

Planning in Open Drinking Water Catchments

August 2023

This practice note explains how open drinking water catchments are protected through guidelines, planning schemes and legislation.

A reliable supply of drinking water that meets appropriate water quality standards is essential to community health and wellbeing. Use and development of land can affect water quality in waterways from nutrient, chemical and waste contamination, as well as sediment run-off. The guidelines, provisions and legislation listed in this practice note are in place to help protect our drinking water supply.

Planning permits (statutory)

Applicants, responsible authorities and water corporations should consult the relevant guidelines, provisions and legislation when considering a planning permit application on land in an open drinking water catchment.

Planning Permit Applications in Open, Potable Water Supply Catchment Areas

(Department of Sustainability and Environment, November 2012)

These guidelines explain how to address the following issues in special water supply catchment areas:

- Guideline 1: Density of dwellings
- Guideline 2: Effluent disposal and septic tank system maintenance
- Guideline 3: Vegetated corridors and buffer zones along waterways
- Guideline 4: Buildings and works
- Guideline 5: Agricultural activities

Protect Our Waters Protect Our Health - A Guide for Landholders on Managing Land in Drinking Water Catchments

(Department of Health, 2010)

This guide explains how landholders should manage their land to protect community drinking water supplies, by:

- improving the condition of waterway frontages with vegetation
- preventing stock access to waterways
- maintaining onsite wastewater treatment systems such as septic tanks
- preventing soil erosion
- using and managing nutrients wisely
- improving agricultural chemical use.



Code of Practice – Onsite Wastewater Management - Publication 891.4

(Environment Protection Authority, July 2016)

This Code describes measures to sustainably manage household wastewater (also known as sewage) and minimise health and environmental risks. It provides guidance on the Victorian legislation and policy framework for onsite wastewater management, and describes the various roles and responsibilities relevant parties have within that framework.

Victorian Land Capability Assessment Framework

(Municipal Association of Victoria, January 2014)

This publication provides advice on preparing a comprehensive land assessment for proposed unsewered developments. The objective of the land assessment process described in this publication is to:

1. Assess the capability of the site to sustainably utilise and manage wastewater within allotment boundaries
2. Identify a management program to minimise the health and environmental impacts of on-site wastewater management.

Australian/New Zealand Standard 1547 - On-site Domestic Wastewater Management

AS/NZS 1547:2012

This standard provides the performance objectives for onsite wastewater management systems to minimise the risks of harm to human health and the environment. It addresses the design, construction, installation and maintenance of onsite wastewater management systems.

Australian/New Zealand Standard 1546.1 - On-Site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units - Septic Tanks

AS/NZS 1546.1:2008

This standard specifies performance requirements and criteria for septic tanks.

Australian/New Zealand Standard 1546.2 - On-Site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units - Waterless Composting Toilets

AS/NZS 1546.2:2008

This standard provides a set of performance statements that form a base against which any waterless composting toilet may be assessed.



**Australian Standard 1546.3 -
On-Site Domestic
Wastewater Treatment
Units Secondary Treatment
Systems**

AS 1546.3:2017

This Australian standard sets out requirements for the design, commissioning, performance and conformity testing of secondary treatment systems for domestic wastewater.

**Australian Standard 1546.4
– On-site Domestic
Wastewater Treatment
Units Domestic Greywater
Treatment Systems**

AS 1546.4:2016

This Australian standard specifies requirements for the performance, design, installation and testing of domestic greywater treatment systems and associated fittings for single domestic dwellings.

**Environment Reference
Standard** (issued under the
Environment Protection Act,
2017)

The Environment Reference Standard (ERS) is issued under the *Environment Protection Act 2017*. The ERS is a reference tool. It does not set compliance limits. Decision makers may use the ERS to evaluate a proposal or activity to understand its potential consequences for human health and the environment.

The ERS specifies that to meet objectives for potable water supply, health-related guideline values for each indicator specified in the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines Paper 6 - National Water Quality Management Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) should be used.

Relevant legislation

- Safe Drinking Water Act 2003
- Planning and Environment Act 1987
- Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994
- Water Act 1989
- Environment Protection Act 2017
- Environment Protection Regulations 2021
- Environment Reference Standard 2021
- Local Government Act 2020
- Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978

Victorian legislation is available at legislation.vic.gov.au



Planning schemes - Planning Policy Framework (PPF)

Clause 14.02 addresses the importance of water quality and water catchments.

Clause 19.03-3 seeks to sustainably manage water through an integrated water management approach.

Other PPF clauses may also be relevant to applications on land in open drinking water catchments. See planning scheme clauses 11 to 19.

Planning schemes (strategic)

When amending a planning scheme to implement risk management measures for residential development in an open drinking water catchment, a Domestic Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) is needed.

The *Planning Permit Applications in Open, Potable Water Supply Catchment Areas* guideline, specifies a one dwelling per 40 hectare limit in special water supply catchment areas, but advises that a DWMP can be used as strategic basis for relaxing that threshold. The guidelines sets out requirements for a suitable DWMP.

Various planning tools are available to a planning authority seeking to manage use and development in an open drinking water catchment, including policy and controls. For example, the Environmental Significance Overlay has been applied in some planning schemes to tailor environmental objectives, permit requirements, referrals and decision guidelines in open drinking water catchment areas.

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