
Supplying and Using Recycled Water

Tabled 17 November 2021



Objective

In this audit we assessed if responsible agencies are increasing recycled water use to meet future water demand.

Who we examined

We examined the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, or DELWP, the Environment Protection Authority Victoria, or EPA, BarwonWater and the City of Greater Geelong.

What we examined

We assessed if responsible agencies have effectively developed and implemented strategies to increase recycled water use and identified and addressed barriers to increasing use.

Conclusion

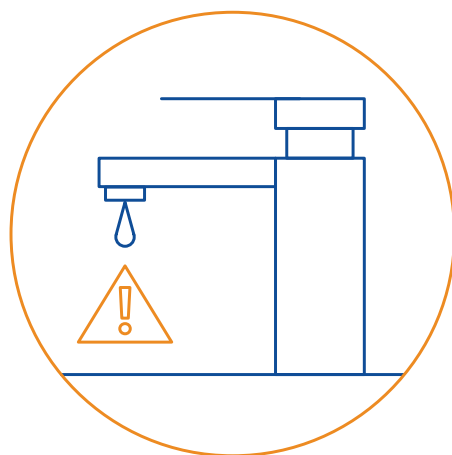
Recycled water use has not increased over the past decade.

Many Victorians have a limited understanding of water security and the risks and benefits of using recycled water. Responsible agencies can help to overcome this by directing more effort to educate the community.

There are also some known and potential regulatory, economic and physical barriers to increasing recycled water use that agencies can address.

Responsible agencies are actively engaging with the community to understand risks and opportunities for recycled water. They are also working together to identify and deliver water recycling projects.

Why is the audit important?



Why is the audit important?

The Victorian Government estimates that demand for water could exceed our supply as early as this decade due to population growth and climate change.

Recycled water could help to address this risk, but it is currently underused. In 2019–20, only 16 per cent of Victoria’s wastewater was recycled.

Background

Water corporations make recycled water by treating wastewater to different standards that are safe for its intended uses, such as watering crops and sportsgrounds and in homes for watering gardens and flushing toilets. Recycled water can also be added to stressed rivers to improve their flow.

Barriers to using recycled water

DELWP’s *Water for Victoria* plan aims to increase recycled water use, but this depends on how well the water sector understands and manages regulatory, policy, physical and economic barriers and community attitudes towards recycled water.

DELWP has a good understanding of these barriers and is working to address them where necessary.

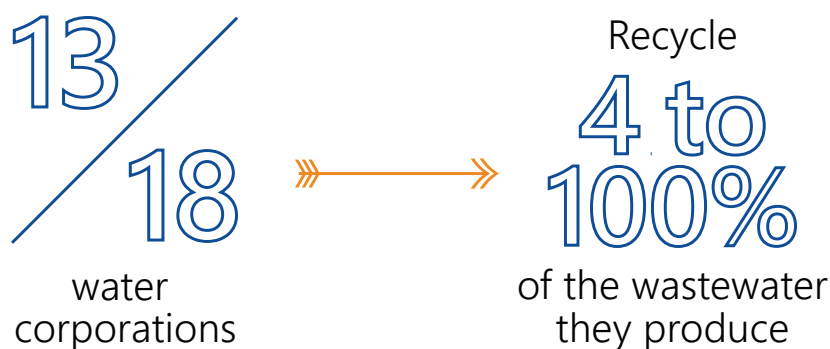
More community education is needed though. DELWP is working to understand how it can support the water sector to better engage with the community.

Planning to increase recycled water use

The audited agencies are working together to plan and identify opportunities for using recycled water.

Thirteen of Victoria’s 18 water corporations have set goals to recycle between 4 to 100 per cent of the wastewater they produce.

Planning to increase recycled water use



For example, Barwon Water has committed to increasing the amount allocated for productive use by 1 000 megalitres a year by 2023 and recycling 100 per cent of its wastewater by 2030. It's on track to achieve its short-term goal.

Funding recycled water projects

From 2017–18 to 2019–20, DELWP contributed approximately \$10.8 million towards 97 recycled water projects. Water corporations and recycled water customers contributed a further \$19.7 million.

Measuring impact

However, DELWP cannot demonstrate if its policies and actions have increased use yet because it needs to monitor changes over a longer period of time.

Recommendations

We made 3 recommendations to DELWP, including one to improve community understanding and two about measuring and reporting recycled water use.

We also made one recommendation to EPA about developing guidelines for using recycled water for environmental flows.

For more information, or to read the full report, go to www.audit.vic.gov.au