

## Fact Sheet

### Sewerage Backlog Program – questions and answers

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide you with information on:

- How the Sewerage Backlog Program came about
- Which properties are included on the Sewerage Backlog Program
- Requirements for connection to the sewerage service once it is provided.

#### Why is my property on the Sewerage Backlog Program?

In the period immediately after the second World War, Melbourne grew rapidly, particularly in the eastern and southern suburbs. Up until the 1980's, new developments were allowed to proceed without a requirement to provide reticulated sewerage services, and septic tank systems were approved as an interim solution. Since the mid-1980's all new developments have been required to provide reticulated sewerage services.

The 'backlog' of properties not provided with a reticulated sewerage at the time of development has been progressively reduced by Melbourne's water companies, however Yarra Valley Water still has approximately 17,000 'backlog' properties within its business area.

At the time of development, several planning controls were put in place to minimise the risks to both public health and the environment from septic tank systems. These included:

- Minimum land sizes were set to maximise the amount of wastewater which could be retained onsite; and
- The use of 'split systems' was approved – which direct toilet wastewater to the septic tank for treatment and containment onsite. All other wastewater (including the kitchen, shower and laundry) flows through separate pipework and is discharged offsite into either piped stormwater drains, open channels at the front or back of the property, or directly into a waterway.

As septic tank systems were only ever approved as an interim solution, the overwhelming majority of properties are unable to fully contain all of the wastewater generated by the household onsite.

Even when the property has a newer treatment system which is well maintained and operating effectively, the treated wastewater which leaves the property contains high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus which finds its way into local waterways. This causes problems such as algal outbreaks, weed growth and disruption to the natural surface and groundwater ecosystems. In extreme cases, failing systems can also discharge poorly treated water containing high levels of pathogens into waterways.

#### What does onsite containment mean?

When a property is assessed as being able to contain all of the household wastewater generated onsite, it means:

- There is no runoff or direct discharge of effluent (whether treated or untreated) from the property boundary at any time throughout the year to either surface or ground waters; and
- All effluent generated is held within the soil profile and released to the atmosphere via either uptake through the root systems of plants (transpiration) or direct evaporation from the soil structure.

**What are the current State Government requirements regarding unsewered properties?**

Under the *Environment Protection Act 1970*, the *State Environment Protection Policy Waters of Victoria* (June 2003) provides a framework for government agencies, businesses and the community to work together to protect and to rehabilitate Victoria's surface water environments.

**What are Yarra Valley Water's obligations to sewer unsewered properties?**

Yarra Valley Water is required to provide a sewerage service to all properties identified by local councils in their Domestic Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs). The DWMPs identify all properties in the municipality which have a septic tank system, make an assessment of whether the systems can suitably contain the household wastewater generated onsite, and if it not, recommend that Yarra Valley Water provides a sewerage service.

This requirement to provide a sewerage service is also included in Yarra Valley Water's Statement of Obligations.

**Will I be required to connect to sewer?**

There may be some properties within a Backlog Area which are of sufficient size and have a suitably performing treatment system to fully contain their wastewater onsite. Provided these properties have an EPA approved treatment system that is in good working order and is being properly maintained, they will not be required to connect.

The flowchart on the back page of this document will show whether your property fits into this category.

**What type of sewerage service will be provided?**

As part of deciding how a Backlog Area will be serviced, Yarra Valley Water conducts a detailed investigation of the servicing options available which are capable of meeting the onsite containment requirement. These options include a mix of traditional solutions (such as pipe networks and pumps) and alternative solutions (such as onsite recycling and reuse).

Yarra Valley Water seeks feedback from the community during this investigation phase to ensure that all possible options have been identified, and considers this feedback when making a final decision. Once an option is selected, Yarra Valley Water advises the community and provides them with information on how it works, the anticipated timeframe for completion of the installation, and how the connection process will work.

**When will my property be provided with a sewerage service?**

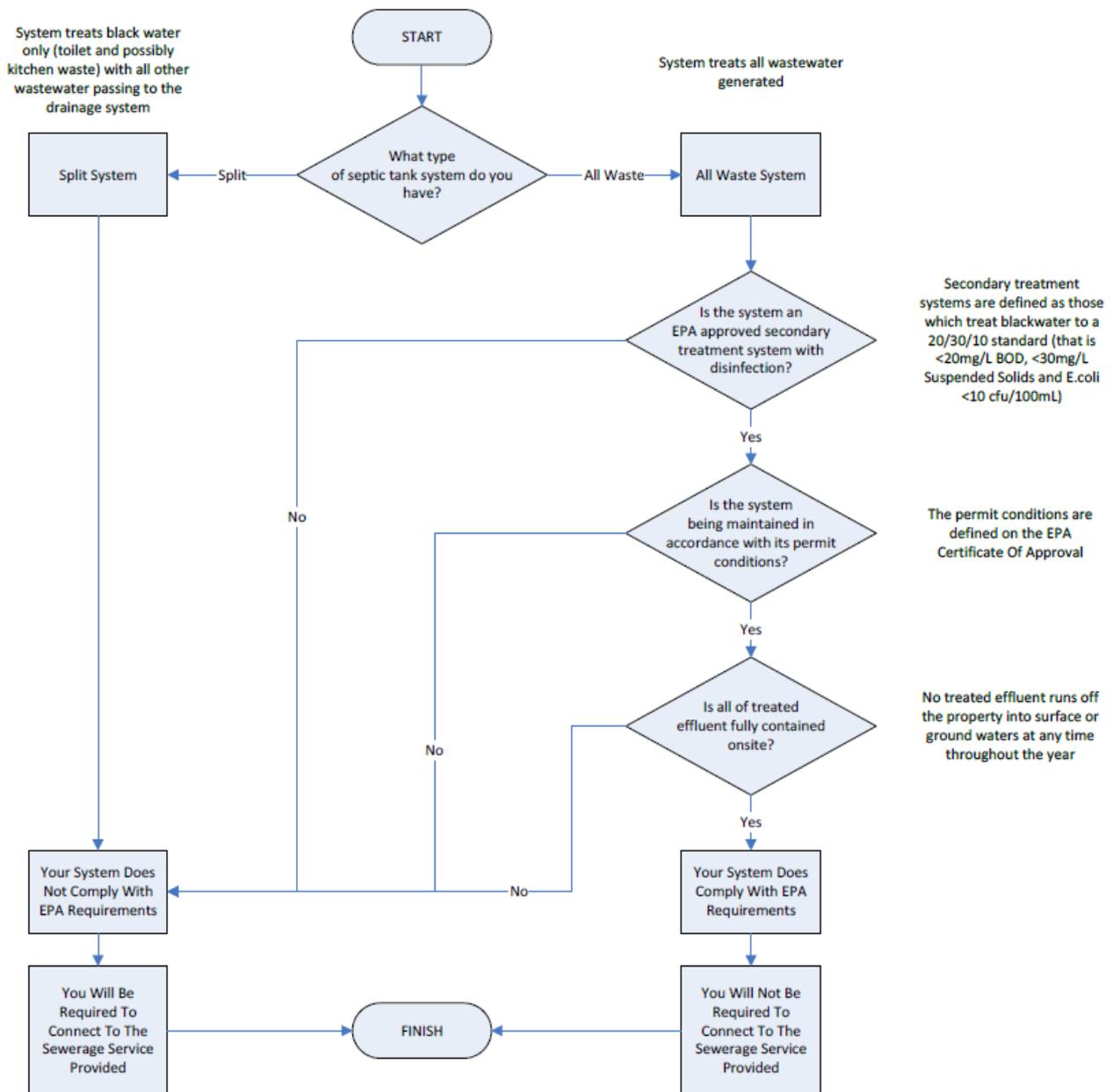
There are over 17,000 properties on the Sewerage Backlog Program. Yarra Valley Water runs a prioritisation process every five years to target the areas which are having the greatest impacts on both public health and the environment.

Priorities are set based on a number of variables including community opinion, the impact on local waterways, flora and fauna impacts, the performance of existing onsite systems, population density, the significance to local industry, and cost.

Yarra Valley Water is currently re-assessing the priorities for the Backlog Areas we plan to service during the next regulatory period, which runs from 2013/14 to 2017/18.

## Will I be required to connect?

The flowchart is a guide to determine whether a property will be required to connect to the sewerage service when it is available for connection.



### For more information:

Further information is available at [www.yvw.com.au/backlog](http://www.yvw.com.au/backlog). Should you have any further questions, please contact the Manager of Sewer Backlog Planning as per the details below.

Manager, Sewer Backlog Planning  
 Yarra Valley Water  
 Phone: 9872 1227  
 Email: [backlog@yvw.com.au](mailto:backlog@yvw.com.au)