



## Important Information

### Connecting to the sewerage system when it becomes available

Yarra Valley Water's Sewerage Backlog Program currently includes 17,150 properties which are currently serviced by septic tank systems, all of which will be provided with a sustainable sewerage service by the end of 2025.

This fact sheet explains how the Sewerage Backlog Program came about, what it aims to achieve, and what your obligations are in regards to connecting your house to the sewerage system once it is provided.

#### Why have a Sewerage Backlog Program?

The program is in place to prevent nutrients, pathogens (which cause human illness), and other pollutants which originate in domestic wastewater from entering both surface and ground waters from septic tank systems.

Once these systems are replaced with a sustainable sewerage service, the risk to both public health and the environment will be significantly reduced.



Domestic greywater entering a waterway from the drainage system

#### How was the program developed?

All Councils which have properties serviced by septic tank systems within their municipality are required by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA Victoria) to have a Domestic Wastewater Management Plan. This plan:

- describes how the septic tank systems will be managed to eliminate or minimise wastewater discharges to the environment all year round; and
- identifies properties which are unable to contain their wastewater onsite all year round and will require a reticulated sewerage service.

If a property is unable to contain its wastewater onsite all year round, it means that the wastewater volume generated within the house is in excess of what the soil in the dispersal field can store. When this occurs (which may only be during the winter months when the soil becomes saturated from rainfall and evaporation rates are low), the excess flow runs off the property into the nearest drain or waterway via either surface or ground waters.

When Council nominates that reticulated sewerage services are the preferred option in their Domestic Wastewater Management Plan, the properties in question are referred to Yarra Valley Water for inclusion onto the Sewerage Backlog Program. This is a program required under Section 21 of Yarra Valley Water's *Statement of Obligations* issued under the *Water Industry Act 1994*.

Before any construction works take place, Yarra Valley Water is required to undertake a number of activities as defined in the *State Environment Protection Policy (Waters of Victoria)* (SEPP) which is issued under Section 16(2) of the *Environment Protection Act 1970*. These include:

- a review of the available wastewater management options;
- identification of the level of sewerage services to be provided;
- setting priorities and timelines for the provision of sewerage services;
- identification of how wastewater is to be treated in accordance with the waste hierarchy; and
- undertaking three yearly reviews of the program and priority areas for sewerage.

## How are priorities set?

In order to ensure that the areas which present the highest risk to both the environment and public health are provided with a sewerage service first, Yarra Valley Water has developed a prioritisation model in consultation with the EPA, Councils, Government and Melbourne Water.

This model takes into account a number of factors such as:

- performance of existing systems;
- sensitivity of receiving waterways;
- risk to public health;
- biodiversity;
- council support;
- customer interest/commitment to connect; and
- cost to service.

All of the data required to calculate a priority score is held by either Yarra Valley Water or other government agencies with Councils able to provide Yarra Valley Water with additional supporting information to improve their scores (for example customer surveys or septic tank system test results) should it be available.

Areas are prioritised based on priority scores and timings are set based on the allocated budget.

## Do I have to connect to the sewerage system?

Once a sewerage system is provided, property owners are required to connect to it unless they can prove that they comply with the regulations contained in Section 5 of the EPA's *Code Of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management*.

This document states that a septic tank system is not permitted in an area where reticulated sewerage services are available, except where:

- an EPA approved secondary treatment system is installed prior to the property owners being notified of the intention to sewer the property by Yarra Valley Water; and
- the septic tank system treats the wastewater to a high standard, defined as:
  - 20 mg/L of Biochemical Oxygen Demand
  - 30 mg/L of Suspended Solids
  - 10 cfu/100mL of *E.coli*; and
- the septic tank system is maintained and meets the EPA's system approval; and
- all treated effluent is irrigated onsite to avoid all year round soil saturation or surface runoff and is contained within the allotment boundary.

Please note that this is a summary of the requirements contained within the *Code Of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Treatment*. You can obtain a copy of this document by contacting the EPA directly or by downloading it from their website at [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au).

Yarra Valley Water is required under Section 34 of the SEPP to ensure that "where sewerage is provided and on written advice from the EPA, premises that cannot retain wastewater onsite are connected to sewerage". If necessary, Yarra Valley Water may use these powers to enforce connection.

If you believe that your property is able to contain its wastewater onsite all year round and you comply with Section 5 of the *Code Of Practice*, you may not be required to connect to the sewerage system.



Algae outbreak in the Mullum Mullum Creek (February 2009) thought to be caused in part by offsite discharges from septic tank systems

### For more information please contact:

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