

Payment Assistant Scheme - Water Accounts

For more information contact
Shoalhaven Water

City Administration Centre

Bridge Road (PO Box 42)

Nowra NSW Australia 2541

P: (02) 4429 3214

F: (02) 4429 3170

water@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au

www.shoalwater.nsw.gov.au

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1 PURPOSE

The Payment Assistance Scheme (PAS) is a Council initiative designed for the purpose of helping residential customers who are financially disadvantaged and having difficulty paying their home water usage charges because of a crisis. The situations whereby PAS could be given is outlined in detail at paragraph 6 of the attached “Guidelines for Community Agencies”.

2 STATEMENT

The PAS is not intended to be used as an ongoing income support nor is it intended to relieve Council of its obligations to manage the customer’s debts in a fair and equitable manner. The PAS is funded entirely by Council and is applied only against water usage charges. It is expected that the majority of people given PAS will be either in receipt of a maximum Government Pension or Benefit or on a low income or have dependent children; making it difficult to absorb costs. People that are not in these groups are not precluded from receiving PAS as other circumstances may dictate assistance being appropriate eg financial hardship or family disaster.

3 PROVISIONS

The policy and management of the PAS is the responsibility of Council with funding levels set each year as part of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan. Interested Community Agencies will deliver the program in order that as far as possible, a person’s needs can be assessed locally and at a time the assistance is required. It also enables Community Agencies to incorporate PAS into their broader range of financial counselling services and assistance measures for people in need. Community Agencies eligible for assistance under this policy must be as a minimum:

- Holders of an ABN, and
- Recognised as an Emergency Relief Material Aid Agency, or
- Be an approved Member of Financial Counsellors Association of Australia, or
- As approved by Council

The limit to which Council will provide assistance under the scheme will be:

- a. Allocation of vouchers proportionately to Agencies (to the value of \$25.00 per voucher in books of 20) and up to a total funding limit for the scheme of \$15,000 and/or as per the level as adopted within the Delivery Program and Operational Plan,
- b. Provision of water saving brochures and advice, and
- c. Provision of onsite audit services at premises to assess and advise on ways to minimise water use in and around homes.

The issue of vouchers to applicants under the PAS is conditional upon Agencies complying with the following parameters;

- Any person within the city served by their organisation is able to apply for PAS and have their situation assessed, regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual preference, religion as defined by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 as amended November 2011,
- It is expected that Agencies will help applicants to develop financial independence and investigate other forms of assistance eg Pensioner Rebate Concession,
- It is expected that Agencies will issue water saving brochures to applicants and encourage them to undertake onsite water audit services by Shoalhaven Water to assess and advise on ways to minimise water use in and around homes,
- Submission of an original water usage account with vouchers, alternatively Agency contact with Shoalhaven Water be made to ascertain water use charges and previous use of PAS,
- Advising applicants that PAS is only applied against water usage charges,
- Attendance of Agency representative at Council convened meetings to review the PAS program and discuss issues as required, and
- Acceptance of the attached document “Guidelines for Community Agencies” as the basis for managing the PAS.

The PAS is not limited to property owners and can be utilised by residential tenants, but only if a water account or copy is rendered with the vouchers.

In exceptional circumstances the Director Shoalhaven Water (Water Customer & Business Services Manager) may authorise the issue of vouchers direct to an applicant where it is not practical or time constraints dictate that an applicant attend the relevant Agency.

It is a preference that Agencies manage the issue of vouchers carefully to ensure that benefits are able to be provided to applicants throughout the financial year after the initial allocation. In this respect applicants should not receive PAS for the entire amount of a water usage account. A self-funded contribution should be encouraged to acquit the total amount outstanding on the water usage account. The use of Council’s payment arrangement scheme should also be utilised as a strategy to reduce the level of account debt.

4 IMPLEMENTATION

Agencies will be provided with vouchers by 1st July of each year with the distribution calculated and monitored by Council. The further issue of vouchers will be at the discretion of Council based on the level of use. It may be necessary to recall vouchers from one Agency for re-distribution. Further funding beyond the total limit set for the scheme each financial year, will be at the discretion of Council.

The Water Customer and Business Services Section of the Shoalhaven Water Group is responsible for the implementation and management of claims within this policy. The Director Shoalhaven Water Group (Water Customer & Business Services Manager) is authorised to determine PAS allocations

and proper use of the scheme under the terms of this policy and “Guidelines for Community Agencies” document.

5 REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed within one year of the election of every new Council.

6 APPLICATION OF ESD PRINCIPLES

To reduce the level of water consumption in residential premises through advice and assistance offered as a condition of PAS.