

# Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan



2021 - 2026

November 2021







Northern Grampians Shire Council  
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## CONTACT US

-  [ngshire@ngshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:ngshire@ngshire.vic.gov.au)
-  [www.ngshire.vic.gov.au](http://www.ngshire.vic.gov.au)
-  (03) 5358 8700
-  PO Box 580 Stawell VIC 3380

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**Responsible Directorate: Infrastructure & Amenity**

**Version: 4**

**Last Edited:**

**Date of Adoption:**

**Review Date: November 2024**

DRAFT

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## **Executive summary**

The proper management of domestic wastewater in the Northern Grampians Shire is important to protect public health, and the environment moving forward. The management of domestic wastewater is particularly important in the increasingly dry conditions, with periods of excessive rainfall as well as an increase in demand to develop smaller allotments or subdivide land.

This *Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2020-2025* (MDWMP) outlines the management strategies and actions planned by Northern Grampians Shire Council (Council) to address identified issues with wastewater management across our communities.

The MDWMP links to other Council Plans to ensure a coordinated and united approach to water management over the next few years.

Northern Grampians Shire Council looks forward to implementing this plan in partnership with stakeholders including the community to achieve the ultimate goals and objectives.

## **Part A: Strategy 2021 – 2026**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Domestic wastewater management**

Domestic wastewater management is one of the public health functions delegated to local government under the Environment Protection Act 2017. Under the legislation Council is the permit authority for the installation and use of wastewater management systems. There are also further responsibilities outlined in the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters).

Poorly treated wastewater from onsite systems is a major pollutant, which threatens public health, the environmental value of surface and groundwater, and local amenity. Poorly managed domestic wastewater presents a threat to public health and the environment in addition to the associated economic and legal risks to councils. Council's Environmental Health Officers (EHO) implement the requirements of the legislation on behalf of Council.

As the licensing body, Council has a responsibility to manage risks, including the enforcement of legislation. The common strategy utilised to achieve this is the development and implementation of a Domestic Wastewater Management Plan. The development of such a plan requires integration with current Council strategies including environmental, public health, and stormwater management. There are several local, environmental, and resource policy issues that need to be considered as part of that planning process.

This plan is based on the 'Model Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan July 2005', developed by the Municipal Association of Victoria.

#### **1.2 Major elements (objectives)**

In line with the terms of reference, the major elements of this plan are:

1. The identification of the key stakeholders within council and external organisations, and the development, implementation and review of domestic wastewater management within the municipality;
2. The assessment of the current wastewater situation with the development of a local wastewater management profile for the municipality;
3. An outline of the process involved in developing the plan; and
4. An outline of the management strategies and action plans to address priorities identified within specified timeframes.

#### **1.3 Goal**

The goal of the MDWMP is to identify actions, relevant stakeholders, and necessary timelines to manage domestic wastewater sustainably in the Northern Grampians Shire Council municipal area.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Risks associated with domestic wastewater

Domestic wastewater is waste generated by household activities including toilet, bathroom, clothes washing and kitchen cleaning activities, and contains high levels of micro-organisms and chemicals that are capable of causing illness.

This waste is either transported away from the property for treatment (centralised sewerage system) or treated on-site via a domestic wastewater management system such as a septic tank and effluent disposal trench.

Wastewater poses a public health, environmental, legal and economic risk. Review of the scientific literature available clearly establishes these risks including decisions made by the courts in relation to councils' responsibilities and their management of statutory duties. The risks associated with domestic wastewater have been summarised in the following table:

Type of risk	Risk summary
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drinking water supplies becoming contaminated with chemicals, bacteria, protozoa and viruses from effluent as a result of poorly drained soils; small lot sizes; high usage; ageing septic tanks; and lack of proper maintenance of septic tanks. Illnesses that are contracted from effluent contaminated water include Gastroenteritis, Shigellosis, Giardiasis, Cryptosporidiosis and Hepatitis.</li><li>• Recreational Water - Statistically significant risk of illness if people come into contact with contaminated water used for recreational purposes. Illnesses include ear and eye infections and respiratory infections.</li></ul>
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Septic tanks contribute high rates of nitrogen and phosphorus to water catchments due to surface runoff;</li><li>• Septic tanks create direct bacterial contamination of the environment with ten times the amount of E coli (a disease producing bacteria found in animal/human waste) found in catchments near residential areas compared to catchments without residential areas;</li><li>• The highest levels of fecal coliforms were found in catchments serving septic tanks compared to other disposal systems</li><li>• A number of environmental contamination incidents have occurred in Australia and Victoria e.g. Benalla, Venus Bay.</li></ul>

Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From an economic perspective trying to alleviate years of environmental contamination is costly and involves overcoming a host of practical issues. Management should be focused on prevention.</li> <li>• In the event of contamination of ground and other waters there is the cost of advising residents, visitors and tourists to the area of the risk, managing community anxiety, and the indirect costs associated with the perception that the area is unsafe.</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council has quite clearly established statutory duties under the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 2017 and Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.</li> <li>• Council has a duty to exercise its enforcement powers where it knows there is a breach of the legislation and there is a likelihood of injury.</li> <li>• Two court cases have determined that a failure to act will be a breach of the duty of care owed by the Council and it will be liable in negligence for any damages caused by the breach of the duty of care</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Regulatory framework

Council has a number of public and environmental health legislative requirements to administer however, there is specific legislation for the management of domestic wastewater management systems.

### Environment Protection Act 2017

The management of domestic wastewater is regulated by Parts 4.2 & 4.3 Environment Protection Act 2017. This part applies to all wastewater management systems designed to discharge less than 5,000 liters per day and, amongst other things, requires a permit from council for the installation of systems and approval to use those systems by the occupier. Council must refuse to issue a permit if the council deems that the applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold a permit, if the activity poses an unacceptable risk of harm to the environment or public health or if all the required information is not submitted with the application.

Domestic wastewater management is delegated to local government where the Council acts as the 'permitting' authority and approves the installation and use of the wastewater management system.

There is no statutory requirement for councils to monitor compliance after approvals have been issued although, as the permitting authority, council has a responsibility to monitor compliance. In saying that, council will respond to complaints regarding failing wastewater systems. The Environmental Protection Regulations 2021 also set offences and allow councils to order system maintenance and enforce breaches of duties.

The Regulations apply to all existing Onsite Wastewater Management Systems (OWMS), including older systems installed before installation permits were introduced.



The current regulations put clear obligations on those who manage or are in control of the land where an onsite wastewater management system is located.

The Regulations also introduce new duties for the operation and maintenance of an OWMS. This includes a duty to:

- keep maintenance records.
- respond to problems.
- notify council of system failures (From 1 July 2022)

An important change in statutory wastewater management approval arrangements has seen the EPA only approving the types of wastewater treatment systems that may be used in a domestic setting. Applicants for permits must now provide council with a certificate of conformity from a JAS-ANZ certified conformity assessment body (CAB) for their particular system, brand or model, unlike previously when all systems required EPA approval. Council must develop their own standard conditions in line with the following Australian Standards and in line with the operating conditions specified under the Certificate of Conformity for the system: Refer to Appendix A at the end of this document.

If required, any land capability assessment must also be conducted to council's satisfaction.

### **State Environment Protection policies (SEPP)**

Division 1 of the Act provides for the formulation and adoption of state environmental protection policies (SEPPs) by government and allows for the declaration of an environment protection policy "... to be observed with respect to the environment generally or in any portion or portions of Victoria or with respect to any element or elements or segment or segments of the environment."

Under the SEPP it is recognised that municipal councils play an important role in protecting surface waters through a number of responsibilities including stormwater, floodplain, drainage, and vegetation management, domestic wastewater management, local road management and land use planning.

Generally, a SEPP identifies the beneficial uses of the environment to be protected, environmental objectives appropriate to those uses, and plans and programs for the attainment of those objectives. The SEPP (Waters) 2018, sets a statutory framework for the protection of the uses and values of Victoria's fresh, marine water environments.

The SEPP sets out requirements for managing domestic wastewater. Under this SEPP councils are responsible for ensuring new residential subdivisions are provided with reticulated sewerage at the time of subdivision or that the allotments are capable of treating and containing all domestic wastewater within the boundaries of each allotment.

The occupiers of premises have the responsibility to manage their system in accordance with the permit conditions and the EPA Code of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management (2016). The SEPP also requires that owners of on-site domestic wastewater systems maintain their systems.

SEPP also outlines the need for councils to:

- Assess the suitability of the land for an on-site system prior to approving a development;
- Ensure that sewerage is provided at the time of sub-division if the use of on-site systems would result in wastewater being discharged beyond allotment boundaries or would impact on groundwater beneficial uses;
- Ensure that permits are consistent with the guidance provided by the EPA and the Code of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management (Publication 891.4 July 2016). The Code is the guideline for best practice management of onsite wastewater systems and associated land capability assessment;
- Identify existing unsewered allotments incapable of preventing wastewater from being discharged beyond allotment boundaries and/or preventing impacts on groundwater beneficial uses; and
- Where relevant develop a domestic wastewater management plan.

The SEPP states:

That Council is required to have a Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan that can be a maximum of 5 years in length. The plan must be audited and assessed every three years with a report created on the process.

### **2.3 Links to other council policies**

#### **Council Plan 2021-2025**

The 2021-2025 Council Plan, was developed by Council in partnership with the community in the early months of 2021. It is a legislative requirement that a Council Plan be prepared when a new Council is elected.

There are two parts to the Plan: Part 1 outlines the strategic direction Council will take to improve its services and build the community and economy. Part 2, the Strategic Resource Plan, explains how Council will use its resources to achieve these objectives.

The Council Plan includes our objectives: -

1. Enhance lifestyles and communities;
2. Boost economic growth;
3. Provide sustainable infrastructure; and
4. Improve organisational effectiveness.

#### **Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan**

The Northern Grampians Shire Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MH&WP) is a key part of Council's Planning Framework. The plan is informed by local health and wellbeing data, the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019–2023 and the Council Plan. The strategic directions of this plan will

lay the framework for the development of detailed implementation plans and service plans resulting in a collective impact approach to improving the health and wellbeing of the Northern Grampians.

The plan is produced to document Council’s strategies and programs to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and is a key response to Council’s responsibilities under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

### Sewerage to small towns

While centralised sewerage systems are considered best management practice, they are not practical in areas with a low population density. For this reason, there are many unsewered townships. Failing septic systems on small blocks, and an increasing density of septic installations have been identified as causing environmental and health problems.

The lack of sewerage also hampers the potential development of townships because new dwellings must contain all wastewater onsite, and this necessitates larger building blocks. It is recognised that each municipality needs to identify and develop priorities for the provision of either reticulated sewerage or alternative wastewater management options for small towns.

Goal Area	Objective	Strategy	Key Performance Indicator	Responsibility
Improvement in wastewater management options for small towns	To improve wastewater management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To apply for funding to develop Domestic Wastewater management plan for small towns without access to sewerage.</li> <li>• On receipt of appropriate funding implement the plan.</li> </ul>	Plan developed. Strategies implemented.	Director of Infrastructure and Amenity

## **Northern Grampians Planning Scheme**

The Northern Grampians Planning Scheme:

- must seek to further the objectives of planning in Victoria;
- include strategic plans, policy statements, codes or guidelines relating to the use or development of land;
- must specify separately state standard provisions and local provisions;
- any other provision which the Minister directs; and
- Allow for amendments.

## **Wimmera waterway strategy 2014-2022 – Wimmera Catchment Management Authority**

The purpose of the Wimmera Waterway Strategy (WWS) is:

The WWS is the planning document for the management of rivers, creeks and wetlands (including lakes) in the region as required under the Water Act 1989 and the Victorian Waterway Management Strategy (VWMS). It has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and the broader community.

### **2.4 Stakeholder roles and responsibilities**

#### **Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA)**

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has the statutory responsibility of overseeing the management of domestic wastewater management in Victoria. The EPA sets the regulatory framework for wastewater and provides advice and guidance to support this framework.

The Environmental Protection Act identifies high value and priority waterways and establishes long term goals for waterway condition underpinned by an eight-year regional work program listing a number of management activities to attract and direct government and philanthropic investment.

The document outlines council's roles and responsibilities in relation to on-site wastewater management; the development and implementation of an urban stormwater plan; and, the incorporation of waterway and catchment objectives, priorities and actions into the strategic and statutory planning processes.

#### **Local Government**

Councils' responsibilities for domestic wastewater management are:

- Ensuring new residential subdivisions are provided with reticulated sewerage or that the allotments are capable of treating and containing domestic wastewater onsite.
- Issuing permits to install new wastewater management systems.
- Refusing permits if the site is unsuitable and / or the area available for the treatment and disposal of effluent is not sufficient. Refusing permits if the wastewater management system is not of a type accredited under Australian Standard.

- Issuing certificates to use wastewater management systems.
- Monitoring the operation of existing wastewater management systems and the compliance with permits and certificates.
- Order system maintenance and enforce breaches of duties on property owners.

## **Water authorities**

Water Authorities are responsible for the provision of water and reticulated sewerage services.

GWMWater is the authority responsible for the provision of reticulated sewerage in the Northern Grampians Shire. There are 4 designated sewerage districts within the Northern Grampians Shire that GWMWater manages which include Stawell, St Arnaud, Halls Gap and Great Western. Section 173 of the *Water Act (1989)* sets out the function of GWMWater within these districts.

GWMWater has developed a Corporate Plan 2020-2030.

## **Landholders**

A land holder's responsibilities are:

- Connecting to a sewerage system where it is available (unless otherwise exempted)
- Obtaining a "Permit To Install" a wastewater management system before a building permit is issued and installing a system
- Obtaining an "Approval to Use " for the systems once installed
- Obtaining a "Permit To make Alterations" to an existing wastewater management system
- Maintaining existing systems, in accordance with the Environment Protection Regulations 2021
- Keep maintenance records for up to 5 years and produce them if requested by Council
- Respond to problems promptly
- Notify council of system failures as soon as practicable. After 1 July 2022 this will be mandatory and Penalty notices can be issued if council is not notified.
- Ensuring effluent absorption area remains clear from development, unsuitable vegetation, impermeable surfaces etc

## **Catchment Management Authorities**

There are three Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in our municipality being the Wimmera CMA, the North Central CMA and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA. The prime responsibilities of the CMAs are the health of land and water in their catchment region and promoting sustainable and productive land use practices.

### **3. Development of domestic wastewater management plan**

#### **3.1 Development process**

This MDWMP has been prepared using guidelines prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and incorporated into the MAV Model Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan.

Council undertook to investigate and document domestic wastewater management processes in the Shire and to provide guidelines for improving the management process.

The process for completing this MDWMP generally involved the tasks listed below:

- Review of existing systems and processes for domestic wastewater management
- Review of the characteristics of the locality including the location of existing septic Tanks and wastewater treatment systems, identification of planning zones and growth areas, and the identification of areas of environmental, heritage, cultural and recreational value
- Risk assessment of the potential for domestic wastewater to impact on public health and the environment, especially in the areas of special value identified in the previous step
- Development of specific management strategies for areas where there were domestic wastewater management risks identified
- Development of action plans to guide the development and implementation of the management strategies
- Compilation of the results of each process into this MDWMP

#### **3.2 Council's current management of domestic wastewater**

Council Environmental Health Officers manage domestic wastewater under the provisions of the *Environment Protection Act 2017*, the EPA Code of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management and Australian Standards.

There are generally four situations where Council manages domestic wastewater:

##### **Planning permit application**

- Planning Department refers application to Environmental Health as part of the internal management of applications requiring referral for comment (i.e. new dwelling, house extension, subdivision).
- Under Clause 65.02 of the Victorian Planning Provisions, a land capability assessment addressing onsite wastewater management should be conducted as early as possible in the planning phase.
- Under Clause 66.02-5 of the Victorian Planning Provisions an application to use, subdivide or consolidate land, to construct a building or construct or carry out works, or to demolish a building or works that are within a Special Water Supply Catchment Area listed in Schedule 5 of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 and which provides water to a domestic supply must be referred to the relevant water board or water supply authority pursuant to Section 55 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 as a determining authority.
- Environmental Health Officer assesses the application and inspects sites as necessary.

- General conditions and comments for the site are formulated. These may include requirements to connect to sewer, to undertake a land capability assessment (LCA), that the wastewater must be treated before disposal, the general buffer distances from significant features such as waterways or that the site is unsuitable for wastewater disposal. Further information may be sought from the applicant that they can demonstrate that land is suitable for development by providing an LCA.
- The Planning Permit is either approved with conditions or refused.

### **Building permit application**

- The Building Department advises applicant that a permit to install a wastewater system is required with the application for a building permit and directs the customer to Environmental Health Department for further advice.
- Waits for advice from Environmental Health that the permit to install a wastewater system or consent and report has been issued and then the Building Permit can be issued.
- The Building Occupancy Certificate is issued once the approval to use a wastewater management system' has been issued.

### **Wastewater management system permit process**

- The application to install a wastewater system is received and the online application is assessed.
- A Land Capability Assessment (LCA) will be required to be submitted in all circumstances where the land is in a special water supply catchment used for potable water supply (see item 3.2.1) or where the relevant officer considers that there may be a significant effect on the environment.
- A site inspection is carried out by the Environmental Health Officer either with or without the applicant or land owner.
- The proposed system is assessed as to whether it conforms to all legal requirements and whether it is suitable for the area and its proposed use.
- A 'Permit to Install' with conditions is issued or the permit is refused.
- Inspections are carried out during installation as requested by the plumber or applicant before backfilling.
- An 'Approval to Use' the system is sent to the applicant after the final inspection is completed and all conditions of the permit have been met

### **Failing wastewater management system**

- A complaint or request for advice is received concerning a failing wastewater management system.
- The Environmental Health Officer assesses the situation, gives advice or if required, issues an order to abate the nuisance and repair the wastewater management system.

#### **4. Implementation**

The implementation of the MDWMP will be the responsibility of Environmental Health team in consultation with the Director of Infrastructure with approval from council.

#### **5. Evaluation**

The Coordinator Sustainable Development shall evaluate, assess and prepare an internal report on the actions undertaken at 3 year intervals and publish the report on its website.

#### **6. Domestic Wastewater profile**

Northern Grampians Shire is located in Central West Victoria and spans over 5,918 square kilometers. The area is well known for a mixture of industries such as textiles, gold mining and broadacre cropping. The Grampians National Park is also a popular tourist destination with over 1 million visitors each year.

The Northern Grampians Shire is driven by a highly skilled and multidisciplinary workforce. Amongst the frontrunners of the region, it is responsible for environmentally sound and innovative growth and development particularly in grain, sheep and viticulture. The shire also fosters a range of professionals in textiles, health, hospitality and trade.

Prominent industry sectors include wool, broad acre grazing, cereal cropping, viticulture, olive growing, tourism, manufacturing, textiles, retail trade, health and community services, landcare and catchment management and professional services.

Industry is generally concentrated in the key townships of Stawell and St Arnaud, where retail and commercial operations are mainly of a local service nature. These centers service the region's needs for shopping, business and commercial services and host other activities including brick making, meat processing, steel fabrication, feed production, supply and service of farm machinery and small service industry.

The Grampians region encompasses a diversity of microclimates and environments and a very livable climate with four distinct climatic conditions. The environment comprises of rich fertile soils, dryland areas, mountain ranges, large scale open plan pastoral areas, parks and lakes.

##### **6.1 Current population**

Northern Grampians Shire comprises an estimated 11,403 residents from the 2016 Census. Population rates are slightly increasing which reflects on the fact that there is some development occurring within the municipality.

The majority of the municipality's population resides in the major towns and villages of Stawell, St Arnaud, Halls Gap, Marnoo, Navarre and Great Western.



## **6.2 Residential development projection**

The municipality is currently experiencing a growth pattern. The Sloane Street, Stawell, and other residential housing developments are in the planning phase. These developments will connect to the reticulated sewer.

## **6.3 Reticulated sewerage**

The management and type of domestic wastewater treatment varies across the municipality. Larger townships of Stawell, St Arnaud and Halls Gap are serviced with reticulated sewerage. The town of Great Western has some properties connected to town sewerage since 2014.

## **6.4 Wastewater Management Systems**

Historically the management of domestic wastewater management systems within the Northern Grampians Shire has been difficult. Local Councils are the regulatory authority for Domestic Wastewater Management. Councils have generally been limited by time and financial support from implementing effective MDWMP actions. Council has mainly focused on an approval scheme for new systems and a basic system monitoring program, as time permits.

The number of installations that are discharging off site (whether with or without approval) is currently unknown. In accordance the Environmental Protection Act 2017, land owners must reduce the risk of harm that may arise from their wastewater management system.

While it is now clear that such practices are no longer appropriate and may be creating unacceptable risks, it is acknowledged that many of these problems will take time to rectify. There are financial implications for owners who have a failing wastewater management system and are required to complete upgrade works. New systems can be expensive, and some owners may not have the finances to undertake works immediately, resulting in continuing system failures.

Under the new Environment Protection Regulations 2021, the General Environmental Duty places responsibilities on the landowner or on a person in management or control of an OWMS, including a legacy system, to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the system is operating so as not to pose a risk to human health or the environment. These obligations include:

- Maintaining the system in good working order
- Ensuring those operating the system have the information they need.
- Responding to any failures
- Notifying Council of failures or discharges (enforceable after 1 July 2022)

There are approximately 540 registered wastewater management systems within the municipality.

## **Part B: Action Plan**

### **7. Strategies**

The revised MDWMP priorities will be focused on the development of council's capacity to manage and monitor wastewater systems in order to discharge its obligations under the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters) and therefore meet the expectations of other stakeholders reliant on council doing so.

#### **7.1 Management approach**

Council's management strategies for wastewater are informed by three factors:

1. Council's statutory duty
2. Council's capacity to undertaken wastewater management services
3. The risks posed by ineffective wastewater management systems

Council currently has limited capacity to undertake these activities and services require a range of resources including:

- the collection of appropriate data at the point source through an ongoing monitoring program, development of a domestic wastewater information management system, and analysis of this information;
- review and development of operating policies and procedures,
- to ensure that the MDWMP is strategically linked to other Council plans, and;
- the development of, and access to, a range of information by owners of septic tank systems and other stakeholders.

#### **7.2 Information management**

There is a need to develop an accurate and complete wastewater management system profile of the municipality that is integrated with Council's Geographical Information System (GIS).

The mapping of new installations started in 2019. This data has recently been integrated onto the council mapping system. It would be ideal to record all systems within the municipality onto councils GIS systems. There are currently restraints around historical information being uploaded to the GIS system. Some of these are as follows:

Budgets to cover the following:

- Development of a customer survey/response form to obtain data
- Site inspections to confirm and log position of system
- Council staff time to incorporate the register of domestic wastewater management systems into the GIS database.

### **7.3 Wastewater policies and procedures**

This MDWMP proposes the development of operational policies and procedures to ensure that Council has a consistent and transparent way of approaching all new installations and ensuring they are all in compliance with the legislation.

Compliance and enforcement strategies could include:

- Requirements for regular and compulsory maintenance and inspection programs in specific areas
- Requirements to connect to a sewer network where available.
- Introduction of a domestic wastewater charge or levy to cover the costs of domestic wastewater management and enforcement programs.
- Introduction of random inspection of domestic wastewater systems and audit of maintenance records.

These guiding documents will provide officers with workflows to approve systems and set out specific requirements relating to land size, capability and overlays. This will ensure that a consistent approach is taken and that all decisions made by Council officers are supported by approved organisational policies.

### **7.4 Compliance auditing and monitoring of wastewater management systems**

As the permitting authority Council needs to develop activities to ensure compliance with the Environment Protection Regulations 2021 after the system has been installed. This is particularly critical in identified high risk areas. This consideration will need to include the options available for resourcing these activities, and legislative constraints. These compliance activities need to be risk based.

A monitoring program will assist Council to gather data to ensure that all new installations and alterations to existing systems are compliant is a more efficient way of managing the risks associated with wastewater.

All new applications, planning referrals and complaints are assessed against current legislation and landowners are provided details of what they are required to do in order to ensure the system is compliant.

Prior to determining if all onsite wastewater systems should be audited for compliance, Council officers can determine the level of risk through the audit of a randomly selected sample of older onsite wastewater management systems. The results of this audit will determine if Council should consider a 100% audit of systems within the municipality. Council may choose to consider the appointment of an officer to complete this project.

### **7.5 Community development and compliance**

Although owners of wastewater management systems have a legal responsibility under the *Environment Protection Act 2017* to comply with the maintenance required by the regulations, there is evidence that there is a need for ongoing education of owners.

These strategies focus on education and awareness to assist in managing the potential risks identified.

These strategies are the most preferred as they are based on a foundation of encouragement and assistance to the customer rather than either capital cost or enforcement of regulations.

To ensure systems are being installed in accordance with the relevant legislation and Australian Standards, communication and education for the community should be a key priority. The development of a suite of wastewater management information for landowners (website, newsletter, pamphlets) highlighting ownership responsibilities regarding Onsite Wastewater Management Systems may reduce the number of failing systems and minimise the impact to health and wellbeing and the environment.

Education and awareness strategies include:

- Extensions of existing guidelines for managing domestic wastewater, including grey water, in the form of information sheets or brochures covering topics such as new home ownership responsibilities.
- Reminder bulletins to undertake inspection and maintenance of systems which can be added to Council rates notices or other Council mail outs.

Budgets for the implementation of these strategies would need to cover the following:

- Council staff time to develop new information brochures;
- The dissemination of these education materials in line with Council's current policy around the use of information technology as a communication tool.

## **7.6 Planning Strategies**

These strategies focus on planning processes within Council as well as the intra-agency processes. These strategies are aimed to clarify and thereby improve processes in relation to wastewater management. This has become apparent in recent years where the demand to develop land and smaller blocks is higher than availability, leading to increased pressure to develop less desirable land.

Having clear planning processes in place will become increasingly important if dry conditions continue and the safe reuse of wastewater (including greywater) become critical issues.

Planning strategies include:

- Development of processes within Council and with external stakeholders to ensure effective wastewater management on all developments in unsewered areas.
- Development of approval process for wastewater management systems within a sewerage district.
- Approval process for wastewater management systems within water catchments.
- Management of developments outside but adjacent to sewer districts.
- Establishment of a consultative process for considering extending of sewerage district.
- Process for initiating new town sewerage scheme.

## **7.7 Strategic management and review**

Council's other strategic documents will need to be considered to ensure that they reference this MDWMP and relevant legislation, where appropriate. This will provide currency to the new plan and ensure that consideration needs to be made to onsite wastewater management at a Strategic level.

This MDWMP will also be required to be reviewed on an annual basis as well as at the end of the life of the plan. This will ensure that all actions are being addressed and completed within the allocated timeframes.

## **7.8 Emergency response**

After a natural disaster like a fire or flood wastewater management systems can be impacted by fire, being driven over during the defence of a property from fire or by being inundated by flood waters. After the initial impact of a natural disaster, a Secondary Impact Assessment is undertaken at impacted properties with OWMS's.

Council's EHO's will be involved in the SIA teams to assess the impact of individual systems that may have been impacted.

## **7.9 Action planning**

The development of an Action Plan ensures that there is accountability for the management strategies identified in this plan. The Action Plan involves the review of each management strategy to assign a priority for implementation, the nomination of a responsible person (whether they be Council staff or external agencies) who will champion the implementation of the strategy, the identification of key stakeholders who can assist in the implementation, the identification of budget/funding options, and a nominated completion or review date.

The action plan in line with the management strategies highlighted in the previous section.

- To develop and maintain a comprehensive wastewater management database;
- To develop a community engagement, education, and information for the management of wastewater management systems; and
- To maintain currency of domestic wastewater management plan.

**Table 1- Action Plan - Domestic Wastewater Management**

	<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Team / Partners</b>	<b>Due date:</b>	<b>Monitoring &amp; Performance Indicators</b>
<p><b>Strategy:</b></p> <p>Undertake an education campaign on the management, operation and maintenance of domestic wastewater management systems, including grey and black water</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reduce loading on wastewater management systems and reach the designed age for system</li> <li>• To increase owner's awareness of the importance of managing wastewater management systems</li> <li>• To improve compliance with regulatory maintenance requirements.</li> <li>• To prevent alterations exceeding the design capacity of existing approved systems</li> <li>• Provide fair, accurate and accessible information on good wastewater management principles, practices and improvement options.</li> </ul>	<p>Develop a communication strategy</p> <p>Consultation with internal staff (customer service, communications)</p> <p>Develop information material – environmental lines, advise of new responsibilities under the GED.</p> <p>Dissemination of information in line with communication strategy</p>	EH Team	1/6/2022	Completion of communication strategy
	<p>Develop program of inspections for domestic wastewater management systems</p>	EH Team	December 2022	<p>Compliance audits conducted</p> <p>Compliance following inspections</p>

	Action Steps	Team/ Partners	Due date:	Monitoring & performance indicators
<p><b>Strategy:</b></p> <p>Improve the quality and quantity of wastewater related information captured.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify &amp; collect the appropriate information required for all installed wastewater management systems.</li> <li>Data capture processes to be reviewed to ensure efficiency of data entry and appropriate use of data fields for reporting and document processing purposes.</li> <li>Develop &amp; maintain partnerships and reporting agreements with service agents to improve reporting accuracy and efficiency.</li> </ul>	Maintain register of domestic wastewater management systems in municipality	EH Team	Ongoing	<p>Accurate database of wastewater maintenance systems.</p> <p>Streamlined process to reduce administrative burden</p>
	Use existing information about land types and locations of sensitive areas to identify high-risk management areas	EH Team	June 2023	<p>Identification of suitable data sources for groundwater levels, soil types, effective transpiration rates and treatment ability to identify high-risk area.</p> <p>Improved data for strategic planning and decision making.</p>
	Maintain database of wastewater management system permits to GIS application	EH Team and GIS	Ongoing	Updated GIS map of septic tank systems in municipality
	Use GPS handheld device for recording location and attributes of new systems for display on GIS application.	EH Team and GIS	Ongoing	Identification of exact location of septic tank systems using GPS technology

	Action Steps	Team/ Partners	Due date:	Monitoring & performance indicators
<p><b>Strategy:</b></p> <p>To influence the regulatory framework in which Council must operate to manage wastewater and develop Council policy and procedures utilising available tools</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence and assist Government agencies and other stakeholders to improve the regulatory framework within which Council operates.</li> <li>• Alternative or innovative uses of existing legislative provisions to enhance wastewater management processes</li> <li>• Develop Council wastewater policy through evidence based investigation.</li> </ul>	<p>Influence government agencies to better coordinate wastewater and water supply policy and legislation.</p>	<p>Executive</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Improved relationships with government agencies and potential funding bodies</p> <p>Improved capability to implement wastewater management initiatives.</p>
	<p>Where appropriate, standardise guidelines and processes with neighbouring Councils, and water authorities.</p>	<p>EH Team</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Better information for decision making and educational activities.</p> <p>Consistency in regulation across the region.</p>
	<p>Investigate funding options to undertake Land Capability Assessments of priority townships and implement findings into Council strategic and statutory policies and programs.</p>	<p>EH Team</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Improve service delivery.</p> <p>Improve compliance with relevant legislation &amp; policy</p>



	Action Steps	Team/ Partners	Due date:	Monitoring & performance indicators
<p><b>Strategy:</b></p> <p>Plan for the long-term sustainability of townships through appropriate development controls of land and infrastructure.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce risks through available mitigation remedies.</li> <li>• Liaise with appropriate departments to ensure that planning and infrastructure proposals adequately address wastewater management needs for townships.</li> <li>• Investigate alternative, community scale treatment systems for priority townships, and availability of funding</li> </ul>	Investigate health protection measures to address high-risk open and accessible contaminated storm water drains or ground waters were found.	EH Team and Infrastructure	June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved relationships with government agencies and potential funding bodies</li> <li>• Improved capability to implement wastewater management initiatives.</li> </ul>
	Review Planning Scheme and other relevant Council policies to identify opportunities for improvements to existing wastewater management clauses and/or policies.	EH and Planning Team	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better coordination of policy and legislation to protect public health.</li> <li>• Reduced impact on amenity.</li> </ul>
	Continue to investigate and update appropriate design standards for high risk townships so as to inform any future improvement plans.	EH and Planning Team	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better information for decision making and educational activities.</li> <li>• Consistency in regulation across the region.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop clear policy guidelines for future developments within unsewered townships and for un-sewered allotments within sewerred townships.</li> </ul>	EH Team and strategy team	June 2026	Better information for decision making.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Investigate sustainable onsite wastewater treatment and water cycle management solutions in partnership with key stakeholders</li></ul>	EH Team	Ongoing	Better coordination of policy and legislation to protect public health.
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## REFERENCES

- Model Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan, July 2005, Smartseptic solutions  
[On-site domestic wastewater management | MAV website](#)
- Domestic Wastewater - Municipal association of Victoria - As above
- Wimmera Waterway Strategy 2014-2022 – Wimmera Catchment Management Authority  
<http://wcma.vic.gov.au/docs/default-source/riversdocs/waterwaystrategy/wimmera-cma-waterway-strategy-2014-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
- Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy 2021-27 (wcma.vic.gov.au)
- North Central Waterway Strategy 2014-2022  
[http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/north\\_central\\_waterway\\_strategy\\_2014-2022.pdf](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/north_central_waterway_strategy_2014-2022.pdf)
- North Central CMA Regional Catchment Strategy 2013-2019  
[http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/nccma-78628\\_north\\_central\\_cma\\_rcs\\_-\\_may\\_2013\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/nccma-78628_north_central_cma_rcs_-_may_2013_web_0.pdf)
- North Central Catchment Management Authority Regional Catchment Strategy 2021-2027 (Under consultation process at the time of reviewing this document)
- Glenelg Hopkins CMA Regional Catchment Strategy 2013-2019  
[11259\\_GHCMA\\_RSC\\_WEB.pdf](#)
- Glenelg Hopkins Waterways Strategy 2014-2022  
[GHCMA Waterway Strategy 2014-2022 by shane mcgrath - Issuu](#)
- Draft Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy  
[Home | Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy \(rcs.vic.gov.au\)](#)

## **Appendix A**

### **Legislation, Policies and Standards Relevant to Domestic Wastewater Management**

#### ***Acts and Regulations***

The following Acts and Regulations impact domestic wastewater in Victoria.

- [Environment Protection Act 2017](#)
- [Environmental Protection Regulations 2021](#)
- [EPA State Environment Protection Policy \(Waters\)](#)
- [EPA Code of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#)
- [Water Act 1989](#) (Part 9 s.180 Septic Tank Permit Applications)
- [Local Government Act 2020](#)
- [Building Act 1993](#)

#### ***Australian Standards and Other Requirements***

Below are the Australian standards relevant to wastewater disposal systems.

- AS/NZS 1546.1:2008 - On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units, Part 1 Septic Tanks.
- AS/NZS 1546.2:2008 - On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units, Part 2 Waterless Composting Toilets.
- AS 1546.3:2017 - On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units, Part 3 Secondary treatment systems.
- AS 1546.4:2016 - On -site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units, Part 4 Domestic greywater treatment systems
- AS1319 - Safety signs for the occupational environment.
- AS2698 - Plastic pipes and fittings for rural applications.
- AS3000 - Wiring rules, electrical installations, buildings, structures and premises.
- AS2870 – Footings & Foundations
- AS3500 - Plumbing and drainage code.

#### ***Local Laws***

Councils can implement Local Laws regarding domestic wastewater management.