

Explanatory Note

State Planning Policy 2.9

Water and Planning for Water Guidelines

This explanatory note introduces the new State Planning Policy 2.9 Water (SPP 2.9) and outlines the key changes that have been made to the water policy framework. It provides some background to this policy review and answers frequently asked questions about the new policy framework.

1 INTRODUCTION

Water is a basic requirement of life. The health and wellbeing of the community, the environment and the economy are all dependent upon water that is of sufficient quantity and quality. Groundwater, surface water and desalinated water support a wide range of ecological and human use values such as habitats, drinking water, amenity, recreation, tourism, agriculture, fishing, aquaculture, mining, industry and cultural heritage.

Western Australia's water resources are vulnerable and subject to increasing pressure from climate change and land uses, that can affect both water quality and quantity. Climate change in Western Australia has already resulted in changes to rainfall patterns, increased temperatures and sea level rise, which has in-turn impacted the reliability and quality of our water resources.

Land use change and development, required to support a growing population, can impact water resources through changes to hydrological regimes, ecological health, contamination, water demand, salinisation and eutrophication. Land use planning plays an important role in ensuring that future development is

appropriately located and serviced with wastewater, stormwater, and groundwater management infrastructure. It also needs to ensure that water quality and quantity are managed and that environmental, social and cultural values of water are protected.

1.1 Why has the policy been reviewed?

The review of Western Australia's water policy framework was prompted by the need to modernise, consolidate, and improve the clarity of water-related planning policies. The previous framework (figure 1) consisted of a suite of documents developed between 1992 and 2017, including six State Planning Policies (SPP), policy measures relating to flooding within SPP 3.4 Natural Hazards and Disasters, the Government Sewerage Policy and Better Urban Water Management guidelines. These documents varied in style, age, and scope, and contained overlapping or duplicated guidance, making them difficult to navigate and apply consistently.

In response to evolving challenges such as population growth, climate change and land use pressures, there was a clear opportunity to streamline the policy framework into a single, accessible document that

supports integrated land use and water resource management. This approach ensures that water considerations are embedded early and effectively in planning and development decision-making.

The result of this review is the development of SPP 2.9 and the accompanying Guidelines, which were prepared under Part Three of the *Planning and Development Act 2005* (Figure 2). These new instruments replace the following policies and guidelines

The new SPP 2.9 and Guidelines replace:

- SPP 2.1 Peel-Harvey Coastal Plain Catchment
- SPP 2.2 Gnamptara Groundwater Protection
- SPP 2.3 Jandakot Groundwater Protection
- SPP 2.7 Public Drinking Water Source Policy
- SPP 2.9 Water Resources
- SPP 2.10 Swan-Canning River System
- Policy measures that address flooding within SPP 3.4 Natural Hazards and Disasters
- Government Sewerage Policy
- Government Sewerage Policy Explanatory Guidelines



Figure 1. Previous Framework - cumulatively over 400 pages.

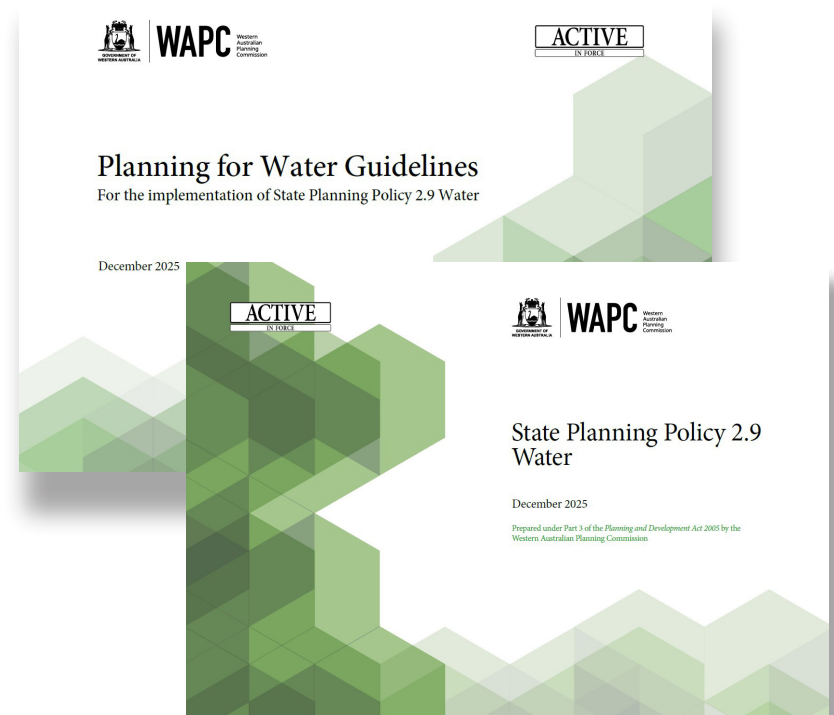


Figure 2. SPP 2.9 Framework - concise 98 pages.

1.2 What is new in SPP 2.9 and Guideline?

SPP 2.9 and the Guideline introduce a more streamlined and outcome-focused approach to water-related planning. These documents provide greater clarity on how water considerations should be integrated throughout the planning and development process, making the framework easier to navigate and implement.

Together, SPP 2.9 and the Guidelines represent a significant step forward in embedding water-sensitive planning principles into Western Australia's planning system.

- Improved alignment with current issues. The framework responds to emerging pressures such as climate change, population growth, and land use change, ensuring water planning remains relevant and effective.

Key improvements include:

- Simplified structure and clearer guidance. The new policy and guidelines consolidate previously fragmented documents into a single, coherent framework, reducing duplication and improving accessibility.
- Stronger focus on outcomes. SPP 2.9 emphasises achieving better water management outcomes through integrated land use and water planning.
- Enhanced implementation guidance. The Guidelines provide practical direction on how to apply the policy at each stage of the planning system, supporting consistent decision-making.
- New requirements and refinements. While retaining the core principle that appropriately detailed water information is required to support proposals, the policy introduces new requirements and updated guidance to reflect contemporary planning challenges.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE KEY CHANGES AND ENHANCEMENTS

2.1 Guiding Principles

SPP 2.9 includes guiding principles to provide the contextual framework for policy implementation across the State where water-related planning issues vary considerably. These principles (Figure 3) should be used to guide the proponent in the preparation of a water management report and for the decision-maker to consider when determining planning proposals with water resource matters.

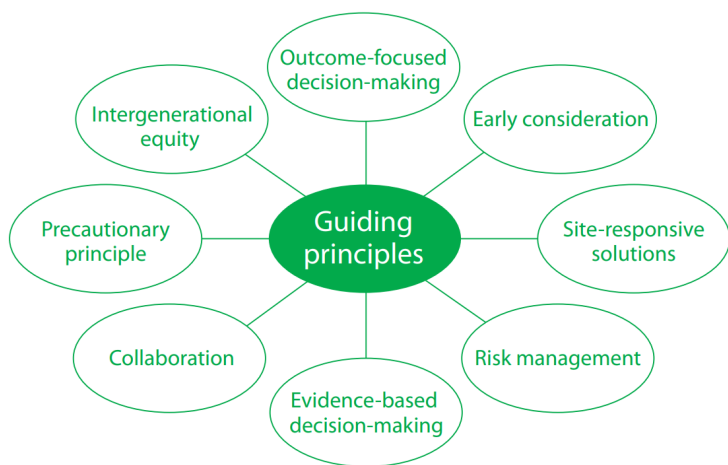


Figure 3. Guiding Principles

2.2 Policy outcomes

SPP 2.9 includes policy outcomes to guide decision-maker discretion, provide a direct line-of-sight for the policy measures and an enhanced basis for monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes. The outcomes focus on the contribution that SPP 2.9 and Guidelines (and the broader planning system) can deliver toward broader whole-of-government water outcomes.

2.3 Climate change

SPP 2.9 presents a new measure requiring proposals to consider water-related issues associated with climate change. This is consistent with whole-of-government initiatives to ensure land use planning considers and responds to WA's changing climate.

2.4 Cumulative impacts

SPP 2.9 requires the cumulative impacts on water resources to be considered (by the decision-maker) particularly at the regional and district levels of planning but also at the subdivision stage if not already considered.

2.5 Aboriginal heritage and knowledge

SPP 2.9 includes a new measure requiring proposals to identify and protect Aboriginal and other historic places and values. This will ensure planning decisions promote respectful and inclusive decision making.

2.6 Public drinking water source areas

SPP 2.9 includes new measures to better address the protection of water resources within Priority 3 and

Priority 3* public drinking water source areas through local planning schemes.

2.7 Wetland buffers

SPP 2.9 and the Guidelines supports the establishment of wetland buffers through the planning process. A separate body of work is underway to review and enhance policy and guidance for the establishment of wetland buffers through the land planning process. This policy, when completed, will go through a formal consultation process.

2.8 Government Sewerage Policy 2019

The Government Sewerage Policy (GSP) and the *GSP Explanatory Notes* established the Western Australian Government's position on the provision of reticulated sewerage in the State for the planning and development of land. The Government Sewerage Policy and its Explanatory Notes are incorporated into SPP 2.9 and Guidelines. Some amendments have been made to its measures to address implementation issues identified during the review and consultation on the water policy framework.

Across Western Australia, soil's ability to retain nutrients and water, particularly phosphorus, varies significantly. This is important to consider in water-sensitive planning to avoid phosphorus leaching into nearby waterways. SPP 2.9 takes a risk-based approach to assessing proposals and takes soil-type into consideration to respond to site characteristics and potential environmental risks. It also gives decision-makers the flexibility to determine when nutrient stripping systems may not be necessary.

Secondary treatment systems

Under the GSP, secondary treatment systems with nutrient removal were generally required in sewerage sensitive and public drinking water source areas which covered much of the Swan Coastal Plain. In some cases, such as larger lots or areas with nutrient-retentive soils the environmental benefits of these systems may be minimal, and the requirement could (in some cases) be considered unnecessary.

SPP 2.9 takes a more flexible approach and aligns with *AS/NZS 1546 On-site domestic wastewater treatment units*. SPP 2.9 recommends secondary treatment systems with nutrient removal in sewerage sensitive areas where:

- soils have low nutrient retention, and
- lots are smaller than 1 hectare.

This provides decision makers with the discretion to not require nutrient stripping systems in certain areas and has significantly expanded the range of systems available.

Secondary treatment systems are still recommended in public drinking water source areas.

Responsibilities

SPP 2.9 applies only to proposals prepared and assessed under the *Planning and Development Act 2005*. It does not cover other government approval processes, such as applications for on-site wastewater systems under the *Health (Treatment of Sewage and Disposal of Effluent and Liquid Waste) Regulations 1974*. These are managed separately and fall outside the scope of SPP 2.9 and its Guidelines.

3 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Applying SPP 2.9 and the Guidelines

3.1. Does SPP 2.9 apply to existing approved developments or plans?

No, SPP 2.9 and the Guidelines do not apply retrospectively to developments or plans that have already been approved. However, it is important to note that since its public consultation in 2021, SPP 2.9 and the Guidelines have been used in decision-making processes.

3.2. Are there instances where SPP 2.9 does not apply?

This policy does not apply to the assessment of applications made under legislation other than the *Planning and Development Act 2005* and subsidiary legislation.

This policy is not intended to apply to a single house on a single lot unless a significant water resource matter has been identified for the lot within a local planning scheme (for example, sections 7.3 Riverine flooding, 7.5 Specific area measures: Public drinking water source areas and 7.7 Specific area measures: Swan Canning River system of the policy). When there is no development approval required for a single dwelling under a planning scheme, SPP 2.9 should not be applied.

This policy does not apply to onsite wastewater permits, approvals or licenses issued under the *Public Health Act 2016* and its subsidiary legislation.

3.3 Will the policy mapping be updated?

Yes, mapping will be updated to reflect the new policy suite in early 2026.

After the initial update, the accompanying mapping may be revised, as needed, to ensure alignment with any subsequent changes. For example, site specific investigations or case studies may result in subsequent changes to groundwater-dependent threatened and priority ecological communities or changes to proclaimed drinking water source areas. It is recommended that you always check the maps for each proposal.

3.4 How do I know if specific planning measures apply to my proposal?

Water related requirements vary depending on the location, scale, and nature of your proposal. Under SPP 2.9, different planning stages and site characteristics may trigger the need for specific measures or water management reports.

To help determine this:

- **Use PlanWA** (PlanWA). The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage's PlanWA is a great starting point. Under the 'State Planning Policy' theme, you can check if your property is within a mapped area such as a:
 - Sensitive Water Resource Area
 - Public Drinking Water Source Area
 - Peel-Harvey Coastal Plain Catchment
 - Swan Canning River System
- **Check the Guidelines:** If your site falls within one of these areas, additional policy measures may

apply in addition to the general measures outlined in SPP 2.9.

- **Consider the planning stage:** Different policy requirements apply depending on whether you're at the regional, district, local, subdivision, or development stage. Section 5 and Table 1 of the Guidelines outline what's required at each planning stage.
- **Ask for advice:** If you're unsure, it's best to contact your local government or the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) for guidance tailored to your proposal.

3.5 Why is early planning necessary?

Planning for water resources at later planning stages such as subdivision or development can make it difficult to achieve good water management outcomes. For example, if land is identified as unsuitable for onsite sewerage purposes at the scheme amendment or structure plan stage, then it may remove complications at later planning stages, such as removing the issue of lots being unable to accommodate the required land application area.

Similarly, water issues are rarely confined to individual sites, they often have cumulative impacts across neighbouring areas and entire catchments. This means water resource planning must take a broader, catchment-scale view to ensure coordinated and sustainable outcomes. This is easier to achieve if considered as early as possible in the planning stage and at all subsequent planning stages.

To support this, water management should be addressed at all stages of the planning process,

with each stage building on the last. By the time a subdivision is proposed, integration with surrounding areas should be seamless, guided by the structure plan and scheme amendment that has preceded it. Early engagement with local government, water service providers, and relevant agencies is essential to achieving this.

The level of detail required at each stage should reflect the scale, location, and potential risks to and from water resources.

3.6 What is a water management report?

A water management report (WMR) addresses all water-related matters relevant to a planning proposal. These reports replace the previous water management strategies and plans required under the Better Urban Water Management guidelines (Figure 4).

While the naming has changed (from strategy or plan to report) to avoid confusion with other water related documents produced by different agencies, the content

and reporting requirements remain largely the same. Proponents are still responsible for preparing the appropriate report type whether regional, district, local, or subdivision and development based on the scale and stage of the proposal.

3.7 Who approves a water management report?

Table 1 and Section 5 of the Guidelines outline who's responsible for approving and endorsing different types of WMRs. In most cases, the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC) is responsible for approval, with endorsement from the DWER, often in close collaboration with the relevant local government.

Depending on the complexity of the proposal, other State Government agencies, including the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Health may also be consulted for specialist advice.

Section 5 also recognises that many local governments have strong technical capabilities. Where this is the case, and with DWER's agreement, local governments can lead in endorsing Local WMRs. Since they often end up managing the water-related infrastructure, it's important that local governments are actively involved throughout the planning and assessment process.

3.8 What does a water management report include?

The content of the water management report will depend on the level of planning process and the characteristics of the site proposed for development. The water management report does not need to be lengthy or complex, however, all water resources relevant to the site and surrounds (including cumulative and downstream impacts) need to be addressed.

In addition, the information provided in the report should appropriately correspond with the level of risk, both to and from the water resource, as well as from the proposed development or land use.

For proposals with minimal water management matters, a separate water management report may not be required. Instead, the relevant information can be contained as a section of a larger planning report. Where the application does not have a planning report, the relevant information may be submitted in an alternative format to the satisfaction of the decision-maker.

Under Better Urban Water Management		Under SPP 2.9 Planning for Water
Regional Water Management Strategy	➔	Regional Water Management Report
District Water Management Strategy	➔	District Water Management Report
Local Water Management Strategy	➔	Local Water Management Report
Urban Water Management Plan	➔	Subdivision and Development Water Management Report

Figure 4. Reports required under Better Urban Water management and SPP 2.9

3.9 When is a water management report required?

In accordance with measure 7.1(b) of SPP 2.9, a water management report is required in most, but not all instances, to demonstrate the appropriate protection, management and use of water resources. The type of water management report to accompany proposals should correspond to the relevant planning decision as detailed in Table 1 within section 5 of the Guidelines.

Appendices B, C, D and E of the Guidelines provide guidance on the preparation and content of a water management report as well as how water resources should be considered at each stage of the planning process. In some cases, if the previously approved water management report specifically states that there is sufficient information for the subsequent planning stage and the proposal complies with the previously approved water management report, a further water management report is not required.

3.10 How do I know what type of water management report is required?

The type of water management report required should correspond to the relevant planning proposal.

Table 1 of the Guidelines summarises the type of water management report required at each level.

3.11 In regards to on-site sewage disposal, what is the justification of the minimum lot sizes detailed in section 8.7 of the Guidelines?

Lot size plays a significant role in minimising the potential adverse impacts of on-site wastewater disposal on people and the environment, such as contamination to sensitive water resources, system failure, use and enjoyment of land and public health. Smaller lots reduce the available area for effective wastewater disposal and increase both the likelihood and consequences of impacts. Smaller lots usually result in an increased residential density; meaning more people are exposed to potential health and amenity impacts from systems and increase nutrient and non-nutrient contaminant loads per unit area. The cumulative load of nutrients and other contaminants puts extra pressure on the environment.

Higher-density development can disrupt the natural water balance, often causing groundwater levels to rise and leading to system malfunctions. On-site sewage disposal further increases hydraulic loads in the area. Additionally, the expansion of impervious surfaces with increased density makes it difficult to maintain deep-rooted vegetation, reducing evapotranspiration and allowing larger volumes of water to infiltrate groundwater, which heightens the risk of contamination.

Table 1 below shows the minimum lot sizes needed for on-site sewage disposal in different planning contexts across WA. It's a handy guide that explains where these requirements apply and why they matter, taking into account things like environmental sensitivity, infrastructure availability, and principles of orderly and proper planning.

Table 1: Table summary of minimum lot sizes and its justification.

Lot Size	Applicable Area/Context	Justification and basis
1–4 ha	Public Drinking Water Source Areas (PDWSA) <i>Locations of public drinking water source areas can be accessed online via the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) website at www.dwer.wa.gov.au</i>	• Minimises risk of drinking water contamination. • Based on the 1994 Parliamentary inquiry: The Select Committee on Metropolitan Development and Groundwater Supply Report (1994). • Supports a preventative and multiple barrier approach which aligns with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.
1 ha	Sensitive water resource areas <i>For non-residential developments (e.g. commercial or industrial), lot sizes are assessed case-by-case, since nutrient loads vary by land use. The same requirements otherwise apply.</i>	• Designed to limit cumulative environmental impacts on sensitive water resources. • Supported by AS/NZS 1547:2012, which recommends caution where environmental risks are high. • Accounts for WA's hydrogeology and vulnerability of receiving water bodies by limiting development density to reduce nutrient pollution from systems, which can rapidly leach into groundwater and surface water, as demonstrated in research by Gerritse (2002). • To achieve desired nutrient targets in unsewered sensitive areas. • Aligns with long-standing planning and environmental policies, such as the previous Draft Country Sewerage Policy and the 1996 Government Sewerage Policy – Perth Metropolitan Region.
	Legacy Zoning <i>Land within a sensitive water resource area that's already zoned for urban use with a residential density of R2 to R12.5 under a local planning scheme or a WAPC-endorsed structure plan can still be subdivided as planned. However, it must follow the existing density coding and meet the site requirements for onsite wastewater disposal in accordance with the Guidelines.</i>	• Subdivision below one hectare should only occur if reticulated sewerage is provided, unless it can be clearly shown the land was intended for on-site systems. • This provision acknowledges historical zoning, often based on previous government sewerage policies. • Allows for subdivision to proceed under current schemes where it can be demonstrated that a density coding was assigned with the understanding that reticulated sewerage would not be provided and each lot can safely manage on-site sewage disposal in line with policy. • Where no specific density code was applied, a conservative approach to lot sizing is required, considering planning context, environmental impacts, and site-and-soil capability.

Lot Size	Applicable Area/Context	Justification and basis
2,000 m ²	Urban/Industrial Subdivision (outside PDWSA and sensitive water resource areas)	- The 2,000m² minimum ensures enough space for buildings, infrastructure, setbacks and sewage systems. - Industrial/commercial lots often require multiple sewage systems (e.g. for staff amenities and trade waste), and experience shows that lots smaller than 2,000m² often can't meet these requirements. - While 1,000 m² lots may be feasible on well-drained soils with secondary treatment, widespread unsewered development at this density poses unacceptable cumulative environmental risks. This position was substantiated by the findings of the 2009 Inquiry into Deep Sewerage in the Cockburn Area, conducted by the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. - Aligns with long-standing planning policies, such as the previous Draft Country Sewerage Policy and the 1996 Government Sewerage Policy – Perth Metropolitan Region.
1,000 m ² (950m ² dependant on soil category)	Infill Residential/Commercial (existing urban areas, outside PDWSA and sensitive water resource areas) <i>Does not apply to sensitive water resource areas, PDWSAs, poorly drained soils, industrial subdivision and large-scale (commonly referred to as 'brownfield') subdivisions which should be sewered.</i>	950m² - The 950 m² minimum applies only to soil categories 1–3. It does not apply to soil categories 4, 5, and 6, which are addressed in Table F.1 in Appendix F of the Guidelines. - Where multiple lots are proposed, the average lot size is not to be less than 1,000m², with a minimum individual lot size of 950m². 1,000 m² - The 1,000 m² lot minimum balances efficient land use with environmental protection. It is justified because: - it allows efficient use of urban land and infrastructure; - retrofitting sewerage in developed areas is often financially and technically unfeasible; - fragmented land ownership and low lot yield make sewerage provision difficult; - most land uses and sewage systems can fit on 1,000m² lots, depending on soil and system type; and - lower lot yield means lower cumulative environmental impact than greenfield development. - To manage risks, site-and-soil evaluations must be done before subdivision approval. Lots on heavy soils (rock or soil category 6) will need to be larger than 1,000m². If existing infrastructure is present, a layout must show how sewage disposal and setbacks will be accommodated.

Lot Size	Applicable Area/Context	Justification and basis
	Towns outside Perth Metropolitan and Peel Region Schemes (outside PDWSA and sensitive water resource areas)	- Many regional towns in Western Australia do not have access to reticulated sewerage, and it's often not feasible to install new systems due to cost, lower land values, and limited growth. While decentralised systems are improving, challenges remain. - To support regional development, SPP 2.9 allows 1,000m² lots in towns outside the Perth and Peel region schemes, based on: - Efficient land use: R10 density allows towns to grow without costly infrastructure. - Site suitability: Most land uses and sewage systems can fit on 1,000m² lots, depending on soil and system type. - Lower environmental risk: Sparse settlement patterns mean fewer unsewered lots per catchment, reducing cumulative impacts. - Water protection: sensitive water resource areas and PDWSAs are excluded. - Public health safeguards: Reticulated sewerage is required where risks are high (Policy s5.1.1). - Planning controls: R10 subdivision must show that environmental and public health impacts are acceptable.
	Towns with no reticulated sewerage	- Applies to small towns without reticulated sewerage, where townsite expansion is limited and establishing new schemes is generally not feasible for a small number of lots. - The 1,000m² lot minimum aligns with previous policies. - It is noted that in some instances the establishment of a new reticulated scheme may be considered reasonable and, in these instances, will be required.
	Towns with reticulated sewerage (but at/near capacity)	In towns with reticulated sewerage nearing capacity, 1,000 m ² unsewered lots may be permitted outside sensitive areas if supported by a local planning scheme or structure plan, and strategic and cumulative impacts are assessed through a scheme amendment or new structure plan.

Lot Size	Applicable Area/Context	Justification and basis
Case-by-case	Survey strata lots with approved grouped dwellings, commercial or industrial development (outside PDWSA)	- No minimum lot size applies to subdivision applications where the buildings have already been approved or constructed. This allows accurate assessment of sewage loads and land application areas. Risks are managed through satisfying onsite wastewater disposal requirements set out in the Guidelines, including site-and-soil evaluations and maintenance obligations. - This table row does not apply to new development applications which should be consistent with the applicable minimum lot size set out in Table 2 of the Guidelines (and above). - Consideration should be given to the potential impacts within sensitive water resource areas. - For survey strata subdivision with approved grouped dwellings, case by case assessment only applies for typically larger strata schemes and where: - The entire scheme shares an onsite disposal system (i.e. each dwelling/proposed lot does not have a separate system); - The onsite disposal system is managed by a single entity or strata scheme; and - An acceptable maintenance program in place. - Applications still need to satisfy site requirements for onsite wastewater disposal in the Guidelines. - Vacant strata lots should meet standard minimum lot sizes.

4 WHO TO CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Below is a summary of roles and responsibilities relevant to the implementation of SPP 2.9, for a comprehensive list refer to section 12 of the Guidelines.

Local government authorities

Information on land use and development control, water management reports, and onsite wastewater disposal system approvals, permits and licencing.

Department of Health

Information on site and soil evaluations, and onsite wastewater disposal system approvals, permits and licencing.

<https://www.health.wa.gov.au>

Phone: 08 9222 4222

Email: ehinfo@health.wa.gov.au

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation

Information on flood mapping, water resources including public drinking water source areas and wetlands, water management reports, water licencing.

<https://www.dwer.wa.gov.au>

Email: info@dwer.wa.gov.au

Phone: 08 6364 7000

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

Information on the Geomorphic Wetland dataset, wetland delineation and evaluation, threatened and ecological communities, Swan Canning Waterways.

<https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au>

Email: enquiries@dbca.wa.gov.au

Phone: 08 9219 9000

Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage

Land use planning proposals and applications.

www.dplh.wa.gov.au

Email: info@dplh.wa.gov.au

Phone: 08 6551 8002

Information on the new SPP 2.9 and Guidelines.

Email: waterpolicies@dplh.wa.gov.au

Phone: 08 6551 8002

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Published by the
Western Australian Planning Commission
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140 William Street
Perth WA 6000
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Perth WA 6001

Publication date: 16 December 2025
Operational date: 18 December 2025

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