

3.4. Wet Weather Approach and Sportsfields

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ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sydney weather cancels sport, closes ovals across city [**3.4.1** - 4 pages]

PURPOSE:

To present information on wet weather procedures and Sportsfields.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report presents information on the current process of assessing North Sydney Council's Sportsfields for suitability of play during wet weather. It also presents details on the problems many Councils have been faced with for the duration of this current period of extreme rainfall.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

No financial implications.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** the report be received.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1. Our Living Environment

1.4 Well utilised open space and recreational facilities

BACKGROUND

Many local government areas of NSW have been heavily affected by the extreme rainfall events during this current calendar year. The monthly averages combined from March 22 through until July 2022 total 556mm. North Sydney has seen double that with 1169mm of rainfall. The non-availability of Sportsfields due to the rain events has been one of many concerns especially through this current winter season.

This issue on top of the last two seasons being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, sporting communities, understandably, are becoming very frustrated.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Protocol.

DETAIL

North Sydney Council along with many other Councils in the Sydney catchment have been faced with unprecedented amounts of rain for the last 6 months

North Sydney Council has a permanent weather station located at the Coal Loader that measures the rainfall and as well as items such as humidity, wind speed and wind direction. The monthly rainfall amounts from the start of March 2022 can be seen in the table below.

Analog Input	Date and Time	Value	Unit	Average
Monthly Rainfall - The Coal Loader	March 2022	437.55	mm	118
Total March 2022	Total March 2022	437.55	mm	
Monthly Rainfall - The Coal Loader	April 2022	207.67	mm	115
Total April 2022	Total April 2022	207.67	mm	
Monthly Rainfall - The Coal Loader	May 2022	88.31	mm	101
Total May 2022	Total May 2022	88.31	mm	
Monthly Rainfall - The Coal Loader	June 2022	6.77	mm	144
Total June 2022	Total June 2022	6.77	mm	
Monthly Rainfall - The Coal Loader	July 2022	428.76	mm	78
Total July 2022	Total July 2022	428.76	mm	

This continuing precipitation trend has opened debate within sporting clubs and the media on the closure of sporting fields due to wet weather. It is also leading to in-depth discussions on the inability for many natural turf fields to cope with the conditions and be returned to play as quickly as possible.

The latest Sydney Morning Herald article entitled “Winter deluge cancels local sport; climate change threatens to ruin it” (attached to this report) is a clear indication of the frustrations across Sydney. The article also touches on the lack of sporting facilities to cope with the growing number of participants. It references the report undertaken by the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) of which found the North Shore needed an additional 62 hectares of playing space – equivalent to 78 rectangular fields – by 2026 for sports such as soccer, football, cricket, and hockey.

In the financial year 2021/22 North Sydney Council spent \$1,165,607.00 on Sportsfield maintenance. The income received from hire fees was \$334,225.00 (this was slightly affected due to covid pandemic relief). Resulting in a return of 28% on the total spent on maintenance of Sportsfields (excluding North Sydney Oval)

As a comparison over the past 4 years the averages are as follows

- Income - \$378,800.00
- Expenditure - \$1,188,700.00
- return is 32%

Wet Weather Closures – Criteria for Assessment

Industry experts state the minimum requirement for all fields, irrespective of the level of competition, is to provide a surface that meets the following criteria:

- Grass covers of 90 – 100% at the commencement of the season. Greater than 85% grass cover mid-season.
- No obvious holes or excessive surface level variation
- Provide a reasonably stable footing.
- Not excessively hard (i.e., < 120g) as measured using the Clegg Soil Impact Tester.
- Turf wickets to be well grassed, level and have an even and consistent bounce. In regard to turf wickets, less pace and bounce can be acceptable at lower grades of competition. However, there must be no compromise with respect to levelness of the surface and consistency of bounce so that the surface is not dangerous.

Currently Council's Greenkeeping staff evaluates when to close grounds based on the field demonstrating the following characteristics:

- The potential for safe play and injury to players;
- If the sport allocated to that field for training or play is likely to cause extensive damage to the playing surface;
- Surface water present – Extensive puddling on the surface (this indicates soil is at its saturation point;)
- Surface is slippery;
- The short-term weather forecast;
- The time of year and the cumulative amount of stress on the field; and
- Drainage capabilities of the field.

In order to have as little impact on play as possible, Council staff assesses each field on its merits and only close fields when absolutely necessary. North Sydney Council's current procedure during wet weather periods includes daily inspections of each field both morning and afternoon on weekdays and mornings on weekends. A decision is made on these daily assessments on each individual ground. This means that grounds with more than one playing field may have some fields closed and some open.

Damage to the playing surface is defined as being beyond general wear and tear. Playing in wet conditions causes major damage that can force fields to be closed for longer periods of time. Impacts such as compaction, complete turf removal and unevenness of the surface are intensified when a wet soil profile is played on.

National NSW Kids' sport

Winter deluge cancels local sport, climate change threatens to ruin it



By [Andrew Taylor](#)

July 23, 2022 – 3.22pm

Wet weather has played havoc with winter sports competitions, with clubs forced to cancel training and games because local councils have closed waterlogged ovals.

But kids are also missing out on games because of a lack of sports grounds and facilities that are ill-equipped to deal with extreme weather.



Easts Junior Beasties RUFC players Charlie Hourigan, Remy Scott, Felix Connor and Ceilim O'Kelly at training in Rose Bay. JANIE BARRETT

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Sydney weather cancels sport, closes ovals across city

Sport NSW chairwoman Carolyn Campbell said rain and floods in NSW had been devastating for sports already dealing with the existing pressure on facilities.

“The sector knows the impact of climate change and associated weather extremes is a major threat to sports participation and the quality and maintenance of infrastructure needed to support future growth,” she said.

Campbell said sporting organisations wanted to work with governments to build sporting facilities that will withstand future weather events.

“Clearly, the outdoor field sports have been most affected by the weather, but right now, pretty much all our members are telling us the biggest hurdle they face is finding places to play,” she said. “Many sports are telling us they’re restricted from growing, often turning away potential participants, because of a lack of facilities – and that is a sad state of affairs.”



Roselea Football Club has been forced to cancel many training sessions and weekend games this year because of waterlogged sports grounds. WOLTER PEETERS

Roselea Football Club has not been able to use three ovals in Carlingford since March, forcing the club to train its 60 junior and adult teams on just two fields instead of five.

When the fields are open, the uneven playing surface is “detrimental to competitive play”, the club’s director of development Rohan Primrose said.

“They have patchy grass and dusty hollows in the dry which become boggy in the wet,” he said. “The fields have no drainage or irrigation leading them to be the first to close and the last to reopen during the mildest wet weather.”

Primrose said the state of the sporting fields had restricted the growth and training capacity of the football club: “Many training sessions and weekend games have been cancelled in the 2022

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Sydney weather cancels sport, closes ovals across city

season due to the sodden fields at our grounds and across the association.”

A Football NSW spokesman said half of Sydney’s football fields did not have drainage, leaving turf ovals in “a moderate to poor state”.

“There are some fields in Sydney that haven’t been used for the winter season due to rain in March, let alone the torrential rain that we have experienced over the last few weeks,” he said.

Soccer clubs that use turf grounds had been forced to cancel training sessions over the past few weeks because of wet weather, he said. “Fields have been closed during the rain and then consequently closed days and weeks post the rain event.”



Under-12 footballers Samaira Bagga, Charlotte Keller and Casey Ahn. WOLTER PEETERS

He said kids were missing out on participation due to the poor condition of sporting facilities: “Kids have had two seasons impacted by COVID-19 and now they have had a third season in a row where competition and training has been affected.”

Some areas of Sydney also lacked enough sporting ovals to cope with the number of people who wanted to play soccer, Football NSW’s spokesman said.

There is an average of one soccer pitch in NSW for every 166 players, but Hunters Hill Council has only one pitch every 518 players.

Soccer players in the Sutherland Shire (one pitch for every 293 players), northern beaches, Blue Mountains and Lane Cove also lack sporting fields.

A 2017 report commissioned by the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils found the north shore needed an additional 62 hectares of playing space – equivalent to 78 rectangular fields – by 2026 for sports such as soccer, football, cricket and hockey.

Other football codes have also been forced to cancel or postpone training or games.

A NSW Rugby spokesman said parts of Sydney with growing population have struggled to provide more open public space.

“As a result, there is a growing need for access to all-weather facilities such as purpose-built synthetic pitches and improved sharing of existing greenfield space,” he said.

He said NSW Rugby supported more all-weather sporting grounds as well as improved lighting to increase the number of hours facilities can be used.

Head of rugby at Easts Junior Beasties Matt Souter said the club was fortunate to share a synthetic rugby field that was unaffected by bad weather. However, two grass ovals at Eastern Suburbs Rugby Union Football Club in Rose Bay have been out of action for most of the year due to wet weather.

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Sydney weather cancels sport, closes ovals across city

Souter said a number of home and away games had been cancelled because of unfit playing surfaces. “When it comes down to ground closures, all the kids miss out.”

But the use of fake grass in parks and open spaces is controversial, with grassroots community groups across Sydney fighting councils planning to install artificial turf.

But Football NSW’s spokesman said a disparity was beginning to creep into community sport because clubs with access to synthetic fields have been less affected by wet weather.

“Teams that train on natural turf fields have had training cancelled multiple times throughout the season,” he said.

“They are playing against teams that haven’t missed a training session. This puts the clubs using natural turf fields at a severe disadvantage no matter what level of competition they are participating at.”

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