

EXCELLENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENT AWARDS



Water Sensitive Urban Design Compliance Program

COUNCIL NAME

Blacktown City Council

WEB ADDRESS

www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

247 square kilometres

POPULATION

382,831

Overview

Blacktown City Council's compliance program aims to check ongoing operation of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) devices installed on private properties. It is the only program of its type in Australia, and it has increased compliance rates from 18% to 80% for 337 devices across over 20 properties.

Background

Compliance of privately-owned WSUD devices is an issue within Blacktown, and across Australia more broadly. A recent study into the compliance rates within the Parramatta River catchment found only 20% of devices are appropriately managed and maintained. 4 in 5 devices are therefore likely resulting in stormwater leaving these sites unmitigated, leading to pollution and degradation of waterway health and increased risk of localised flooding.

Blacktown City Council first began the WSUD compliance program in 2012/13 to attempt to address the issue. However, a review in 2019 identified significant inefficiencies and information gaps, leading to a transition of the program. For example, the inspection-based approach was impractical as several hundred properties had more than one WSUD device. Council has now moved to a reporting-based approach requiring the property owners to report on device condition, which determines whether maintenance is required.

Implementation

Over the past 12 months, Council has been trialling the new compliance program funded by the stormwater service charge. The trial covers 20 randomly selected properties with 337 devices. A new system has been adopted to collect, track and analyse the WSUD data for each property.

The 2019 review identified a knowledge gap among private property owners and contractors regarding WSUD systems and the legal requirements. Council developed an education package and a toolkit of resources to address this gap, including a welcome pack, factsheets and guidelines. These highlight critical information about WSUD, the compliance program and how to safely inspect and maintain WSUD devices.

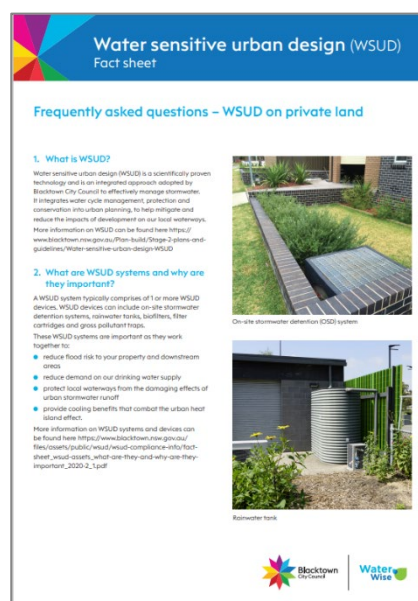
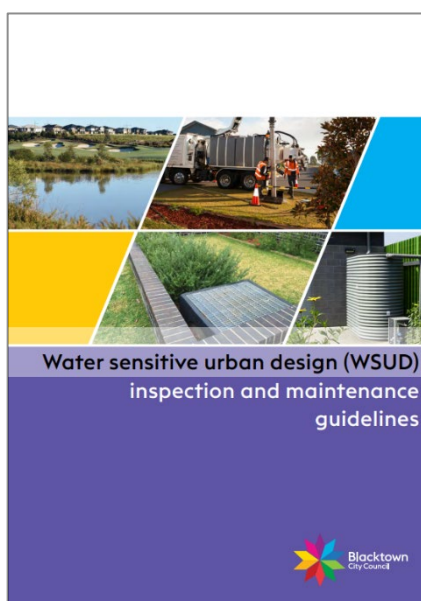
Council has also been working directly with landholders to ensure they clearly understand their legal obligations. Templates have been provided to assist with associated processes such as the documentation required for the WSUD development application stage.

Outcomes

Over the 12 months since the program trial was initiated, there has been an improved compliance rate from 18% to 80% across the 20 properties. Over 1 tonne of litter and 3,000 litres of pollutants were removed from 11 properties that would have otherwise ended up in waterways.

The success of transitioning to a reporting-based program over the last year has meant that there have been opportunities to identify a much larger database of privately maintained WSUD systems. The program has identified a further 120 properties that have a WSUD maintenance schedule assigned with an additional 359 devices that can be included in the program.

Many councils across NSW and Australia have expressed significant interest in the program. Blacktown City Council has presented information on 6 occasions to 4 symposiums/webinars reaching 300 people and to 2 industry conferences. Staff are also currently working on a WSUD Compliance manual that will be available to all councils as a guide for how to set up this program, including lessons learnt along the journey.



Key Learnings

Challenges experienced in operating the program include the relatively high administrative load. Currently reports are individually reviewed and compliance data is entered manually for each property. Non-compliance events were difficult to accurately track and required significant time spent following up with property owners.

Lessons learned over the last year identified improvements that will allow automating some of these functions to remove the need to review every report. These include moving to a software-based interface for property owners and implementing an audit-based review. Compliance will instead be tracked from data provided by the software and automatic notifications sent to owners for non-compliance events.

Transitioning to a software-based interface would offer a better return on investment of effort and allow more scope to include a larger number of properties, improve customer service and directly benefit ongoing management of waterways. It would also allow council to focus on directly supporting property owners.

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This project was the 2023 winner of the 'Water Management Award' at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.

This award was supported by our category partner the Water Directorate.