

The Hindu 05.04.2013

Metrowater to ramp up online services

K. Lakshmi

The city's water agency is gearing up to enhance its online services to cater to the growing number of residents paying their taxes and water charges online.

This month, Chennai Metrowater is planning to implement a system under which customers of any bank can remit their water, sewerage tax and charges through internet banking.

It is currently in the process of appointing a payment gateway service provider.

At present, account-holders of only one private bank are able to use the internet banking facility. Measures are on to tie up with over 50 banks to facilitate more customers to use online services. Residents can also take printouts of previous

payments made, which are available on website.

Though online customers contribute to only a small number of the total of 7.35 lakh consumers, including those in added areas, there has been a steady rise in their number over the past few years.

From 8,000 consumers who paid online in 2008-09, the number has increased to nearly 65,000 people now. The water agency believes more consumers will use its online facility once the website is made more consumer-friendly.

In the last fiscal ending March 31, consumers remitted tax and charges to the tune of Rs. 6.83 crore online. About 20,000 additional consumers have sought online services compared to the previous fiscal — 2011-12, during which the water agency received Rs. 4.24 crore through online payments.

Though the project was devised two years ago, negotiations related to transaction fees payable by online customers to their respective banks had delayed the process. Some customers also complain of difficulties in accessing the

website to remit tax. Payments across Metrowater office counters continue to be many customers' preferred choice.

Metrowater officials however said that once the service is improved, such problems will be resolved.

This fiscal ending March 31, Metrowater received water, sewerage tax and charges totalling Rs. 352.74 crore of the total demand of Rs. 425 crore. Residents in added areas paid up to Rs. 10 crore. However, customers in the merged areas pay only water charges as the Chennai Corporation has not started an exercise for property tax assessment as yet.

Officials said it is imperative for the water agency to increase its revenue, as it has been facing a financial crunch for the past few years.