



Submission: to **The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal**

June 21, 2005

Level 2,
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Submission against the extra financial levy on Sydney Water's fees

This submission suggests the New South Wales Government's action in increasing the price of water to flats, while not increasing prices to other users, is discriminatory, unfair to voters and others living in flats in Sydney, and not designed to educate users on the need to husband New South Wales' water resources.

I bought my flat in Campsie in 1987, and not long afterwards paid off the mortgage and I now own it outright.

When I came here almost all the residents owned their flats.

Now, in 2050, of the 12 flats, only three occupiers are owners.

1. There is only one water meter for these flats. I assume that Sydney Water divides the water shown by the meter into 12, and then bills all flat owners. This is done quarterly.

2. However, this system assumes that each flat consumes the same amount of water as the rest, which is obviously impossible.

I use water for one person; flats with two, three or four occupants obviously must consume more water than I do. Or, if I was away for 1, 2, 3 or 4 weeks, I would not be rewarded for not using water, but charged as if I had not been away.

3. Billing consumers quarterly does not equate to equal water consumption. There may be two people letting a flat. They leave, and a family of four takes over. I have not seen any changes proving that Sydney Water charges for water consumption, only on a permanent scale.

If I went away for, say, six weeks, using no water for half the billing period, under Sydney Water's billing system I would still be billed for one twelfth of the total water consumption.

Conclusion 1: Billing each flat by dividing each billing period by 12 (or how many flats there are in each block) takes no notice of changing consumers' water consumption.

4. I assume that water bills go to each flat owner, and where the owners do not live here, the actual consumers (tenants) are unaware of the charges for water.

5. Quite a few of our present flat occupants are not English speakers. Asking them to conserve water, wrapping rubbish and other obligations, are met with blank looks and a torrent of foreign languages.

Conclusion 2: Some flat occupants are not aware of their duty to decrease water consumption.

In these circumstances some flat occupants will not take on board their duty to conserve water. I suggest they - not the landlord - are made to pay for the water they consume, and are charged monthly. Also, moving into a flat available for letting should automatically involve their letting Sydney Water know of their occupancy, and paying a deposit sufficiently large enough to cover a full month's consumption. On leaving, the deposit would be returned, or transferred to another flat.

6. I complained about this "bulk charging" to Sydney Water some years ago, and was told (a) retrofitting metering for each flat (of about a quarter million flats then, in Sydney) **would cost about \$1,000/a flat.**

However, it appears Sydney Water has not used the period to prepare a plan to meter each flat in a block, where the block chooses to go to the expense. Also, good engineering could well ensure that metering each flat could, in most cases, be less expensive.

7. Therefore: Sydney water has not tackled the problem of unfair charging in the period that I (and presumably others who were being over-charged (or under-charged) for it to try and substitute a more equitable fee structure.

8. One assumes that as each new block of flats is prepared, individual metering is now demanded, considering the present failure to cope with increasing ?

9. Sydney Water also objected to metering each flat on the "who would read the meters?" excuse. May I suggest that it shows Sydney Water is unaware about modern technology, where - with coaxial and/or fiberoptical cables finding their way into all buildings in Sydney - modern remote meter reading becomes practical.

10. Electronic metering also means that a computer at each base that was programmed to read meters automatically each month could also print an account ready to be enveloped and posted, unless the customer preferred email billing.

Conclusion 3: Sydney Water appears not to have prepared a plan for individual billing. It appears to be ignorant of modern communications to enhance the practicalities of individual billing.

With the population of Sydney rising from 3 million to 4 million, do we the public, having foisted upon us a failure of water supply, assume that Sydney Water (or its Government) has failed Sydney's population to prepare for a "leaner" and more efficient water supply?

Addendum

May I suggest some minor details about saving water that seem to have escaped Sydney Water:

(a) Sydney Water, as a service to retirees, converted my shower to use less water. However, adjusting the hot/cold ratio takes some time, bearing in mind the inertia period while the change in the taps reaches the shower rose. With this system, only a change of a few degrees (of 360°) needs some delicate operating.

Has Sydney Water considered fitting pointers to shower taps that would allow immediate settings very close to ideal settings?

(b) Establishing three or four "standard" taps. If one of my taps dies of old age and needs replacing, it is hard to get a matching replacement (the tap makers seem to apply a redesign to taps every few years).

Three or four "standard" taps would make replacements easy to change, getting rid of leaking taps and thus saving home owners and those renting flats and houses. While my knowledge of plumbing is limited, I have not seen the concept of "standard" taps on display in hardware shops.