

Wastewater Treatment Obligations

Environmental Protection Act

Compliance with the *Environmental Protection Act 2017* (EP Act) is essential to protect waterways, human health, and community sustainability. Special conditions apply near waterways (larger setbacks, higher treatment standards, more frequent monitoring).

New obligations coming into effect

Onsite wastewater management systems (OWMS) waste is now classified as *priority waste*. From 1 July, 2026 new obligations for managing OWMS will come into effect.

The changes are aimed at:

- protecting human health and the environment
- preventing overflows and system failures
- ensuring systems are maintained and operating correctly, and
- requiring prompt reporting of risks to councils.



Aerial view of Lake Eildon

The *Environmental Protection Act 2017* ([EP Act](#)) sets out the legislative framework for the protection of human health and the environment from pollution and waste in Victoria. It focuses on preventing impacts from waste and pollution rather than managing those impacts after they have occurred and includes obligations under the general environment duty (GED).

What's changing?

The following compliance obligations apply:

- **Stricter effluent quality standards:** There are now lower nitrogen and phosphorus limits to protect waterways. Leaseholders must ensure treated wastewater meets these new standards.
- **Regular maintenance and inspection:** Annual inspections by certified professionals are required, along with routine maintenance to avoid risks.
- **Record-keeping and reporting:** Maintenance and inspection records must be kept for five years, and annual reports must be submitted to the local environmental authority.
- **Higher penalties for non-compliance:** Non-compliance can result in substantial fines and legal action.

The changes vary depending on the volume of onsite wastewater produced on any given day. The below summarises the roles and responsibilities by volume:

Small users (<5,000L/day)

These are defined as producing less than 5,000 litres of wastewater in any given day (including peak periods).

Small users are required to:

- obtain council permits for installation/alteration
- maintain and operate systems properly
- monitor performance regularly, and
- report risks and follow best-practice wastewater management.

Permits for the construction, installation or alteration of OWMS that discharges less than 5,000 litres in one day are issued by councils.

Large users (>5,000L/day)

These are defined as producing more than 5,000 litres of wastewater in any given day (including peak periods). A permission to operate will be required for any OWMS that discharges more than 5,000 litres in one day.

Large users are required to:

- obtain EPA Permission to operate
- must develop a wastewater management plan
- conduct regular inspections and ensure discharges meet standards
- hold records for five years, and
- engage with councils/EPA on compliance.

The obligations apply to all clubs, caravan parks, and other operators on Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) land.

Steps for upgrading or retrofitting systems

If a council permit was not obtained for the original onsite wastewater management system (OWMS), you are required to follow these steps to ensure compliance with the *Environmental Protection Act 2017* (EP Act) and council regulations:

- have the existing system assessed
- complete a land capability assessment (LCA)
- obtain council permits/approvals to certify the system
- maintain and monitor regularly.

Calculating wastewater

GMW recommends installing a meter to track wastewater, especially during peak holiday use.

Daily wastewater is calculated using occupancy × design flow rate (litres per person per day).

Examples:

- 5 × 4-bed cabins, 2 people/bed, 150L/person/day = 6,000L/day
- 9 × 6-person caravans using amenities (100L/person/day) = 5,400L/day
- If >5,000L/day → EPA Pathways Application required.

Getting Help:

Local councils: provide permits, approvals, and guidance on any grants or support that maybe available.

Environmental consultants: assist with land capability assessments (LCAs), design, and compliance support.

Licensed contractors: install, upgrade, and maintain systems.

EPA Victoria: handle licensing, determine permissions to operate and regulatory compliance.