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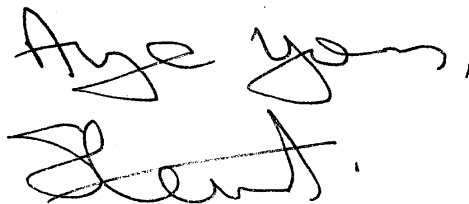


Thank you for your letter of 17 February 2009 on behalf of the Nairn Allotment Society about water charges.

I should first clarify that the role of Ministers in the water charge setting process is to set the public policy objectives and binding principles that Scottish Water, regulated by the Water Industry Commission for Scotland, must apply in setting charge levels. Within this broad framework, the detail of charging for individual business customers is an operational matter for the retail services provider, in this case Business Stream. It is therefore appropriate that Business Stream responds to the specific questions raised about charging for secondary water services (i.e. water charges associated with the maintenance of allotments). Business Stream should also be able to advise on any other measures that the Allotment Society may be considering to reduce its water costs.

Turning to the crofting charging example that your constituents mention. I understand from Scottish Water that this was a practice introduced by the former North of Scotland Water Authority and incorporated within its scheme of charges. This was only available to crofts who had to provide evidence that they were registered. Scottish Water adopted this charge basis from 2002 and the tariff is now contained within Scottish Water's wholesale scheme of charges.

Finally, where the handling of any future water charge element forms part of a management agreement, it would be for the Allotment Society to consider this with the local authority concerned. Ultimately, allotments are a local matter, in which the local authority is best placed to assess the needs of the local area, develop policy on allotments and administer provision as they best see fit.



STEWART STEVENSON