Water and Wastewater Service Disruption Emergency Response Plan

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action



VICTORIA State Government | Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Author

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Water and Catchments Group

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We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Doc ID: 40.4.3.7.PLN
Date effective: 4/11/2026

Revision History

Ver	Approved	Effective	Summary of Changes	Owner	Approver
1.0	15/12/2020	15/12/2020	2019 version of Water and Wastewater Service Disruption Response Plan	Senior Policy Advisor Water Emergency Management	Deputy Secretary, Water and Catchments Group
2.0	4/11/2026	4/11/2026	Updates, corrections, additions, and improvements to format and content of Water and Wastewater Service Disruption Response Plan.	Senior Policy Advisor Water Emergency Management	Executive Director, Water Security and Resilience

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1 Summary

Disruptions to water and wastewater services can cause emergencies, which impact water supplies (including drinking) and/or wastewater treatment services to communities. It is imperative to ensure that processes are in place to both manage the disruption and return services to communities as quickly as possible. Depending on the scale, different responses are required. These differing responses are outlined in three levels: local, regional or state. Depending on the level, the responsibility for controlling the emergency is either the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) or the state's water corporations.

The following table outlines the response levels, and whether the responsible entity is DEECA or a water corporation, along with the triggers for each level.

Table 1: Incident levels and triggers

Incident Level	Responsible Agency	Arrangements	Triggers
Level 1 (Local)	Water corporation	Water corporation to manage the event as Business as Usual (BAU) or activating response plans as needed	• Can be resolved during routine business as usual works with internal resources.
Level 2 (Regional)	Water corporation	Water corporation(s) to activate the Corporation Incident Management Plan and arrangements in this Plan. DEECA may activate a Regional Controller if required.	• Credible threat or external impact, with multi-agency response beyond business as usual; or • Any unplanned disruption to supply for >5 hours impacting >500 households; or • Disruption is impacting critical customers (vulnerable facilities) such as hospitals, schools, childcares, kindergartens, aged care, power utilities and/or major industry; or • Any incident attracting or likely to attract media attention that may result in reputational damage; or • Any incident involving a public health concern, significant property damage or damage to a sensitive environment; or • Has the potential to escalate to a Class 2 emergency
Level 3 (State) Class 2 State Emergency	The Department	The Department Secretary may appoint a Class 2 State Controller. The Department is supported by emergency services, establish response arrangements at local, regional and state level.	• A large and complex event; or • Has the potential to cause or is causing extensive damage to the environment; or • Has the potential to have or is having significant adverse consequences for the Victorian community, a part of the Victorian community, or the Victorian economy; or • At the request of the Emergency Management Commissioner; or • As determined by the DEECA Secretary as the Control Agency Officer in Charge (CAOiC). Quantitative examples could include when there is: • A disruption of >24 hours for >10,000 customers[1] for a single water corporation; or • A disruption of >24 hours to town/city for <10,000 customers where >75% of a town/city's customers are impacted; or • Widespread disruption for >24 hours across a single or multiple water corporations; or

[1] Customers are individual connections which include households, businesses and other entities that are provided reticulated water or wastewater services by a water corporation.

			• A disruption to supply for >24 hours to critical customers including large hospitals, schools, aged care facilities, power utilities and/or major industry.

When a water emergency occurs, the responsible water corporation must notify DEECA in accordance with the arrangements for each level (as per *40.0.3.1.GUI Incident Notification Protocol by DEECA and Water Corporations*). The responsible entity should communicate with the Department if an emergency is escalated and is anticipated to scale up in a level. Likewise, when an emergency is de-escalating, communication should occur between the Department and relevant agencies.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose

The Water and Wastewater Service Disruption Plan (the Plan) has been developed to assist the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA, or the Department), and the Victorian water sector in managing its obligations associated with water and wastewater service disruptions. The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) names the Department as the control agency for response to water and wastewater service disruptions. Additionally, the Department has obligations under the SEMP for mitigation through monitoring water corporations' implementation of business continuity and emergency management plans to restore water and wastewater (sewerage) services to full functionality; and observe emergency management exercises in the sector. The Department also is assigned as the Recovery Coordinating Agency (RecCA) for restoration and rehabilitation of reticulated water and wastewater services.

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this Plan are to:

- Provide direction on role clarity and responsibilities, including consequence management for different levels of water and wastewater disruption incidents and emergencies.
- Ensure an integrated, coordinated, consistent and scalable response across the Department and the water sector.
- Minimise the impact of water and wastewater disruptions where possible, on the community, industry, public health and safety and local amenity.
- Provide guidance for the water sector on their obligations for water and wastewater disruptions.

2.3 Scope

This Plan applies to all suppliers of reticulated water and sewerage services, in Victoria, including third pipe recycled water supply and regulated water. The extent of authority for this plan includes water corporations (WCs) and other water suppliers and wastewater treatment facilities, together with other agencies who have responsibilities in this jurisdiction, including DEECA, Parks Victoria and Alpine Resorts, at local, regional and state level.

2.3.1 Out of scope

The plan does not apply to the following

- Planned service disruptions that do not extend beyond the planned disruption
- Water and wastewater supply-by-agreement (an agreement between the water corporation and the customer to supply water/wastewater)
- Private water treatment and septic tank services
- Irrigation, stock and other raw water supply not covered by reticulated services

- Drinking water contamination (that does not cause water supply disruptions)
- The response, relief and recovery of non-reticulated water and wastewater incidents such as loss of tank water or septic systems

2.4 Audience

The plan is targeted at the Department, portfolio and partner agency emergency management personnel, water corporations and other reticulated water and wastewater services suppliers. The primary audience includes those assisting in the management of the consequences of water and wastewater disruptions such as local government, health, tourism and agriculture agencies.

2.5 Authorising environment

The *Emergency Management Act 2013 (Vic)* is the authorising legislation for the management of emergencies in Victoria.

The SEMP is prepared under Part 6A of the *Emergency Management Act 2013 (Vic).* The SEMP outlines arrangements for the coordinated response to emergencies by all agencies and details the roles that different organisations play in Victoria's emergency management arrangements. The Department is appointed as the control agency for water and wastewater service disruptions.

The supply of water and sewerage are defined as an essential service under the *Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic) and again in the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic). Infrastructure assessed by the Minister as significant, major or vital is designated as critical infrastructure under part 7A of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic). Additional emergency risk management obligations apply to water corporations that operate infrastructure assessed as vital to the continuity of supply of essential services, or the economic and social wellbeing of Victoria under section 74E of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic).

The *Water Act 1989 (Vic)* applies to water in Victoria and includes powers, functions and duties of the Minister for Water (the Minister), WCs and catchment management authorities (CMAs). Section 159A-159E of this Act provide the specific requirement for water corporations to prepare emergency management plans for events which would prevent them from performing their legislated functions such as water and wastewater service disruptions.

Section 4I of the *Water Industry Act 1994 (Vic)* provides the Minister with the power to issue a Statement of Obligations (SoO) specifying WCs' obligations including in relation to managing emergencies.

In the SoO (General) issued by the Minister, Part 5-2 Managing Incidents and Emergencies outlines the responsibilities for all WCs with respect to planning and response to incidents and emergencies. This includes the following relating directly to a water or wastewater service disruption

- Develop an emergency management plan for incidents and emergencies covering all hazards and measures, including:
    a) the continuity of services;
    b) incidents resulting in waste discharges to the environment;
    c) a dam safety incident;
    d) a major Information and Communications Technology (ICT) incident;
    e) potential security risks, including but not limited to terrorist attacks; risk to water quality; and
    f) (for Melbourne Water only) flooding in any waterway in Melbourne Water's waterway management district or water which flows into or out of works operated by Melbourne Water.
- Undertake such appropriate training and annual exercises as may be necessary to ensure that its emergency management plan and business continuity plan are tested and can be implemented effectively.

This Plan reflects the legislation, arrangements in the SEMP, the strategic direction for emergency management in Victoria and the accepted state practice for managing emergencies.

This Plan acknowledges the following:

- Water Industry Standards – Rural Customer Service, Section 1.6, that a water business must have policies and procedures to minimise the impact of unplanned interruptions to supply services.
- Water Industry Standards – Urban Customer Services, Section 18.3, that a water business must have policies and procedures to minimise the impact of unplanned interruptions to services, and to provide customers with access to emergency supplies of drinking water in the event of an unplanned interruption.

2.6 Activation of the Plan

The arrangements in the Plan apply on a continuing basis and, as such, do not require formal activation. The response level will be escalated and de-escalated in accordance with the Plan.

2.7 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and First Peoples

The Department is committed to genuinely partnering and meaningfully engaging with Traditional Owners and First Peoples to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations. DEECA ensures that rights of Traditional Owners under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 and any Land Use Activity Agreements are preserved, restored and strengthened and does not diminish the rights that have been secured to date.

2.8 Review

This Plan is current at the time of publication and remains in effect until modified, superseded or withdrawn.

This Plan will be reviewed and updated not less than every three years. Consideration will be given to an earlier revision:

- Where revisions are required following a major emergency or exercise;
- Following a substantial change to the relevant legislation or arrangements; and/or
- In the event that important changes or corrections have been identified outside the review cycle.

3 Defining and categorising emergency types

3.1 Water service disruptions

A water supply interruption is an event that causes a total loss of supply to one or more customers. Interruptions may be due to planned maintenance activities, or unplanned activities resulting from pipeline or delivery system failures. Planned interruptions that take longer than the planned duration are also considered to be unplanned interruptions.

Different classifications or types of water can be supplied to a customer based on the location and services provided. This can include potable drinking water, recycled water and supply by agreement.

A variety of causes can result in a failure of water supply including damage to a water treatment plant or water reticulated network, lack of power and / or communications to operate a treatment plant or pumps, a cyber event that causes a system failure or even a lack of available water.

3.2 Wastewater service disruptions

A wastewater service disruption is an event that results in inadequate sewage services. This could be at the customer property and be manifested as:

- customer’s inability to use the drains or sewage,

- untreated environmental discharge, and/or
- inadequately treated discharge.

A variety of causes can result in a failure of wastewater services including a sewage block or burst, an overflow of sewage due to excessive flows from water intrusion, damage to a wastewater treatment plant, lack of power to operate a treatment plant or pumps, or a cyber event that causes a system failure.

This plan also considers unlicenced (or temporary only licenced) discharges of treated wastewater into waterways to be a form of wastewater service disruptions as the wastewater treatment plants are operating outside of the designed conditions.

3.3 Categorising a water and wastewater emergency

Water and wastewater service disruption emergencies are categorised using the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) framework to provide a scalable response to emergency management based on the potential or realised consequences of the event. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Incident levels and triggers

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Level 3 (State) Class 2 State Emergency	The Department	The Department Secretary may appoint a Class 2 State Controller. The Department is supported by emergency services, establish response arrangements at local, regional and state level.	• A large and complex event; or • Has the potential to cause or is causing extensive damage to the environment; or • Has the potential to have or is having significant adverse consequences for the Victorian community, a part of the Victorian community, or the Victorian economy; or • At the request of the Emergency Management Commissioner; or • As determined by the DEECA Secretary as the Control Agency Officer in Charge (CAOiC). Quantitative examples could include when there is:

			• A disruption of >24 hours for >10,000 customers[2] for a single water corporation; or • A disruption of >24 hours to town/city for <10,000 customers where >75% of a town/city's customers are impacted; or • Widespread disruption for >24 hours across a single or multiple water corporations; or • A disruption to supply for >24 hours to critical customers including large hospitals, schools, aged care facilities, power utilities and/or major industry.

Planned or unplanned interruptions to urban water supply or sewerage services rarely escalate beyond five hours in Victoria. In 2015-16 the state's sixteen urban water businesses restored 94% to 100% of unplanned water supply interruptions within five hours. Similarly, most businesses contained 100% of sewer spills within five hours (worst performing business was 85%)[3].

3.4 Cyber security incidents

Cyber security can impact the supply of water and wastewater services. In instances where cyber security impacts water and wastewater services, this Plan should be followed as part of the WC's cyber response along with relevant WC and state-level cyber response plans.

In the event of a cyber security incident or data breach, the Victorian Government Cyber Incident Response Service must be notified along with the arrangements covered in *40.0.3.1.GUI Water Corporation and DEECA Incident Notification Protocol* and the Victorian Government cyber security response information web page.

4 Consequences

A water or wastewater service disruption incident may have various impacts on communities. It is essential to consider potential consequences and engage support agencies (detailed in the SEMP based on sectors and services impacted) in planning and response.

Consequences may include:

- Decline in water quality or water quantity with potential to impact on human health;
- The psychosocial impact on individuals and community potentially increasing the vulnerability of specific groups (e.g. business owners, farmers and their families, children, drought/flood/ fire affected communities, communities impacted by previous emergencies);
- Economic loss due to impact on livelihoods and community function;
- Potential decline of community wellbeing due to impact on livelihoods; and
- Damage to the environment.

The roles of agencies assisting in the management of consequences, leading or supporting response, relief and recovery are summarised in section 8.3 below.

[2] Customers are individual connections which include households, businesses and other entities that are provided reticulated water or wastewater services by a water corporation.

5 Introduction to arrangements

5.1 Water and wastewater service providers

Victoria's water sector is made up of eighteen WCs established under the *Water Act 1989*, each including a Board of Directors appointed by the Minister. Based on services provided, these WCs are divided into three types of entities: metropolitan, urban or rural.

- Metropolitan water corporations
  - Greater Western Water
  - Melbourne Water
  - South East Water
  - Yarra Valley Water
- Urban water corporations
  - Barwon Water
  - Central Highlands Water
  - Coliban Water
  - East Gippsland Water
  - Gippsland Water
  - Goulburn Valley Water
  - Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
  - Lower Murray Water
  - North East Water
  - South Gippsland Water
  - Wannon Water
  - Westernport Water
- Rural water corporations
  - Goulburn-Murray Water
  - Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
  - Lower Murray Water
  - Southern Rural Water

Note that Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water and Lower Murray Water exist as hybrid WCs as they both provide urban and rural water depending on the customer location.

Metropolitan and urban WCs provide water supply (including recycled), sewage treatment and trade waste disposal services. Rural WCs provide water supply, drainage, salinity mitigation services for irrigation and water for domestic and stock purposes. Uniquely, Melbourne Water provides a bulk water and sewage disposal services to metropolitan urban WCs, and under their function as a CMA have responsibilities for the management of waterways and drainage systems.

Other agencies can be water and sewage disposal services providers, including Parks Victoria (Tidal River Campground at Wilsons Promontory National Park and Twelve Apostles Visitor Facility at Port Campbell National Park) and Alpine Resort Victoria's management boards under the *Parks Victoria Act 1989* (Vic) and the *Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997* (Vic) respectively. Along with WCs, they are responsible for implementing the requirements of the *Safe Drinking water Act 2003* (Vic). Victoria's desalination plant is operated by Aquasure under contract with the Victorian State government and is managed by DEECA. Desalinated water from this plant is supplied to Melbourne's water storages and to other WCs in the State.

5.2 Shared responsibility

The SEMP recognises that emergency management is the shared responsibility of all Victorians, not just the emergency management sector. A commitment to shared responsibility recognises that no single actor can be responsible for mitigation, planning, preparedness, response and recovery. All Victorians, First Peoples, community groups, networks, businesses, individuals, households, visitors to Victoria, government and non-government organisations, along with the emergency management sector, have a role to play. Preparing for emergencies requires a collaborative approach that integrates the abilities and skills from across our State. This shared responsibility is reflected in the emergency sector's shared goal "We Work as One."

5.2.1 State

The state arrangements for emergency management are defined under the SEMP with emergencies and areas of consequence management assigned to the relevant entities.

DEECA is the control agency for water and wastewater service disruptions in Victoria. In the mitigation phase, DEECA has obligations to monitor water corporations' implementation of business continuity and emergency management plans to restore water and wastewater (sewerage) services to full functionality and to observe emergency management exercises in the sector. DEECA is also the Recovery Coordinating Agency (RecCA) for reticulated water and wastewater services.

The SEMP identifies Lead Response Support Agencies by functional area with the consequences of the service disruption determining which other agencies are required in the event of a state level event. Due to the close ties between water service disruptions and water quality events which can follow once services are restored, the Department of Health (DH) is often identified as a key support agency. Wastewater disruptions can often lead to sewage or trade waste flowing into the environment, requiring input from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria.

5.2.2 Regional

Regional arrangements match the state and local arrangements. If the Regional Emergency Risk Assessment (RERA) identifies catastrophic consequences or an extreme overall risk rating, the Regional Emergency Management Planning Committee (REMPC) may consider additional structures and processes to incorporate into the Regional Emergency Management Plan (REMP) to manage the residual risk.

5.2.3 Local

Water corporations have defined responsibilities under the SEMP as the Lead Response Support Agency (RSA) for the functional area of reticulated water and wastewater (sewerage). They are also required to activate emergency management plans and business continuity plans when there is a foreseeable or actual failure of assets or disruption to services.

As water corporations are the owners and operators of their own treatment plant and assets, they are expected to have the expertise and experience to both maintain supply of services and restore supply of services in emergency events.

5.3 Linkages to other arrangements

The Plan reflects applicable legislation, the arrangements in the SEMP, the strategic direction for emergency management in Victoria and the accepted State practice for managing emergencies. The arrangements in the SEMP have not been repeated in this Plan unless necessary to ensure context and readability.

6 Mitigation

6.1 Responsibilities under the SEMP

The Department has responsibilities under the SEMP for mitigation of water and wastewater service disruptions through the following activities:

- Monitor water corporations' implementation of business continuity and emergency management plans to restore water and wastewater (sewerage) services to full functionality
- Observe emergency management exercises in the sector

6.2 Regional obligations and opportunities

Water corporations have opportunities to mitigate the occurrences or severity of certain types of water and wastewater service disruptions on a regional level through improvements to waterways and catchment systems. Healthy and well-vegetated riparian environments can improve water quality and reduce the severity of potential black water events such as after fires or flooding, making water easier to treat and not resulting in water service disruptions. Similarly, this can help to catch and filter wastewater spills preventing them from spreading further downstream and impacting larger areas.

Such programs could be achieved by liaising with CMAs, other water corporations, Local Government, AgVic and others, to encourage river and catchment improvement works to be carried out. This aligns with the entity's goals of cleaner waterways and safer source water for providing the Victorian Community with drinking water. This additionally aligns with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines established under the SDWA (*Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*) which requires the need to maintain robust barriers to potential contamination of waters, incorporating a preventative strategy from catchment to consumer. Catchment management and source water protection provides the first barrier for the protection of drinking water quality.

6.3 Local obligations and opportunities

Water and wastewater service providers have the opportunity to reduce the impacts of potential future service disruptions through the continuous infrastructure and plant maintenance and improvements.

Similarly, mitigation can occur by following the principle of build back better. Assets that were destroyed or damaged due to an emergency event should be replaced with newer assets or systems that would not fail under similar or worse conditions than when it previously failed.

7 Preparedness

7.1 State coordination and preparedness

The Department ensures a coordinated preparedness across the State for water and wastewater service disruption emergencies. It achieves this through a variety of activities including organising regular preparedness and emergency management meetings, developing policies and other doctrine around the management of emergencies (including regularly reviewing this Plan), maintaining a list of active and historical service disruption emergencies for trend analysis and ensuring its own capability and capacity.

7.1.1 Resilience and emergency committees

The Department supports preparedness in the water sector through various committees such as the Sector Resilience Network (SRN) and the Sector Resilience Water Emergency Management Forum (SRWEMF). These committees include all water corporations and CMAs.

The Sector Resilience Network meets every 6 months with discussion on significant risks in the water sector, updates from other agencies including on cyber risks, and discussion on projects implemented by water corporations which have improved their ability to respond to emergencies that other water corporations should consider.

The SRWEMF meets regularly to consider emergency risk, business continuity, emergency management and security policies and practices relating to water supply, sewerage, irrigation services, critical infrastructure and dam safety.

7.1.2 Capability and capacity planning

The Department will use its own portfolio resources to manage the direct response to a Level 3 – Class 2 water or wastewater service disruption emergency. Agencies from across government (broadly described in

the SEMP) will be requested to provide specific operational and technical expertise and assistance, particularly with respect to consequence management.

Specific response arrangements for Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 - Class 2 emergencies detailed in section 7 below indicates the source of resources within the portfolio, including WCs and Department staff.

Incident management personnel may be drawn from outside the portfolio from agencies such as local government authorities, and subject matter experts or the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) by mutual agreement to share learning, access local knowledge or assist with managing resource demand.

There are pre-existing mutual aid arrangements between various WCs to assist each other during times of emergency. These arrangements are managed by the individual WCs. There are also state arrangements for mutual aid in Victoria based on the National Mutual Aid Guidelines produced by Water and Sewerage Sector Group (WSSG) and Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA). The Department can activate these arrangements for additional assistance during an emergency. The Department may manage requests for specialist WC personnel and equipment and other mutual aid arrangements.

7.2 Regional obligations and opportunities

Regional preparedness is primarily managed by the local water corporations to ensure that if a water or wastewater service disruption escalates to a regional event that they are still able to meet their obligations. Specific regionally focused activities include ensuring processes are in place for the activation of mutual aid arrangements. This includes having lists of available assets and other resources that may be spare for other WCs to use in turn based on the impacted areas of an emergency.

DEECA can enhance its regional mitigation and preparedness by incorporating water and wastewater service disruptions in regional preparedness planning and contingency planning such as access to adequate relief resources.

DEECA and water corporations should be present at Regional Emergency Management Planning Committees (REMPC) to ensure this topic is appropriately considered and accounted for in the Regional Emergency Management Plans.

7.3 Local obligations and opportunities

7.3.1 Emergency and business continuity plans

Water corporations should develop emergency plans for water and wastewater service disruptions to ensure early activation and response to an emergency event. The Emergency Plans should be in line with regional and state response arrangements and compatible with the SEMP framework. This should prioritise high risk or consequence assets with contingency planning for various possible causes of service disruptions to prevent them from occurring or limit their impact or duration as much as possible.

Business continuity plans should also be developed on a broader perspective to ensure that water corporations are able to undertake their core functions regardless of any emergencies or other events that are occurring. As one of the core functions is the supply of water and wastewater services, the business continuity plans should tie in closely with the specific water and wastewater service disruption emergency plan. It should consider staffing requirements and capacity to ensure the water corporation can continue to function with heightened levels of activation.

Water corporations should update their plans annually and take account any changes to relevant organisations both within and outside of the water sector and linkages to state-wide and municipal emergency management planning strategies and developments. They should also consider the best way for their Emergency Plans to be linked to the SEMP, Municipal Emergency Management Plans and any other related planning instruments.

These plans should be regularly tested and ensure staff are adequately trained to carry out the activities and responsibilities required.

7.3.2 Exercises

Under the Statement of Obligations (SoO) issued by the Minister for Water, water corporations are required to undertake annual exercises to test readiness and response arrangements across the Water and Catchments Group's portfolio control agency responsibilities. Water corporations that are deemed as vital critical infrastructure must also comply with Part 7A of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic) when performing their exercises. The exercises are conducted in accordance with the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Managing Exercises Handbook and observed by the Department.

These exercises are evaluated with reviews performed after to identify potential lessons on where improvements can be made, or on things that went well that should be maintained. These lessons should be implemented where possible to increase organisations' capability and capacity when responding to a real emergency, including a water or wastewater service disruption. Exercises can also be designed to test and evaluate changes that have been implemented due to lessons learned following previous exercises or events as part of the continuous improvement model for emergency management. Additionally, practicing under emergency conditions can increase staff capability in a real emergency.

8 Response (and Relief)

8.1 Notification and classification

Water corporations are required to report water and wastewater service disruption incidents to the Department as per *40.0.3.1.GUI Water Corporation and DEECA Incident Notification Protocol*. These notifications should be provided to the State Duty Officer - Water (SDO - Water) by the responsible water corporation in line with the required timelines based on the incident severity and possible consequences (i.e. the incident level). Notifications made by water corporations should be consistent with both this Plan and *40.0.3.1.GUI Water Corporation and DEECA Incident Notification Protocol*. A detailed description of the triggers for the various emergency levels is provided in Table 1 in Section 3.3.

Notifications provided to the SDO - Water are then assessed internally within the Department. The distribution list for the SDO - Water when internal sitreps are produced include key Department executives and the Office of the Minister for Water.

Under the SDWA, DH must be made aware of non-complying drinking water or known or suspected contamination of drinking water. These obligations are set out in sections 18 and 22 of the SDWA. Further information is available on the DH Website: www.health.vic.gov.au/water/drinking-water-notifications

8.2 Emergency information and warnings

The Public Information function of an Incident Control Centre (ICC) is responsible for the provision of information to the community through media, community liaison, social media and warnings. They are responsible for disseminating information and warnings to the community on behalf of the Incident Controller and should ensure that notification is based on reliable information and data and adhere to the Victorian Warnings Arrangements. Information channels should be appropriate for the community impacted and allow for monitoring of community sentiment and issues. Some functions such as warnings and media can be undertaken at a state level if an Incident Control Centre is not established or if there are resource constraints.

Joint Standard Operating Procedure Public Information and Warnings for Class 2 Emergencies (J04.02) is available from the EM-COP library. This provides detailed guidance for the provision of timely, relevant and tailored community information and warnings before, during and after emergencies.

A Communication Specialist - Water may be activated in the water cell and will work closely with the Public Information Officer to ensure consistency of messaging.

In the event of the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC) being activated, the Public Information Officer will provide updates as required.

Water corporations can also provide public communications directly to their customers via their various communication channels including social media, emails or door knocking. Emergency messaging relating to

immediate health and safety can be provided directly to customers without external review. These messages still need to be passed along to the Department for awareness. Messages that do not relate to immediate safety need to be approved by the Department before dissemination. The information should be consistent across the emergency management sector.

8.3 Control and coordination

The management of a water or wastewater service disruption event is based on the emergency management principles described in the SEMP. Emergency management within Australia uses AIIMS which provides for a scalable response and outlines the key roles to be filled, and functions performed by the Incident Management Team (IMT).

The scale and potential consequence of any service disruption will determine accountability for response at local, regional and state levels. Triggers specified in Table 1 provide for appropriate escalation (and de-escalation) between each tier.

8.3.1 Level 3 – State

While the Department is the control agency for a State Level 3 water or wastewater service disruption emergency, there are many other agencies involved in a state level response. Table 2 below details some of the key agencies involved and their response activities. Specific response roles, particularly those run by the Department are outlined in 0. Other agencies that have emergency management roles that can be involved in the response process based on the consequences of the event or concurrent and compounding events. These agencies would be linked together at the State and Regional level for coordination and can include but is not limited to the Victorian State Emergency Service (VicSES), Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV).

Table 2: Level 3 Agency Response Activities

Agency	Role	Response Activities
DEECA	Control	• During a Level 3 service disruption, the Department undertakes their control agency responsibilities to manage the incident, including coordination of the local and regional responses. • The Secretary as the CAOiC appoints a State Controller to oversee the event. • Activates emergency water sector roles in the State Control Centre to provide technical advice on the water sector and advocates for the needs of water corporations where required. • Coordinates large scale relief drinking water for reticulated water service disruptions or alternative sewage and waste disposal for reticulated wastewater service disruptions • Obtains technical advice and information/advice for water corporations where relevant. • Liaises with DH and other agencies where required. • Advises the relevant Minister where required. • Upon request, coordinate mutual aid across the water sector between water corporations.
Water corporations	Support	• IMT lead at a local level. • Manage the operational activities required on their own assets to rectify or mitigate service disruptions. • Embed EMLOs from their organisation into relevant Incident Control Centres, Regional Control Centres and the State Control Centre. • Lead relief activities to impacted customers including the provision of alternative drinking water or alternative sewage options
DH	Support	• Control agency and regulator for drinking water quality.

		• Maintains situational awareness of water service disruptions due to the consequences of service disruptions leading to poor drinking water quality events.
EPA	Regulator	• Regulator for treated wastewater discharges untreated discharges, unlicenced discharges, discharges to waterways and land, and general environmental duties.

When an incident is reported to DEECA, the Water corporation Incident Controller will maintain command and control and continually assess the incident level based on data, technical advice, information and observations. In cases where a water or wastewater emergency incident escalates to a Level 3 (Class 2) emergency, the State Control Centre will be activated to support the coordination of the event. The Class 2 State Controller Water is appointed by the DEECA Secretary as the Control Agency Officer in Charge (CAOiC).

The State response to major emergencies is coordinated by the Emergency Management Commissioner who manages them through the following five teams:

- State Coordination Team (SCOT)
- State Control Team (SCT)
- State Emergency Management Team (SEMT)
- Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC)
- State Emergency Recovery Committee (SERC)

The Class 2 State Controller is a member of SCOT and SEMT. The Department State Agency Commander (FFMVic SAC), a Department water portfolio representative and each of the agencies involved in the incident or consequence management are all members of the SEMT.

During a large-scale emergency, the Victorian Government's Security and Emergency Management Committee of Cabinet (SEMC) provides whole of government ministerial oversight. The State Crisis and Resilience Council (SCRC) provides SEMC with assurance that the broad social, economic, built and natural environmental consequences of the emergency are being addressed at a whole of government level. The SCRC also has responsibility for the oversight of the development of a whole of government communications strategy for the approval of SEMC. However, neither the SEMC nor SCRC have an operational response role.

8.3.2 Level 2 – Regional

Level 2 water and wastewater service disruptions are managed similarly to Level 1 events with the relevant water corporation(s) establishing IMTs and Incident Controllers to manage their own operational responsibilities.

However, as Level 2 events have a larger degree of impact and broader consequences, these often come with additional coordination and input from other agencies, similar to Level 3 events. Where an event impacts multiple water corporations or consequences from another event are causing water or wastewater service disruptions, a Regional Control Centre may be established and a Regional Controller appointed by the relevant emergency services agency.

8.3.3 Level 1 – Local

Response at the local level is managed by the relevant water corporation(s) and focuses primarily on the operational activities and public messaging. As they are the owners and operators of the infrastructure that has failed or been impacted resulting in a service disruption, they are best suited to undertake the required operational activities to rectify the situation. Even in a regional or State level event, these activities will likely be done by, or in consultation with the relevant water corporation(s).

When a Level 1 water or wastewater service disruption occurs, the response activities undertaken by the relevant water corporation include but are not limited to:

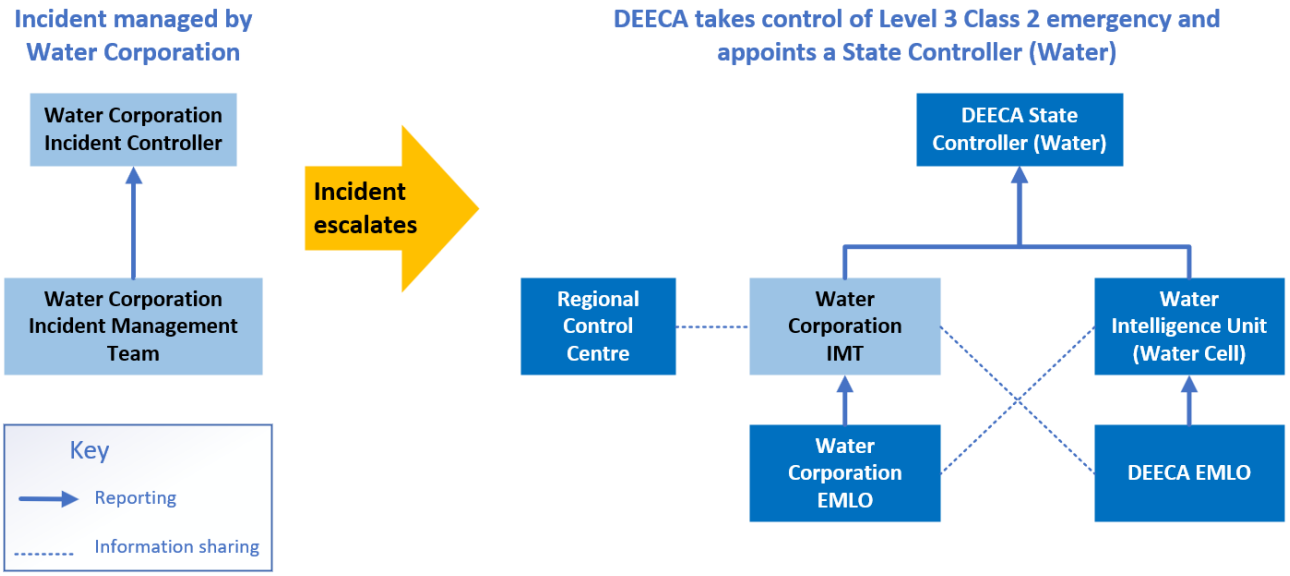
- In line with the triggers identified in Table 1 inform the Department and all other relevant entities listed in Table 2**Error! Reference source not found.** of the water or wastewater service disruption.
- Appoint an Incident Controller from within the organisation to lead their response to the service disruption emergency.
- Manage the service disruption in line with the organisation's emergency response plans, business continuity plans and this Plan.
- When required, lead relief activities to impacted customers including the provision of alternative drinking water or alternative sewage options.
- Communicate service disruptions to customers and organise public messaging as required.
- Documents and records all actions taken.
- Support and where appropriate, participate in the response to Regional or State service disruptions, at the request of the Regional Controller or State Controller.

8.4 Transfer of Control

In cases where a WC incident escalates to a Level 3 (Class 2) emergency, a transfer of control from the water corporation to the DEECA State Controller (Water) will need to occur. An example of the process is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

DEECA will become the control agency and oversee the incident, including state-level arrangements. However, the water corporation will maintain operational control of their assets and is responsible for the restoration of services.

Figure 1: Level 1 or 2 to Level 3 Transfer of Control example



The key steps in this process are:

- The water corporation Incident Controller communicates with DEECA about the incident and the response arrangements in place.
- DEECA establish response arrangements that include the appointment of a State Controller (Water) and activates the Water Intelligence Unit (also known as the Water Cell).
- The water corporation Incident Controller transfers control and subsequently reports up to the DEECA State Controller (Water). The water corporation's Incident Controller is now referred to as the Agency Commander.
- The water corporation mobilises an Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) to embed in the Regional Control Centre (RCC) / State Control Centre (SCC).

9 Recovery

9.1 Social, economic, built and natural recovery

Aspects of the recovery phase, such as planning, can occur at the same time as the response phase. Depending on the incident, recovery activities may include ongoing consequence management. Incidents could have direct or indirect impacts across these recovery environments of social, economic, built and natural. It is important to consider all the various consequences of the event when recovering.

The principle of build back stronger in recovery leads straight into the mitigation phase of water and wastewater service disruptions with activities like infrastructure or plant repairs and improvements enhancing the overall emergency management cycle.

Specific recovery areas are covered by the relevant portfolio entity through and outside of the emergency management framework.

9.2 De-escalation

Response arrangements, including public information and warnings remain in place until the Incident Controller determines that the incident level triggers are no longer met and the emergency can either be de-escalated or closed out.

The Class 2 State Controller will decide when to de-escalate from a Level 3 (Class 2) emergency down to a Level 2 emergency and similarly, the Regional Controller decides when to de-escalate a Level 2 emergency down to a Level 1 emergency. The impacted water corporation will then decide when to deactivate their emergency response and manage the event under BAU arrangements.

Considerations in de-escalation include:

- A contraction of the scale and geographic extent of the emergency.
- A reduction in potential consequences of the emergency; and
- Recovery arrangements have commenced and are in place.

10 Lessons and evaluation

The Victorian emergency management sector supports a culture of continuous improvement to enhance the response to future incidents and reduce the impact to community. This is done through a variety of methods including exercising existing plans, conducting After Actions Reviews, and supporting the Lessons Management Framework in line with the Emergency Management Framework.

After an event has occurred which required activation, all parties involved in management of the event should be invited to the lessons management process (usually through an After Action Review), including providing input into the response activities and plans that were activated to allow for continuous improvement.

Improvements and lessons learned should be disseminated across the sector and to all relevant stakeholders to enhance continuous improvements at all levels of responsibility.

Appendix A Glossary

AIIMS	Australasian Inter-service Management System
CFA	Country Fire Authority
DEECA	Department of Energy Environment and Climate Action
DH	Department of Health
DJSIR	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
EMC	Emergency Management Commissioner
EM-COP	Emergency Management Common Operating Picture
EMJPIC	Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee
EMLO	Emergency Management Liaison Officer
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
FRV	Fire Rescue Victoria
IC	Incident Controller
ICC	Incident Control Centre
IMT	Incident Management Team
RAC	Regional Agency Commander
RCC	Regional Control Centre
SAC	State Agency Commander
SC	State Controller
SCC	State Control Centre
SCOT	State Coordination Team
SCRC	State Crisis and Resilience Council
SCT	State Control Team
SDO - Water	State Duty Officer - Water
SEMC	State and Emergency Management Committee of Cabinet
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan
SEMT	State Emergency Management Team
SES	State Emergency Service
SoO	Statement of Obligations
SRW	Southern Rural Water
Water Cell	Water Intelligence Unit
WC	Water Corporation

Appendix B Agency contact details

Table 3: State Contact Details

Company	Contact Person	Email	Telephone
Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action	Customer Service Centre	customer.service@deeca.vic.gov.au	136 186
Department of Health Chief Health Officer Group	Environmental Public Health and Water	water@health.vic.gov.au	1300 790 733 (Emergency Number)
Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria	Pollution Hotline	contact@epa.vic.gov.au;	1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842)

Appendix C Emergency management roles

C. I DEECA State Duty Officer - Water (SDO Water)

The SDO - Water provides updates on water emergencies to the State Agency Commander (SAC), the Department executives, and the office of the Minister for Water. The SDO Water is available 24/7 and is the first point of contact for water related incidents where the Department is the control agency or a relevant Support Agency.

The SDO Water contact details can be found in *40.0.3.1.GUI Water Corporation and DEE*CA Incid*ent Notification Protocol*

C. II The Water Intelligence Cell (Water Cell)

DEECA's Water Intelligence Cell (more commonly called the 'Water Cell') can be activated from the SCC during a Class 1 or Class 2 event that impacts the water sector, either directly or indirectly. The Water Cell forms part of the response to water incidents and emergencies, to support when activated.

C. III Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC)

Under the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic), the EMC has legislated management responsibilities across major emergencies, except for terrorism-related emergencies. These include response coordination, ensuring effective control arrangements are established, consequence management and recovery coordination.

C. IV The Department Agency Commanders

The State Agency Commanders (SAC) notifies the EMC of significant events and coordinates with the SC and Regional Agency Commanders (RACs) in Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies. The RAC monitors incidents, advises on escalation, and coordinates with Regional Controllers.

The State Agency Commander duty statement 20-WI-2.3.2 and Regional Agency Commander duty statement 20-WI-2.3.2.2 are available on Tarnook.

C. V Class 2 State Controller (SC)

During a Level 3, large scale event, a Class 2 State Controller (SC) is appointed by the Control Agency Officer in Charge (CAOiC), which is Department Secretary. The SC leads and coordinates the emergency response, oversees information dissemination, risk management, and ensures integration with recovery efforts.

C. VI Incident Controller

The Incident Controller is appointed by the water corporation, or at higher levels can be appointed by the SC or the Class 2 Regional Controller. The IC directs incident response, sets objectives, communicates with communities and stakeholders, and ensures recovery and relief services

C. VII Class 2 Regional Controller

The Regional Controller is appointed by the SC or the RAC. The Regional Controller supports the SC by monitoring response effectiveness, issuing community warnings, and working with regional emergency teams.

C. VIII Water Corporation Commander

The water corporation Commander is responsible for command of water corporation resources and participates in the Incident Management Team or the Regional Management Team.

The Commander is not responsible for control of the incident and is not responsible for issuing community warnings. That responsibility resides with the Incident Controller. However, note that in consultation with the Department's emergency communications team and the IMT Public Information Officer (PIO) the Commander may issue information to water corporation customers about outages and related matters.

When an emergency is managed solely within a water corporation, the water corporation Commander and Incident Controller are the same role. They become separated when the IMT is managed outside of the water corporation. Section 8.4 discusses how a water corporation IMT transfer's control once an event exceeds their span of control.

C. IX Water Corporation EMLO

The Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) serves as a communication bridge between the water corporation and emergency services, updating on disruptions, asset locations, and control transfers, and ensuring reports are properly attributed and communicated to relevant agencies.

Appendix D References and Links

Table 4: References and links

Doc ID	Doc type	Doc title
40.0.3.1.GUI	Guidance	Incident Notification Protocol by DEECA and Water Corporations
-	Plan	State Emergency Management Plan by Emergency Management Victoria
-	Policy Statement	Statement of Obligations – Water Industry Act 1994 by Minister for Environment Climate Change and Water
-	Standard	Water Industry Standard – Rural Customer Service by Essential Services Commission
-	Standard	Water Industry Standard – Urban Customer Service by Essential Services Commission
-	Handbook	Victorian Emergency Operations Handbook by Emergency Management Victoria