

Re: Foundational Information Disclosure for Wellington

Utilities Disputes Limited | Tautohetohe Whaipainga (UDL) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Commerce Commission's (Commission) paper, *Foundational Information Disclosure for Wellington Water (WW Disclosure Paper)*. Our core submission is:

- The *Operations Report* could be made more consumer friendly through regular updates on Wellington Water's website, the inclusion of more complaints data, and a definition section to help consumers understand each panel.

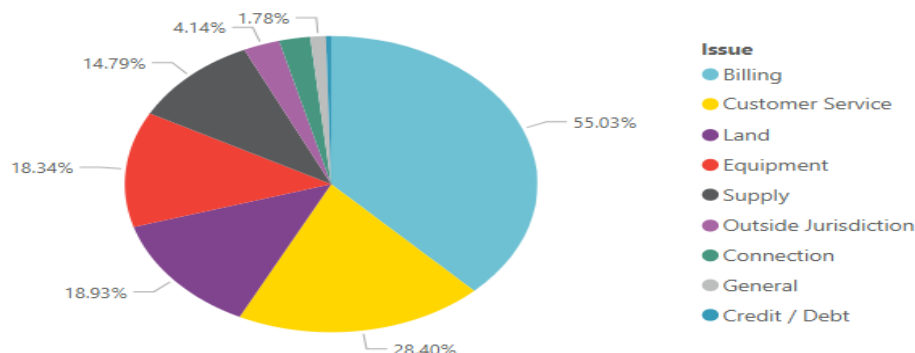
These changes, in terms of the purpose of a foundational information disclosure (ID), could improve the *Operations Report's* ability to communicate the progress Wellington Water is making, as it transitions to a new entity and makes changes for the long term.¹

Utilities Disputes – Provider of Resolution Services

UDL responds to the *WW Disclosure Paper* from the perspective of providing independent dispute resolution services across all essential utilities in New Zealand: water, energy and telecommunications. UDL provides water dispute resolution services principally for Watercare and Wellington Water. Since 2021 we have considered 243 complaints and 244 queries from water customers. Most of these are resolved by providers after referral to their internal complaint's teams.

These complaints raise a range of issues such as billing errors, property damage, customer service. They also raise concerns about the management of public and private leaks. A breakdown of issues raised since 2021 is shown below:

Complaint Issues for Water Scheme
from 1st April 2021 to Present



¹ The Commission notes that the purpose of a foundational ID is to: a) to promote the long-term benefit of consumers of water services, and b) to ensure that sufficient information is readily available to interested persons to assess whether the purpose immediately above is being met. See *WW Disclosure Paper*, 2.6.

UDL’s main scheme is the mandatory Energy Complaints Scheme. In the 2024-2025 reporting year we considered 7533 complaints and 11499 queries.

We also provide the government mandated Broadband Shared Property Access Dispute Scheme (BSPAD scheme), and an independent telecommunications scheme which has one member, Contact Energy.²

UDL is a non-profit company and across all its schemes there is no cost for a consumer to make a complaint.

Information Disclosure

We acknowledge the foundational ID provisions are temporary and are meant to be a light-handed form of economic regulation.³ We also note the provisions are likely to change mid-next year when Wellington Water transitions to a new entity under the Local Water Done Well framework.⁴ However we have also noted the Commission is seeking recommendations for improvement with a longer term view in mind, confirming it: “....may also be relevant to successor water organisations, and we will consider these when we establish the enduring ID regime.”⁵

The Commission, in its drafting of the foundational ID requirements, has considered the submissions on its paper, *Economic Regulation Water Service – Information Disclosure* (12 February 2025).⁶ In its response to this paper UDL emphasised the importance of the robust disclosure of complaints data and the fact this would help Water Service Providers (WSPs) achieve their statutory aim to provide services according to sound business practices, and in an open, transparent and accountable manner.⁷ We also highlighted the importance of uniform data collection so that different WSPs can be compared to each other. We recommended the following framework for data collection:⁸

Number of Complaints

To enable quality statistics on the number of complaints, an adequate definition of complaint is required. The Australian and New Zealand Standard is an: “an expression of dissatisfaction”.⁹ A clear universally adopted definition prevents complaints from disappearing into other categories such as queries, feedback, or points to be noted.¹⁰

Nature of those Complaints

A universal classification system of complaints is necessary to ensure a meaningful comparison of services. The Commission is encouraged to

² The independent scheme is not an industry dispute resolution scheme under part 7 of the Telecommunications Act 2001.

³ *WW Disclosure Paper*, X3.

⁴ See *Ibid*, X2.

⁵ *Ibid*, X6.

⁶ *Ibid*, 2.18.

⁷ See Local Government (Water Services) Bill, cls 3, 15-16.

⁸ Adapted from list, UDL response, *Economic Regulation of Water Services – Information Disclosure*, 5.

⁹ See *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations*, AS/NZS 10002, 4.2 (in force in New Zealand).

¹⁰ See Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia (SOCAP), *Return on Investment of Effective Complaints Management: Public Sector Organisations*, (Research team - University of Newcastle) June 2020 30-31.

work with WSPs to identify a list of complaint categories that are broad enough not to be onerous but meaningful enough to identify the subject matter of the complaint.

Timing for Resolution

Resolution times matched with the subject matter of a complaint will identify where the difficult complaints are. Such data can then be used to work out new strategies to manage these complaints and shorten resolution times.

Staffing

The number of complaints staff employed by a provider and their training. This statistic gives insight into the resources a WSP is investing in complaints compared to the size of their customer base and the number of complaints it receives.

Against this background UDL makes the following points:

- 1) UDL supports the publishing of the *Operations Report* on the Wellington Water website. At this stage the format of the report includes separate reports for each Wellington Water council or council region. The panel for complaints breaks down Customer Service Requests; Complaints Received; and Compliments Received:¹¹



¹¹ *WW Disclosure Paper*, 4.38-4:40, & Attachment D. See also Hutt City Council “Agenda of Wellington Water Committee” (30 May 2025), Attachment 2, 45-49. Other panels in the report will also be relevant such as the Customer Satisfaction panel.

2) Considering the data set proposed under the Local Government (Water Services) Bill and the suggested data framework above, the Commission may wish to recommend the complaint report be more prescriptive. The Local Government (Water Services) Bill allows the Commission to request complaint data including:

- a) the number of complaints received by the supplier;
- b) the nature of these complaints;
- c) when each complaint was received and how long it took to resolve it;
- d) how the complaint was resolved.¹²

Including this data in the *Operations Report*, particularly a breakdown of the subject matter of complaints, will make the report more informative for water customers. Adding this data now, will also help Wellington Water prepare for the likely greater data gathering and disclosure proposed under the Local Government (Water Services) Bill. Making this change at this time may mean systems do not require later revision, especially as it seems Wellington Water may develop a new CRM.¹³

3) The inclusion of definitions will also assist with interpretation of the report. For example, it is unclear when an interaction with Wellington Water makes a matter a complaint or a service request. Service requests are the greater category, while complaints are low. There are also panels for items such as leak repairs, and it is unclear if these matters if reported by a member of the public would also be included in the complaint or service statistics.

4) At this stage the *Operations Report* is linked to Wellington Water Committee meetings.¹⁴ However it may be reports can be updated with greater frequency on the website.¹⁵

The above observations are made to enable the public to comprehend the *Operations Report* better. The internal categories of the *Operations Report* may need further explanation and expansion so interested external parties can get the most out of the report. Such changes will help the public assess the performance of Wellington Water as it transitions to a new entity and plans for the long term.¹⁶



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¹² Local Government (Water Services) Bill, cl 226; 57X.

¹³ See Agenda of Wellington Water Committee" (30 May 2025), Improvement Plan, Group 1, "Review existing systems, applications and data architecture", 76: "Proposed actions to support the recommendation include: Investigate and implement a suitable CRM system." As new systems are put in place, some assessment of likely future data requirements will ensure that any new systems are already able to fulfil the data requirements under the to be amended Commerce Act 1986.

¹⁴ See *Wellington Water Foundational Information Disclosure Determination 2025* (Draft), cl 2.7.1.

¹⁵ It appears there is good facility at Wellington Water for dashboard creation, see FieldForce4, *Contract Review Wellington City Council/Wellington Water*, January 2024, 46.

¹⁶ UDL notes the extensive work programme underway, see *WW Disclosure Paper*, 2.17.