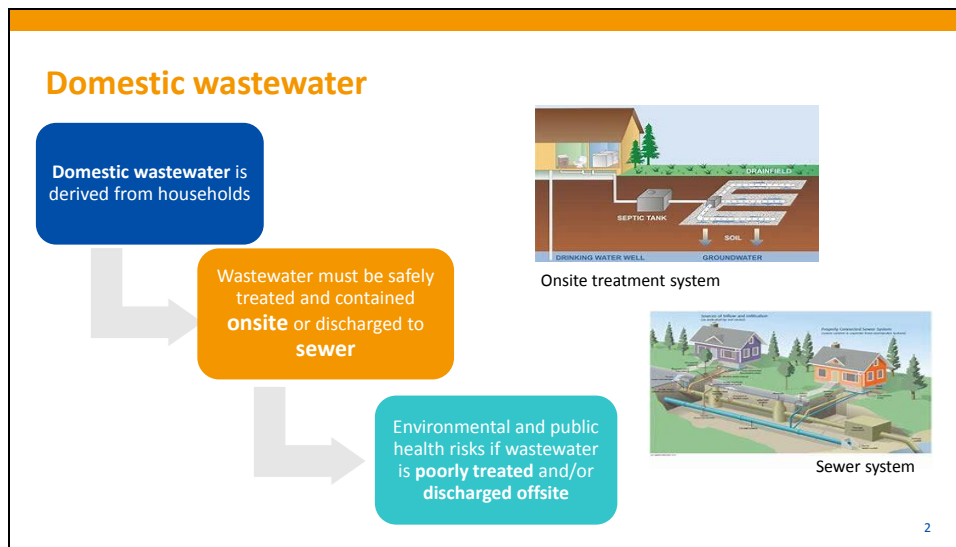


Slide 1



This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Managing the Environmental Impacts of Domestic Wastewater*.



Domestic wastewater is derived from household water use. It contains pathogens harmful to human health and contaminants that are harmful to the environment if not treated safely.

Wastewater can be safely treated onsite—typically through an onsite system and drainage fields if a property is large enough, has the right soil conditions and is not too steep. If one or more of these is not met, wastewater should be discharged to sewer.

Owners must regularly maintain their onsite systems to ensure the continued safe treatment of wastewater.

### What we looked at

To determine whether the risks posed by domestic wastewater are effectively managed to prevent environmental and public health impacts

We examined:

- Regulatory framework
- Onsite domestic wastewater system management
- Metropolitan sewer backlog programs


Government agencies	Councils	Water authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)</li><li>The Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Yarra Ranges Council (YRC)</li><li>Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>South East Water Ltd (SEW)</li><li>Yarra Valley Water Ltd (YVW)</li></ul>

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This audit examined whether the risks posed by domestic wastewater are being effectively managed to prevent environmental and health impacts.

We looked at:

- The regulatory system and oversight provided by the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)
- The management of unsewered metropolitan properties and the risks posed by these, by Yarra Ranges Council (YRC) and Mornington Peninsula Shire Council (MPSC)
- The roles of South East Water (SEW) and Yarra Valley Water (YVW) in servicing high risk unsewered metropolitan townships.

**What we found** 

The environmental and public health risks from poorly performing onsite systems are not being adequately managed

	Regulatory issues, poor leadership and limited collaboration between DELWP and EPA
	Audited councils are not effectively managing poorly performing onsite systems
	Property owners are slow to connect to sewer

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The audit found the environmental and public health risks from poorly performing onsite systems are not being adequately managed.

This is due to:

- poor leadership and limited collaboration between DELWP and EPA
- audited councils not effectively managing the ongoing risks posed by poorly performing onsite systems
- property owners being slow to connect to sewer provided by the water authorities

### Regulations, governance and processes



Regulatory framework has significant gaps

Onerous requirements to force sewer connection

Approval processes lengthy and unwarranted

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Overall a lack of leadership, oversight, and collaboration between EPA and DELWP means there is limited drive and accountability to ensure councils and property owners comply with their legislated roles and responsibilities.

There are regulatory issues. For example, permits for onsite systems are issued in perpetuity. This means councils cannot prevent property owners from allowing old systems to discharge sewage offsite.

Another example is that no entity can effectively enforce a property owner to maintain their system or connect to sewer if they can't safely treat wastewater onsite.

The approval processes are lengthy and unwarranted and there is a lack of clarity around governance responsibilities for alternative approaches to sewer such as onsite systems maintained by water authorities instead of property owners.

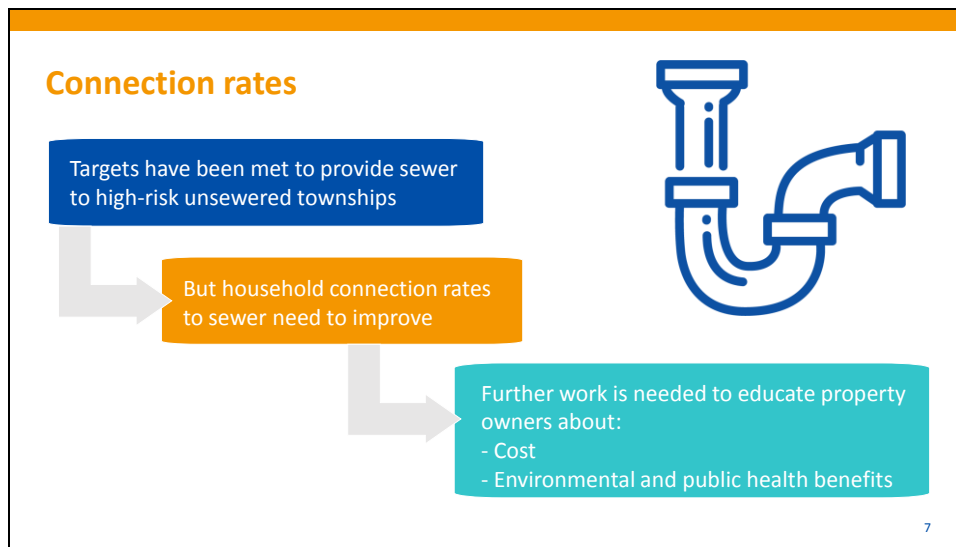
Councils and managing systems	
✓	Approving and installation of <u>new</u> onsite domestic wastewater systems
✗	Identification of risks posed by onsite systems - ongoing performance
✗	Legacy system risks not adequately addressed
✗	Compliance inspections and follow up inadequate

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Councils manage the process for approving new onsite systems well, but they aren't doing enough to check that new and existing systems continue to comply with permit and policy requirements.

Also, because of poor data, there are large gaps in their understanding of the number of onsite systems in their area and how many are not functioning well. This means councils aren't well placed to understand how great a risk poorly-managed onsite systems are to their municipality.

MPSC has improved its compliance and inspection programs but neither councils' programs are currently adequate.



Since 2005–06, SEW and YVW have met their targets to provide sewer to high-risk unsewered townships.

However, household connection rates to sewer need to improve to fully realise the environmental and health benefits of sewerage townships.

While water authorities and councils have implemented a range of incentives to encourage households to connect, further work is needed to address perceived customer barriers around cost, and educate property owners about the environmental and public health benefits of connection.

### Unresolved issues



Our 2006 audit made **16** recommendations  
**11** have not been addressed



Poor collaboration  
and leadership by  
EPA and DELWP



Issues previously identified  
with regulatory framework  
remain unaddressed

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Our 2006 audit *Protecting our communities from failing septic tanks* made 16 recommendations. Of these, 11 have not been addressed and 3 were only partially addressed.

This is mainly due to poor collaboration and leadership by EPA and DELWP. As a result, issues previously identified with the regulatory framework and its tools to manage risks from domestic wastewater remain unaddressed.



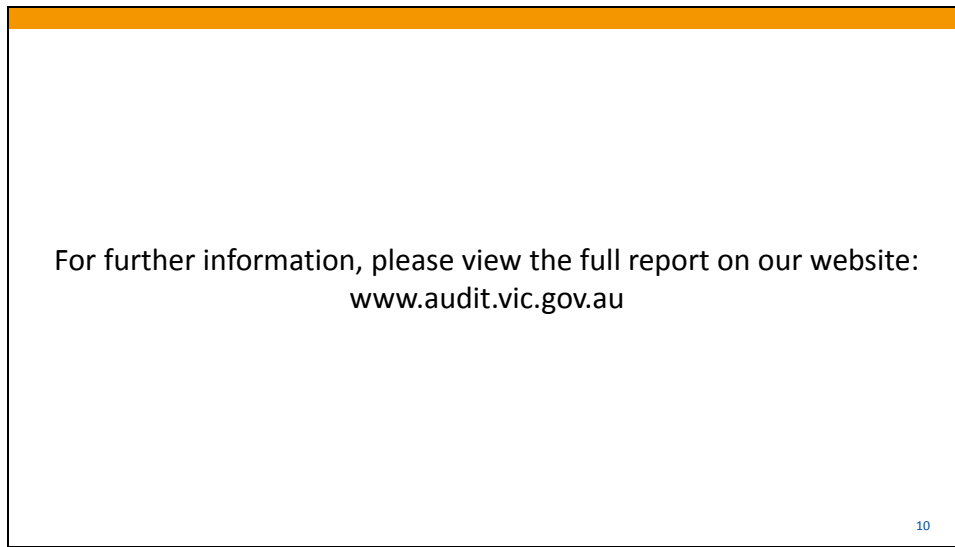
## Recommendations

- 8 Recommendations for DELWP and EPA**
  - work collaboratively to provide better leadership and oversight of the regulatory framework and its implementation
  - address issues with the regulatory framework and its tools
- 4 Recommendations for Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and Yarra Ranges Council**
  - improve its risk assessment process and the information supporting it
  - improve compliance, inspection and education programs
- 3 Recommendations for water authorities**
  - improve collaboration and information sharing with councils
  - better educate property owners around life-cycle costs for onsite systems and sewer

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This audit made 15 recommendations.

All recommendations have been accepted by the audited agencies.



For further information, please view the full report on our website:  
[www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au)

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