

Why are we recommending irrigation prices?

The Queensland Government directed us to recommend irrigation prices for Sunwater and Seqwater customers over the pricing period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024.

This includes recommending prices for irrigation customers in the **Central Brisbane River water supply scheme (WSS)**. Prices for non-irrigation customers are outside the scope of our review.

After extensive consultation with irrigators, we have released our final report. The Government will make the final decision on irrigation prices, taking our recommendations into consideration.

How we have recommended prices

We recommended a two-part tariff for the tariff group in this scheme. The first part (Part A) is a *fixed price per megalitre (ML) of water access entitlement (WAE)*, and the second part (Part B) is a *volumetric price per ML of water used*.

The volumetric price recovers variable costs (e.g. a portion of labour costs) that change with water usage. The remaining costs associated with this scheme are recovered by the fixed price. We have assessed all expenditure to ensure that Seqwater only recovers prudent and efficient costs.

We applied the pricing principles in the referral, as these give effect to the Government's water pricing policy. Under that policy, prices are to gradually transition over time to the 'lower bound cost target'. This target recovers the irrigation share of the scheme's operating, maintenance and capital renewal costs but does not recover a return on, or of, the scheme's existing asset base (as at 1 July 2000). We also moderated bill impacts by capping total price increases to inflation plus \$2.38/ML of WAE (from 2020–21, increasing by inflation). More details are in Part A (chapter 2) of our report.

Under our recommended prices, cost recovery for Seqwater's irrigation customers will improve from 74% in 2020–21 to 77% by 2023–24. The shortfall is currently funded by a subsidy, paid by the Queensland taxpayer, which will reduce over time as prices transition to the lower bound cost target.

What prices have we recommended?

For this scheme, our recommendations result in the fixed price and volumetric price decreasing to cost-reflective levels immediately. Prices fully recover costs.

Dam safety upgrades for this scheme are due to be commissioned in 2025–26. While this will not impact on

prices in this pricing period, we have estimated the impact in the year following commissioning (2026–27) to be around a \$4.47/ML increase to the cost-reflective fixed price.

Our recommended prices are shown in the table below.

Recommended prices for irrigation customers—\$/ML

Tariff group	2019–20 (Existing)	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Fixed (Part A)	24.48	6.27	6.41	6.55	6.70
Volumetric (Part B)	11.76	2.55	2.60	2.66	2.72

How we have addressed stakeholder concerns

Cost allocation to irrigators

Seqwater said that it had jointly commissioned a study with the Mid-Brisbane River Irrigators Committee (MBRI) that concluded that the scheme assets did not provide irrigators with any significant change to the hydrologic benefit, compared to a situation where the dams and high priority water supply did not exist and irrigators were able to take water from natural flows.

Based on this study, Seqwater proposed a zero cost allocation to, and zero prices for, irrigators in this scheme.

While we welcome customers and the water businesses working together to reach agreement on pricing issues, we consider that the proposed cost allocation of zero is inappropriate and inconsistent with the requirements of the referral.

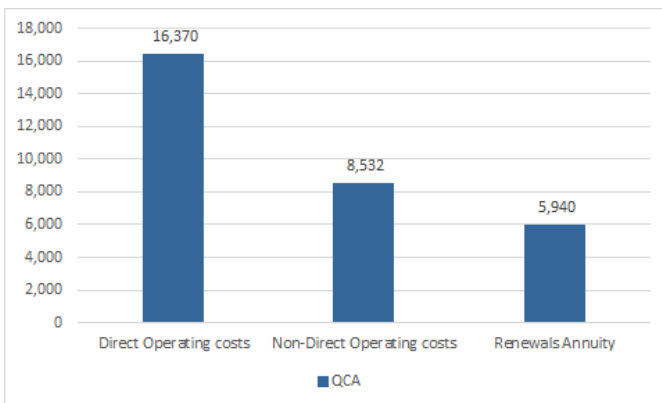
However, we recommended a fixed price that is lower than the prevailing fixed price, based on an improved approach to assigning benefits attributable to different customer groups in this scheme.

Further details on our cost allocation to irrigators in this scheme are in Part C (section 6.3) of our report.

We have recommended adjustments in scheme costs for Central Brisbane River WSS

We made adjustments to Seqwater's proposed scheme costs over the pricing period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024. This includes removing billing system expenditure from non-direct operating costs, accepting Seqwater's revised renewals expenditure which they submitted in January 2019 and accepting Seqwater's revised insurance costs submitted to us in response to our draft report.

Total scheme costs over the price path period—Central Brisbane River WSS (2018–19 dollars) (\$'000)



Notes: 1. Revenue offsets are not included in the charts. 2. QCA Non-direct operating costs includes the QCA regulatory fees.

More details on our recommended costs for Seqwater schemes are in Part C (Chapters 2 to 4) of our report.

We have assessed local impacts

The table below presents an estimate of the change in water bills (compared to the bill based on existing prices), for various levels of water use.

More details on bill impacts are in Part C (chapters 7 and 9, and appendix B) of our report.

Change in water bill

Water use as portion of entitlement held (%)	Water bill change from 2019–20 to 2020–21 (%)	Water bill change from 2019–20 to 2023–24 (%)
0	(74)	(73)
25	(75)	(73)
50	(75)	(73)
75	(75)	(74)
100	(76)	(74)

Where you can find out more

The final report is on the [QCA website](#) in three parts:

- Part A—key regulatory and pricing framework issues that apply to both Sunwater and Seqwater
- Part B—Sunwater schemes
- Part C—Seqwater schemes.

What happens next?

The Government will consider our final report and make the final decision on irrigation water prices for Sunwater and Seqwater customers over the pricing period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024.