

# Water Wise Program 2009-2010





## Message from the Minister

Victoria has one of the most comprehensive concessions programs in Australia – however we are now facing new challengers resulting from climate change. I am very pleased that we can assist households in financial hardship to meet these challenges through the Water Wise program.

The program enables eligible households to receive a free water audit and retrofit (up to the value of \$500). The aim of the project is to reduce water usage by repairing or replacing inefficient water fittings. Information on how to reduce water usage will also be provided at the time of the water audit.

The Water Wise program assists all eligible concession cardholders who fall into targeted low income customer groups such as:

- Those with an increase in water usage
- Large families
- High water users
- Those customers who will benefit from a water audit and water retrofit

From 1 July 2009, Water Wise will provide greater assistance to hardship households by making changes to conserve more water and reduce their water bills.

Water Wise is an important part of a range of programs operated by the Victorian Government to assist low-income households experiencing financial hardship.

### **Lisa Neville MP**

Minister for Community Services

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Water Wise program is to make water and sewerage charges more affordable for low income Victorians by providing free water audits and retrofits to eligible customers and to protect the environment for future generations by reducing water usage on an ongoing basis.

## 2. Guidelines and Eligibility Criteria

### 2.1 General principles

The Water Wise program (“program”) is for domestic water usage and assists low income customer groups.

The program assists these households by providing a free water usage audit (“water audit”) and, if required, as a result of the water audit; repairing or replacing inefficient water fittings (“water retrofit”).

This helps the household to reduce water usage and therefore improve the customer’s capacity to pay ongoing water costs.

The program is funded by Department of Human Services. The cap for each application is \$500 (including GST) which includes the cost of the water audit and water retrofit. For any costs over \$500 prior approval is required by Department of Human Services before the water retrofit proceeds.

Water corporations will advise eligible customers in accordance with these guidelines and will conduct, or arrange, water audits for those customers. As a result of the water audit, the water corporation may arrange for a water retrofit to be completed on the eligible customer’s property.

## 2.2 Eligibility criteria

Assistance is available to all eligible concession customers who fall into any one of the following low income customer groups:

- Those with an increase in water usage
- Large families
- High water users
- Those customers who will benefit from a water audit and water retrofit

To ensure that the program is delivered in a fair and equitable manner, water corporations have been set an allocation of water audits to be completed by 30 June 2010. The allocation is based on one per cent of each water corporation's eligible concession households.

In addition, the applicant must agree to their water corporation providing Department of Human Services with information regarding their application and water usage. This information will be used by Department of Human Services to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

### 3. Program overview

Water corporations in partnership with Department of Human Services will manage the program. Eligible customers will be advised by water corporations. Department of Human Services recommend inviting eligible customers to participate in the program by letter (attachment 1) enclosing the water wise brochure or flyer. The water corporation will be responsible for determining a customer's eligibility and obtaining customer consent to participate in the program.

If the property is privately tenanted written consent to participate must be obtained by the landlord. Department of Human Services public housing tenants have an automatic consent from the Office of Housing to participate in the program.

Water corporations will either conduct a water audit at the property or refer to a water auditor or a registered or licensed plumber ("the plumber") in the area to do so.

Following the water audit the plumber will carry out any suggested improvements up to the value of \$500. Any cost over \$500 approval by Department of Human Services is required prior to the commencement of the retrofit.

At the completion of the retrofit the customer will be provided with water conservation information and a signed copy of the water auditor's checklist.

## 4. Role of the Water Corporation

Water corporations will:

- advise eligible customers of the program
- conduct or arrange a water audit
- obtain signed customer consent
- co-ordinate the water retrofit by a registered or licensed plumber
- provide the customer with water conservation information
- pay water audit and water retrofit costs
- invoice Concessions Business Management Unit (CBMU) for reimbursement inclusive of administration fee each month
- provide CBMU details of each Water Wise grant for the given month i.e.
  - customer name, address and concession card number
  - target customer group
  - water audit and water retrofit details
  - cost of each grant
  - water usage data 12 months before water retrofit
- annually provide CBMU with water usage data 12 months following the water retrofit for data analysis

## 5. Role of Department of Human Services

Department of Human Services will:

- develop and print promotional documentation
- provide support and assistance to water corporations in administration of the program
- provide water corporations with a list of plumbers
- discuss and approve applications over \$500
- reimburse water audit and water retrofit costs to water corporations within 30 days of receipt of invoice
- pay water corporations an administration fee
- provide water corporations with information about the program based on the monthly reports provided by water corporations.

## 6. Tenanted Properties

- Tenants who receive a water account are also eligible to apply.
- If the property is privately tenanted written consent to participate must be obtained by the landlord.
- Department of Human Services public housing tenants have an automatic consent from the Office of Housing to participate in the program.

## 7. Customer Consent

To receive the water audit and/or water retrofit, the customer is required to sign the following consent declaration on the water auditor's checklist:

I understand and agree that information collected as part of the WATER WISE audit and retrofit will be provided by the Water Corporation to the Department of Human Services, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, for evaluation purposes. This information will include, but will not be limited to, customer details (including name, address, and concession card number); 12 months water usage history prior to the retrofit; water audit and water retrofit details; and 12 months water usage data after the retrofit. Consent is sought under the Information Privacy Act 2000 and it is acknowledged that under this Act the customer is able to gain access to this information.

## 8. The Water Audit and Water Retrofit

### 8.1 The Water Audit

Where a customer is eligible and wishes to receive assistance through this program the water corporation will arrange for a water conservation auditor or a registered or licensed plumber ("the plumber") to visit the customer at his or her property and conduct the water audit utilising the Department of Human Services Water Wise Water Auditor Checklist.

During the water audit the water conservation auditor or plumber will:

- Identify the household's water usage patterns;
- Provide advice on ways to reduce water usage through behavioural change; and
- Identify faulty and inefficient water fittings that if repaired or replaced would reduce the household's water usage

## 8.2 The Water Retrofit

Following the completion of the water audit any identified water retrofit improvements up to the value of \$500 (inclusive of the water audit cost and GST) are to be carried out by a registered or licensed plumber.

Before the water retrofit can commence the customer is required to sign at the bottom of the water auditor's checklist acceptance to carry out the recommended retrofit.

The type of work to be undertaken may include:

- Replacement of faulty washers
- Installation of flow control valves or aerators to reduce water flow
- Installation of 3 star rated shower rose
- Repairing a leaking toilet cistern
- Replacing a single flush cistern with a dual flush cistern
- Minor adjustments to hot water service
- Replacing faulty trigger nozzles
- Providing water conservation products

If the estimated cost of the water audit and water retrofit is \$500 or less (including GST) the plumber conducts the water retrofit repairing or replacing faulty or inefficient water fittings as outlined in the water auditor's checklist.

### **8.3 Department of Human Services approval over \$500**

If the estimated costs of the water audit and water retrofit are more than \$500 (including GST) the plumber advises the water corporation who then email Department of Human Services CBMU to seek approval (concessionsinvoices@dhs.vic.gov.au)

- In assessing the approval Department of Human Services will consider:
  - The nature of the work to be undertaken
  - Whether to refer to another program
  - The benefits in reducing on-going water usage and costs to the customer
- Department of Human Services will forward a reply email advising the outcome
- Once approval is granted the water corporation will authorise the plumber to continue with the water retrofit.
- Should the additional cost not be approved the customer can apply to Department of Human Services to have the decision reviewed. The review of the decision will be conducted by the Manager, Concessions Business Management Unit.

### **8.4 Completion of the Water Audit and Water Retrofit**

Following the completion of the water audit and water retrofit the:

- customer will be provided with water conservation advice and brochures on how to save and conserve water
- customer will be provided a copy of the completed water auditor's checklist
- plumber submits an invoice to water corporation for payment.

## 8.5 Delivery options

Water corporations can select any one of the options depending on individual business needs. Whilst the preference would be for the water audit and water retrofit to be undertaken during the one visit to the customer's property, water corporations may opt to select another option.

**OPTION 1:** A water corporation trained water conservation auditor visits the customer at his or her property and conducts the water audit, identifying any required retrofit repair or replacement water fixtures on the water auditor checklist.

The results of the water audit are then referred to a licensed or registered plumber to carry out any retrofit work as identified in the water auditor's checklist.

**OPTION 2:** If water corporations have an arrangement with a licensed or registered plumber the customer's details are referred to the plumber who will visit the customer at his or her property and conduct the water audit.

If any retrofit is required the plumber will undertake those improvements as identified in the water auditor's checklist following the water audit, subject to the customer's signed acceptance to carry out the recommended water retrofit.

**OPTION 3:** If water corporations do not have an arrangement with a licensed or registered plumber who can meet the water wise guideline requirements refer to the following companies who are available to assist in this matter:

Schultz Plumbing  
32 Sherbourne Rd  
Briar Hill VIC 3088  
Contact: 1300 SCHULTZ (1300 724 858)  
[www.schultzplumbing.com.au](http://www.schultzplumbing.com.au)

GreenPlumbers International Pty Ltd  
PO Box 9250  
Scoresby VIC 3179  
Contact: 1300 368 519  
[www.greenplumbers.com.au](http://www.greenplumbers.com.au)

## 9. Reimbursement Claim

Water corporations are reimbursed by Department of Human Services for the invoices paid to plumbers for completed water wise grants.

Payment will be made within the standard Department of Human Services terms of 30 days from receipt of tax invoice.

An administration fee of \$30.63 plus GST will be payable to water corporations for the 2009-10 financial year.

- only 1 administration fee is payable per property
- the administration fee is indexed each year in line with inflation by adding the previous financial year's administration fee plus CPI for the March quarter for Melbourne as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Water corporations are required to submit two documents when making a claim for reimbursement. These are:

- reimbursement claim form
- tax invoice.

When completed, the reimbursement claim form, and tax invoice must be forwarded to Department of Human Services via email to [concessionsinvoices@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:concessionsinvoices@dhs.vic.gov.au)

Any incomplete information on either document could result in a delay in processing the reimbursement claim payments.

## 9.1 Reporting requirements

Water corporations are required to submit details of each water wise grant in order for Department of Human Services to provide an evaluation of the program. The following data is required:

- customer name, address and concession card number
- target customer group
- water audit and water retrofit details
- cost of each grant
- water usage data 12 months before water retrofit

This data is to be submitted with the monthly reimbursement claim.

Annually water corporations will be required to provide water usage data 12 months after the water retrofit.

## 10. Audit requirements

The Department of Human Services may undertake (or engage a third party to undertake) an audit, including a financial audit, of the water corporation's compliance of these guidelines.

The Department of Human Services will provide at least 28 days' notice prior to an audit commencement and an audit will not occur more than once in any 12-month period.

The audit undertaken will seek to:

- verify any invoice received by the Department of Human Services
- verify any data supplied for reimbursement.

## 11. Training

Each year the Department of Human Services offers training to water corporations to assist in the delivery of water and sewerage concessions, including the water wise program.

## 12. Contacting the Concessions Business Management Unit

**Phone:**

Information line 1800 658 521

**Mail:**

Concessions Business Management Unit  
Department of Human Services  
GPO Box 4057  
Melbourne 3001

**Email:**

[concessionsinvoices@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:concessionsinvoices@dhs.vic.gov.au)

**Website:**

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions>

## Attachment 1: Proforma Water Wise Letter of Offer

Date

«Customer\_Name»

«Address»

«Suburb» VIC «Post\_Code»

Dear «Dear»

**Subject: Water Wise Program**

**Property: «Property»**

**Customer Number: «Customer\_No»**

After reviewing our customer records, it has been identified that your household is eligible to apply for a free Water Wise audit and water retrofit.

The Water Wise program is a joint initiative between *(enter water corporation name)* and the Department of Human Services aimed at reducing water bills by offering eligible concession card holders a free water audit and repair or replacement of inefficient water fittings.

The Water Wise grant will provide you with a free water audit and, if required, a licensed or registered plumber, employed by *(enter water corporation name)* will repair or replace any inefficient water fittings with the aim of assisting you to reduce your water usage. Further details of the program are provided in the enclosed brochure.

At the time of the water audit you will be required to sign a consent form agreeing to the sharing of information collected as part of the Water Wise program, including your name, address, eligibility for the program, and water usage information. This information will only be provided to the Department of Human Services for program evaluation purposes.

The Water Wise audit and retrofit, which takes approximately two hours to complete, can be scheduled during normal business hours and is a free service for eligible customers.

Should you wish to participate in the Water Wise program, or enquire further please contact *(enter contact details)* quoting account number «Customer\_No».

Yours Sincerely





If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, please phone **1800 658 521** using the National Relay Service **13 36 77** if required, or email **concessions@dhs.vic.gov.au**



To find out more about financial services available for low income Victorians visit **[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions)** or call **1800 658 521** (toll-free)