

Melbourne Sewerage Strategy: What is our shared vision?



From thunderboxes and nightmen to a world-leading sanitary system

Melbourne owes much of its liveability to the ingenuity of its sewerage system.

Nearly 150 years ago our capital city was dubbed 'Smellbourne' due to its poor waste disposal methods that created a terrible odour and led to the spread of diseases like cholera and typhoid.

In those days, the toilet was just a bucket housed in a wooden structure known as a 'pan closet toilet' or 'thunderbox' that was only emptied about once a week by a 'nightman'.

In 1888, a Royal Commission into Melbourne's unsafe sanitary condition led to an ambitious plan to build an underground sewerage system. It was constructed with foresight and ambition in the 1890s to improve public health and wellbeing, and has continued to grow and adapt to the needs of our growing city and population.



Our shared vision for Melbourne's sewerage system

The same foresight and ingenuity that has characterised the evolution of our sewerage system is being applied today as we work together with water companies, regulators and the community to ensure our city is future-ready and continues to thrive.

We're all working together to achieve our shared vision.

“ A resilient adaptable system, that supports healthy, thriving communities and a liveable, flourishing environment.”

To achieve this vision, the sewerage system needs to go beyond just continuing to protect public health and the environment.

It needs to also keep our options flexible and open to creating a more water secure future through resource recovery and generation of valuable products such as recycled water, renewable energy and soil conditioners; from what we currently think of as waste.



A framework to guide decision making

Our sewerage system has always adapted and changed to meet the needs of our city's growing population while protecting public and environmental health. The transformation of our current system to a resource recovery system, will be supported by the strategy's framework that will guide governance and decision-making across organisations.

This process will encompass many moving parts, it will be reflective and responsive to community values and also meet the necessary regulatory requirements. Working together we can embrace this opportunity for positive change and achieve the strategy's five core principles, ensuring Melbourne's sewerage system is future-ready:



Community health and wellbeing

The ongoing development and changes of Melbourne's sewerage system will continue to enhance community and environmental health.



Looking after the environment

Melbourne's sewerage system is world leading in protecting our rivers, creeks and other waterways as well the habitats of plants and animals.



Using all our resources

We are committed to reusing 100% of the resources from the sewerage system as well as ensuring our services are always kept affordable.



Community liveability

Our community uses water wisely and understands the role the sewerage system plays in protecting and enhancing Melbourne's liveability and lifestyle.



An enabling policy and regulatory environment

We work together with policy managers and regulators to make sure the sewerage service is fair for everyone and adapts to the needs and challenges of the future.

For further information visit [Melbourne Sewerage Strategy](#) | [Melbourne Water](#)