ON-SITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2014

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The operation of a system of sewage management became a prescribed activity under the *Local Government Act 1993* on 6 April 1998. This change ensured that such a system cannot be operated lawfully without being given an Approval to Operate from the Local Council as per Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993*. The change also requires local councils to regulate the performance and operation of all on-site sewage management facilities in their local government areas.

An Approval to Operate an On-Site Sewage Management (OSSM) system is issued to the landowner and not to the property.

Section 44 of the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* sets the performance standards that must be met for the operation of an on-site sewage management system. Section 45 of the Regulation outlines additional operational requirements that must be followed by householders in order to obtain and keep their Approval to Operate an OSSM system.

In the Tamworth Regional Council area it is estimated that there are approximately 6,000 OSSM systems. These systems range from conventional septic systems to secondary treatment systems such as aerated wastewater treatment systems (AWTS) and composting toilets. Many systems in the Tamworth Regional Council area are located in high risk sensitive environments close to rivers, creeks, and underground water supplies. The number of OSSM systems is continually increasing as more development occurs in rural and semi-rural areas. Consistent control and regulation of such systems is essential in order to minimise potential negative impacts on the environment and public health.

This Strategy will be used to assess, regulate and manage the design, installation, operation and maintenance of OSSM systems. The intention is to identify the requirements of the legislation and provide a flexible approach to on-site sewage management by using a risk based criteria to determine an appropriate frequency of inspections for systems to ensure their continued compliance with the legislation. The Strategy ensures that landowners with OSSM systems are afforded the best opportunity to hold a current Approval to Operate. It represents a best practice system of management for Tamworth Regional Council, whilst complying with the legislative requirements and aims to continue Council's involvement in educating the community to achieve sustainable on-site sewage management practices within the local government area.

This Strategy supersedes the *On-Site Sewage Management Strategy* formulated by the Tamworth Regional Council in 2008.

1.2 Scope

This Strategy applies to all on-site sewage management systems in the Tamworth Regional Council local government area that do not directly discharge into Tamworth Regional Council sewer mains, and are not regulated under a pollution control licence by the Environmental Protection Authority.

An OSSM system consists of a sewage management facility and, where applicable, its related effluent application area (land application area).

The Regulation defines a "sewage management facility" as:

- a human waste storage facility; and
- a waste treatment device intended to process sewage;

and includes a drain connected to such a facility or device.

The Regulation defines a "related effluent application area" as the area of land:

- where it is intended to dispose of the effluent and any by-products of sewage from the facility; or
- to which the effluent and by-products are intended to be applied.

For the purpose of this Strategy an on-site sewage management system includes but is not limited to the following:

- septic tank and absorption trench;
- septic tank and evapo-transpiration area (ETA);
- aerated wastewater treatment system;
- wet composting toilet with sand filter and/or wetland reed bed with sub-surface application system;
- waterless composting toilet and grey water treatment system;
- grey water treatment systems;
- septic tank with sand filter and/or constructed wetland/reed bed with sub-surface application system;
- septic tank and amended soil mound system;
- septic tank and pump-out well; and
- any other system that stores, treats and/or disposes of sewage and/or wastewater on-site.

Under the Regulation, to "operate a system of sewage management" means to hold or process, or re-use or otherwise dispose of, sewage or by-products of sewage (whether or not the sewage is generated on the premises on which the system of sewage management is located). This includes the use of artificial wetlands, transpiration mounds, trenches, vegetation and the like in related effluent application areas, and holding or processing sewage that is to be later discharged into a public sewer.

1.3 Goals

The aim of this *On-Site Sewage Management Strategy* is to provide a practical framework to effectively manage the installation and operational performance of all on-site sewage management systems installed throughout the Tamworth Regional Council area, while also ensuring that landowners have the appropriate Approval to Operate. To achieve this aim the following goals have been established:

- maintain a database of OSSM systems;
- maintain a regular inspection program of a representative sample of all OSSM systems to ensure that the systems and the associated land application areas comply with legislative requirements. The frequency of inspections will be determined by each system's risk classification;
- raise the awareness of property owners using OSSM systems with regard to the correct maintenance and operation of these systems, and the requirements for the replacement of existing systems;
- develop a partnership approach between Council, householders and service agents to ensure the ongoing effective operation of OSSM systems;
- consult with Aerated Wastewater Treatment System (AWTS) service agents in order to achieve uniformity and quality of service reports;
- ensure Council's approval criteria for the installation of new OSSM systems and system alterations are fit for purpose and represents best practice under the required legislation. This will ensure that provision is made for installation of the most appropriate and sustainable types of OSSM systems and that the impacts of such systems on the environment and public health will be minimal;
- maintain links between this Strategy and Council's *Annual Operational Plan* and other relevant planning instruments to ensure that the objectives of this Strategy are integrated with relevant planning processes; and
- ensure that all Council staff involved in the assessment of new OSSM systems and inspections of existing OSSM systems are aware of the objectives and goals of this Strategy and suitably trained to implement the Strategy appropriately.

1.4 Performance Standards

All systems of sewage management must be operated in a manner that achieves:

- the prevention of the spread of disease by micro-organisms;
- the prevention of the spread of foul odours;
- the prevention of contamination of ground and surface water;
- the prevention of degradation of soil and vegetation;
- the discouragement of insects and vermin;
- ensuring that persons do not come into contact with untreated sewage or effluent (whether treated or not) in their ordinary activities on the premises concerned;
- the minimisation of any adverse impacts on the amenity of the premises and surrounding lands,
- if appropriate, provision for the reuse of resources (including nutrients, organic matter and water); and

All systems of sewage management must be operated in accordance with relevant operating specifications and procedures (if any) for the type of sewage system and must allow the removal of any treated sewage (or by-product of sewage) in a safe and sanitary manner.

For inspections Council staff will use these performance standards to assess the level of compliance of OSSM systems.

It should be noted that where an OSSM fails for reasons beyond the control of the person managing the system of sewage management (such as fire, flood, earthquake), this is not considered a breach of performance standards.

1.5 Approval to Operate

In accordance with Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993*, a system of sewage management cannot be operated lawfully without an Approval to Operate from the local Council.

An Approval to Operate is issued to the landowner and not to the property.

If an owner or occupier of land is the holder of an Approval to Operate a system of sewage management on the land (being an approval that is in force), any other co-owner or occupiers of that land may operate the system of sewage management (without obtaining a further approval) in accordance with the conditions of the approval. However, if the land is sold (or disposed of by other means) it is necessary for the purchaser to make application for a new approval.

Except for new installations, change of ownership, or revocation of approvals, Council will issue Approvals to Operate on an annual basis following payment of a service fee.

Council is able to levy a service fee under Section 608(2) of the *Local Government Act 1993* for an approval to operate a system of sewage management. Section 107A of the Act provides that an application for an approval to operate is deemed to have been made on payment of the service fee. This fee is able to be listed as a separate item in the annual rates notice provided that the fee item and the funds when collected are separately specified and accounted for. It is noted that this is a separate service fee and is not an increase to the annual rates.

An Approval to Operate for any **new installations** and for any **change of ownership** will require an inspection by Council staff before an approval can be issued.

2. LEGISLATION AND GUIDELINES

This section outlines the relevant legislation, guidelines and standards that must be considered by Council in the management of new and existing OSSM systems.

2.1 Local Government Act 1993 & Local Government (General) Regulation 2005

The *Local Government Act 1993* and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* regulate the design, installation and operation of OSSM systems in New South Wales. Section 68 of the Act requires property owners to obtain Council's consent prior to the installation, construction or alteration of a human waste treatment device or storage facility and any drain connected to it.

The *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* sets out specific requirements for OSSM approvals including matters for Council consideration, performance standards and

circumstance where prior Council approval is not required. Division 4 of the Regulation incorporates the requirements for approval to operate an OSSM system.

Section 626 prescribes three penalty units for operating an OSSM system without prior Council approval. Section 627 prescribes three penalty units for operating an OSSM system otherwise than in accordance with the terms of Council approval. The value of a penalty unit is set by the *Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999* and currently stands at $110.

When OSSM systems fail to achieve the prescribed requirements, Council may deal with these non-compliances in several different ways. Section 124 of the *Local Government Act 1993* gives Council the authority to issue orders requiring a person:

- to comply with an approval (Order 30);
- to take action to maintain premises in a healthy condition (Order 21);
- to store, treat or dispose of waste (Order 22);
- not to use or permit a human waste storage facility to be used (Order 25); and
- to connect premises to a public sewer when that sewer is within 75 meters (Order 24).

Orders can be given to the owner or occupier of the premises or to the person responsible for the waste or the container in which the waste is stored. Failure to comply with an Order is an offence punishable by a fine of up to 20 penalty units.

In the case of environmental risk, Council staff members that have been empowered as authorised persons under the *Local Government Act 1993* may enter a premises for the purpose of conducting an inspection in accordance with Section 192 of the Act. When conducting inspections authorised persons have the power to take photographs in connection with the inspection, and require any persons at the premises to answer questions or furnish information in relation to the matter that is the subject of the inspection.

If entry to a premise is actively refused and an inspection to assess the system for compliance cannot be conducted by an authorised person, Council may commence enforcement action. Authorised persons may apply for a search warrant in accordance with Section 201 of the *Local Government Act 1993* in the instance that entry of an authorised person is refused. This can be done if it is reasonably suspected after the refusal of entry that the provisions of the Act or Regulation have been, or are being, breached in or on any premises. The issue of the warrant will allow the authorised person to enter the premises and search for evidence of a breach of the Act or Regulation, or the terms of an approval or order. A police officer may accompany and assist an authorised person executing a search warrant.

2.2 Environment and Health Protection Guidelines

The Department of Local Government released the document "*Environment and Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage Management for Single Households*" to assist councils to regulate the installation and operation of OSSM systems. The Guidelines are specified guidelines for the purposes of Section 23(a) of the *Local Government Act 1993*. This relates to Council's responsibility to consider the Guidelines when approving the installation, alteration, construction and operation of an OSSM system.

The Guidelines address the following areas:

- the regulatory framework of Council's operations, including legislation and development planning;
- the development of local OSSM strategies;
- administration and operational strategies;

- site evaluation including the site and soil assessment; and,
- system options and the operation of OSSM systems.

2.3 Australian Standards

The most current Australian Standards are referenced below. (**NB**: The Australian Building Codes Board. (2014) National Construction Code Volume Three – Plumbing Code of Australia, Canberra, references the Australian standards listed below in brackets.)

AS/NZS 1546.1:2008 – On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units – Part 1: Septic Tanks (AS/NZS 1546.1:1998)

This Standard identifies the performance requirements and criteria for septic tanks, specifies technical means of compliance and provides test specifications that allow septic tanks to be manufactured to comply with the Standard.

AS/NZS 1546.2:2008 – On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units – Part 2: Waterless composting toilets (AS/NZS 1546.2:2001)

This Standard covers the requirements of waterless composting toilets which are intended primarily as stand-alone units for residential use but may be suitable for non-residential applications.

AS/NZS 1546.3:2008 – On-site Domestic Wastewater Treatment Units – Part 3: Aerated wastewater treatment systems. (AS/NZS 1546.3:2001)

This Standard sets out performance, design, and installation requirements, means of compliance, requirements for operations and maintenance and specification for testing aerated wastewater treatment systems and associated fittings.

AS/NZS 1547:2012 – On-site Domestic Wastewater Management (AS/NZS 1547:2000)

This Standard identifies the performance statements that cover the overall design and sustainable management of OSSM systems. It provides the requirements for treatment units and their land application systems to achieve sustainable and effective on-site domestic wastewater management in order to protect public health and the environment.

2.4 NSW Health Accreditation Guidelines

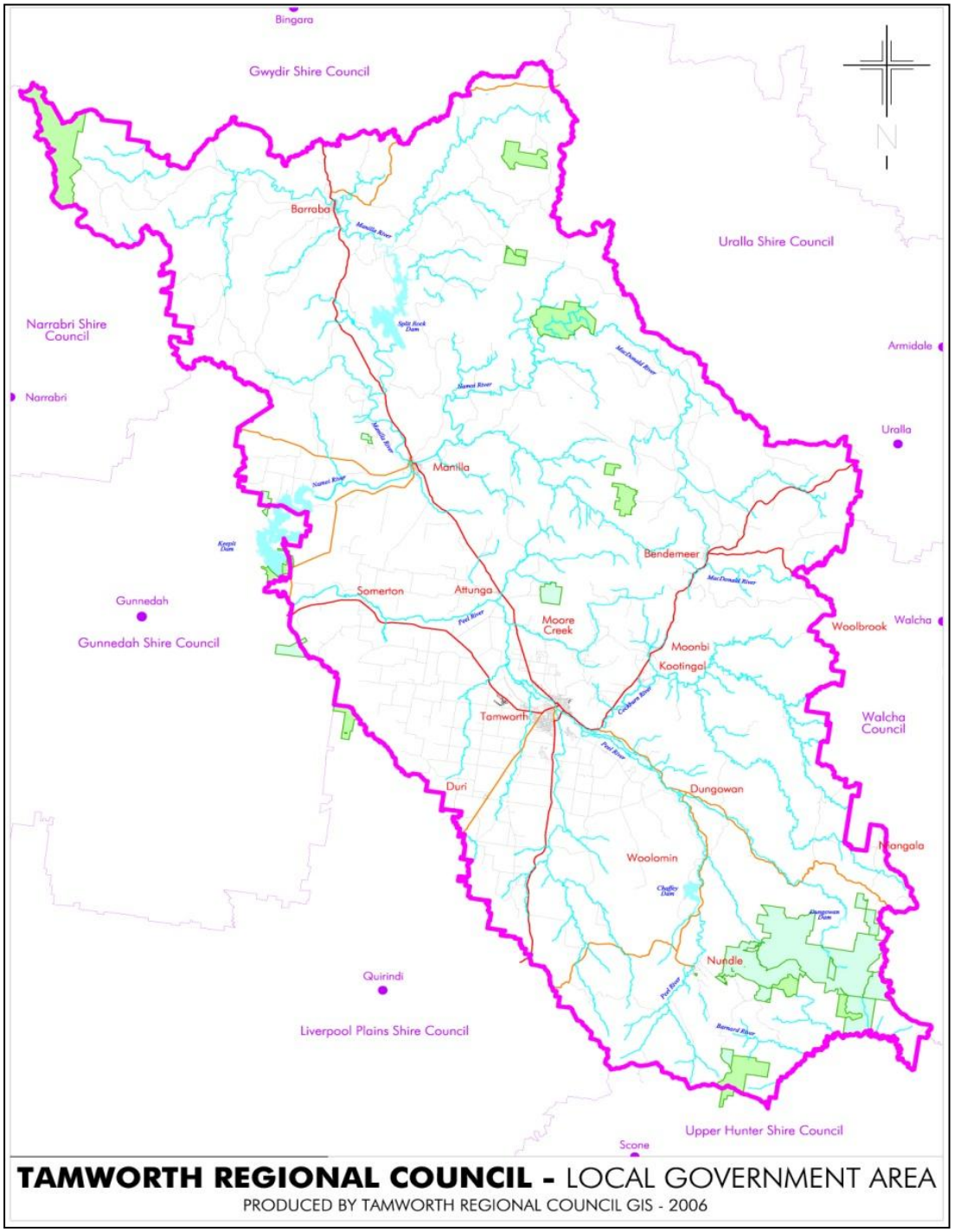
Clause 41(1) of the *Local Government Act 1993* states that councils must not approve the installation or construction of an OSSM system unless it has a current certificate of accreditation issued by the NSW Health Department. To facilitate the accreditation process the NSW Health Department has developed a range of accreditation guidelines for each type of OSSM facility. The guidelines are as follows:

- *Septic Tank and Collection Well Accreditation Guidelines December 2001* – (includes septic tanks, collection wells, septic closets, grey water tanks, CED pre-treatment tanks and sewage ejection pump stations).
- *Sewage Management Facility, Sewage Treatment Accreditation Guidelines* (incorporating AWTS and Sand Filters), May 2005.
- *Waterless Composting Toilet Accreditation Guideline*, May 2005.
- *Grey Water Reuse in Single Domestic Premises*, April 2000.
- *Domestic Grey Water Treatment Systems Accreditation Guidelines*, February 2005.

3. OSSM SYSTEM LOCATIONS AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Tamworth Regional Council local government area (LGA) covers some 9,655 km², as identified in **Map 1** below.

Map 1



This Strategy is relevant to a variety of locations in the Tamworth LGA, including but not limited to: Barraba, Manilla, Kootingal/Moonbi, Nundle, Bendemeer, Woolomin, Dungowan, Daruka/Moore Creek, Attunga, Somerton, and Kingswood.

As of July 2013, there were 3,468 existing approvals to operate OSSM systems in the Tamworth Regional Council area with an estimated 2,500 premises yet to be registered with Council. A final figure will not be confirmed until field audits have been completed.

Inspections will focus on high density population areas and areas close to environmentally sensitive receptors, whilst large rural farms and stations may be inspected at a later time.

The location and vulnerability of environmentally sensitive areas need to be considered when installing and operating OSSM systems.

The amount of surface water which infiltrates the ground and enters the water table is dependent on factors such as annual rainfall, air temperature, evaporation and soil structure. A substantial portion of surface waters enter streams and rivers, and groundwater also contributes to the flow in streams and creeks during extended periods of dry weather.

This close interaction between groundwater, river water, aquifers and surface waters highlights the importance of identifying and managing potential sources of surface water pollution from OSSM systems.

Micro-organisms including harmful bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens can be carried great distances through ground and surface waters. It is essential that the potential threats to public health and the environment from defective, poorly operated or maintained OSSM systems be identified and monitored and where necessary faults rectified.

The Tamworth Regional Council LGA contains a number of minor streams which drain into the Peel, Cockburn, Namoi, MacDonald and Manilla Rivers. Villages such as Bendemeer, Nundle and Woolomin have many OSSM systems which are located in close proximity to rivers. Many rural villages are not serviced with treated drinking water, and residents utilise bore water for domestic use and drinking water supplies. Many of the OSSM systems in these areas are conventional septic tanks, with only a small proportion of these communities serviced by newer AWTS systems. All of these factors, in combination with relatively poor soil quality for effluent dispersion, results in these areas being identified as higher risk for potential public health and environmental harm.

4. ASSESSMENT OF RISK

In order to conduct effective and ongoing inspections of OSSM systems within the Tamworth Regional Council LGA, all systems are classified as high, medium or low risk depending on the potential environmental or public health risk they pose. The main considerations in determining the risk category include:

- location and size of land (e.g. village allotments, farms);
- system design, condition and observed performance;
- the amount of wastewater generated (the hydraulic load). This depends on factors such as the number of people occupying the house and the type of water supply utilised (e.g. town water, rainwater tank, bore water);
- soil type;
- vegetation coverage;
- slope of land in the application area;
- distance to watercourses, drains and property boundaries;
- surface or subsurface discharge of effluent; and
- risk of flooding.

Table 1 below is used by Council staff during the inspection process to assess each system and provide it with a suitable risk classification.

Once each system has been given a risk classification, compliance inspections are carried out at an interval which is appropriate to the individual system's risk category and operational status.

Risk classifications can be re-assessed from time to time, such as when conditions change or system operation is improved.

An Approval to Operate an OSSM system can be revoked at any time if complaints relating to the system are received and verified by Council. This applies to high, medium and low risk systems.

It should be noted that for the first 12 months of operation by a new owner or for the first 12 months of a new system, the system is given an interim approval and while not allocated a risk category are effectively considered high risk. This is due to the system being commissioned for use and subject to capacity testing requirements. When a new system is installed a follow up within 12 months is required to ensure that the system has been adequately graded for use and that the system is able to support peak and overload flows. Following re-inspection at the end of this period the system will be re-assessed as a high, medium or low risk category.

Table 1: Classification of OSSM System Risk

Distance from	permanent waterway (river, stream, creek, dams)	>300m	100-300m	<100m
	temporary waterway (intermittent gully or creek)	>100	40-100	<40
	well or bore used for domestic purposes	NIL	>100	<50
	Closest boundary of a neighbouring property to effluent disposal area	>100	<100 and >20	<20
Land area		>10ha	1500$m^2$to 10ha	<1500m^2
Flood liable?		NO	NO	YES
Meets performance standards/no history of ongoing problems?		YES	YES	NO
Effluent ponding on ground surface/wet soggy disposal area		NO	NO	YES
(Aerated Systems) Are service reports, including information on disposal area, received regularly?		YES	YES	NO
System other than standard septic or AWTS		NO	NO	YES
Condition of tank and infrastructure		Good	Good	Poor
CATEGORY		**LOW RISK**	**MEDIUM RISK**	**HIGH RISK**

4.1 High Risk Systems

Systems that have the potential for significant environmental risk in the event of failure are deemed high risk.

Systems that in the event of failure have the potential to cause negative impacts on neighbouring properties, local water bodies, or environmentally sensitive areas due to poorly treated sewage leaving the approved OSSM system, are deemed high risk.

A system may be assessed as being high risk if it meets the following criteria:

- the system is less than 100m from permanent surface waters;
- the system is located less than 50m from a well or bore used for domestic purposes;
- the system is less than 40m from temporary water ways;
- the system is located on a property less than 1500m^2 in size;
- the system is situated on a flood-liable area according to current flood mapping data;
- the disposal or land application area is within 20m of a property boundary;
- the property has had a history of problems associated with the on-site system or the initial inspection reveals that it has not recently been operating in accordance with performance standards;
- any system which is not a regular septic tank or AWTS (e.g. pump out system or common effluent line);
- the tank condition is poor and the tank will need significant repairs or replacement within the next 12 months;
- the owners of the system have demonstrated a lack of knowledge as to how to properly maintain the system, do not undertake regular maintenance or have not agreed to provide Council with documentation of on-going and regular maintenance upon request.

Council will endeavour to inspect High Risk systems for compliance with the legislation ideally on an annual basis but no less than every three (3) years. Inspection fees and, where relevant, re-inspection fees, will apply. The system must be operating in accordance with the Performance Standards (see 1.4), before compliance can be achieved.

High risk systems located on public land with unrestricted public access will also be inspected ideally on an annual basis but no less than every three (3) years. Such systems include those connected to public toilets and bathroom facilities located in environmentally sensitive areas, and existing cesspits in publicly accessed and environmentally sensitive areas. This is required as the loading capacity of these systems cannot be accurately determined, and this in turn presents an increased potential for the system to fail.

As it currently stands many of these systems are traditional septic systems and are still functioning within their capacity. If it is found during routine inspections that these systems are failing and rectification works are required, the standard procedures for upgrade or repair works which pertain to all systems will apply.

4.2 Medium Risk Systems

Systems which have a potential for failure but with a lower risk factor of negative consequences on environmental and public health are deemed medium risk.

A system may be assessed as being medium risk if it meets the following criteria:

- the system is not situated on a flood-liable area;
- the system does not produce effluent that settles in a pond on the ground surface;
- the system does not have a recent history of problems and inspection does not reveal evidence of recent failure to comply with performance standards;
- the system is located on a property greater than 1500m² but less than ten (10) hectares;
- the disposal or land application area is located less than 100m but greater than 20m from the boundary of a neighbouring property;
- the system is greater than 100m but less than 300m from permanent surface water;
- the system is greater than 40m but less than 100m from non permanent waters;
- the system located more than 100m from a well or bore used for domestic purposes; and
- the owners of the system have demonstrated knowledge of how to properly maintain the system, undertake regular maintenance and agreed to provide Council with documentation of on-going and regular maintenance upon request, as determined by an initial inspection.

Council will endeavour to inspect medium risk systems for compliance with the legislation ideally every five (5) years but no less than every ten (10) years. Inspection fees and, where relevant, re-inspection fees, will apply. The system must be operating in accordance with the Performance Standards (see 1.4), before compliance can be achieved.

4.3 Low Risk Systems

Systems which present a low environmental and public health risk should they fail to operate correctly are deemed low risk. They are generally located on large land holdings in remote areas where there will be minimal impact on surrounding neighbours and environmentally sensitive areas. Low risk systems may also have large land application areas and/or low wastewater generation rates.

A system may be assessed as being low risk if it meets the following criteria:

- the system is greater than 300m from permanent surface water;
- the system is greater than 100m from non permanent waters;
- the disposal or land application area is greater than 100m from the boundary of a neighbouring property;
- the system does not produce effluent that settles in a pond on the ground surface;
- the system is located on a property greater than ten hectares;
- the system is located more than 250m from a well or bore used for domestic purposes;
- the system is not situated on a flood liable area; and
- the owners of the system have demonstrated knowledge of how to properly maintain the system, undertake regular maintenance and agreed to provide Council with

documentation of on-going and regular maintenance upon request, as determined by an initial inspection.

The system must be operating in accordance with the Performance Standards (see1.4) to be classified as low risk.

Low risk systems in continuous ownership are not subject to a programmed inspection cycle. However, random inspections of low risk systems may be undertaken as a precaution to ensure the process is effective. The initial inspection will be at no charge, however, if it is found that the system is failing then re-inspection fees will apply and the low risk rating may be changed.

5. OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

5.1 Installation of New or Altering of Existing Systems

Any person wishing to install or alter an OSSM system is required to make an application to Council in accordance with Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993.* The installation of new or altered OSSM system requires that consideration be given to the potential risk category of the system, as this may determine the level of treatment required for the wastewater. Systems in high risk areas may need secondary treatment, while those in low risk areas may be well suited to primary treatment only. The application for installation of a new system is assessed by Council in accordance with the relevant *Australian Standards*, *Environment and Health Protection Guidelines* and the *NSW Health Accreditation Guidelines*.

All new or upgraded systems are required to be installed according to the *2014 National Construction Code Series Volume Three – Plumbing Code of Australia*. Once installed a final inspection will be conducted by Council's building inspectors (Authorised Persons, as delegated by the Plumbing Regulator) to ensure all requirements of the installation approval have been fulfilled.

If it is determined that all requirements have been met an Approval to Operate will be issued for the remainder of the financial year. At the commencement of the new financial year the Approval to Operate will revert to an annual service fee and will be charged via the Rate notice as per Section 1.5 of this strategy.

All newly installed systems will be given an interim 12 month risk rating. This allows the system to undergo a thorough operational assessment once it has been used consistently for a period of one year. Following re-inspection at the end of this period the system will be re-assessed as a high, medium or low risk category.

5.2 Change of Ownership Requirements

The approval to operate an OSSM system is issued to the owner of a property, not the property itself in accordance with the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005*. When a property is sold the new owner is responsible for lodging a change of ownership application form with Council and paying the change of ownership fee within three months of the date of transfer. Once this has been completed a compliance inspection of the system will be conducted and an inspection fee will be charged.

If the new property owner has had a recent pre-purchase compliance inspection conducted on the OSSM system they will still need to lodge a change of ownership application form with Council and pay the associated fee. Provided that the pre-purchase inspection did not

indicate any failure to comply with the performance standards, an additional inspection will not be required.

If the change of ownership form is not submitted within three months of transfer a compliance inspection of the system may have to be conducted for an inspection fee as the operation of the system may have changed significantly with the change of ownership.

If it is determined that the system complies with the performance standards an Approval to Operate will be issued for the remainder of the financial year. At the commencement of the new financial year the Approval to Operate will revert to an annual service fee and will be charged via the Rate notice as per Section 1.5 of this strategy.

All existing systems which are subject to a change in ownership will be given an interim 12 month risk rating. This allows the system to undergo a thorough operational assessment once it has been used consistently for a period of one year. Following re-inspection at the end of this period the system will be re-assessed as a high, medium or low risk category.

5.3 Failing Systems

Failure is deemed to have occurred when an OSSM system does not achieve the performance standards listed in Section 1.4 of this Strategy. This failure may result in adverse impacts on public health and/or the environment. If the inspection reveals that a system has failed and rectification works are required, Council will issue correspondence outlining the nature of the problem and Council requirements to rectify the problem. The period of time granted by Council to have the required works completed, will be based upon the scale of environmental or public health risk.

Council may revoke an Approval to Operate an OSSM system at any time if complaints relating to the system are received and verified by Council. This applies to high, medium and low risk systems.

Systems that are not accredited (for example pit (long drop) or pan toilets) are required to be included as failing systems when they are encountered during the inspection process. This is because they cannot meet the required performance standards. If these systems are encountered, rectification works will be required and Council officers will advise how compliance can be achieved. A section 68 approval will be required in these instances for alteration or installation of a new system.

Owners of systems which experience failure may be supported with advice and educational material regarding the best practice in operating and maintaining the OSSM system. This may include advice on the use of water saving devices, stormwater diversion and controls, and system pump-out procedures. System failures may result in Council issuing Orders to conduct works, as previously outlined in Section 2.1 of this Strategy.

In the instance that major rectification works are required, such as the installation of new absorption trenches, a new tank, or an entirely new system, approval must be sought and granted from Council in accordance with Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993*. This approval must be granted prior to the commencement of any work. In such cases, Section 5.1 of this Strategy applies.

5.4 Inspection Procedures and Frequency

Prior to any inspections, if Council is aware of any new owners or owners of properties that have previously not been inspected, the property owners will be notified in writing and given a minimum of one week's notice prior to Council Officers undertaking an inspection.

For all other inspections or re-inspections of OSSM systems Council Officers will normally attend the property without written notification.

Council is not required to provide written notice if the entry to the premises is made with the verbal consent of the owner or occupier of the premises at the time, or if entry to the premises is required because of the existence or reasonable likelihood of a risk to health or safety.

Systems will be inspected at a frequency which is determined by their risk classification. Council will endeavour to inspect

- High risk systems ideally once per year but no less than every three (3) years;
- Medium risk systems ideally once every five (5) years but no less than every ten (10) years; and
- Low risk systems have no pre-determined inspection frequency and may be randomly inspected as time and resources permit.

Following any inspection, the landowner will be provided with written correspondence that includes the reasons for the inspection, the findings of the inspection and relevant material to support the performance of OSSM systems.

5.5 Fees and Charges

The fees and charges issued by Council for the approval to install and operate OSSM systems are issued to the owner/occupier of property. Fees and charges relevant to OSSM approvals and inspections are included in Council's *Annual Operational Plan - Schedule of Fees and Charges*. All fees and charges are issued in accordance with Section 608 of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

The fee system has three separate parts:

1. *Fees for Approval to Operate an OSSM system*

   Council will charge an annual service fee as a separate item in the annual rates notice of all properties with an OSSM system.

2. *Fees for Performance Standard Compliance Inspections*

   Council will invoice landowners each time a High or Medium Risk OSSM system is inspected. If the inspection reveals that the system is failing and requires rectification works, re-inspection fees may apply. There is no initial inspection fee for Low Risk properties however, if there are issues identified during any inspections, re-inspection fees will apply.

3. *Fees for the Installation of New or Alteration of Existing Systems*

   Fees related to Section 68 applications and their associated inspections apply. Application fees are paid up front and further inspection fees (minimum of two inspections plus travel costs) will apply.

4. *Fees for Change of Ownership*

   Council will invoice new landowners to process the change in ownership. This fee includes the approval to operate for the remainder of the current financial year. If an inspection is required, inspection fees may apply.

5.6 Education

Council will undertake educational initiatives including providing online advice on the Council webpage and preparing information leaflets to help support landowners to manage their OSSM systems. It should be remembered that owners of OSSM systems are responsible for ensuring that their OSSM complies with the performance standards detailed in Section 1.4 of this strategy.

Landowners will be encouraged to undertake regular maintenance of their systems to reduce the risk of breaching the required performance standards. For example, tanks should be periodically pumped out to remove built up sludge, checked for any visible cracks, broken caps or vent covers, signs of leakage, signs of root intrusion and any problems identified must be rectified and water conservation measures will improve the overall functioning of the systems.

6. DELIVERY OF THIS STRATEGY

The successful delivery of the strategy will be measured against the following Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):

- Number of OSSM inspections per year = 400;
- This will be split up into the following proportions of each risk group:
    - High Risk = 70% (~280 systems) (including all interim approved systems);
    - Medium Risk = 25% (~100 systems);
    - Low Risk = 5% (~20 systems)
- Maintenance of a current database.

7. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Tamworth Regional Council is committed to continuous improvement in the regulation and operation of OSSM systems. This Strategy will be reviewed if any significant changes to relevant technology, legislation or guidelines occur. It will be reviewed, at a minimum, on a 5-yearly basis.

8. GLOSSARY

AWTS	Aerated Wastewater Treatment System; a wastewater treatment process typically consisting of: • Primary Settling of solids and flotation of scum; • Secondary oxidation and consumption of organic matter through aeration; • Clarification —additional settling of solids; and • Disinfection of wastewater before surface irrigation. • Mechanical operation of air pumps and pressure pumps which must be serviced quarterly
De-sludging	Withdrawing sludge, scum and liquid from a tank by a qualified service agent licensed to transport and dispose of liquid waste
Effluent	Wastewater discharging from a sewage management facility.
Groundwater	All underground waters.
Land Application Area	The area over which treated wastewater is applied
Pathogens	micro-organisms that are potentially disease-causing include but are not limited to bacteria, protozoa and viruses
Septic Tank	Wastewater treatment device that provides a preliminary form of treatment for wastewater, comprising sedimentation of solids, floatation of oils and fats, and anaerobic digestion of sludge.
Trench	An absorption trench located below ground level designed to transpire and absorb effluent discharged from a septic tank. A trench must be installed correctly or pollution of ground water can occur.

9. REFERENCES

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