

Integrated Planning & Health

# **Waste Water in the Dandenongs**

## **Project Briefing Paper**

A Good  
Practice  
Program  
Project



# Integrated Planning & Health

## Waste Water in the Dandenongs



### **This briefing paper:**

- provides an outline of the *Integrated Planning and Health - Waste Water in the Dandenongs Project*;
- briefly describes the background issues associated with waste water and current management practices;
- identifies some stakeholders and their roles in management of waste water;
- details the strategies to involve all stakeholders, and
- encourages all interested parties to work with the project team to reach an agreed set of sustainable solutions.

**A comprehensive Issues Paper will be developed and circulated early in 2003.**

All project stakeholders are invited to forward information, which they suggest be included in that paper. During the initial project briefing sessions, stakeholders will be invited to note the issues to be incorporated into that paper.

### **Contacts**

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# Project Outline

The Shire of Yarra Ranges recognises that the Dandenong Ranges are an icon for the people of Melbourne. However, there is evidence that the significance of the environment for which this area is known is at risk. The effect of poorly maintained wastewater systems on the creeks and waterways are having significant impact on the health of the environment and the broader community. Many different groups and authorities have an interest in the issue of wastewater in the Dandenongs, but there is no one responsible body to move the issue forward.

The Shire has recently received funding from the Department of Human Services, which is intended *'to stimulate new developments and creative approaches to municipal public health planning using the new Framework, Environments for Health.'*

Council has taken the opportunity to use this funding to assist in development of an integrated approach to the issue of wastewater management in the Dandenongs, providing solutions to protect and preserve this significant area.

## **Council has been able to negotiate use of this funding:**

- **to produce a plan to** develop sustainable solutions and to reduce the negative impacts on the water quality within the Shire's streams and catchments, considering issues such as :
  - best practice waste water disposal systems;
  - nutrient management;
  - sullage;
  - sewerage "backlog properties";
  - impact of land use and development;
  - water quality monitoring;
  - soil erosion and
  - storm water

- **to build a** collaborative approach between State and Local Government, the community and business.
- **to enable** all stakeholders to work together develop an agreed plan with clarity about relevant responsibilities and timelines.
- **to commit** all stakeholders to agreed strategic directions.
- **to explore** alternative solutions and sustainable options.
- **to work** within current Planning controls to service the community.

**The project is not about:-**

- The Council taking over the role of (responsible) agencies.
- Pre-determined trench based systems.
- Expanding commercial and residential development in the Dandenong Ranges.

**This *Integrated Planning and Health - Waste Water in the Dandenongs* project is designed to begin the process for addressing a waste water issue in which many organisations have an aspect of responsibility. It will enable all the stakeholders to work together develop an agreed plan with clarity about relevant responsibilities and timelines.**

# Waste Water



Currently, the two most common ways of treating and disposing of wastewater from commercial or residential premises in the Dandenong Ranges are :

- Septic tank Systems, and
- Reticulated Sewerage Systems.

## Septic Tank Systems

Most of the Dandenong Ranges area is unsewered. Septic tanks provide most of the treatment and disposal of waste water generated from commercial developments in townships and residential areas. Many septic tanks systems installed in this area allow 'grey water' from kitchen sinks, laundries and bathrooms and treated effluent from sand filters and domestic package treatment plants to discharge into open street drains and gullies.

Other systems in this area discharge waste water into absorption trenches, which allow the effluent to be treated and retained within property boundaries.

The current laws allow waste water to continue to be discharged in these ways, provided appropriate and regular maintenance prevents the system from failing. However, there is currently no regulatory mechanism to ensure that domestic waste water systems are regularly monitored for compliance with their conditions of use.

Overloaded or malfunctioning systems increase the levels of pathogenic organisms and nutrients, which infiltrate into waterways causing environmental damage. Poor street drainage can allow the nutrient-enriched stormwater to stagnate, causing odours and posing health risks for the public.

There are many factors causing overloading and malfunctioning systems. These include:

- poorly maintained and ageing septic tank systems;
- illegal plumbing works;
- increasing numbers of tourist accommodation businesses, and
- increasing installation of high water using devices such as spas and dishwashers.

Overloaded and malfunctioning waste water systems cause a wide range of problems including:

- providing a source of disease.
- odours from stagnant nutrient-enriched water in open drains;
- die back of native vegetation and Mountain Ash trees in particular; and
- weed growth in drains and waterways.

## **Reticulated Sewerage Systems - Backlog Sewer**

In the early seventies it was identified that poor water quality caused by the inability of households to retain wastewater could not be sustained. As a result a Water and Sewerage Backlog program was commenced by the former Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) to improve water quality and provide reticulated sewerage and water to the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. This meant that all residential subdivisions before a predetermined date were considered to be part of the program.

The impact of industry reform in the 1990's moved the responsibility for the program to the retail water companies. This renewed Council's role to recommend priority areas for the staged program. The shift of responsibility, the difficult terrain and consequent high cost has meant that the program has addressed the fringe areas of the Dandenongs. However, there remains a significant number of properties in the Dandenong Ranges without sewer available. Recent projections to complete the program are estimated to be 40 years.

# Managing Wastewater



There are many organisations with responsibility for aspects of managing waste water. Some of these are :

- **Yarra Valley and South East Water** – the “retail” water companies which are responsible for providing local water supply and waste water disposal systems to metropolitan customers;
- **Melbourne Water** – the “wholesale” water company that provides bulk water and waste water services to the “retail” companies;
- **Department of Infrastructure** – the state government department which coordinates long term infrastructure planning for Victoria and Victorian Government agencies, and
- **Shire of Yarra Ranges** – the Council approves the installation of wastewater systems that produce less than 5,000 litres per day.

Currently, the **Environment Protection Authority** and the **Municipal Association of Victoria** are working with Local Government to develop a Model Domestic Wastewater Management Plan. The outcome of the trial will inform the development and implementation of legislative reforms proposed by government.

The roles, responsibilities and special projects of these and other stakeholders are to be addressed in greater depth in the Issues Paper.

Obviously, waste water issues in the Dandenong Ranges are of a complex nature. It will require the commitment from all stakeholders to take up the challenge to find sustainable solutions to this problem.

**A Waste Water Management Strategy will articulate the policy and commitment of all organisations which have a responsibility for waste water management in the Dandenongs.**

# Project Management



This Shire of Yarra Ranges Integrated Planning and Health - Waste Water in the Dandenongs Project is being managed by a team of senior Council Officers who are working closely with all stakeholders. The team comprises :

- Manager Environment – Guy Pritchard
- Public Health Coordinator – Peter Wright
- Manager Organisational Strategy and Development – Bryce Craggs
- Manager Sustainable Futures – Stuart Menzies
- Manager Community Development and Partnering – Mark Doubleday
- Project Officer - Sophie Akers

# Stakeholder Participation

The Project is designed to have significant input from stakeholders with whom the Council team will work to develop a plan for sustainable solutions. The process for input is initially designed as follows:

- **Between September and November 2002**, - Council's CEO and members of the Project Management Group will be organising meetings with all stakeholder groups and individuals to discuss the Project and the issues they believe should be taken into consideration and which should be addressed in the Project Issues Paper.
- **December 2002**, - All stakeholder groups and individuals will be invited to form a working group to develop an issue paper and explore sustainable solutions.
- **February and March 2003**, - the Project Issues Paper will be circulated to all stakeholders in time for discussion with their own constituencies and the Project Management Team members.
- **In March and April 2003** - all stakeholder groups will be invited to provide feedback on the paper and to participate in workshops to explore and develop the options described in the paper and to determine the appropriate strategies to move the issue forward.
- **April and May 2003** - it is likely that some stakeholders will participate in further workshops to refine the strategies and timelines.

**Please circulate this Briefing Paper to all people and organisations, which you want to know about the project. Contact Sophie Akers at the Shire of Yarra Ranges for any further information and to register your interest in receiving the Issues Paper and participation in the Issues Workshop early in 2003.**