Service Standards for Planning and Development

Frequently Asked Questions

3 March 2025

Melbourne Water issued renewed Service Standards for Planning and Development on 3 March 2025. The standards are available on the [Melbourne Water website (Services > Building and works > Service standards and performance)](https://www.melbournewater.com.au/building-and-works/service-standards-and-performance).

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| **Question** | **Answer** |
| ***The standards and the services they relate to*** | |
| ***What is the purpose of the Service Standards for Planning and Development?*** | These service standards set out the principles we apply to processing planning and development applications and the maximum timeframes, in calendar days, for Melbourne Water to process and close applications. |
| ***What Melbourne Water services do these standards relate to?***  ***Do they relate to all of Melbourne Water’s urban planning and development services?*** | These service standards relate to planning permit and certification referrals Melbourne Water receives, and to applications for Stormwater Management Strategy assessments, Offers of Agreement (Works and Non-works), Design Acceptance (or approval), and Statement of Compliance.  The standards include statutory timeframes, non-statutory timeframes for Standard applications and new non-statutory timeframes for Complex applications related to Stormwater Management Strategies (or SWMS), Works Offers, and Design acceptance and comments (these apply to Concept and Functional Designs only, not Detailed Designs).  The service standards relate to most planning and development applications we manage. They don’t relate to development construction or to asset protection applications (that is build-overs – applications to build on or near Melbourne Water assets). We will continue an ongoing review of service standards for our other urban planning and development services. |
| ***How do Melbourne Water’s planning and development services support housing growth?*** | The planning and development services Melbourne Water provides help ensure that new development is safe from flooding and does not adversely impact neighbouring properties or waterways. As we provide these services, we also work to protect Melbourne Water assets and maintain the health of local waterways. These services also support the timely delivery of housing that meets the needs of our growing city.  Melbourne Water provides advice on and sets requirements for development, to ensure new housing is protected from flooding, that our waterway corridors are enhanced and maintained, and that stormwater runoff does not detrimentally impact on our waterways and bays. This includes the funding and delivery of critical infrastructure, such as wetlands and retarding basins, which are required to enable urban development. |
| ***Why has Melbourne Water issued these service standards?*** | The Service Standards for Planning and Development encapsulate Melbourne Water’s commitment to our statutory obligations, and to expectations of the State Government, councils and the development industry.  Melbourne Water has issued these service standards to provide clear and transparent commitment on the level of service we will provide to our customers and stakeholders. |
| ***Are these new or changed service standards?*** | These services standards replace previous standards and are the first update in about 8 years. Timeframes for statutory applications remain the same because they are set by legislation. Timeframes for majority of non-statutory application types also remain the same but the new service standards introduce new, longer timeframes for Complex applications in these categories:   * Stormwater management strategies; * Works Offers; and * Design acceptance (or approvals) and comments (Concept and Functional Designs only).   The new service standards also now include Principles for the way Melbourne Water will perform this work. We have started publishing monthly updates on the [Melbourne Water website (Services > Building and works > Service standards and performance)](https://www.melbournewater.com.au/building-and-works/service-standards-and-performance) about our performance related to the standards. These regular updates are an initiative aligned with industry expectations. |
| ***Who was involved in developing the new standards?*** | These service standards are the result of a comprehensive review of our processes, systems and resources and incorporate feedback from our customers.  We consulted with the Association of Land Development Engineers (ALDE), the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) and the Property Council of Australia (PCA). We also received feedback from members of Melbourne Water’s Urban Planning and Development Strategic Collaboration Group (UPD SCG). We appreciate the constructive input and welcome further feedback as we work to continually improve our performance delivering these services. |
| ***Are these the final service standards or will there be more changes?*** | These standards have been developed based on what we understand today to be reasonable and achievable standards. Melbourne Water will closely monitor and report on our performance.  We will also continue to seek industry feedback and conduct an internal review to ensure the standards are fit for purpose and meeting expectations. We will review the standards in mid-2025 and mid-2026, in consultation with the development industry.  We will also continue an ongoing review of service standards for our other urban planning and development services. |
| ***Why has Melbourne Water changed the service standards for non-statutory applications?*** | Melbourne Water last updated the planning and development service standards approximately 8 years ago. Over that time, significant changes have occurred in the land development industry. There are new regulatory and technical requirements. One example is ANCOLD Assessments, risk assessments for dam structures in line with guidelines issued by ANCOLD, the Australian National Committee on Large Dams Incorporated (ANCOLD Inc.).  Also, new on-site challenges have emerged for example more complex geological conditions. We have proposed new service standards with longer timeframes for applications with higher complexity. We believe longer timeframes for more complex applications will ensure all relevant matters are considered and allow sufficient time to work with all relevant stakeholders. |
| ***Why do you need to issue standards when there are already legislative, regulatory and policy requirements in place?*** | Timeframes for statutory applications for planning permits and certification are set by relevant State legislation. Many other applications requiring Melbourne Water’s planning and development services are not subject to legislative timeframes.  These non-statutory application types have timeframes agreed with the development industry and reflecting what is reasonable and achievable to resolve applications, along with consideration of customer and industry expectations. |
| ***How were the standards decided?*** | The standards are based on the reasonable time required to resolve applications, along with consideration of customer and industry expectations for different services.  Longer timelines have been introduced for complex Stormwater Management Strategies, complex Design consent or approval applications and complex Works Offer applications.  Among other factors, complexity generally relates to high-risk assets or where a change to a drainage strategy or Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) is proposed, because these require additional time to resolve. |
| ***What does it mean when the standards say an application type is “Complex”?*** | Broadly speaking, a Complex application is one which is not in accordance with the established drainage strategy for the area, and/or which includes design of a high-risk asset.  An example of a complex Stormwater Management Strategy is one that proposes to vary the drainage strategy (also known as Development Service Scheme or DSS) or a Precinct Structure Plan (PSP).  Another example is an application involving development proposed before downstream infrastructure is in place.  An example of a Complex Works Offer or design application is one that proposes assets that are high-risk, either because it the assets are complex or the site has environmental or other sensitivities. |
| ***How does Melbourne Water determine if an application is “Standard” or “Complex”?*** | This depends on the specific application type and can be generalised as being of significant capital expense.  For the most part, applications will be deemed Standard if they do not involve high-risk or high-value assets or sites of high significance or sensitivity.  The service standards include information about the criteria Melbourne Water uses to determine whether to manage an application as a Complex one, with a longer timeframe. |
| ***Are the timeframes in the service standards given in business days or calendar days?*** | All timeframes in the service standards are in calendar days, not business days (or working days).  Timeframes reflect the period an application is with Melbourne Water for processing until it is closed.  However, they do not include any time an application is in the hands of an applicant such as when they are preparing additional information requested by us (a Request for Information or RFI). |
| ***Does the clock stop at any time while an application is being processed?*** | As a general principle, the timeframes set out in the service standards are the number of calendar days an application is with Melbourne Water for action.  The days an application is with an applicant to respond to requests from Melbourne Water for further information are not included.  Our guidance about “Stopping the Clock” will help applicants understand when the clock stops, is reset or restarts. |
| **Melbourne Water’s service performance against the standards** | |
| ***How will Melbourne Water let the industry know how it’s tracking against the service standards?*** | Melbourne Water’s performance will be updated monthly on the Melbourne Water Service Standards web page on the [Melbourne Water website (Services > Building and works > Service standards and performance)](https://www.melbournewater.com.au/building-and-works/service-standards-and-performance). |
| ***How the standards will impact customer experience of these services*** | |
| ***What difference will I experience as an applicant when the standards are introduced?*** | Changes aim to enhance the efficiency and timeliness of our processes, ensuring that you receive consistent and relevant feedback throughout the application lifecycle  As an applicant, you can expect clearer, more proactive information and more timely responses from Melbourne Water.  You will also be able to view monthly updates on our service performance overall and provide feedback on your own experience of our services. |
| ***How can I give feedback on the service standards and how I think Melbourne Water is tracking?*** | We welcome feedback on how we are performing against the service standards.  You can provide feedback either by using the contact details in our correspondence with you or on the [Contact Us page on the Melbourne Water website](https://www.melbournewater.com.au/about/contact-us) (melbournewater.com.au/about/contact-us).  We also encourage people in the development industry to sign up for updates on the dedicated Planning and Development Sector Hub on our Let’s Talk Melbourne Water web platform: letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/development-sector-hub |
| ***Will the service standards mean changes to the way I submit applications or other processes?*** | There are no changes to the way you make one of these applications to Melbourne Water. However, we strongly advise you to familiarise yourself with our minimum application requirements so that we can make a prompt start. The minimum requirements are available on the Melbourne Water website (go to Services > Building and Works > Apply to build or develop).  If you have any questions about your application or the process, please use the contact details in our correspondence with you or use the [Contact Us page on the Melbourne Water website](https://www.melbournewater.com.au/about/contact-us) (melbournewater.com.au/about/contact-us). |