Quality Water for Wannon

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Quality Water for Wannon moves ahead

Update | June 2024

We've been busy talking to our customers to find out what we need to consider when implementing the Quality Water for Wannon Program in their community.

Between February and April 2024, we held a pop-up to let each community know that we are moving ahead with the project. We outlined more about our plans, answered questions and listened to any concerns.

Around 80 people attended our events in Portland and Heywood and about 20 people responded to our online surveys.



The majority of people that spoke with us were keen for the project to proceed. Those who responded in favour of the project indicated that they can't wait for it to happen.

In Port Fairy we had about 70 survey responses and around 50 people attending our pop-up event. The majority supported the project, but wondered why it was taking so long.

Those who supported the program let us know that they want the same quality water as other towns, and a reduction in the cost currently experienced due to purchasing water and maintaining appliances.

Some customers however, were not in favour of the preferred option of reverse osmosis due to the cost and energy consumption involved, waste disposal (brine) concerns and Wannon Water's capacity to maintain and facilitate the plants once built.

Overall, there were some great questions raised. Most are answered on our website project page, or you can read some of the frequently asked questions and answers on the overleaf.

How we engaged

Communication activities

1,074
Visits to our website project page

1,215
Letters delivered in Port Fairy

5,466
Letters delivered in Portland and Heywood

940
Emails sent

Engagement activities

138
Responses to online feedback forms

5
Pop-up events spread across three towns

2
Stakeholder meetings with the Port Fairy Pipeline Action Group and Corangamite CMA

1
Community briefing held with Moyne Shire Councillors

What's next?

Our team are out and about visiting the sites and talking to our expert operators to ensure we're delivering what we set out to do. We're working to finalise our project plans to deliver this huge program with master plans developed for each specific site.

Rest assured, there's a lot happening behind the scenes to be able to deliver quality water for our Portland, Heywood and Port Fairy communities.

Keep an eye on our socials, and our project page for updates.

You can sign up for project updates by scanning the QR code below or head to engage.wannonwater.com.au

Frequently asked questions

Where does my water come from and is the aquifer reliable and secure?
Water for Portland, Port Fairy and Heywood is sourced from the Dilwyn Aquifer. This is a deep underground geological formation that stretches across South West Victoria and into South Australia. The Dilwyn is one of the most substantial and reliable water sources in Victoria due to its massive storage. Its depth means that it's isolated from the effects of climate change and land use. It's also isolated from more shallow aquifers by layers that prevent water moving from one aquifer to the other.

Why does the water taste saltier than other towns and will it taste better following the installation of the reverse osmosis plants?
The Dilwyn Aquifer comprises strongly confined quartz sand that is up to 1.5 kilometres deep in places. The water in the aquifer is very old, having fallen as rainfall between 900 and 30,000 years ago.

Because the water comes from deep underground, it has naturally occurring mineral salts which can impact the taste. By reducing the amount of salt in the water supply below the taste threshold for most people (<300 ppm), we expect that the water will be high quality drinking water, similar to other surface water supplies across our region. It will produce high-quality drinking water that meets our strict quality requirements including standards set by the:

- Australian Drinking Water Guidelines
- Victorian Safe Drinking Water Act
- World Health Organisation.

What is reverse osmosis?
Reverse osmosis is a process that uses enormous amounts of pressure to force salty water through a membrane (a filter with microscopic holes). The salt molecules are generally too big to squeeze through the holes but the water molecules are small enough to pass through. This leaves most of the salt on one side of the membrane and fresh water on the other side.

What will you filter out to make it better, where will these deposits go and will it meet EPA requirements?
Filtration will remove naturally occurring mineral salts in the groundwater. Known as 'brine reject', this removed salt will be sent to mix with the salty ocean through our licensed discharge points at Portland and Port Fairy. At this stage for Heywood, it's expected that we'll tanker it through to Portland where it will be discharged to the ocean outfall. However, this won't be confirmed until the final treatment method for Heywood is approved.

Reverse osmosis will subtly change how the outfall operates as overall volumes increase, and there may be periods where brine reject is the only discharge.

This change may prompt the need for formal EPA approvals, including revisiting the existing discharge licences in place.

Why does it cause spots on my shower screen and drinking glasses, scaling on my appliances and will it go away with the reverse osmosis process?
This is caused by the natural minerals, particularly calcium and magnesium carbonate, which can remain after the water has evaporated. When the water is heated, the minerals are deposited as scale. This can affect kettles, hot water services, dishwashers, pipes and fittings. Scale is harmless but will build up over time.

We expect that any salty residue will be eliminated, consistent with experience in other areas where the water quality is better.

Will I have to pay for the project?
There will be no additional cost to customers. The Federal Government announced $26.1 million in its 2023 budget to support us to improve the water quality in Heywood, Port Fairy and Portland.

How will you manage the maintenance of the filtration plant?
A routine maintenance program will ensure the filtration plants continue to work well. Routine maintenance is a normal part of operations at all our existing water treatment plants. The filters undergo regular automated cleaning as part of normal plant operations, and from time to time they need replacing. Ongoing maintenance costs have been allowed for in our planning.

What's the project timeline?
As part of the federal funding agreement, water quality improvements in all three towns need to be completed by 2029. We won't have a specific timeline until the design and approvals are finalised.

Will reverse osmosis impact water re-use/recycling opportunities?
The demand for recycled water will in part depend on its quality. For most re-use applications, a key consideration is salinity. In general, lower salinity recycled water is preferred for uses including irrigation on farms and recreation facilities.

What is the energy requirement?
The options assessment shows the indicative energy consumption for local treatment at Port Fairy is 550 Megawatt hours a year compared to the pipeline options which ranged from 710 to 810 MWh/y. The energy requirement for each plant will be thoroughly researched and you will be kept up to date as we progress.

You can reach out to our Quality Water for Wannon program team directly with any questions or concerns on **1300 926 666** or via email **info@wannonwater.com.au**