

Wet Weather Policy for Shellharbour City Council's Sportsgrounds

Policy Owner: Executive Manager Works and Services	
Date Last Adopted: 24 May 2019	Review Date: 24 October 2026

1. Policy Statement/Objective(s)

Shellharbour City Council is committed to providing a range of accessible recreation opportunities and associated facilities to cater for a broad range of ages, abilities and interests. This policy outlines the method on which all sportsground users can access Shellharbour City Council's sportsgrounds in wet weather conditions.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- (a) provide clear guidelines for the closure of Council maintained sportsgrounds during and following wet weather.
- (b) maximise access to sporting facilities, whilst considering the safety of users and the long-term conditions on the fields.
- (c) allow Council to pro-actively manage sportsgrounds in order to prevent over-use and or inappropriate uses, thereby ensuring the long term sustainability of playing fields.
- (d) provide accurate and timely information concerning sportsground closures across the city.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council's Sportsgrounds during wet weather conditions.

The responsibility for ground closures will remain at the discretion of Shellharbour City Council and the decision to close sportsgrounds will be based on the following:

- (a) The potential for injury to players;
- (b) The type of sport played and potential for damage to the playing surface;
- (c) The short and long-term impacts to the playing surface and the use of that field by other users;
- (d) The condition of the ground when inspected; and
- (e) The weather forecast for the day of training/competition.

3. References

Sporting Facilities Policy
Shellharbour City Council Sportsfields Information and Guidelines

4. Consultations

External

Current Sportsground Users

Internal

Executive Director Infrastructure Services
Executive Manager Works & Services
Open Spaces Manager
Open Spaces Coordinators
Sportsfield Coordinator
Sportsfield Administration Officer
Recreation Planner
Assets Officer Open Spaces

5. Definitions

Sportsground	An area set aside for sports, usually with one or more playing fields and/or courts, usually accompanied by other features such as amenities for players and spectators and a potential grandstand.
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6. Variation and Review

Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy.

Review History -

Date Policy first adopted – version 1	10 December 2013
Date amendment adopted – version 2 (amendment to cost of bond)	16 June 2014
Date amendment adopted – version 3 (amendments to Sportsfields categories)	4 August 2015
Date amendment adopted – version 4 (minor amendments not requiring re-adoption)	2 April 2019
Date amendment adopted – version 5 (amendment to bonds and category closures)	24 October 2023

7. Policy

7.1. The Chief Executive Officer or authorised delegate has the authority to close sporting grounds should they be adversely affected by wet weather or for operational or public safety needs.

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7.2. Users do not have the authority to use of sports grounds when Council has closed the grounds. Groups with a booking to use to Council sports grounds are required to comply with all conditions as set out in individual agreements, booking terms and conditions, licences, leases and the like as relevant to the facility and activity.

7.3. Where Council has deemed all grounds open, it is the responsibility of the clubs or umpires/referees to deem the facility is safe for their specific activity.

7.4. Information regarding sports ground closures is available on Council's Website.

7.5. If Council closes a sportsground for training or competition in accordance with this policy, Council is not obligated to identify other locations for the activity to proceed.

8. Related Forms/Documents

- Inspection Guidelines for Wet Weather closure
- Sportsfields – Casual Hire Application Form
- Sportsfields – School Casual Hire Application Form
- Sportsfields – School Term Hire Application Form
- Sportsfields – Seasonal Application Form
- Request for repairs to sportsfields

Note: Related forms can be located Online under "Forms"

9. Attachments

- Attachment 1: Inspection Guidelines for Wet Weather closure

Policy Authorised by:

Name: Council Resolution 168

Date: 24 October 2023

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ATTACHMENT 1

Wet Weather Ground Inspection Guidance and Information

General Information

The Shellharbour Open Space and Recreation Needs Study (2020) identifies Shellharbour City Council has 29 active sport reserves that consist of a number of recreation facilities, catering to approximately 50 clubs and organisations. These facilities are under enormous pressure from continual use.

To ensure their playability and condition over the long term, some grounds may be closed from time to time. Playing on sportsgrounds that are wet can cause major damage that can result in grounds being closed for longer periods of time, impacting other user groups. Closing wet grounds prevents this damage and for the long-term sustainability of these assets for all users. Wet and damaged grounds also present safety issues for some sports.

Some grounds may remain closed even after raining stops because they require many days of continuous fine weather to dry out.

All grounds have different characteristics, such as soil type and drainage capacity and recover from rain at different rates. Some grounds may feel dry but still be wet underneath. Decisions to close grounds are based on; inspections, weather conditions and field characteristics. During periods of wet weather, Council staff inspect grounds to determine which are kept open and which are closed. If grounds are closed, follow up inspections continue until all the grounds are opened.

Council makes the decision to close grounds because:

- it is best placed to inspect grounds.
- it is responsible for managing risks associated with use of open space including ensuring grounds are safe.
- It is aware of all field needs of current and next season users.
- it will consider the impact of closures equitably.
- it has the technical expertise to assess wet grounds.
- it can communicate in a timely way with all users.

Two main issues need to be taken into account for ground closures due to wet weather:

1. **Player Safety** - while it is often considered that hard ground is the main concern in relation to player safety, slippery and heavy turf is also the cause of player injury. If grass dislodges easily players can find it hard to maintain footing and more unusual injuries can occur due to irregular movement and responses to the conditions. Another safety issue is dirty water in puddles. Stagnant water sitting in muddy puddles can carry bacteria that can cause illness. Council, Associations and Clubs have a duty of care and WH&S obligations to their players and must ensure the safety of players as their first priority.
2. **Substantial damage to grounds** - Council needs to ensure grounds are not damaged for 1 day's play which could see the ground closed for maintenance for a number of weeks. Council will consider the impact that a closure would have on current users and subsequent season users.

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Notification

During periods of wet weather, users of Sportsgrounds are encouraged to visit Council's website on www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au or phone 4221 6111 the day prior to the event for information regarding field closures. Council will aim to inspect grounds at the beginning of the week and before the weekend to give user groups notice to make changes to training and competition.

The following measures are to be used by Council as a guide to assess the suitability of grounds for play:

1. Surface Water

Competition and training must be cancelled if there is any surface water visible on the ground. The only exception to this would be if the area affected was small (less than 2m²), in a low usage/wear area and the rest of the ground is firm, and no other issues such as ground softness and poor grass cover are evident. Surface water means that the ground has reached saturation point and will be damaged very quickly if played on.

2. Ground Softness

Competition and training must be cancelled if there is any sinking into the field when walking on it and this does not bounce back or if when standing still/walking water rises up to the surface. The only exception to this would be if the only area affected was small (less than 2m²), in a low usage/wear area and the rest of the field was firm and poor grass cover is not an additional issue. Water rising to the surface when walking on it means that the ground has reached saturation point and will be damaged very quickly if played on.

3. Amount of Rainfall

Rainfall leading into competition and training should be used to guide decisions. If it has rained heavily or consistently leading up to training and/or competition then this should aid the decision to be made. Some grounds will take rain all week and be fine on the weekend for competition; other grounds will have no rain all week and rain the night before an event and will need to be cancelled. Council will take into consideration the rainfall during the week, the night before and the forecast for the day of training/competition when making decisions.

4. Soil profile and Drainage

Some grounds naturally drain better than others; this has to do with the soil profile below the surface. Sand based grounds (usually near the coast - sandy profile) drain quicker and more effectively than those on natural ground (away from the coast - heavier profile) or filled grounds (heaviest profile). Council has a historical reference of the drainage and amount of rainfall grounds can take, and this is considered when making decisions.

5. Grass cover

During the winter season grass cover can often get below 60% or 70% and be fine for play during dry weather. However, during wet weather if overall grass cover is below 70% then this ground is likely to wear more substantially under wet weather training and competition than grounds with more grass cover. If a decision is made to play or train on wet ground with low grass cover, then this may cause damage to the ground that will take a long time to fix. This may impact other users that want to use ground in subsequent season.

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6. Amount and type of activity

Council may give lower impact sports discretion to play on wet grounds. Lower impact sports include; athletics, baseball, cricket, netball, softball. Higher impact sports include; AFL, hockey, oz-tag, rugby league and union, soccer and touch.

Grounds can be damaged very quickly over 1 or 2 weekends with heavy use and wet weather. Also, juniors and seniors impact the ground differently and clubs need to understand the impact that different groups have on the grounds. Junior games could take place with less damage to the grounds (comparing 1 junior game to 1 senior game).

However, if the ground is just playable and there is a significant amount of games to be played which will cause the ground to deteriorate as the day goes on, Council will discuss with the club options to limit the number of games played.

7. Inspection of grounds

Grounds will be inspected at a minimum, twice a week. An assessment will be made before Tuesday afternoon each week to provide advice on grounds open for use to assist in the scheduling of training. Grounds will be inspected again by Friday afternoon to determine if grounds are suitable for weekend use. User groups may contact Council between these inspections if special consideration is required (e.g. mid-week School Athletic Carnival).

For further information contact:

Shellharbour City Council on 4221 6111.