

Planned replacement of Trade Waste Acceptance Criteria for total dissolved solids (TDS) with sodium

Questions and answers

Why the changes?

Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) is classified as a priority pollutant for Melbourne Water's Western Treatment Plant. Investigation work identified that the key parameter to manage within the broad suite of substances that constitute TDS is sodium. Managing sodium will have the greatest impact on managing the risks to soils and plants irrigated with recycled water within the Werribee irrigation district from the Western Treatment Plant.

It makes sense that Trade Waste Acceptance Criteria should reflect this.

How was the review done?

In 2016, an industry working group comprising Yarra Valley Water, South East Water, City West Water and Melbourne Water engaged a recycled water consultant to assess options to achieve salinity reduction in recycled water from the Western Treatment Plant. It was identified that most of the required salinity reduction could be achieved through a combination of dilution, diversion or blending options (collectively referred to as treatment options). A smaller portion of the reduction (less than 25%) was found to be possible by undertaking targeted source control where specific trade waste opportunities may provide comparable or lower cost salinity reduction on a dollar per kilogram basis. The assessment also identified that trade waste customers discharge only a portion of the sodium entering the Western Treatment Plant.

What do the changes involve?

Introducing sodium concentration and load acceptance criteria will enable South East Water to focus on the largest customers where a change could make a difference to the risk level while significantly reducing the administrative burden for other customers and water businesses.

What are the benefits of these changes?

By lowering the volume of sodium entering our treatment plants, it greatly assists production of recycled water and its end-uses, including irrigation. The change also addresses customer feedback to apply a specific sodium limit rather than rely on total dissolved solids as a catch-all approach. Applying a limit is also establishing better industry practice.

When will these changes happen?

For these changes to take effect, the Essential Services Commission requires a customer impact assessment to be completed, based on customer consultation and feedback as part of the submission to change the acceptance criteria. All water businesses are currently consulting with customers about the planned changes and what they will mean for them.

It is anticipated that the new Acceptance Criteria will be applicable by October 2017, subject to the Essential Services Commission's approval.