



# **COMBINED DRAINS GUIDELINES**

**October 2023**

# Table of Contents

Combined Sanitary Drains Explained ..... 3

    What is a Combined Sanitary Drain? ..... 3

    Who Maintains Existing Combined Sanitary Drains?..... 3

    Is my property on a combined sanitary drain? ..... 4

Water Approval Process ..... 4

    What is the Water Approval Process? ..... 4

Categories of Development..... 4

    Building Approvals ..... 4

    Development Approvals..... 5

    Plumbing Approvals ..... 5

Development Approvals and Combined Sanitary Drains..... 5

    Removing a Combined Sanitary Drain ..... 5

    Water Approvals Conditions for Combined Sanitary Drains ..... 6

    What about Adjacent Properties on a Combined Sanitary Drain? ..... 6

    Ownership of Existing Combined Sanitary Drains..... 6

    Reuse of an Existing Combined Sanitary Drain ..... 6

## Version control/updates

|      |   |         |          |
|------|---|---------|----------|
| V1.0 | Original version                                      |         |          |
| V2.1 | Updated branding, email addresses, Act and Regulation | A Doyle | Oct 2023 |
|      |   |         |          |
|      |   |         |          |

We welcome feedback on these guidelines. Send your comments to:  
[DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au](mailto:DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au)

# Combined Sanitary Drains Guidelines

This guideline explains the obligations of developers and property owners for sites connected to (or serviced by) combined sanitary drains.

**Note:** A Plumbing Approval from your local council is required before any plumbing work associated with a combined sanitary drain can commence.

## Combined Sanitary Drains Explained

### What is a Combined Sanitary Drain?

Most properties in our service area have an individual private sewer, which drains to a property connection and into the Urban Utilities sewer network. Each property has an individual property connection which is owned and maintained by Urban Utilities.

However, some properties (typically those in older, inner city suburbs) are instead serviced by 'combined sanitary drains'.

A combined sanitary drain is a communal private sanitary drain that services two or more properties, and drains to one common Urban Utilities' connection point. A combined sanitary drain is not owned or operated by the local council or Urban Utilities. Their maintenance, operation and installation falls under the Queensland state plumbing legislation and as such, any queries relating to existing combined sanitary drains must be forwarded onto the local council for that area. The pipes which make up combined drains typically have a smaller diameter (100 millimetres, or 4 inches) than an Urban Utilities reticulated sewer.

### Who Maintains Existing Combined Sanitary Drains?

Unlike property connections owned by Urban Utilities, ongoing maintenance of a combined sanitary drain is the responsibility of the property owner where maintenance is required. This is a plumbing legislative requirement.

Regulation of the maintenance, repair and use of a combined drain is governed by the provisions of the *Plumbing and Drainage Act 2018* (P&D Act) and the *Plumbing and Drainage Regulation 2019* (PDR) (or current equivalent).

Section 128G of the P&D Act states that the owner of premises must take all reasonable steps to ensure all plumbing and drainage on the premises is kept in good condition and operates properly. In this context plumbing and drainage includes combined sanitary drains.

If a combined sanitary drain is not properly repaired or maintained this may cause damage to the Urban Utilities network, and poses a potential risk to public health, safety and the environment. Penalties apply for failure to repair or maintain plumbing and drainage, which includes combined sanitary drains.

Any defects that occur in the combined sanitary drain must be rectified by the owner of the property that contains the defective section of a drain. A permit must be obtained from your local council before repairs are carried out.

## Is my property on a combined sanitary drain?

Contact your local council to establish if your property is connected to a combined sanitary drain.

## Water Approval Process

Combined sanitary drains are considered private plumbing. They may be replaced with reticulated wastewater infrastructure through the Water Approval process, either in the process of land development, or simply to modernise and improve the existing sewer service.

### What is the Water Approval Process?

Urban Utilities is the assessment authority for the water supply and wastewater aspects of development within our service area. Assessments are undertaken in accordance with a legislated [Water Approval Process](#). A Water Approval is required where the demand on the water or wastewater network changes as a result of development activities (new connections or disconnections), or where an existing connection is altered in some way (alterations).

Water Approval applications for new or altered connections and disconnections are assessed against Urban Utilities' requirements, including (but not limited to) the following standards and guidelines:

- [SEQ Water and Sewerage Design and Construction Code \(SEQ Code\)](#)
- [Urban Utilities Developer Customer Service Standards](#)
- [Water Netserv Plan \(Part A\) - Connections Policy](#)

For more information visit <https://urbanutilities.com.au/development> or email our team at [DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au](mailto:DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au)

## Categories of Development

The reuse or replacement of a combined sanitary drain is subject to requirements imposed by both Urban Utilities and local councils.

### Building Approvals

A Building Approval may be required for the renovation, extension or reconstruction of a dwelling on an existing lot. Building Approvals control the safety of building structures, and incorporate building works undertaken under the *Planning Act 2016*. Building Approvals are assessed against the Building Code of Australia, and Queensland building and plumbing regulations.

Building Approvals generally don't require an Urban Utilities Water Approval.

*For questions regarding building approvals and combined sanitary drains, please refer to your local council.*

## Development Approvals

Development Approvals determine what types of land use activities go where, and control the potential impacts on surrounding properties. Local council planners assess Development Approval applications. Where a Development Approval is required, (for example, a Reconfiguration of Lot, subdivision, or Material Change of Use) a Water Approval is also typically required.

## Plumbing Approvals

A plumbing approval ('compliance permit') is required before any plumbing work associated with a combined sanitary drain can commence.

*For questions regarding building and plumbing approvals, please refer to your local council.*

## Development Approvals and Combined Sanitary Drains

Combined sanitary drains must be removed and replaced by a reticulated sewer (providing an individual property connection to each lot) for all development activity requiring a Water Approval within the Urban Utilities service area.

### Removing a Combined Sanitary Drain

Where development authorised under a Development Approval occurs within a site serviced by a combined sanitary drain, a new sewer must be installed to connect the site(s) to Urban Utilities' reticulated sewer network. This includes all new properties within any Reconfiguration of Lot or subdivision development, which must have separate property connections installed. This requirement is prescribed in the supporting SEQ Code, including the following clauses:

- *clause 5.1 - The design shall provide a property connection point for each existing and proposed property serviced by the network;*
- *clause 5.2 - Property connections shall only be made to reticulation sewers.*

In addition, the following general rules apply for properties adjacent to a development site which are also connected to a combined sanitary drain:

- properties upstream of a development site serviced by a combined sanitary drain must be provided with a connection to a reticulated sewer as part of the Water Approval process;
- properties downstream of the subject site may retain use of the existing combined sanitary drain, as long as the reticulated gravity sewer installed enables the future connection of those properties.

A plumbing approval is required before any plumbing work associated with a combined sanitary drain can commence.

As a general rule, new development must be serviced by contemporary sewers designed and constructed in accordance with the SEQ Code.

## Water Approvals Conditions for Combined Sanitary Drains

Water Approvals include a standard condition that the applicant must replace any existing combined sanitary drain:

- ‘Supply and install a wastewater property service connection to serve each proposed lot and which connects into the Urban Utilities wastewater reticulation system’; and
- ‘Each lot must have a separate wastewater property service connection which commands the whole of each lot.’

In the process of assessing and issuing Water Approvals, Urban Utilities will actively review new property connection requests to help identify existing properties that are connected to, or encumbered by, combined sanitary drains.

### What about Adjacent Properties on a Combined Sanitary Drain?

The existing and future sewer servicing of upstream lots must be accounted for in developing a site under a Development Approval. It is a standard condition of each Water Approval that *“water and wastewater infrastructure shall terminate in a location and in an arrangement that allows future connection to the network to be made without disruption to the community, damage to infrastructure and the need to obtain private land owner’s consent”*.

This standard requirement is also applicable where combined sanitary drains are in place. Upstream properties must not be disadvantaged by the removal of a combined sanitary drain. Upstream properties connected to a combined sanitary drain, which is removed, must be provided with an alternative and suitably-sized sewer service.

### Ownership of Existing Combined Sanitary Drains

Urban Utilities will not accept transferred ownership of a combined sanitary drain. There is no agreement between Urban Utilities and our partner councils for the transfer of combined sanitary drains to Urban Utilities.

## Reuse of an Existing Combined Sanitary Drain

Urban Utilities reserves the right to refuse the reuse of an existing combined drain for development purposes. If you believe reuse of an existing combined drain may be necessary, please lodge a request for a Services Advice Notice, or contact [DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au](mailto:DevelopmentEnquiries@urbanutilities.com.au).

Where a Development Approval requires a Water Approval and Urban Utilities considers that new sewer property connections are not possible, the property owner must also consult with the local council’s plumbing department.