

Animal faeces among EPA concerns for Wannon Water plant



A decision on the Wannon Water treatment plant expansion has been delayed further while the EPA seeks more information on what will end up in the ocean near Thunder Point.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

If you're wondering what's happening with Wannon Water's \$40 million Warrnambool treatment plant upgrade, here it is – a decision has been delayed amid concerns that waste collected from the abattoirs and saleyards contains animal faeces that could cause disease.

Charming, huh?

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) was due to make a decision on the controversial plant expansion by 12 March, but is now asking Wannon Water for more information.

According to the EPA notice issued on 26 February, Wannon Water denied that effluent collected from the abattoir would contain animal faeces, but the EPA was on to it:

“In contrast with what was claimed in the (Wannon Water) report, it is also to be noted that abattoir effluents do contain slurries and animal faeces”, the notice says.

The EPA sent Wannon Water back to the drawing board for a “deeper assessment of the pathogens that may be present in the wastewater” which – remember – will continue to be discharged into the ocean off Thunder Point.

This is a spot where, despite the warnings, people still fish and dive and collect shellfish, as you do, when at a beach.

The EPA is rightly worried about humans coming into contact with animal waste.

“Specifically, we believe that the report (from Wannon Water) does not consider the pathogens most likely to be present in the trade wastewater from the saleyards and the abattoirs.

“Rather than having a dilution effect, these wastewaters will add protozoa and bacterial pathogens.”

Pathogens = disease causing microbes.

Lovely.

Wannon Water no longer tests for micro-organisms such as E.coli, coliforms and enterococci within the so-called “mixing zone” off Thunder Point. As such, its planning submission quotes figures from 2018 and 2015 to estimate what levels can be expected after the upgrade.

Wannon Water must now re-evaluate these risks and, the EPA says, take into “proper account the risks posed by animal wastes” including from different types of animals.

Animal waste, however, is just one issue raised by the EPA in what is called a Section 22 notice.

The EPA has also asked Wannon Water to explain how adding an extra two processing tanks – from four to six – will cope with an almost doubling of the amount of effluent coming into the plant to 27.9 megalitres a day when it barely copes already.

As the EPA confirms and as has been captured on video by Good Will Nurdle Hunting, the plant “has failed multiple times”.

“Currently the plant is hardly rated at 16.4 megalitres a day as the plant has failed multiple times (dirty decants, failed nutrients discharge limits),” the notice says.

The EPA wants to know how much waste the expanded plant could reliably handle, and how it will cope if a tank breaks down, or is offline for repair, or – heaven forbid – both.

In that last, worse-case scenario, four tanks – the same as now – will be handling almost double the volume of sewage and trade waste.

No wonder the EPA is drilling into that detail.

In addition, the EPA wants more information on how much phosphorous and nitrogen will be coming in from (mostly) the dairy industry each year, and discharged into the ocean, and how these annual loads will be measured.

Lastly, the EPA has asked for a concise summary of exactly what Wannon Water has planned for the upgrade, given the many changes, public comments and back-and-forths that have happened since the project was first unveiled in 2017.

If the EPA is confused with the final proposal, no wonder the rest of us are.

I am, however, grateful to the EPA for making sure that Wannon Water nails all of this detail, as this upgrade is intended to

last for the next 20 years.

Wannon Water had until 1 March to respond to the EPA notice but has not yet done so.

You can read all of the documentation on this upgrade and keep track of its progress [through the EPA here.](#)