

Water metering

Managing water appropriately and measuring it accurately

The use of water meters for measuring water extraction in rural Queensland is an important management tool necessary for the protection and long-term viability of the state's water resources.

The Queensland Government has committed to a national water reform agenda to ensure our water resources are properly planned and managed. Accordingly, the Department of Environment and Resource Management is undertaking a program to install water meters across the state in major groundwater and surface water areas where supplemented water from large dams is not provided.

The *Water Act 2000* and *Water Regulation 2002* provide the department with the necessary administrative arrangements to implement metering.

Why is metering important?

The use of meters allows accurate measurement of water use, providing valuable information for planning and management. Accurate water use information will benefit all water users by:

- promoting on-farm water use efficiencies
- improving the planning and sustainable management of the resource
- providing greater protection and security of water entitlements
- establishing more equitable water sharing arrangements
- enabling water trading.

Where is metering occurring?

The department is progressively installing meters in catchments where water resource plans and resource operations plans are developed and implemented and in other areas that are under stress or that require closer management.

The department's metering program mainly applies to users who draw water direct from streams and declared groundwater areas that are not supplemented by infrastructure such as dams or weirs managed by water service providers.

Who will require a water meter?

Any water user who takes water under an authorisation administered under the *Water Act 2000* will be required to have a departmental meter installed on their works, unless they have an exemption.

Who does not require a water meter?

Generally, a water user will not require a meter if:

- they use their water entitlement for stock and/or domestic purposes only. Stock and domestic use will only be metered if the department considers the resource to be stressed or in a high demand area that requires intense monitoring.
- they have no irrigation works in place and, therefore, are not capable of taking water.

Water users will be given the opportunity to apply for an exemption from metering at the beginning of the rollout process in each area if they consider they meet the above criteria.

Who owns the meter?

Once installed, the meter and ancillary equipment remain the property of the department.

Where a water user has already established a meter on their works and it is considered acceptable and not owned by the department, legal ownership will be required to be transferred to the department.

In this case the water user will be compensated for the meter through a reduced metering service charge.

What is the process?

The meter rollout process involves:

- communication and information
- site assessment
- site preparation
- meter installation
- reading and maintenance.

Communication and information

The department will regularly inform water users at critical stages in the rollout process about the program, how it affects them, their obligations and what they are required to do.

Also, where considered beneficial, the department will hold community information sessions to explain the metering process.

Site assessment

Before meter installations commence in an area, departmental staff or a qualified contractor will visit every pump site to collect information about the general pumping setup, pipe size and type, water quality and other operating conditions. This information is used to determine:

- the most suitable type and size of meter to be installed
- the most suitable point to install the meter
- any pipe reconfiguration and site preparation needed for the meter to be installed to the department's specifications
- any site access and safety requirements that need to be addressed.

Site preparation

Site preparation is critical to the meter installation process and each water user will be required to prepare their sites at their own cost. This ensures that users with minor costs do not subsidise the more costly needs of others.

The site assessor will advise each water user of any site preparation needed, including any pipe reconfiguration work required to enable the meter to be installed to the department's specifications. The department normally allows a maximum of six weeks for this work to be completed.

This advice and the date by which site preparation is to be completed will be provided either directly to the water user on the day of the assessment or posted at a later date.

Any site preparation work not completed by the specified date may be completed by the department's installation contractor with the costs of this work separately billed to the water user.

Meter installation

Selecting the meter

The department selects the meter type best suited for the local operating conditions. Only meters that match the

department's specification and conform to national standards are selected.

Where a meter already exists it must comply with the department's specifications to be considered acceptable.

Installing the meter

The department uses nationally certified contractors and agency staff to install the meter and ancillary equipment. This ensures all meters are installed, configured and tested to state and national standards and manufacturer's installation and operating specifications.

The installation contractor will contact each water user to confirm that site preparation has been completed and to arrange a time to install the meter.

Meter reading and maintenance

The department is responsible for the reading and long-term maintenance of the meters, including full replacement if necessary. The department uses nationally certified contractors to provide this service.

Reading frequency can vary from area to area; however, all meters are read at least annually. Data loggers will be fitted to all meters to reduce the reading frequency and costs and to provide more detailed information.

The department also conducts regular maintenance checks of the meters to ensure meters are always performing within accuracy requirements.

What you need to do

During the metering process the water user will be required to:

- provide information about their irrigation works when requested
- provide a safe working environment and allow access for departmental staff and contractors to carry out the metering activities
- prepare the site in accordance with the specifications provided
- remove water from pipework prior to the meter being installed.

Metered entitlements

Once the metering installation process in an area has been completed, all water authorisations within the area (generally with the exception of stock and/or domestic water authorisations) will become metered entitlements under the Water Regulation 2002.

Penalties apply under the *Water Act 2000* for an entitlement holder to then take water without it passing through a meter.

What are the costs?

The department will supply and install the meter, read and maintain the meter and recover the costs of this service from the water user over time through an annual fee, known as a metering service charge.

The first annual charge will be issued shortly after the completion of the rollout of meters within an area and will continue annually as long as an entitlement holder has a meter fitted to their works.

The metering service charge comprises two components—a fixed charge based on the costs of supplying and installing the meter and a variable charge based on the ongoing operational costs of reading and maintaining the meter.

Water users will have the option of paying both components annually, or the fixed charge component in full as a one-off payment, with the ongoing operational costs as an annual charge.

The metering service charge is calculated for each meter type and size within an area so that entitlement holders who have the same meter type and size pay the same charge, although some variations in the charge may result depending on specific user installation requirements.

Normally, final charges are available when the rollout of meters in an area is complete. However, the department can provide indicative charges to water users throughout the rollout process.

Where a water user applies to the department to remove the meter because they no longer intend to take water under their entitlement, a metering exit charge will apply to remove the meter.

Further information

For further metering information please contact the Department of Environment and Resource Management.

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For general enquiries contact the
Queensland Government call centre 13 13 04
or visit www.derm.qld.gov.au