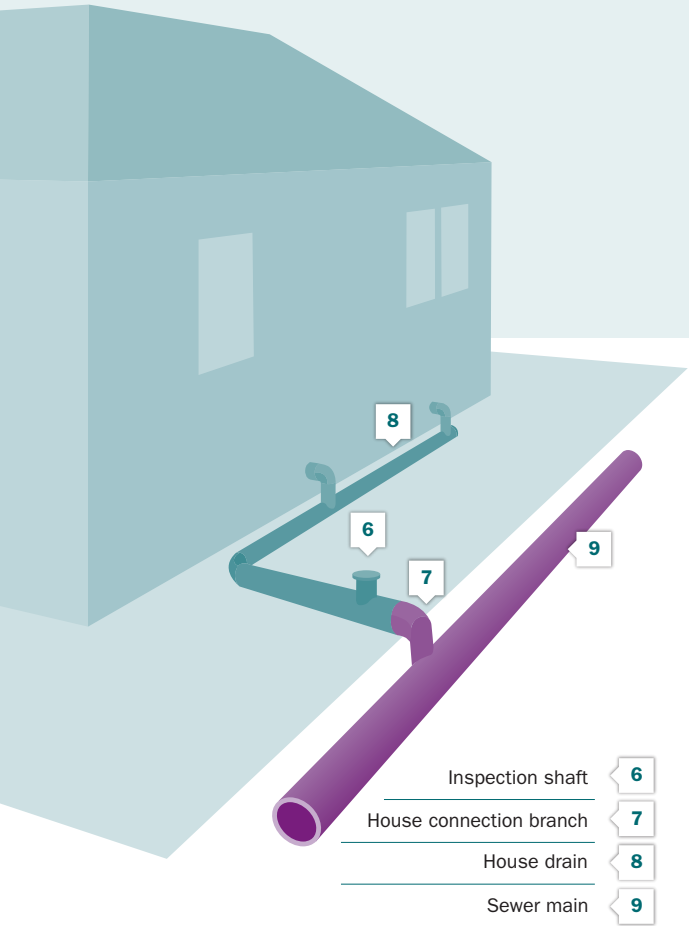
## LEGEND

-  Essential Water's responsibility
-  Home owner's responsibility



## Your house

The diagram below shows you where Essential Water's responsibility ends and where the home owner's responsibility begins.



## **Installation, maintenance and water use**

If you own land where a water main is connected or available for connection, you must ensure that:

- The installation and connection of any water service is carried out by a licensed plumber with appropriate/approved plumbing materials or by Essential Water
- The water service complies with the NSW Code of Practice for Plumbing and Drainage
- It is maintained in good condition and free from blockages or leaks.

## **Shared water services**

You need to obtain consent from Essential Water before operating or using a shared water service. A shared water service means a water service that extends over, or supplies water to, two or more separately owned parcels of land.

## **Water to be taken through approved stop taps**

It is an offence under the Water Management Act 2000 to take water from a water main except with consent by Essential Water, from a supply service pipe that is connected to the water main using an approved Essential Water stop tap.

Consent may be conditional, varied and may be revoked. Essential Water may direct the owner/occupier to provide information necessary to assess the quantity of water supplied to the land. It is an offence to fail to comply with this direction.

## **Unauthorised water use, misuse and waste of water**

It is an offence under the Water Management Act 2000 to wrongfully take or use any water supplied by Essential Water, interfere with water meters, or wrongfully discharge any substances into the water, or sewerage systems. You must not allow for a plumbing fitting to be used, be out of repair or anything else to be done that may waste water supplied by Essential Water.



## Repairing of private leaks

You must have all plumbing work at your property completed by a licensed plumber, except unavoidable temporary intervention in emergency situations.

## Trade waste discharge

If your business discharges trade waste into our sewerage system you must enter into an agreement in accordance with our Trade Waste policy, prior to the discharge of any waste. For more information on our Trade Waste policy please visit our website at [essentialwater.com.au](http://essentialwater.com.au) or contact us on **13 23 91**.

## Cross-connection control and backflow prevention

You may be required to install a backflow prevention device. These devices help to ensure that where there is a cross connection to the water supply, the potable (or drinking) water is protected against any possible contaminants from entering into our precious water supply. Additionally, if you install a rain water tank to the potable supply you are required to install an approved backflow prevention device.

## Water meters

The meter is how we measure the quantity of water we supply to you. We may install, or alternatively, we may ask you to have the installation completed by a licensed plumber.

## Ownership of meters

Any meter or plumbing fitting provided by Essential Water and connected to or forming part of a water supply service pipe, is the property of Essential Water.

## Meter access

It is important that the water meter is always accessible for reading and maintenance. If the meter isn't accessible, you need to:

- Arrange for a licensed plumber to reposition the meter to enable access. The costs for this will be the responsibility of the land owner or
- Work with Essential Water to coordinate a time when the meter can be conveniently accessed for a reading or inspection.

## Meter care

As the property owner you are responsible for keeping the meter and meter fittings protected from damage or theft, and may be liable for the cost of repairing a damaged meter or meter fittings. Any suspicion of meter theft should be reported to the police immediately. The property owner may be liable for the cost of the replacement meter and any water usage recorded on a meter that is under suspicion of theft or tampering. This includes if the property owner suspects the meter has been temporarily removed from the site, used at another location and then returned to the original premises.

If you wish to discontinue the use of the meter you need to provide Essential Water at least 14 days written notice that the meter is no longer required. Availability charges will continue to be applied on your account even if you no longer have a meter connected to your property. For example, in the case of vacant land, you will be charged availability charges whether you have a meter connected or not as availability charges relate to your ability to access water and sewer services.

If you believe the meter may be faulty you can apply to Essential Water to have the meter tested, however there may be costs associated with this. For more information about how to apply to have your meter tested, phone **13 23 91**.

## Sewer connections to the system

If you own land where a sewer main is connected or available for connection, you should ensure that:

- The installation and connection of a sewer to the sewerage main is carried out by a licensed plumber with suitable plumbing materials
- The sewerage service complies with the NSW Code of Practice for Plumbing and Drainage and
- It is maintained and free from blockages or leaks.

You need to obtain our consent before operating or using a shared sewerage service that extends over, or receives sewage from, two or more separately titled properties.

You must not discharge any prohibited substances into Essential Water's sewerage system without consent.

## What if I want to arrange plumbing work?

You need to obtain a plumbing permit in order to carry out plumbing work on your property, and the work should be undertaken by a licensed plumber. There are some exceptions to this rule, particularly in the case of emergency situations. Contact us on **13 23 91** for information on exceptions to this rule.

Once the plumbing work has been completed, you must provide Essential Water with a certificate of compliance within 48 hours. This does not apply if the plumbing work was done by a Essential Water employee.

If any damage to Essential Water property is caused during the plumbing work, you need to notify us immediately.

If your plumbing work is defective or unauthorised and we believe it is likely to cause further problems, we can direct you to arrange repair work to bring it in to line with the NSW Code of Practice for Plumbing and Drainage.

On completion of any sewerage work, the person doing the work must supply a plan of the work to the owner of the land (or the owner's agent) and to Essential Water.

## Thinking of building?

There are precautions that should be taken when building over or adjacent to Essential Water sewers. All building plans must be submitted to Essential Water for approval prior to being submitted to Council, please note that Essential Water does not permit building over every sewer.

If you do build over any Essential Water sewer without consent, Essential Water may direct you to remove all building works that do not meet our approval.

Essential Water may require you to take special precautions or make amendments to your plans to safeguard the stability of both the sewer and your building and to ensure Essential Water has access to the sewer for maintenance, repair, or replacement.

For information on location of sewers or for a copy of your drainage diagram please contact our Plumbing Inspectors office located at Block 10, Blende Street Broken Hill.

For full details please contact us on **13 23 91**.

## Water restrictions

At times it may be necessary for your water supply to be restricted, particularly in situations of drought or emergency. Conditions of the restrictions will be published in major newspapers, and may be placed on the:

- Purposes for which water may be used
- Times when water may be used
- Quantities of water that may be used and
- Means or methods by which water may be used.

There may be fines and penalties for not complying with the conditions of water restrictions.

### **Essential Water may also restrict water under the Water Management Act 2000 if:**

- Any service charges or other charges relating to the water account are unpaid
- The owner fails to comply with a notice regulating or restricting the use of water
- The owner fails to comply with the conditions of supply
- The owner fails to comply with the requirements in relation to the installation, repair or alteration of a meter for measuring water
- The owner fails to comply with the requirements in relation to the installation, repair or alteration of water or sewerage connections, plumbing fittings or appliances connected, or intended to be connected, directly or indirectly to a water main or sewer main or
- The owner fails to comply with anything that, under the Act or Regulation, is required to prevent waste, misuse, undue consumption, backflow or contamination of the water supplied by the water authority.

## Are there penalties for non-compliance with this charter?

There are penalties associated with non-compliance with any of the provisions in the Water Management Act 2000 and the Water Management Regulations 2004.

For details of non-compliance penalties please contact us on **13 23 91**.

## How do I pay my bill?

Residential customers are sent quarterly bills. Commercial customers are generally sent quarterly bills, although arrangements may be made for customers with very high water usage to be sent monthly bills. Bill payment options are detailed on your bill.

If you hold either a Pensioner Concession Card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card embossed with TPI/TTI or War Widow/Widower or Extreme Disablement Adjustment (EDA), you are eligible for a concession and should contact us to make appropriate arrangements.

**Essential Support** – If you are having difficulty paying your bill, call Essential Water on **13 23 91** and ask to speak to a customer service adviser about Essential Support. Essential Support is a program that focuses on providing household, farming and small businesses with long term payment solutions – not just short term fixes.

## Disconnection or restriction of services

If you fail to pay your bill by the due date and have not made alternative payment arrangements, we may disconnect or restrict the supply of water to your property.

### We will not disconnect or restrict your supply for non-payment unless we have:

- Given you written notice
- Made a reasonable attempt to contact the occupier and
- Provided information on our Credit Control Water Collection and Restriction processes.

### We may also disconnect or restrict your supply if:

- Your private system is not authorised or does not comply with legal requirements
- You discharge trade waste into our sewer system and do not have a trade waste agreement with us
- You have not complied with our direction to install a backflow prevention containment device within a specified timeframe or
- You use recycled water inappropriately.

## Contacting Us

If you have a general enquiry or complaint about our service, our compliance with this Customer Charter, your bill or another matter please contact a customer service adviser either by phone on **13 23 91** or in person at one of our essential service centres.

Our aim is to handle your complaint promptly and respectfully at this first point of contact. If you are not satisfied with this outcome you may request that your complaint is escalated to the appropriate manager for review.

If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint you may contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) on **1800 246 545** to address this matter further.

# Essential Water sewer systems and stormwater management

Essential Water sewer systems are designed to transport sewerage (wastewater) from residential, commercial and industrial areas. These systems should not be used for diverting stormwater. Stormwater should be directed away from entering the sewer system by running downpipes directly into roadside guttering, identified stormwater drains, gardens, lawns or rain water tanks.

## **Who is responsible for stormwater management?**

Property owners are responsible for maintaining the pipes and downpipes on their properties so stormwater does not enter the sewer system. When stormwater enters the sewer system it creates additional pressure on the sewer system. This pressure can cause sewerage to back up the sewer system and force open sewer access chambers, which could result in a sewerage overflow in backyards as well as overloading the sewerage treatment plant.

Sewerage overflow is costly to clean up and could cause considerable environmental harm. Even if an overflow doesn't occur, there are additional costs associated with having the stormwater pumped to Essential Water's sewerage treatment plants for processing.



## **What should I do about buried or damaged inspection points?**

Most properties have an opening into the sewer pipe, known as an inspection point. It is generally a vertical pipe from the underground sewer line to the surface with a round plastic or metal cover approximately 150mm in diameter. Broken pipes or damaged covers can let stormwater into the sewer. Make sure all broken pipes or damaged covers are repaired or replaced as soon as possible. Contact a licensed plumber to undertake any maintenance or repairs.

## **Where should I divert stormwater?**

It is illegal to connect stormwater pipes and drains to the sewer system as this causes excess water to enter the system and can result in sewerage overflows. Disconnect all downpipes from the sewer system and divert stormwater directly into roadside guttering, identified stormwater drains, gardens, lawns or rain water tanks. Property owners should also ensure that any diverted stormwater does not cause localised flooding.

## **What if tree roots enter cracks in pipes?**

Tree roots can enter the smallest cracks in pipes, where they will grow and eventually cause a blockage. This can then result in storm water entering the sewer system. If tree roots on your property have entered pipes, the tree roots need to be removed and cracked pipes repaired by a licensed plumber. When planting trees make sure they are not planted near your sewer pipes.

## **How can I identify broken pipes?**

Grass flourishing above your sewer pipes, odours and ground movement are signs that pipes below ground may be broken. This can result in stormwater entering the sewer system, as well as allowing sewerage to soak into the soil. Broken pipes need to be repaired or replaced by a licensed plumber.

## Hidden or damaged sewer access chambers

Sewer access chambers are important access points to the sewer system and should be kept clear. Poorly fitting, cracked or damaged sewer access chambers can let water into the sewer system. If you notice any damage to sewer access chambers please call Essential Water on **13 23 91** to report the problem.

## For more information

If you would like more information on sewer system maintenance or how to correctly divert stormwater please call Essential Water general enquiries on **13 23 91** or visit **[essentialwater.com.au](http://essentialwater.com.au)** or alternatively contact a licensed plumber.

## Notes

We're here  
to help.

## Essential Service Centre

### Broken Hill

160 Beryl Street

**For general enquiries call 13 23 91**  
**[essentialwater.com.au](http://essentialwater.com.au)**

Essential Energy trading as Essential Water

