

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wet weather results in wastewater releases in Omeo

Ongoing wet conditions have continued to impact wastewater storages, with East Gippsland Water preparing for a necessary controlled release of recycled water at Omeo – commencing on Monday 19 September.

Significant rainfall through winter has resulted in the organisation’s on-site recycled water storages reaching capacity, with the Bureau of Meteorology also warning of at least a 70 per cent chance of La Nina conditions during spring.

Between 10 and 20 megalitres of treated wastewater currently held on the Omeo wastewater treatment site will be slowly released in a controlled manner through 21km of paddocks and adjacent farmland, prior to undergoing significant dilution in Livingstone Creek some 2km away. This is the second release at Omeo this year, with around 12 megalitres released in January. This release did not reach the Livingstone Creek and was absorbed into by the local paddocks.

East Gippsland Water’s Executive Manager Service Delivery, Neville Pearce, said after years of drought, the wet conditions were welcome news for the organisation’s water supply, however they created problems for the wastewater system.

“While consistent rain to fill up our water storages is great news for water supply coming into the warmer months, the opposite is true when it comes to wastewater,” he said.

“This water is treated to Class C standard and ordinarily used to irrigate pasture in Omeo.

“However, the past 18 months of exceptionally wet weather has meant irrigation has been impossible due to already saturated ground.

“The excess water is too much for our wastewater storages, with releases needed to prevent uncontrolled overflow into the environment.”

Mr Pearce said there had been misconceptions around the quality of the water released (also known as discharges).

“The water has already been through a considerable treatment process, it’s not raw wastewater,” he said.

“Our staff will continually monitor and test the water during the release to ensure a consistent quality to prevent environmental impacts.”

East Gippsland Water is currently notifying adjacent residents, stakeholders and agencies about the imminent release and, as a precaution, warning signage is being erected in the immediate area.

For further information, please contact East Gippsland Water on 1800 671 841.

FAST FACTS: Omeo wastewater release

What: Release of treated wastewater from our Omeo Wastewater Treatment Plant

When: Beginning Monday, 19 September 2022

Where: From our Omeo wastewater treatment facility (McNamara's Road), onto farm land and then into Livingstone Creek.

Why: Heavy and consistent rainfall in the region has meant the land normally irrigated with wastewater from the Omeo plant cannot possibly hold any more water. The wastewater plant is now nearing capacity, so some of the treated wastewater needs to be released back into the environment. This has occurred due to the second wetter than normal winter, in what many locally are calling "the great wet".

How much wastewater is being released: Between 10 and 20 megalitres. For comparison, the last release from Omeo was around 12 megalitres. A megalitre is one Olympic swimming pool.

The Omeo Wastewater Treatment Plant: Collects wastewater from the Omeo community (population of around 500), via gravity sewers and septic tank pump systems.

Standard of the wastewater: Wastewater from our treatment plants are treated to Class C standard. Class C wastewater is suitable for a number of important functions including irrigation of pasture and food crops that are going to be processed or cooked before being sold; irrigation of crops such as fruit trees; watering parks and gardens; dust suppression works and construction.

What does the released wastewater look like: Clear water! Depending on the biological situation at our wastewater plants at the time of release, the water can be completely clear or at the very worst, have a slight colour tinge.

Fun fact: 99 per cent of wastewater that is discharged from households (down the sink, shower drain, toilet etc) is water! Only 1 per cent is solid, which is broken down and filtered out during the treatment process.

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