

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 **Macintyre Brook 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 two-part tariffs for the tariff groups 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 are recovered by the fixed price. We assessed all expenditure to ensure that Sunwater 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 Sunwater's irrigation customers will improve from 90% in 2020–21 to 94% 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 increasing by our estimate of inflation (2.24%) plus \$2.38/ML (2020–21 dollars) over the price path period. The volumetric price decreases to the cost-reflective level immediately.

Prices in this scheme will not recover costs by the end of the pricing period. Cost recovery will increase from 84% in 2020–21 to 96% by 2023–24.

Dam safety upgrades for this scheme are due to be commissioned in 2022–23. However, this has no impact on our recommended prices over this pricing period. We have estimated the impact in the year following commissioning (2023–24) to be an increase in the cost-reflective fixed price of \$3.37/ML.

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)	48.62	52.09	55.69	59.42	63.30
Volumetric (Part B)	4.54	4.11	4.20	4.30	4.39

How we have addressed stakeholder concerns

Access charge

Some irrigation stakeholders did not support the inclusion of an access charge.

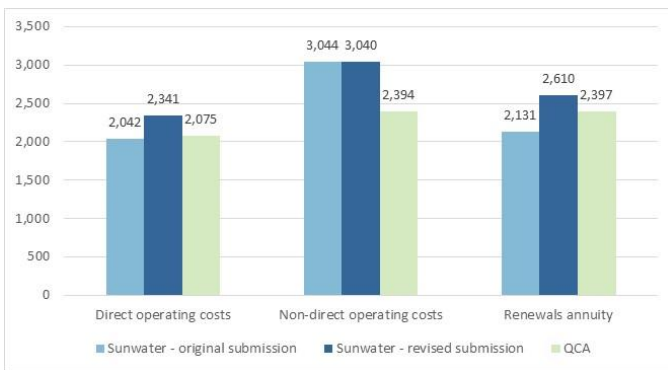
We welcome the water businesses working with their customers to reach agreement on issues of concern. We are generally receptive to recognising such agreements when we recommend irrigation prices, subject to any agreement being consistent with the requirements set out in the referral.

Given the importance of the access charge and its impact on affordability, we have recommended that an access charge not be introduced until further consultation is undertaken with Sunwater's customers, particularly with small water users. See Part B (section 6.3) of our report for further details.

We have recommended a reduction in scheme costs for Macintyre Brook WSS

We have reduced Sunwater's proposed scheme costs by 5% over the pricing period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024.

Total scheme costs over the price path period— Macintyre Brook scheme (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.

Further details on our recommended costs for Sunwater schemes are in Part B (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 B (chapters 7 and 9, and appendix C) 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	7	30
25	7	29
50	6	29
75	6	28
100	6	27

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.