

# Onsite Sewage Facility Panel

Findings from Local Government and Licensee Surveys

Dr Janet Cumming

Panel Chair



**Queensland**  
Government

# Outline

- Background to Onsite Panel
- **The Surveys**
  - **Local Government**
  - **Licensees**
- Consultation
- What's next?



# The OSTP – who and what is it?

The On-site Sewage Treatment Panel (the Panel) was established by the Service Trades Council (the Council) on 8 August 2019 to investigate concerns relating to on-site sewage management in Queensland, including:

- Public health and safety risks

- Licensing requirements

- Training and qualifications

- Public knowledge of maintenance requirements; and

- Regulation of the industry.

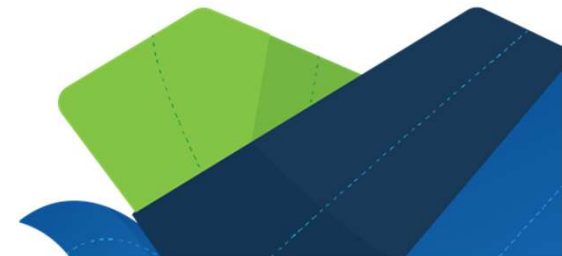
## Members

Queensland Health, the Department of Energy and Public Works (DEPW), Seqwater, local governments, Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland and TAFE Queensland, specialists and academics in the field of on-site sewage management and research



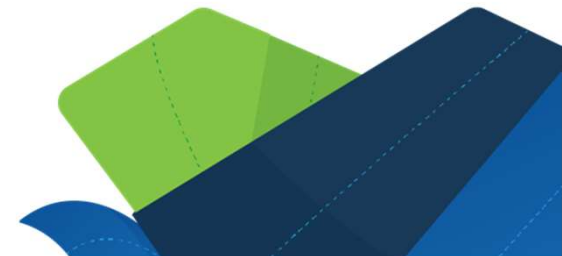
# What the Panel did

- Literature Review
- Examined the roles of state departments, local governments, national and state organisations
- Workshops (internal)
- Surveys
  - Local Government
  - Licensees
- Public Consultation
- Report to the Council



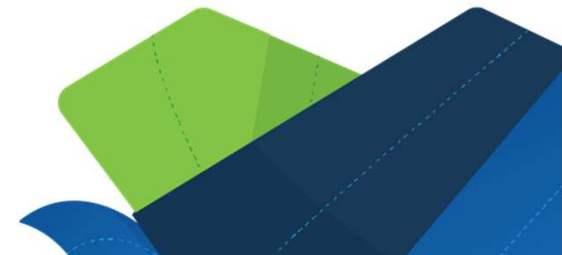
# The literature Review

- Several studies on the performance of OSFs conducted in SEQ the early 2000s, fizzling out after about 2010
- None in rural or regional Queensland (Noosa Shire)
- A splattering of others around Australia, particularly Victoria and Western Australia
- Several studies from USA on health impacts from drinking water wells contaminated by onsite wastewater
- Many studies from USA and Europe on health impacts from contamination of recreational water by wastewater



# Government Reports

- Victorian Auditor General's Office (2006, 2018)
    - Sewer Backlog Program
  - Sydney Catchment Authority
  - Seqwater
  - Gold Coast City Council
  - Noosa Shire Council
- 
- USEPA
  - Ireland



# Regulation

- Qld State Departments that have a direct or indirect role in OSFs
  - Dept of Energy and Public Works
  - QBCC
  - Dept of Environment and Science
  - Dept of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water
  - Dept of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning
  - Department of Employment, Small Business and Training
  - Queensland Health and Health and Hospital Services
- Organisations
  - Standards Australia,
  - Australian Building Codes Board
- Local Government
  - Planning, Building, Plumbing
  - Environmental Health, Water Services

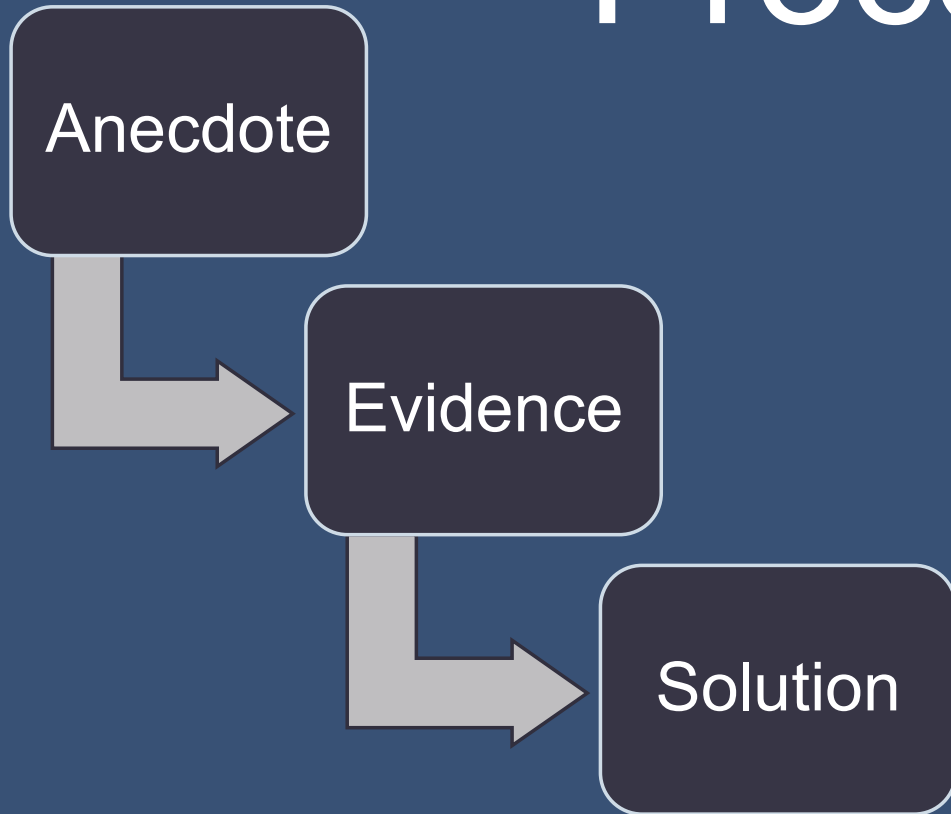


**AS/NZS 1547:2012**

On-site domestic wastewater management

**Available format(s):** Hardcopy, PDF 1 User, PDF 3  
5 Users, PDF 9 Users

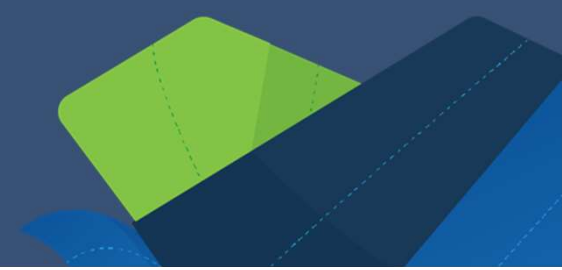
# Process



Workshop



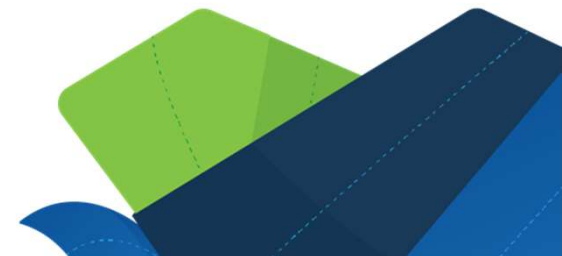
GOBAT





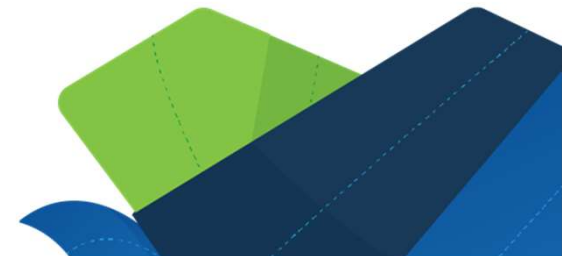
# Workshop results:

- Categorised the problems into these areas:
  - Performance
  - Location
  - Licencing
  - Design
  - Households
- Notice what is missing from this list!
- This formed the basis for the survey questions and the formulation of recommendations



# The Local Government Survey

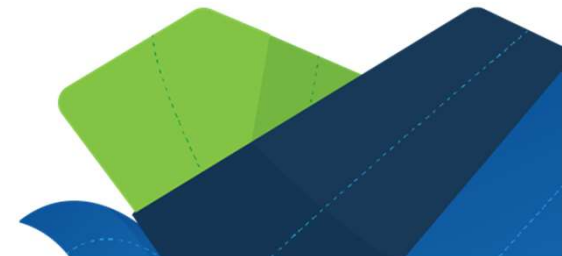
- Sent to all 77 Local Governments by QBCC
- 41 responses from 34 local governments
  - 5 responded twice
  - 1 responded 3 times
  - Multiple responses were from different sections of local government for example one from plumbing and one from building. We had one response from Environmental Health
  - Multiple responses were not always consistent



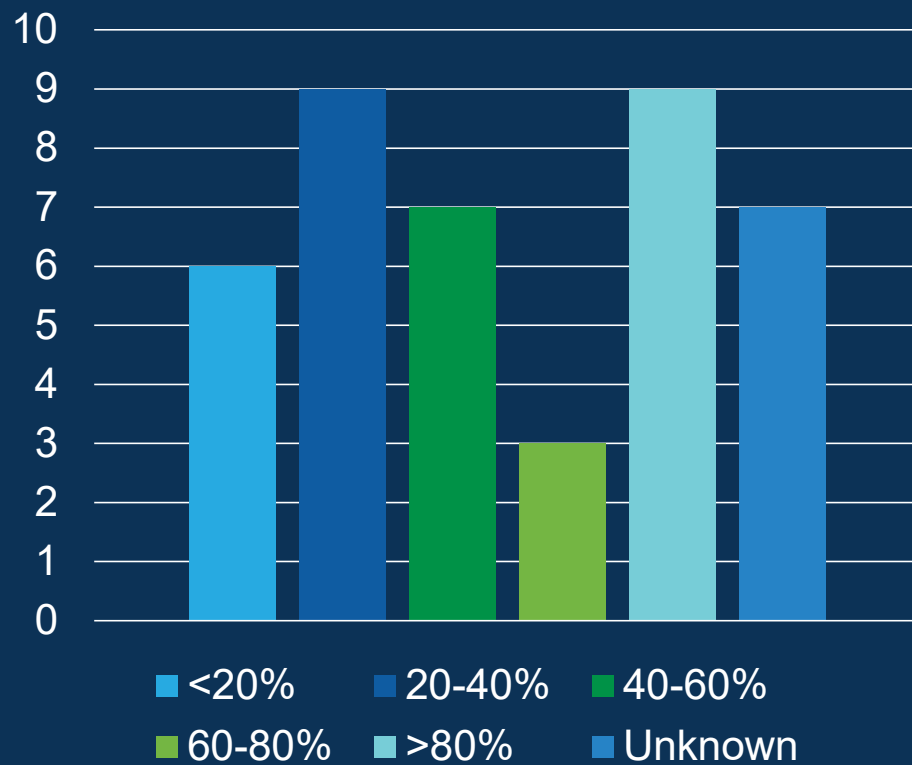
# Local Government Record Keeping

First questions were about their record keeping

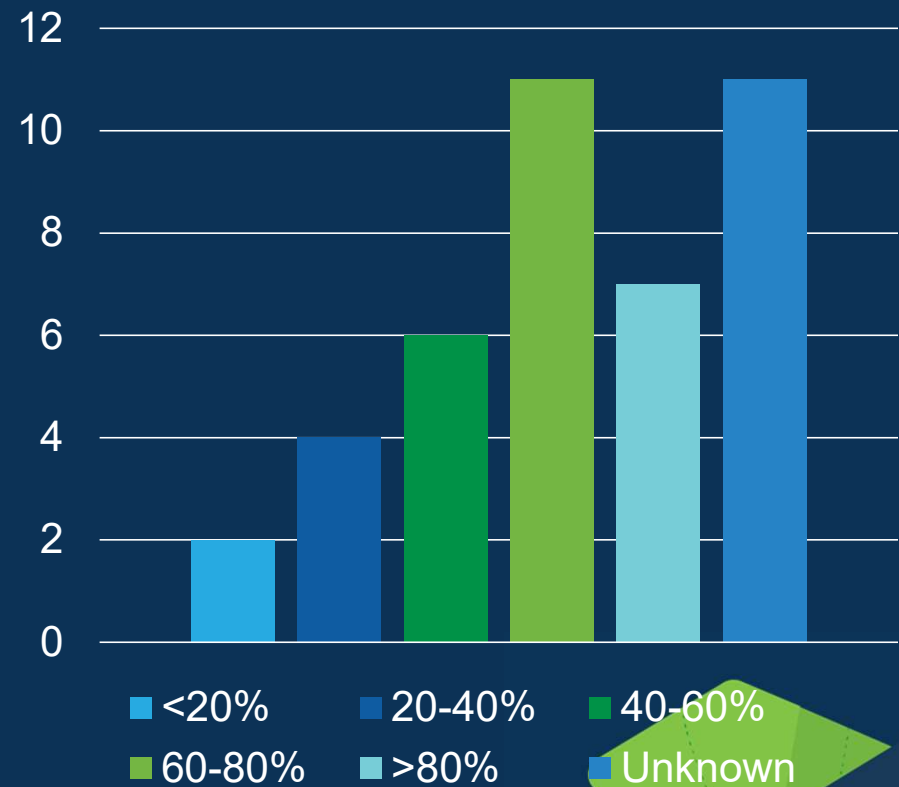
- 29 had electronic database of OSFs, 3 had hardcopy and 9 had systems under development or included AWTs only
- 25 said database included current compliance status, and 16 included compliance history
- 23 almost always inspect new installations and 10 both inspect and accept Form 8
- Only 7 did audits, 12 did site inspections, 3 did compliance checks only after complaints



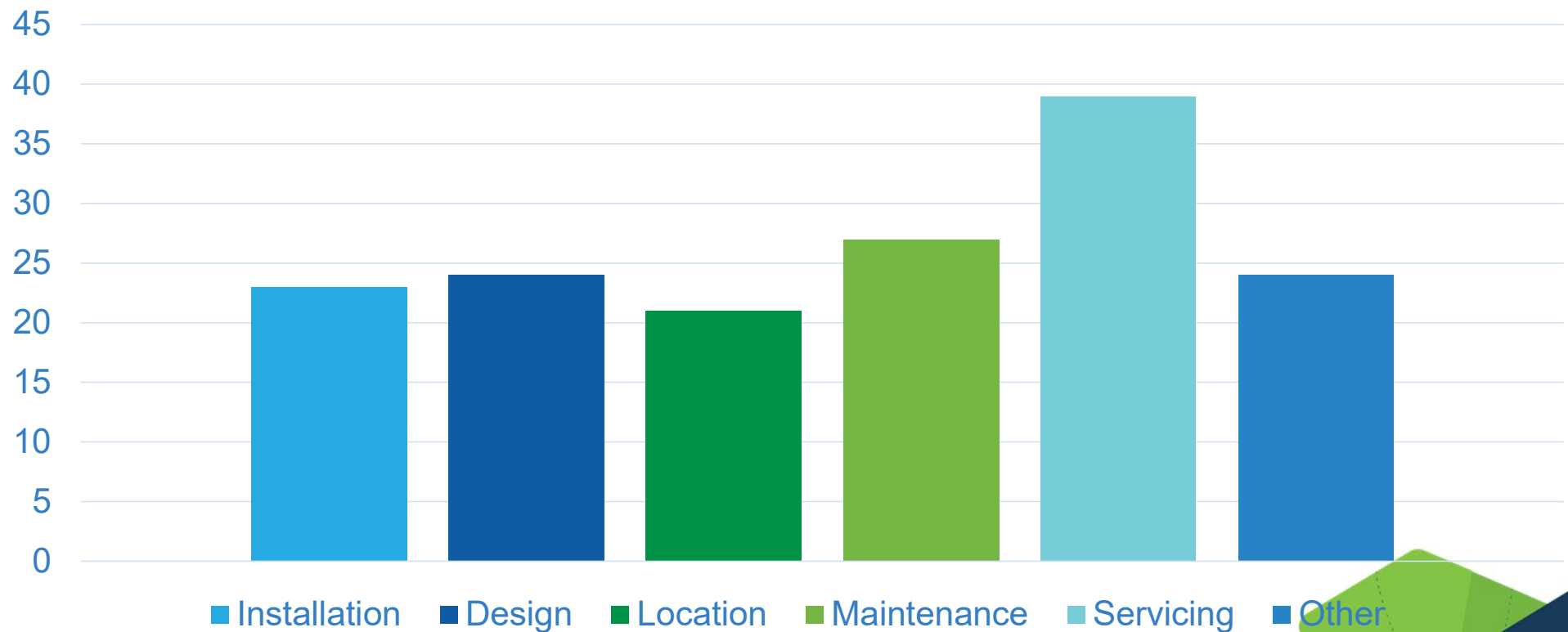
Approximately how many on-site sewage facilities installed in your local government area involve a conventional septic system?



Approximately how many on-site sewage facilities in your local government area are compliant (performing in line with Australian Standards)?

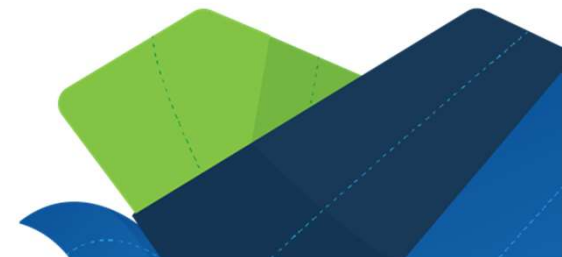


# What are the key areas that need improvement? (choose all that apply)



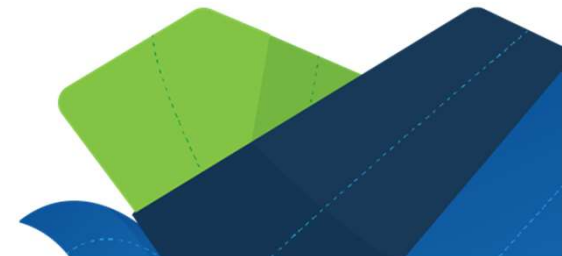
# Local Government -Impacts

- 8 said there were confirmed cases of OSFs impacting water sources in their jurisdiction but 17 didn't know
- Only 12 said they undertook water quality testing although 33 said there was both primary and secondary recreational activity in their area (3 said secondary only)
- 9 had undertaken upgrades to their water treatment plants to manage contaminated or degraded water quality



# LG on Licensees

- Most thought that training for design, install and maintain were somewhat or very adequate
- “Please provide more details about any changes you would recommend to the current training and qualification requirements.”
  - Usual demarcation comments
  - Revalidation requirements similar to backflow
  - Continuing Professional Development
  - Design was the area most often mentioned
  - More thorough servicing



# LG on Households

- Almost all (87%) thought that owners and occupiers didn't have enough education on how to maintain their OSF
- “What information do you think is important for owners and occupiers to know about maintaining on-site sewage facilities?”
  - Chemical use and other disposal issues
  - Maintenance schedules
  - Protection and maintenance of Land Application Areas
- Tenants were subject of particular opprobrium in both surveys and the consultation
- Homework: Check the PDA on responsibilities of owners vs occupiers. (Section 70). Also Schedule 5 of the PDR and Section 3.8 of AS 1547





# Licensee Survey

- Distributed to all occupational and contractor licensees with a relevant licence
- 1061 signed on to respond, and answered the first questions on the type of licences they hold
- Only 763 answered the second question on their work on OSFs, 126 saying they never design, install, service or maintain any OSFs
- 80 said they never come across an OSF that is non-compliant, not well maintained or failing (includes 52 of the 126 'nevers' above)
- There was another significant drop out rate after this question. Only 9 of the 126 answered any subsequent questions



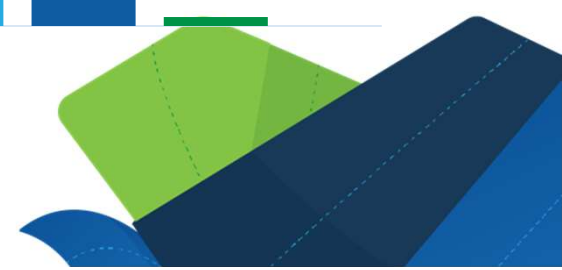
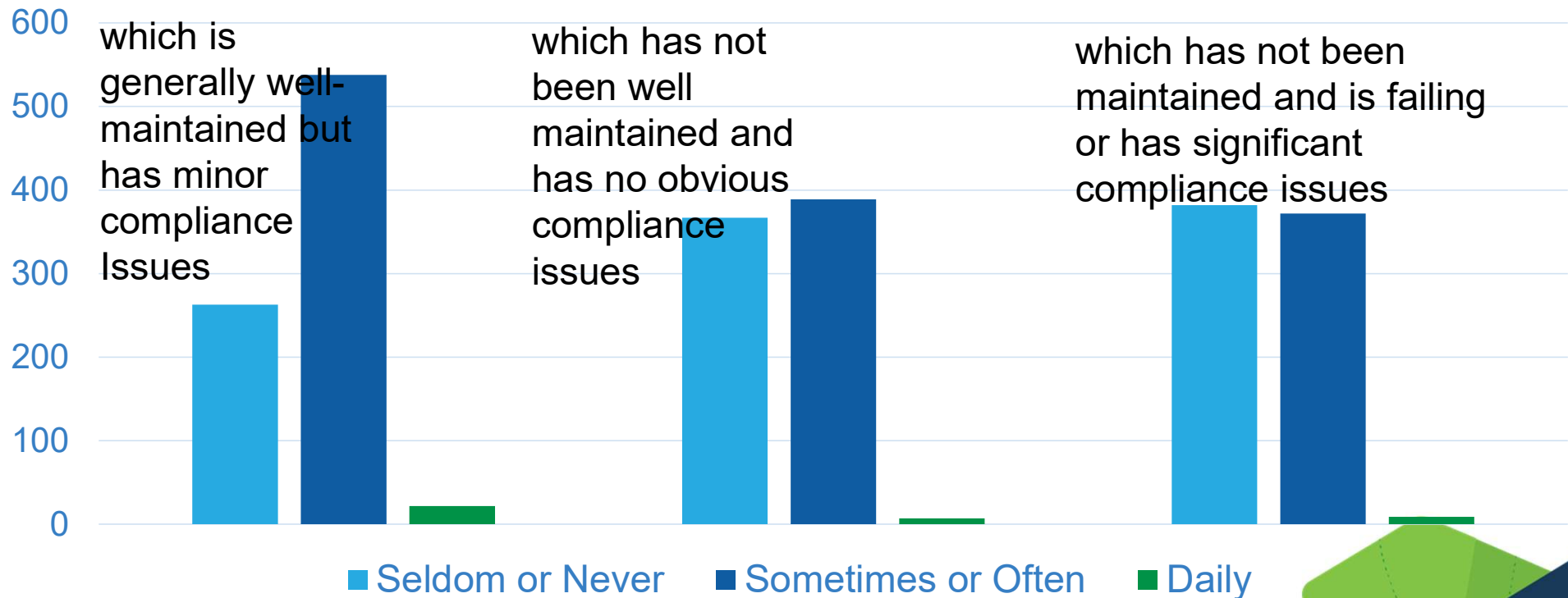
Licence Class	Number	Percent
Drainer	37	3.5
Plumber and Drainer	896	84.4
Provisional Plumber and Drainer	52	4.9
Provisional Drainer	4	0.4
Restricted Drainer (maintain only)	50	4.7
Restricted Drainer (install and maintain)	22	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>100</b>
Contractors Licence	591	55.7
Endorsement for OSF (maint)	328	30.9

<b>Region</b>	<b>Only</b>	<b>Regions including</b>
<b>SEQ</b>	540	634
<b>Wide Bay Burnett</b>	63	107
<b>Darling Downs and South West</b>	52	107
<b>Central Queensland</b>	48	97
<b>North Queensland</b>	40	178
<b>Far North Queensland</b>	67	119
<b>Central West Queensland</b>	3	32
<b>Mackay, Isaac, Whitsunday</b>	25	73
<b>Total</b>	838	1347
<b>No region</b>	107	

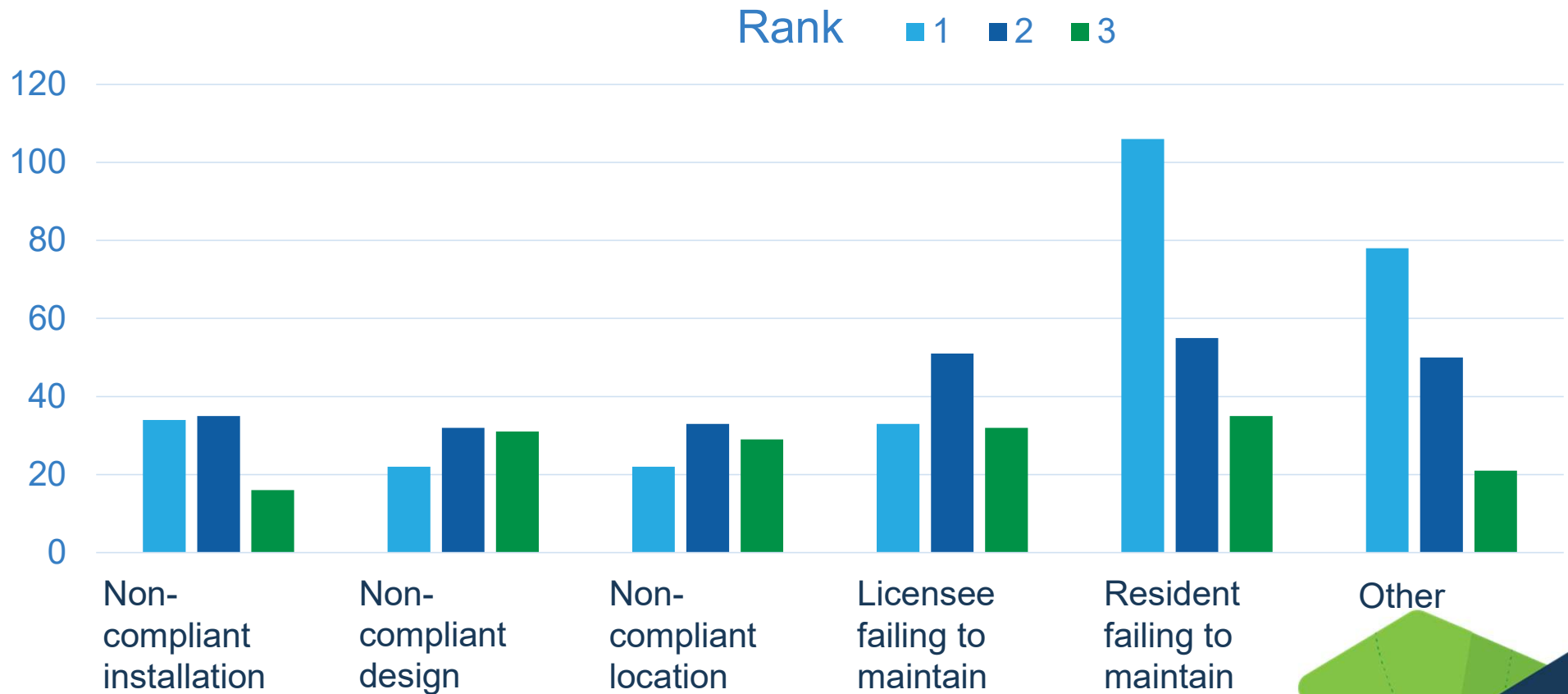


# In your work, how frequently do you come across the following situations?

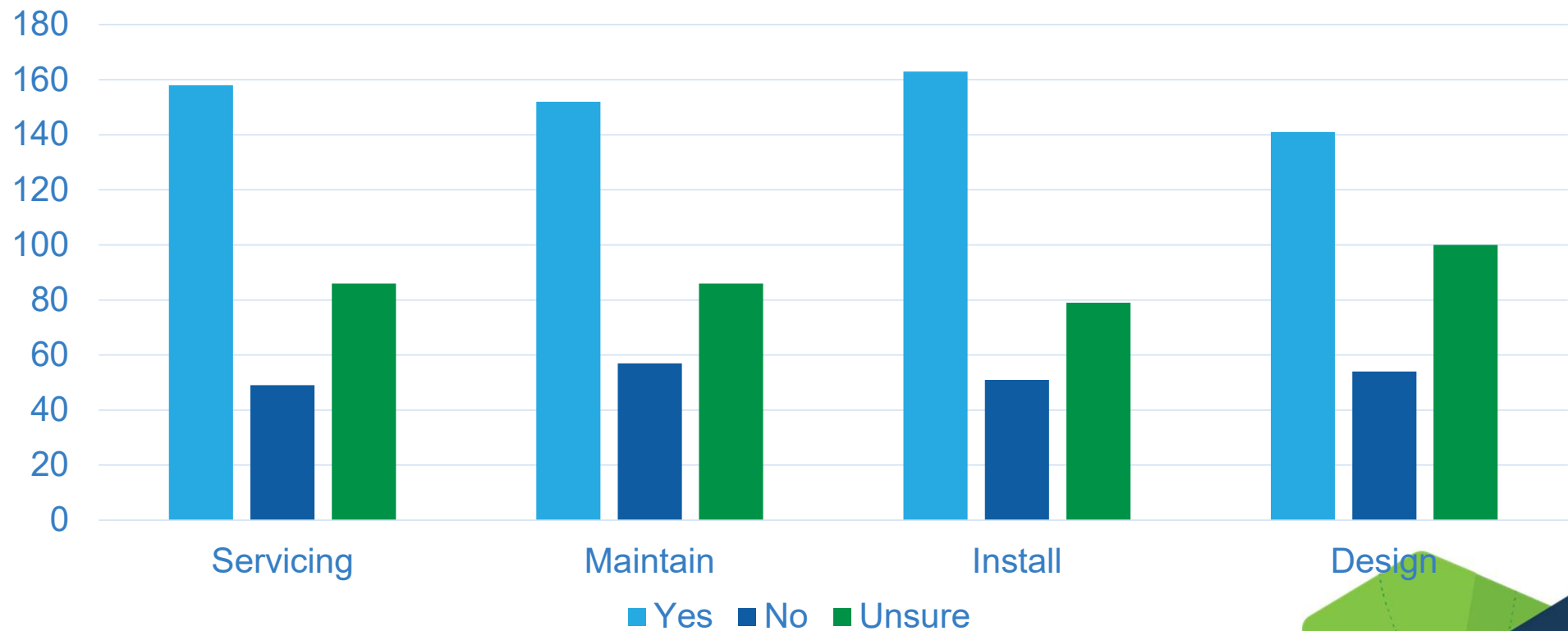
## An onsite sewage facility –



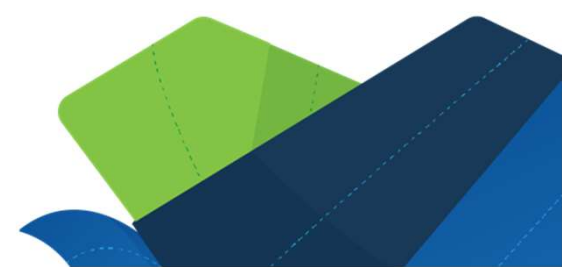
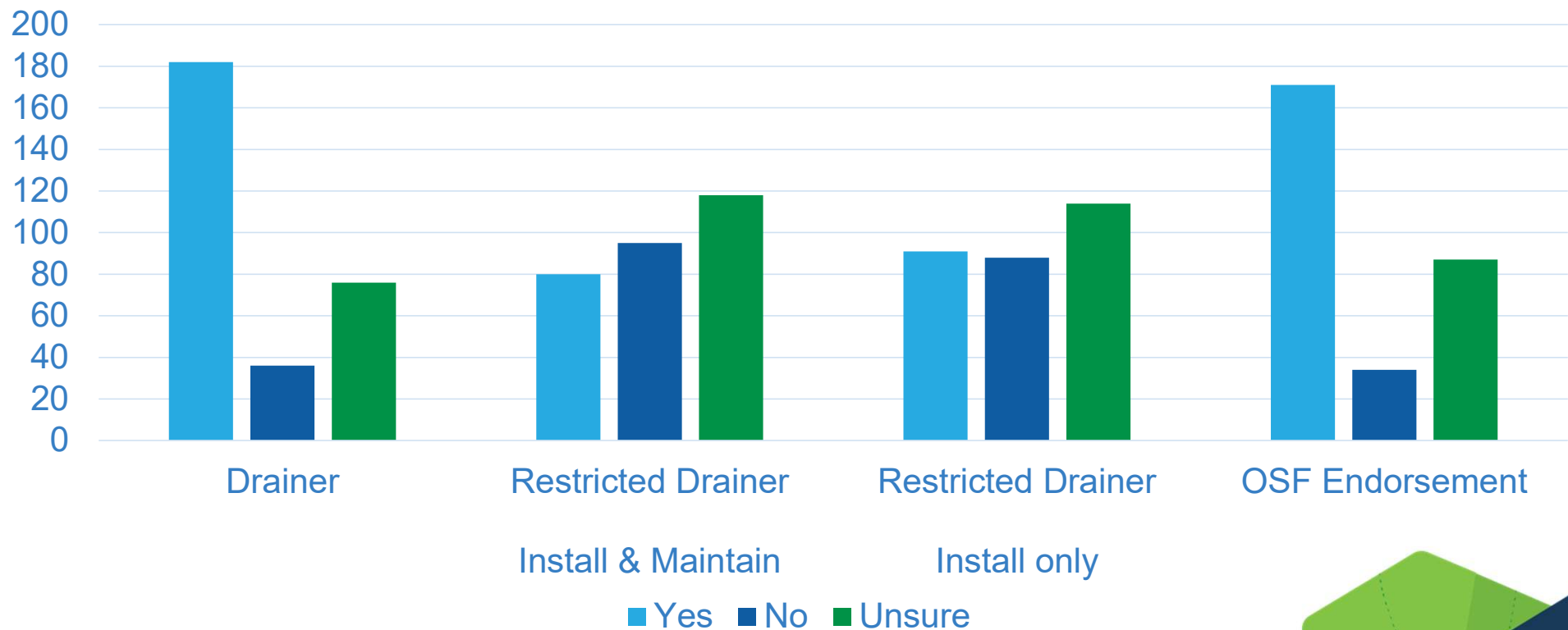
# Ranking Significant Issues



Do you believe that the current training and qualifications for the following types of on-site sewage facility work are adequate?

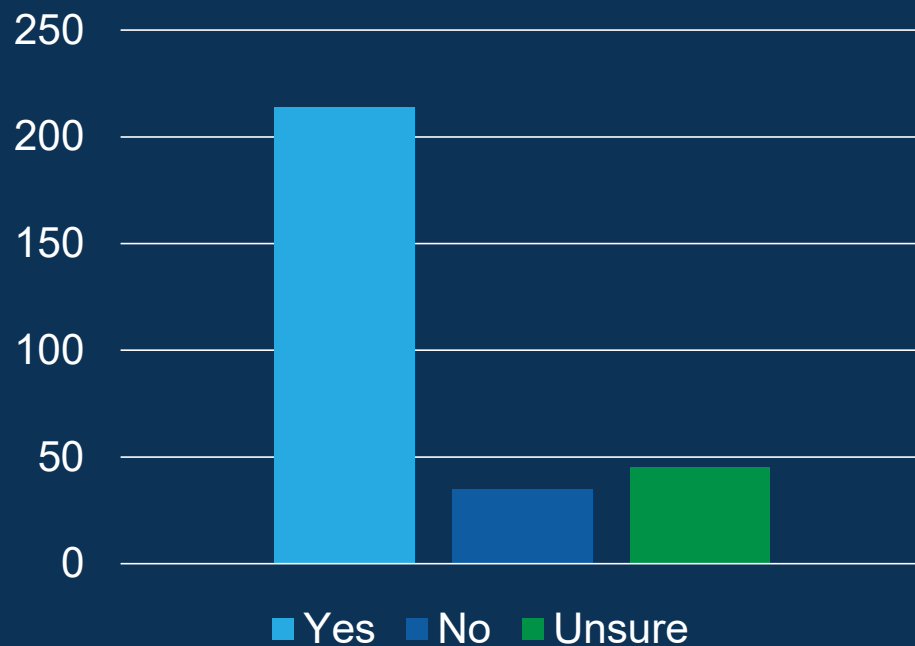


# Do you believe that the experience requirements for the following types of on-site sewage facility licences are adequate?

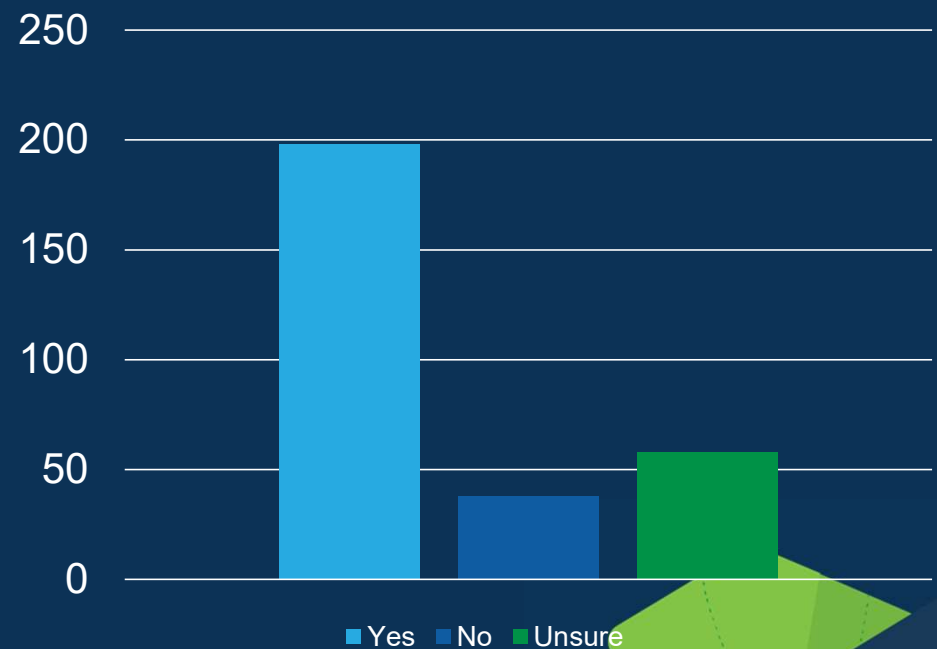


Do you believe that the current standards, including Australian Standards and the Queensland Plumbing and Wastewater Code (QPW Code) for on-site sewage facilities are adequate?

### Australian Standards



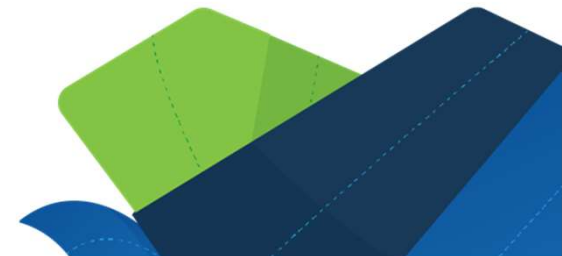
### Queensland Plumbing and Wastewater Code





# General Responses to Consultation

- It would be good to have consistency across the State.
- Local Governments need to be able to respond to local situations
- Sewers also leak
- Small LGs, rural properties
- What's it going to cost?
- Who is going to do it?
- It's not us, it's them
- THAT dispute



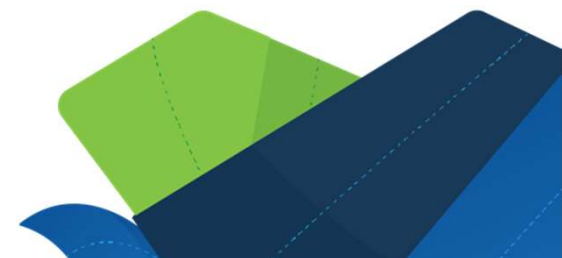
# Where to next?

- Recommendations and draft report have been presented to STC
- One recommendation is waiting on clarification from EPW
- Final edits of the draft document are being done
- Recommendations and report will be provided to the Minister for Public Works and Procurement
  - Minister can refer matters not in his portfolio to relevant Ministers
  - Minister can refer matters within his portfolio to the appropriate area in EPW/QBCC for further discussion
- Not all recommendations require policy or legislative change and can be implemented at departmental/local government level



# Acknowledgements

- STC for the opportunity to contribute to this work
- All the panel members for their generous contributions of time and expertise
- QBCC for the Secretariat, and particularly Hannah and Liz for their work, support and patience
- The people who generously responded to the surveys and consultation both online and in written contributions
- And in anticipation everyone at State and Local Government who will carry this work through to completion



*Thank You*

