



An Coimisiún
um Rialáil Fóntas
**Commission for
Regulation of Utilities**

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Commission for Regulation of Utilities

Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook Requirements

‘Code of Practice on Billing for Non-Domestic Customers’

Decision and Response Paper

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Executive Summary

This paper sets out the Commission for Regulation of Utilities' ('CRU') decision on the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers.

One of the CRU's roles as the economic regulator of Irish Water is to ensure that customers of Irish Water receive a high quality of service. For non-domestic customers, this is achieved through the 'Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook'¹. This Non-Domestic Customer Handbook is written by the CRU and sets out the required levels of customer service and customer protection measures that Irish Water must provide to its non-domestic customers and reflect in each of Irish Water's Codes of Practice. Irish Water is required to prepare separate Codes of Practice, which must, at a minimum, reflect the customer service requirements set out in the Handbook. There are 5 Codes of Practice for non-domestic customers, namely, Codes for Customer Communication, Metering, Billing, Network Operations and Complaint Handling.

In November 2017 the CRU undertook a 7 week public consultation (CRU/17/321) which set out proposed additional customer service standard requirements to the existing Billing Code of Practice (Section 7 of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook (CRU/17/322)).

Following this consultation and in consideration of comments received, this paper sets out the CRU's decision in relation to these proposed amendments. In summary, the CRU's approved amendments will provide benefits to non-domestic customers by setting customer service standards and protections to ensure:

- bills are calculated accurately based on either an actual meter read, customer meter read, an estimated meter read or an assumed/calculated charge (for non-metered properties).
- bills are clear, simple, and easy to understand for customers
- bills display sufficient information to allow customers to understand their charge(s)
- clear rules are set as to how billing errors are corrected
- IW will endeavour to issue bills in a reasonable timeframe after meter readings are completed
- IW will endeavour to issue at least one bill that is based on a meter read within any 12 month period
- customers are provided with a choice of payment options
- customers experiencing difficulties in paying their bills will be offered a payment plan
- clear rules for how a customer can close an account and the timeframe in which a final bill will be issued

¹ There is also a separate Customer Handbook for domestic customers called the 'Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook' (CER/17/319)

Please see the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook (CRU/18/041) for full details of the approved Billing Code of Practice Handbook requirements which is published alongside this paper.

This paper also sets out the responses received from the public in relation to the proposed amendments to the existing Billing Code of Practice and provides the CRU response to each.

The approved Non-Domestic Customer Handbook takes effect from the date of publication, 27 March 2018.

Public Impact Statement

One of the CRU's roles as the economic regulator of Irish Water is to ensure that customers of Irish Water receive a high quality of service from the utility. This is achieved through adherence by Irish Water with standards of service set out in the 'Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook'². This document is written by the CRU, and sets out the specific standards of service that Irish Water must offer its customers across a number of service areas such as metering, handling of complaints, network operations, communications with customers and billing customers.

The Non-Domestic Customer Handbook is an important customer protection measure as it ensures customers are provided with a high quality of service. It is an evolving document and is kept under review by the CRU to ensure the service standards remain appropriate as developments and policies in the water sector are implemented over time.

In November 2017, the CRU undertook a 7 week public consultation which proposed to introduce additional service requirements to the Non-Domestic Customer Handbook that Irish Water must offer in relation to billing its non-domestic customers. This Decision Paper sets out the CRU's decision on the additional amendments to the Billing Code of Practice. These amendments will provide benefits and extra protections to non-domestic customers in relation to the billing service levels they receive, such as billing accuracy, information to be provided on the bills, payment options, rules to deal with billing errors, closing of accounts and issuing of final bill(s) and offering payment plans.

² There is also a separate Customer Handbook for domestic customers called the 'Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook' (CER/17/319)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Purpose of this Paper

One of the CRU's roles as the economic regulator of Irish Water is to ensure that customers of Irish Water receive a high quality of service. For non-domestic customers, this is achieved through the 'Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook'³. This Non-Domestic Customer Handbook is written by the CRU and sets out the required levels of customer service and customer protection measures that Irish Water must provide to its non-domestic customers and reflect in each of Irish Water's Codes of Practice. There are 5 Codes of Practice for non-domestic customers, namely, Codes for Customer Communication, Metering, Billing, Network Operations and Complaint Handling.

The CRU first established the 'Irish Water Customer Handbook' in October 2014. At this time non-domestic customers were billed by their Local Authority ('LA') on behalf of Irish Water. There was a large variation across the then 34 Local Authorities in existing contracts, billing formats, charging mechanisms, billing frequency and customer account systems. This prevented the CRU from placing into the Billing Code of Practice within the Customer Handbook standard requirements around general billing customer service levels, such as billing accuracy, information to be provided on the bills, payment options, rules to deal with billing errors, closing of accounts and issuing of final bill(s) and offering payment plans.

Since October 2014, Irish Water commenced a project to migrate all of its non-domestic customers billing and consumption information from each LA billing system to Irish Water's central billing system. This project was completed in June 2017, and now Irish Water directly bills all of its non-domestic customers. As a result, in November 2017 the CRU conducted a 7 week public consultation concerning the 'Code of Practice on Billing for Non-Domestic Customers' (CRU/17/321). This consultation proposed to put in place additional customer service requirements to the existing Billing Code of Practice (Section 7 of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook (CRU/17/322)) to ensure that non-domestic customers receive a high quality of service when receiving bills from Irish Water.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the CRU's decision on these proposed additional customer service requirements to the Billing Code of Practice within the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook. Please note, for ease of reference the approved Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook - 27 March 2018 that reflects the CRU's decision is published alongside this document (CRU/18/041). This replaces the previous '*Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook - 17th November 2017*'. This Paper also summaries the comments received to this consultation and provides a CRU response to each.

³ There is also a separate Customer Handbook for domestic customers called the 'Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook' (CER/17/319)

1.1.2 Background

The Water Services Act (No. 2) 2013 which conferred on the CRU the role of economic regulator of Irish Water includes the provision for the CRU to regulate customer service provided by Irish Water. As economic regulator of Irish Water, the CRU has a key role in protecting the interests of water and wastewater customers of Irish Water and ensuring that they received a high quality of service. One way this is achieved is through the 'Irish Water Customer Handbook'. This document is written by the CRU and sets out the required levels of customer service and customer protection measures that Irish Water must provide to its customers and reflect in each of Irish Water's Codes of Practice. The Codes of Practice cover a number of service areas, such as customer communications, metering, billing, customer complaints and network operations.

Irish Water is required to prepare separate Codes of Practice, which must, at a minimum, reflect the customer service requirements set out in the Handbook. Irish Water must submit each Code of Practice for approval by the CRU. The CRU has the authority to approve or refuse to approve the Codes of Practice developed by Irish Water. The Codes of Practice are an important customer protection measure to ensure that Irish Water customer's interests are protected and they receive a high quality of service which is delivered in a safe, secure and sustainable manner.

The CRU regularly monitors Irish Water's implementation of the various Customer Handbook requirements to ensure it continues to deliver a high standard of service for customers. If Irish Water fails to meet these customer service standards, the CRU has the authority to require Irish Water to comply with the Codes of Practice. Also, if a customer has not received the required standard of service set out in a Code of Practice, they can raise a complaint with Irish Water, which, after completing the complaints process with Irish Water, can be further escalated to the CRU for resolution.

The CRU first established the 'Irish Water Customer Handbook' (CER/14/364) in October 2014. This Handbook contained the customer service standard requirements for both domestic and non-domestic customers of Irish Water. Since that date, there has been two subsequent updates to the Irish Water Customer Handbook;

- In 2015, the CRU published an updated version of the Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/15/010) to take account of the Water Services Act 2014; this update impacted the domestic sections of the Handbook only.
- On 14 November 2017, the Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/15/010) was divided into two separate Handbooks, a Handbook for domestic customers (Irish Water Domestic Customer Handbook (CER/17/319)) and another Handbook for non-domestic customers (Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook (CER/17/318))⁴. The Domestic and Non-Domestic Handbooks replaced the existing Customer Handbook (CER/15/010) and the contents remained identical to the previous version. No amendments were made to Handbook requirements.

⁴ Further detail can be found in the CER Information Note "Division of the existing Irish Water Customer Handbook" (CER/17/317)

The Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook is an evolving document and is kept under review by the CRU to ensure it remains relevant, is fit for purpose and the service standards are appropriate for customers. It is the CRU's intention to undertake a full review of the Non-Domestic Customer Handbook requirements in Q4 of 2018 as part of the Non-Domestic Tariff Framework Project⁵. The Non-Domestic Tariff Framework Project concerns the establishment of a new Non-Domestic Tariff Framework which will apply to Irish Water's non-domestic water and wastewater customers. The Framework will introduce harmonised non-domestic tariffs, which will benefit customers in terms of transparency, simplicity and equity. Reviewing the Irish Water Non-Domestic Handbook requirements will ensure that Irish Water's customer commitments remain appropriate and are sufficient for customers as developments in the water sector take place and new policies are implemented over time.

1.1.3 Comments Received

The CRU would like to thank the respondents for their contribution to the consultation process. The CRU received two responses to the consultation. Submissions were received from the following organisations:

- Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
- Irish Farmers Association

These responses to the consultation paper (CRU/17/321) have been published alongside this paper and can be accessed at www.cru.ie.

1.1.4 Related Documents

By way of background to this decision paper, the following list of documents contain previous CRU consultations or decisions made in relation to the Irish Water Customer Handbook:

- Draft Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/14/087)
- CER Consultation Paper on The Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/14/086)
- CER approved Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/14/364) – *Version 1.0*
- CER Response Paper to Irish Water Customer Handbook Consultation (CER/14/365)
- CER Decision Paper on The Irish Water Customer Handbook (CER/14/363)
- CER approved Irish Water Customer Handbook revision (CER/15/010) – *Version 2.0*

⁵ Further details on the timing of Non-Domestic Customer Handbook review as well as the Non-domestic Tariff Framework Project can be found within the CRU's 'Establishing Irish Water's Non-Domestic Tariff Framework' Information Note (CRU/17/287)

- CER Information Note - Establishing Irish Water's Non-Domestic Tariff Framework (CER/16/304)
- CRU Information Note - Establishing Irish Water's Non-Domestic Tariff Framework (CER/17/287)
- CRU Information Note – Division of the existing Irish Water Customer Handbook (CRU/17/317)
- CRU approved Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook - 14 November 2017 (CRU/17/318)
- CRU Consultation Paper – Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – Proposed Amendments to the Code of Practice on Billing – (CRU/17/321)
- Draft Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – Proposed Amendments to the Code of Practice on Billing - Consultation – 17 November 2017 (CRU/17/322)
- Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – 27 March 2018 (CRU/18/041)

Information on the CRU's role and relevant legislation can be found on the CRU's website at www.cru.ie.

1.1.5 Structure of Paper

The paper will be structured in the following manner:

- **Section 1** provides an introduction and background information in relation to this Decision Paper.
- **Section 2** outlines the CRU's decision regarding the proposed amendments to the Billing Code of Practice Handbook requirements.
- **Section 3** summaries the principal comments received to the consultation and provides the CRU's response to each.
- **Section 4** identifies the next steps to this Decision Paper.

Please note that the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – 27 March 2018 is published alongside this decision paper & response paper (CRU/18/041).

2. CRU Decision

The CRU has reached a decision on the proposed additional service standards to the Code of Practice on Billing for Non-Domestic Customers. This section outlines the CRU's decision in relation to the Billing Code of Practice – Section 7 of the Irish Water Customer Handbook. The full list of approved customer service requirements are detailed in the 'Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – 27 March 2018 (CRU/18/041)' which is published alongside this paper.

These additional standards will enhance the customer service requirements to be provided by Irish Water to non-domestic customers and ensure that customers receive a high quality of service in respect of the bills they receive, the information provided in the bills, the accuracy of customers' bills, as well as the access to information on tariffs, how to close an account, payment options, payment plans and guidelines on dealing with billing errors.

2.1 General Customer Service in Relation to Billing

The CRU within its consultation paper proposed to introduce a number of customer service standards in relation to the general service Irish Water must offer when billing its non-domestic customers. The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments set out in the consultation paper (with exception to the modification set out below), which will strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to Section 7.1 'General Customer Service in Relation to Billing'. It is important that customers of Irish Water receive bills that are calculated accurately and bills are issued in a reasonable timeframe. Where billing or meter errors occur, it is important that a clear set of rules is established for how such errors will be corrected.

Modification to Proposed Billing Error Requirement

The CRU has made the following modification (tracked-change) to the proposed Handbook requirement **7.1.8** in the consultation paper:

7.1.8 *Where an error is discovered in relation to the billing applied to an account holder or the meter readings or meter number associated with an account holder, Irish Water will determine whether the account holder has been in effect over or under paying for the water and/or wastewater services supplied. Where the account holder has been determined to have been underpaying and has previously paid bills in a timely manner, the account holder will only be required to pay the balance for the previous 12 months from the date the error is corrected.*

Where the account holder has been in effect overpaying and unless any law limits, restricts or prevents Irish Water from doing so, Irish Water will refund in full ~~the any~~ amount overpaid by the account holder ~~for the duration of the error~~ as established by investigation.

For the avoidance of doubt where an account holder has consistently been in arrears with their bill payments and has not engaged with Irish Water in efforts to establish an appropriate payment plan, they will not be eligible for such protection from charging errors.

The above amendments to the text of this Handbook requirement are made because it is not clear under legislation that in every case Irish Water is liable to repay amounts overpaid by a customer prior to 1st January 2014 (the date on which the functions of the water services authorities transferred to Irish Water⁶). This will be determined between Irish Water and the customer on a case by case basis and in accordance with legislation. The CRU would like to clarify that the CRU's legislative powers to providing a dispute resolution service to any customer of Irish Water having an unresolved complaint is limited to situations where the cause of a complaint continues to exist, and the party was registered with Irish Water, on or after the 1st January 2014.

Please refer to **Section 7.1** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of approved requirements.

2.2 Information on the Bill

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to Section 7.2 '*Information on the Bill*' and Section 7.5 '*Tariffs & Prices*'.

It is important that bills received by non-domestic account holders are clear, simple and easy to understand, and also contain helpful information for the account holder in relation to the billing of water and wastewater services received.

Please refer to **Section 7.2 & Section 7.5** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of approved requirements.

2.3 Presentation of Information on Non-Domestic Tariffs

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to '*Presentation of Information on Non-Domestic Tariffs*'.

By approving the proposed additional requirements, customers of Irish Water will have easy access to information on non-domestic tariffs and applicable charging arrangements will be clearly displayed and explained for customers. When presenting information on tariffs, Irish Water must clearly display all available standard tariffs (metered and unmetered) and charges on its website. These are to be displayed inclusive and exclusive of VAT, as applicable.

In addition to displaying all tariffs and charges, Irish Water must display explanatory information on any applicable tariff discounts, allowances and applications relation to tariff or volume consumed/discharged. For customers on assessed tariffs, details of all assessed charges and categories must be displayed. For customers who enquire by telephone, Irish Water must provide details on all applicable tariffs.

⁶ SI 576/2013 – Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 (Transfer Day) Order 2013

Please refer to **Section 7.3** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

2.4 Payment Options

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to *'Payment Options'*.

By approving the proposed additional requirements, Irish Water must offer a choice of payment options to all non-domestic customers and that the range of payment methods should be clearly communicated to the account holder in Irish Water's billing process. If the account holder selects a direct debit as their method of payment, the account holder must be in line with the Single European Payment Area (SEPA) standards for notification of direct debits.

Please refer to **Section 7.4** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

2.5 Closing Accounts and Issuing Final Bill

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments set out in the consultation paper (with exception to the modification set out below), which will strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to *'Closing Accounts and Issuing Final Bill'*.

It is important that customers understand the requirements for closing an account and when a final bill will be issued. By approving the proposed additional requirements, there are now a number of measures to protect customers during an account closure and the issuing of final bill(s). For example, Irish Water must not keep a customer's account open because the account holder is unable to provide Irish Water with details of the new account holder. In addition, there are requirements in relation to the methods of a final read of metered consumption that should be accepted by Irish Water when a customer wishes to close an account, and the time period by which Irish Water must issue a final bill after the account holder has closed their account.

Please refer to **Section 7.6** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

Modification to Proposed Customer Requested Meter Read Timeframe

The CRU has made the following modification (tracked-change) to the proposed Handbook requirement **7.6.3** in the consultation paper:

7.6.3 *Irish Water will, upon request from an account holder to close an account, offer an estimated read at no charge to the account holder. If the account holder does not wish to accept this the account holder can provide a self-read, or can request an account holder specific Irish Water meter read to be conducted, for which a cost reflective charge may apply. Irish Water will endeavour to conduct such a read within 10 working days of the request from customer, subject to operational capacity.*

7.6.4 *Irish Water may not keep an account holder's account open and bill the account holder indefinitely for continued consumption where the account holder has made contact to close their account and has accepted an estimated read, provided a self-read or requested a specific Irish Water read. If none of these options have been accepted by the account holder Irish Water should put in place a process for addressing this which may include engaging with the account holder until a satisfactory outcome is reached before closing the account.*

The above tracked change amendment has been made to reflect operational capacity constraints that may arise when carrying out a special customer requested meter read within 10 working days due to the transition of non-domestic meter reading capability from the existing system (which involves 31 separate Local Authorities) to a single utility model. It should be noted that customers also have the option of providing a self-read or accepting an estimated read from Irish Water to close an account.

In addition, the original requirement **7.6.3** has been split into two separate requirements (**7.6.3** & **7.6.4**) to improve clarity for the reader.

2.6 Arrears & Arrangements for Identifying and Dealing with Customers in Difficulty

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to '*Arrears & Arrangements for Identifying and Dealing with Customers in Difficulty*'.

It is important that Irish Water offer assistance to customers who are experiencing difficulties in paying their bills. By approving the proposed additional requirements, Irish Water is required to set out within their Billing Code of Practice procedures for dealing with non-domestic customers who are facing financial difficulties and options available to these customers. Irish Water must also be proactive in engaging early with customers who are having payment difficulties.

Please refer to **Section 7.7** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

2.7 Payment Plans

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to '*Payment Plans*'.

Payment plans are a method offered by a utility as a way of assisting customers who are experiencing financial difficulties in paying their bill and/or are in arrears. By approving the proposed additional requirements, Irish Water is required to assist customers in making a payment plan. It is important that payment plans offered by Irish Water take into account the individual customer's ability to pay and for Irish Water to agree with the customer the arrangements of the plan and ensure that they are manageable with the customer. The details of the payment plan must be clearly explained and communicated to the customer.

Please refer to **Section 7.8** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

2.8 Monitoring of Billing Issues

The CRU has made a decision to approve the proposed amendments to strengthen the standards of service Irish Water is obliged to provide when billing its non-domestic customers in relation to *'Monitoring of Billing Issues'*.

The CRU proposed to closely monitor non-domestic billing data, for example, the numbers of customers who are in arrears, are on payment plans or have been disconnected. The reason for this is so that we can easily identify where customer protection measures may need to change or improve. The CRU also included requirements for Irish Water to monitor and collate data on a number of areas related to billing of non-domestic customers and report to the CRU.

This will be in addition to the data reporting the CRU already received from Irish Water in relation to other areas of the Non-Domestic Customer Handbook as well as the Domestic Customer Handbook.

Please refer to **Section 7.16** of the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook for more detail on the full list of requirements.

3. Comments Received to Consultation Questions

In November 2017, the CRU published the *Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook - 17 November 2017* (CRU/17/322) with proposed additional amendments to The Code of Practice on Billing for Non-Domestic Customers, with an accompanying consultation paper. In this consultation paper (CRU/17/321) the CRU sought comments to 8 specific questions regarding the proposed amendments which the CRU in particular sought feedback. This section summaries the principal comments received from the respondents and outlines the CRU's response to each.

3.1 Responses to the Proposed Amendments

3.1.1 General Customer Service in Relation to Billing

Application of Standing Charges

One respondent argued that in the case of “agricultural holdings” where a non-domestic customer has multiple meters, only one standing charge should be applied per customer. On a related point, another respondent sought the implementation of a cap on water meter charges in cases where multiple meters exist.

CRU Response:

The CRU notes these comments which relate to the charging arrangements for non-domestic customers. Irish Water has been developing its proposals for a Non-Domestic Tariff Framework which will include proposals as to how standing charges should be applied. Irish Water's proposals for the framework will be issued for public consultation later this year. The CRU will seek views on all aspects of Irish Water's tariff proposals during that consultation.

Irish Water's charging arrangements are not placed within Irish Water's Customer Handbook (which concerns the service levels and standards provided to customers) but within Irish Water's 'Water Charges Plan' document.

Application of a ‘Domestic Allowance’

One respondent stated that “where the same meter accounts for both domestic and farm use, a domestic allowance should be deducted from the bill.”

CRU Response:

Irish Water is required to maintain non-domestic tariffs in accordance with the structures and arrangements applicable prior to 1st January 2014. As per the existing LA charging rules, a domestic allowance is deducted from the non-domestic bill applied to a mixed-use premises.

Irish Water is also required under Handbook Requirement **7.1.2 (i)**, to place on non-domestic bills a “*Clear breakdown of tariff charges, water consumption and wastewater/trade effluent release unit data; including any applicable discounts, rebates, allowances or penalties*”. The deduction of a domestic allowance will be made clear on a customer’s bill.

Back-Billing Period

One respondent disagreed with the proposed requirement **7.1.8**, where it states “... *Where the account holder has been determined to have been underpaying and has previously paid bills in a timely manner, the account holder will only be required to pay the balance for the previous 12 months from the date the error is corrected....*”. This respondent proposed to reduce the timeframe from 12 months to 6 months as “*It is not the fault of the customer if Irish Water is underestimating payments*”.

CRU Response:

The CRU notes this respondent’s point and it is not the fault of the customer that they have been undercharged. However the customer has consumed water supplied by Irish Water and/or discharged wastewater into the public sewer system. From an equity perspective customers should pay for water that they consume and/or the removal of wastewater from their premises. On balance, the CRU is of the view that limiting the period a customer can be back-billed to 12 months from the date the error is corrected is fair and appropriate.

Relocation of the Handbook Requirement

One respondent highlighted the need for the CRU to reinstate the Non-Domestic Customer Handbook requirement which existed in the previous Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook – 14 November 2017 (CER/17/318) ‘*Code of Practice on Billing for Non-Domestic Customers*’, Handbook Requirement **7.1.1**, which stated “*Irish Water guarantees to apply the applicable discount/rebate to a customer’s bill in relation to notices that declare water unfit for human consumption in line with the CRU’s decision on Irish Water’s Water Charges plan*”.

CRU Response:

For clarity this requirement was not removed from the Customer Handbook, but was moved from requirement number **7.1.1** to **7.1.4** during the consultation. The CRU repositioned this obligation to accommodate other proposed billing requirements.

3.1.2 Information on the Bill

Identifying Charges that Apply to a Meter

One respondent proposed that *“Where multiple meters are present on the same account as is the case for many farms, the location of the meter (townland) to which each charge applies should be clearly stated on the bill in addition to the water meter number so that farmers can easily identify what charges apply to what meter.”*

CRU Response:

Under Requirement 7.2.1(e), each water meter number is required to be presented on the bill, along with the “Supply/Property” address associated with each meter. This will allow customers to identify what charges apply to each meter located at the supply address. Charges for each meter will be separately shown on the customer’s bill.

Identifying Domestic and Non-Domestic Usage and Charges for Mixed-Use Premises

One respondent emphasised, where a customer identifies as a mixed-use connection (i.e. the same meter records both domestic and non-domestic usage), the bill should clearly show the charge broken down into two parts, the charge which is allocated to domestic usage and the charge which is allocated to non-domestic usage. The Respondent further stated *“A clear distinction should be visible on the bill for charges related to domestic use and non-domestic use in cases where a meter serves both the household and the farm.”*

CRU Response:

Irish Water is required under Handbook Requirement **7.2.1 (i)** to place on customer bills a *“Clear breakdown of tariff charges, water consumption and wastewater/trade effluent release unit data; including any applicable discounts, rebates, allowances or penalties”*.

The usage and charges (including domestic allowances) that make up the non-domestic bill will be clearly stated on the bill.

3.1.3 Tariffs & Prices

Notify Customers of Tariff Changes

One respondent disputed that “*Changes to tariff should be issued prior to issuing a bill as opposed to the CRU proposal which states they must be stated clearly in the bill.*”

CRU Response:

Requirement 7.5.2 states; “*Where there is a change in tariffs, this will be clearly indicated on the bill....*”. For clarity, the CRU will also require that any changes to tariffs to be notified to customers in advance of changes taking effect.

Including the “Ability to Pay” Criterion when Setting Tariffs

One respondent argued that the Non-Domestic Handbook has failed to include the “ability to pay” as a criterion when setting tariffs and prices. The respondent stated that farming is a low income and margin sector and that classifying farming and the wider agri-food sector as a ‘non-domestic customer’ in the same category as a multi-national corporations is “unacceptable and inequitable”.

CRU Response:

The CRU notes these comments which relate to including “ability to pay” as a criterion when setting tariffs and prices for non-domestic customers. Irish Water is currently developing its proposals for a Non-Domestic Tariff Framework which will include proposals relating to method of setting tariffs and classification of customers.

Irish Water’s proposals for the framework will be issued for public consultation later this year. The CRU will be seeking views on all aspects of Irish Water’s tariff proposals during this consultation. The charging arrangements for customers are not contained within the Handbook, the Handbook concerns the service levels and standards provided to customers.

3.2 Response to Existing Customer Handbook Requirements

The CRU received a response regarding the Irish Water Non-Domestic Customer Handbook Requirement, Section 7.9 – Disconnection Procedure, this requirement was outside the scope of the consultation.

3.2.1 Disconnection Procedure

Disconnection Procedure

One respondent argued the need for the CRU to amend the existing Handbook disconnection procedure to ensure that it does not impact on human or animal health in the circumstance where livestock does not have access to watercourses.

CRU Response:

The CRU notes this respondent's point. The CRU is happy to further discuss this point with the respondent, with a view to assessing the appropriateness of the existing disconnection procedures as part of the CRU's full review of all of the Non-Domestic Customer Handbook requirements later this year and also future policy developments regarding Irish Water's disconnection procedure.

4. Next Steps

4.1 Next Steps

Irish Water is now required to update and submit its 'Business Customer Codes of Practice' document (which contains the Billing Code of Practice for Non-Domestic Customers – Section 2.0) for approval by the CRU. The CRU will review Irish Water's Billing Code of Practice submission to ensure that it is in line with the Non-Domestic Handbook Requirements. Once approved, Irish Water will publish the updated Business Customer Code of Practice and make it easily accessible for the public on its website.