

12 January 2024

Mr William

By Email: fyi-request-24972-9150630b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear William

I refer to your request for information on missed water reads regarding the Christchurch City Council excess water charges:

I would like to request the total number of successful water meter reads and the total number of unsuccessful water meter reads when the water meter is not found or cannot be read ect and the process undertaken when an unsuccessful meter read has occurred.

Also as part of this request the total cost on an annual basis of residential water meter reading since the excess water charges came into effect.

Council Response

Please note, the data below is accurate to the date you submitted your LGOIMA request.

There are currently 138,519 residential properties within the Council reporting system.

- 113,433 properties have a single metered connection, being approximately 82% of the residential properties (single metered connection).
- 25,068 properties have shared connections, being approximately 18% of the residential properties (shared connection residential properties). Note in the decision by Council, shared water meters are not subject to the excess water charges, unless by written agreement.

In the latest read cycle of 90 days (from the date you submitted your LGOIMA request), there were approximately 12,703 (approximately 11.2%) of single metered connection properties where the water meter wasn't readable for a variety of reasons (as outlined below). Of these, approximately 15.87% relate to reasons that are generally outside of the Council's control.

The unreadable residential properties will at some point be subject to the excess water charge, once the circumstances preventing the meter being read are resolved. The circumstances giving rise to the inability to read the meters are varied, and some are easier to resolve than others.

Some occur on one off/temporary basis (such as flooding or hazards on the property at the time of the read) which Council has limited (if any) control. Generally, these properties are subject to the excess water charge when a reading is ascertained at the next available reading date. The water usage for that property is then averaged out over a longer period between reads (this is discussed in more detail below).

Other categories are ones where meters are not read and not subject to the excess water charge until the issue preventing the water meter being read is resolved (i.e., a specific contractor is sent out to find the meter).

The types of reasons generally within the Council's control to remove the issue are grouped into the following categories:

Cannot locate

For example, the water meter is buried in the garden, a homeowner has moved a fence on top of the meter etc. Refer to question 5 below regarding the intended steps to try and remedy this issue.

Meter replaced

An existing water meter has been replaced but the Council's system has not yet been updated to reflect the new meter details.

Council staff need to manually input new meter information into its system. The Council contracted temporary data staff in June 2022 to go through the water meter replacement data backlog to try and rectify this issue. However, since this time, there is more replacement data to input. The Council is bringing in 3 temporary data entry staff next week to continue with the work (as well as inputting new water meters into its system (see above) to reduce the current backlog.

Box clean out required

This is where the water meter is blocked by dirt/debris. To rectify this issue, the Council must organise specific contractors to go to site to carry out physical works. The extent of the work involved varies for each property depending upon the circumstances.

Vegetation

Excess vegetation is blocking or hiding the water meter. To rectify this issue, the Council needs to organise specific contractors to go to site and carry out physical works to cut back the foliage. The extent of the work involved varies for each property depending upon the circumstances.

Wrong route

The meter that is listed on the water meter readers route is not physically on that route (it could be a similar street name that has been mistakenly put on the wrong route). The Council's data needs to be updated to correct the information.

Jammed Lid

The Council needs to organise a maintenance contractor to fix the lid before the meter can be read.

Dial Unreadable

Meter is unreadable because it is either upside down, on its side, too far down to read, or has condensation on the dial. The Council needs to organise a maintenance contractor to fix the issue before the meter can be read.

The types of reasons generally outside the Council's control are grouped into the following categories:

Box flooded

The meter box is inaccessible at the time of read because of heavy rain and the area around the meter is flooded.

Construction

The house is a construction site, and it is considered unsafe for a water meter reader to access due to health and safety risks.

Meter inaccessible

Catch all category – for any other reason not specifically identified.

Meter removed

Mostly relates to new developments where several new meters will be replacing single meters. The old meter has been removed but the new meters are not yet in place.

Property locked

Access to the property is prevented i.e. locked gates

Covered by car

At the time the meter reader went out to site, a car is blocking the meter.

Dog

The meter is unable to be safely accessed.

Health and Safety Risk

Catch all category – for any other reason not specifically identified.

The first table below provides a snapshot of the number of unreadable residential properties from the last three 90 day read cycles. It indicates the number of residential properties that a meter was unable to be read for each category.

The second table shows by way of comparison the percentage of those unreadable residential properties compared to the total number of single metered connections.

Reason	Mar to May	Jun to Aug	Sep to Nov
Steps generally within the Council control that could be taken to remedy the issue. ¹			
Cannot Locate	7,891	7,072	5,636
Meter Replaced	2,257	2,795	3,535
Box Clean Out Required	731	770	610
Vegetation	347	433	451
Jammed Lid	112	171	95
Wrong Route	65	116	85
Dial Unreadable	200	202	144
No Meter	125	138	130
SUBTOTAL	11,728	11,697	10,686
Reasons generally outside Council control			
Construction	313	382	261

¹ Subject to resourcing and budgetary constraints.

Meter Inaccessible	273	373	586
Box Flooded	1,837	2,126	952
Property Locked	98	117	104
Covered by Car	60	53	47
Dog	34	60	52
Health and Safety Risk	23	56	15
SUBTOTAL	2,638	3,167	2,017
TOTAL	14,366	14,864	12,703

Percentage of unreadable properties to single metered connection residential properties

	Mar to May	Jun to Aug	Sep to Nov
Steps generally within the Council control that could be taken to remedy the issue			
Cannot Locate	6.96%	6.23%	4.97%
Meter Replaced	1.99%	2.46%	3.12%
Box Clean Out Required	0.64%	0.68%	0.54%
Vegetation	0.31%	0.38%	0.40%
Jammed Lid	0.10%	0.15%	0.08%
Wrong Route	0.06%	0.10%	0.07%
Dial Unreadable	0.18%	0.18%	0.13%
No Meter	0.11%	0.12%	0.11%
SUBTOTAL	10.34%	10.31%	9.42%
Reasons generally outside Council control			
Construction	0.28%	0.34%	0.23%
Meter Inaccessible	0.24%	0.33%	0.52%
Box Flooded	1.62%	1.87%	0.84%
Property Locked	0.09%	0.10%	0.09%
Covered by Car	0.05%	0.05%	0.04%
Dog	0.03%	0.05%	0.05%
Health and Safety Risk	0.02%	0.05%	0.01%
SUBTOTAL	2.33%	2.79%	1.78%
TOTAL	12.68%	13.10%	11.20%

The Averaging Process

The Council's target for its water meter readers is to read water meters every 90 days (+/- 5 days).

If the Council is unable to read a water meter for a particular property, the readers record the reason, and another reading is carried out in the next 90 days. The water reading is then averaged out over the last two reads i.e. 180 days rather than 90 days. If that reading shows the water usage for the property is in excess of the 900L allowance, the user will receive an excess water charge

based on two actual reads but averaged over 180 days or until the next read occurs. If there is a lengthy period between reads, invoices are manually reviewed by staff.

Averaging the water usage on residential properties between reads, where there have been occasions when reads cannot occur, ensures those properties that are high water users are still subject to the charge. This is the case even when it is averaged out over longer read periods covering multiple seasons of the year. If a property is consistently using excess water, then a longer read period will not impact the charge.

Cost of Water Meter Reading

The exact costs of meter reading are commercially sensitive to our contractor and releasing them could prejudice their and the Council's commercial position. Therefore we have decided to withhold specific figures under the following section of the LGOIMA - 7(2)(b)(ii) – to protect the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information.

However, we can tell you that nationally a manual read is on average around \$1 per read. For the last 2 years we have read every water meter every quarter. Prior to that we read residential properties every 2 years and commercial either quarterly or annually depending on consumption.

Additionally, the total administration costs for both the residential and commercial water charging management for 12 months is approximately \$250,000.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Kind regards

Ella Sullivan

Official Information Advisor

Office of the Mayor and Chief Executive