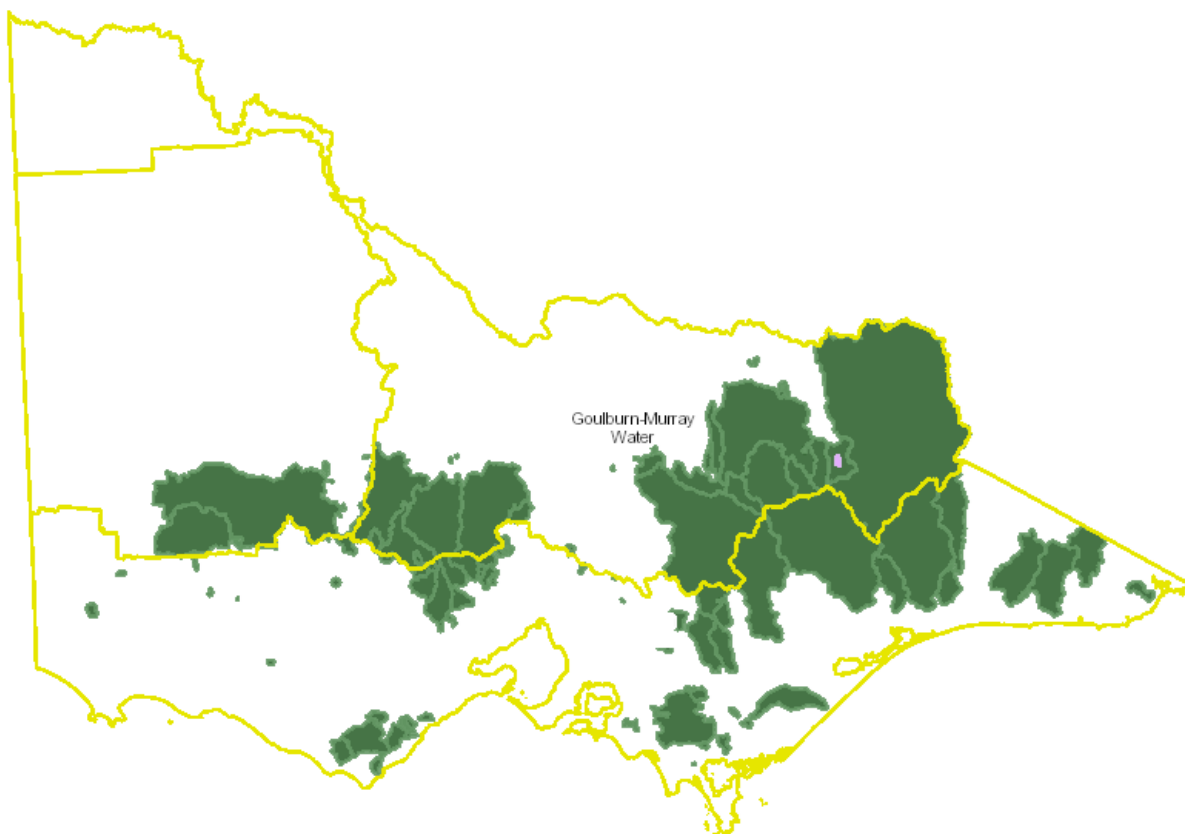


**Assessing land use and development proposals to determine their impact on surface and groundwaters, as well as GMW infrastructure, is a vital component of GMW's role as a Referral Authority. This fact sheet aims to provide information and context in relation to the risks and considerations assessed by GMW.**

## Context:

Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) manages 43 Special Water Supply Catchments across Northern Victoria. These catchments are crucial for protecting water quality and ensuring sustainable water supply for domestic, agricultural, and industrial uses. These catchments are protected under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

GMW works closely with Council to ensure that any land use and development proposals do not cause harm to these catchments. Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO), as a regulator of onsite wastewater management systems, must be guided and give regard to the same policy, legislation and guiding documents as GMW.



*Special Water Supply Catchment Areas (shown in green shading) located within GMW's jurisdiction*

### Why is managing onsite wastewater important?

Sustainable and proper management of onsite wastewater is essential to prevent environmental contamination. When wastewater is not adequately treated, it can release harmful pollutants such as pathogens, nutrients (like nitrogen and phosphorus), and chemicals into the environment. These pollutants can have environmental and public health implications.

#### Environment

- Effluent can be carried into other bodies of water, causing further downstream pollution
- Groundwater contamination by ammonia, nitrates and faecal pathogen
- Salinity in certain areas caused by seepage raising the groundwater table
- Land degradation, such as erosion and weed and algal growth can be stimulated by surface runoff which adds nitrogen and phosphorus to water catchments.
- Suspended solids, ammonia and organic matter which is carried by effluent can impact some aquatic plants and microorganisms

#### Public Health

- Septic overflows can lead to the pooling of organically rich wastewater, which increases mosquito breeding sites, including those species known to transmit diseases to humans
- Pathogens in untreated or poorly treated wastewater can cause a range of human diseases, from mild to severe gastroenteritis, hepatitis, dysentery and cholera

#### Economic

- Poor onsite wastewater management system installation and operation/maintenance can decrease land amenity and economic value
- Poor ongoing maintenance of onsite wastewater management systems can cause economic impacts to landowners, from costly maintenance, upgrade or replacement of faulty/failing systems

### What is the 'General Environmental Duty' (GED) and how does it apply to landowners?

The general environmental duty (GED) is at the centre of the *Environment Protection Act 2017*, and it applies to **all** Victorians, and **all** businesses located in Victoria. The GED states that you must manage your activities to reduce the risk of harm to human health and the environment from pollution or waste.

The GED requires every Victorian to reduce the risk of their activities harming the environment or human health. If you are the owner or occupier of a property that relies on an Onsite Wastewater Management System (septic tank), you have legal responsibilities under the GED to ensure that the system is working properly and that it does not pose a risk to others.

This includes:

- Making sure that the system does not leak or overflow
- Maintaining the system, ensuring that it is checked regularly and de-sludged, or serviced as required

- Having the system fixed quickly by a licensed contractor if it is not working properly
- Maintaining and protecting the absorption field and lines and ensuring that all treated wastewater remains within the boundaries of your property
- Complying with Local Council requirements in relation to installation, alterations, maintenance, and use.
- If you are the landowner, providing written information about how to use the system to any tenants

It is vital that all Victorians (landowners, consultants, applicants, etc) provide **accurate** and **thorough** information when submitting a planning permit application or accompanying report, to ensure that they are meeting their obligations under the GED.

### What is a Land Capability Assessment (LCA), and why do I need one?

An LCA is a detailed written report completed by a suitably qualified professional that assesses the various aspects of a site and determines the capability of the land to sustain a wastewater treatment and disposal system.

The main purpose of an LCA is to evaluate whether the wastewater generated by the proposed development can be managed on-site without causing harm to the environment or public health. The LCA assesses the suitability of the land for on-site wastewater treatment and disposal, considering factors such as soil type, topography, and climate. It helps determine the appropriate treatment system and the area of land needed for sustainable wastewater management.

### What documents should be considered when a Land Capability Assessment (LCA) is prepared?

The [Guidelines for onsite wastewater management \(EPA, May 2024\)](#) is for onsite wastewater professionals, Councils and other regulators, Water Corporations (such as GMW), and property owners and occupiers.

The [Guidelines for effluent dispersal and recycling systems \(EPA, May 2024\)](#) is for wastewater experts who design onsite wastewater management systems (such as LCA assessors), install the systems, and check that the land is suitable for the systems. It can also help those who make planning decisions and regulators to assess permit applications for onsite wastewater management

systems under 5,000L/day (such as Council and GMW).

The following Australian Standards are also applicable to the design and installation of onsite wastewater management systems:

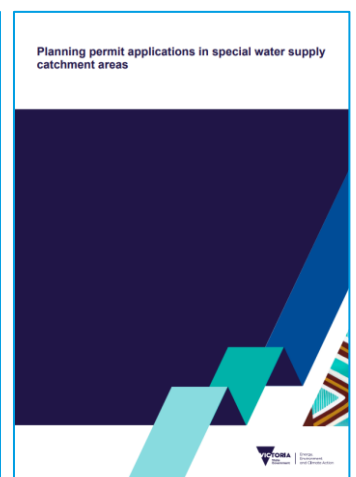
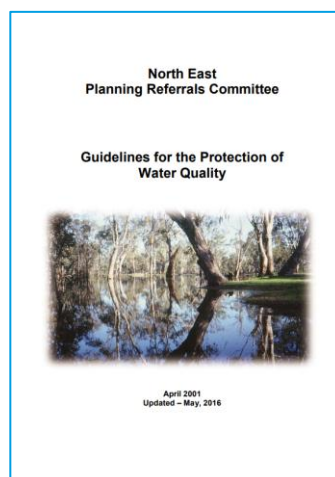
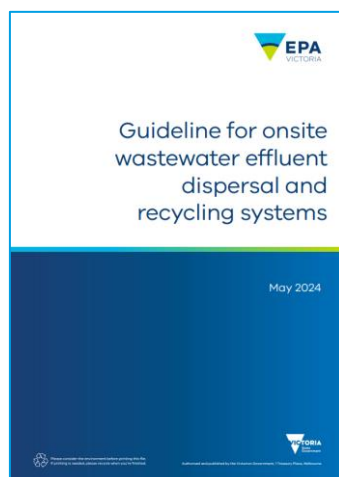
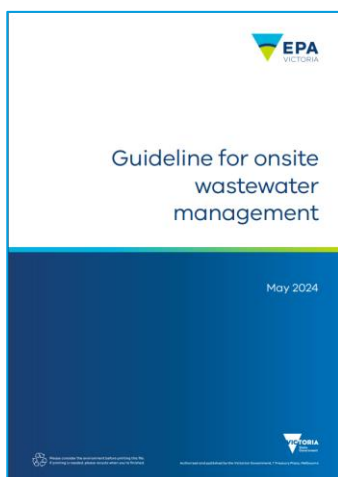
- AS/NZS 1546.1:2008, On-site domestic wastewater treatment units, Part 1: Septic tanks
- AS/NZS 1546.2:2008, On-site domestic wastewater treatment units, Part 2: Waterless composting toilets
- AS 1546.3:2017, On-site domestic wastewater treatment units, Part 3: Secondary treatment systems
- AS 1546.4:2016, On-site domestic wastewater treatment units, Part 4: Domestic greywater treatment systems
- AS/NZS 1547:2012, On-site domestic wastewater management

The following documents should also be considered in the preparation of an LCA:

- [Guidelines for the Protection of Water Quality \(North East Planning Referrals Committee\) 2001 – Updated May 2016](#)
- [Planning permit applications in open, special water supply catchment areas \(February 2024\)](#)

All these documents aim to prevent harm to the environment and human health from wastewater.

**GMW expects that any suitably qualified professional prepares an LCA in accordance with the recommendations and requirements of these documents.**



Date & version no; DM #

### What is an Onsite Wastewater Management Plan (OWMP)?

An Onsite Wastewater Management Plan (previously known as a Domestic Wastewater Management Plan, or DWMP) is a document created by Council, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders (such as GMW), which:

- a) identifies risks of harm to human health and the environment from unsewered allotments in its municipal district;
- b) identifies and assesses the risks of harm to human health and the environment associated with existing and future on-site wastewater management systems in its municipal district, including but not limited to:
  - i. the cumulative risks of existing on-site wastewater management systems that are discharging, or may in the future discharge, wastewater beyond allotment boundaries; and
  - ii. the risks of on-site wastewater management systems that are impacting, or may in the future impact, on groundwater or surface water;
- c) identifies actions with implementation timeframes to:
  - i. minimise the risks identified in paragraphs 1(a) and (b); and
  - ii. prevent discharge of wastewater beyond allotment boundaries; and
- d) sets out Council's approach to compliance and enforcement.

### What is the relationship between Council's Onsite Wastewater Management Plan and a Land Capability Assessment?

Land Capability Assessments (LCAs) and Onsite Wastewater Management Plans (OWMPs) are closely interrelated, as both are essential components in ensuring effective and sustainable wastewater management.

OWMPs set the framework for how Council (and any other relevant authority) aims to approach management of existing, and assessment of proposed onsite wastewater management

systems within their Council area. OWMPs outline strategies and requirements to ensure onsite wastewater management systems within the municipality pose minimal impact to the health of the community and surrounding environment. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Identifying medium and high risk areas in the municipality
- Consideration of minimising wastewater volumes (i.e. reducing number of bedrooms) to reduce required area for land application of treated wastewater
- Requirements for higher standards of treatment of wastewater in certain areas
- Discouragement of development in inappropriate locations
- Education for system owners and users on the management, use and maintenance requirements of their wastewater system

All LCA assessors must ensure that any LCA report is completed in accordance with the recommendations of Council's OWMP. When assessing an LCA, GMW will conduct a comparative analysis of the report against the OWMP, to ensure the relevant requirements are being met.