

Greater Melbourne Flood Information Program Council briefing pack 2026

Stormwater drainage system

Melbourne's drainage system directs stormwater away from urban areas to reduce the risk of flooding. While it can handle most storms, extreme rainfall can still cause floods.

Who manages the drainage system?

Melbourne's drainage system is a shared responsibility:

- Melbourne Water manages over 1,400 kilometres of major drains and thousands of kilometres of natural waterways.
- Local councils manage 25,000 kilometres of smaller street drains.
- Property owners are responsible for roof gutters, downpipes and pipelines on their land.
- Other agencies like VicRoads and VicTrack manage drainage along major roads and rail lines.

How the drainage system works

When it rains, some water naturally seeps into the ground. The drainage system directs the rest into rivers and creeks, eventually flowing into the bay.

1. Stormwater enters house gutters and downpipes, flowing into residential drains.
2. Residential drains connect to council drains along streets and roads.
3. Council drains connect to Melbourne Water's regional drains.
4. Regional drains direct stormwater into the nearest river or creek, or directly to the bay via piped beach outlets.
5. Rivers and creeks flow into Port Phillip or Western Port Bay.

Minimising flood risk

From building new infrastructure to cleaning drains, we operate and maintain our drainage system and make improvements to reduce the impacts of flooding now and in the future. We determine where upgrades to the drainage system and other flood mitigation infrastructure might be needed to reduce flood risk and impact.

New drainage infrastructure isn't always the best or most cost-effective way to reduce flood risk. It can be disruptive to build, and isn't possible in some areas due to limited space. We carefully consider any new flood mitigation infrastructure to balance economic, environmental and social factors. Effective flood mitigation combines multiple strategies and balances economic, environmental and social factors. Updating flood information, through sophisticated flood modelling, is crucial to plan for the future to understand where flooding might occur so agencies and communities can be better prepared.

Flood Management Strategy

The Flood Management Strategy for Port Phillip and Western Port 2021-2031 addresses these challenges. It focuses on resilience by raising awareness and preparing for floods and their impacts. While we cannot completely eliminate flood risks, we can reduce their impact through innovative approaches and collaborative efforts.