



CLOSURE OF SPORTS FIELDS AND RECREATIONAL AREAS

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Responsible Director:	Director Engineering
Functional Area:	Services Engineering

BACKGROUND

Council maintains various forms of sporting fields and recreation reserves on behalf of the community. Council recognises that it has an obligation to maximise the sustainable use of these facilities and to accommodate competing demands for use of them on an equitable basis.

Council manages a diverse range of sporting fields accommodating a variety of sports. Due to this diversity, a 'Sports Field Closure' policy is required to regulate who is responsible for determining whether a sporting field should remain open for use or not.

Council attempts to provide the best possible playing surfaces to sporting fields throughout the year for all user groups and members of the public.

There will be times when inclement weather, large rain events, maintenance and unforeseen circumstances will prompt the closure of our sporting fields and/or recreation reserves to ensure the surface condition is protected and maintained.

However, the Council's aim will be to minimise such closures and it will work closely with the local sporting clubs and schools to ensure these closures have minimal impact on the community.

PURPOSE

To define the process for the closure of sporting fields or recreation reserves that are under the Council's control.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure the sustainable use of Council's sporting fields while providing equitable access to training and playing facilities for local sporting clubs, schools and recreational use by the public.
- Optimise the utilisation of Council's limited sporting facilities; and
- Protect sporting fields infrastructure against wear and tear that may result from overuse or wet weather conditions.

POLICY STATEMENT

This policy applies to Council managed sporting grounds and recreational areas across the Shire with a particular emphasis on the premier sporting grounds in Junee being:

- Loftus Oval
- Laurie Daley Oval
- Burns Park

BASIS FOR CLOSURE

A decision by Council to close a sporting field should be based on:

- Safety and the potential for injury to players
- The sport played and the potential for damage to the playing surface
- The weather, during prolonged and /or extreme weather conditions (ie. severe drought, wet weather and /or flooding)
- The condition of the ground when inspected

Note: Irrespective of the above Council may, at any time, withdraw the use of the facility (or part thereof) if it is deemed to be unsuitable or in need of repair or maintenance.

PROVISIONS:

Closure by Council:

User groups do not have the authority to approve use of sporting fields when Council has closed them.

User Groups using closed fields will be liable for the cost of repairs and may be excluded for using the sports field until the field has been repaired.

Ground closure by Council can occur at short notice and will be communicated to individual sporting clubs /associations who primarily use the fields. The sporting club/association will be charged with the responsibility for the closure of a sporting field as directed by Council during periods of prolonged wet weather and or drought.

To assist in communicating the status of the sporting field closure or re-opening to user groups Council will provide 'Ground Closed' signs at all sporting fields. In accordance with this Policy, the sporting club/association is responsible for appropriate positioning so that all coaches and players associated with the user group will know whether the facility is 'open' or 'closed'.

A notice will be lodged on Council's web page and social media page advising any sporting field closure (ie. those closed by Council).

Closure by User Group or referees:

The closure of sporting fields by a user group or referees is restricted to sporting fields that are deemed unsafe to play on. The Council shall be notified of any decision to close a sporting field by a user group or referee.

The decision to close a sporting field by a user group relates to sporting activities under their direct control.

Registered sporting referees or umpires who are in control of an organised sporting match may also choose to close sports fields to prevent injury to players. When this occurs, club representatives should erect the grounds closed sign and contact the affected visiting clubs and teams.

Criteria used to assess sporting field condition

Council will make a determination as to whether Councils sporting fields should remain opened or closed. If a decision is made to close a particular sporting field, user groups must abide by that decision.

An inspection to reopen a sporting field that has been closed will usually be made the following day. Where a specified closure period has been determined that period shall take precedence.

Council decides to close sports fields based on:

- The potential for injury to players.
- The type of sport played and the potential for damage to the playing surface.
- The weather forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology.
- The condition of the ground when inspected.
- When inclement weather occurs, Council officers will inspect and assess the turf/field conditions using the following criteria:
 - The amount of precipitation that has occurred.
 - The presence of standing water on the field.
 - Drainage capabilities of the field/site.
 - Damage that could occur if the fields were to remain open for use.
 - How many field closures have there been recently
 - The time of year and the cumulative amount of stress on the field.

ALLOCATION OF USER GROUPS ACTIVITIES TO SPORTING FIELDS

The Junee Sports Committee Inc. is the peak body who provide support to local sporting associations and the Council. They provide a holistic view towards improving participation in sport, training and advice for committees and determine the allocation for the use of sporting fields for competition, training nights and events.

RESTRICTIONS AS TO SPORTING ACTIVITY AT CERTAIN SPORTING FIELDS

Sporting Activity at Burns Park

Burns Park is used primarily for soccer and to a lesser extent, cricket. Burns Park also provides additional sporting fields to facilitate the Riverina Schoolboys Football Carnival.

In 2017 one of the fields suffered visible wear and tear as a result of overuse that required its closure for 10 weeks to permit for the turf to grow back.

To help guide user groups in operating sporting carnival and events outside of standard home and away competitions the following restriction are in place to help protect the playing surface at

Burns Park. Burns Park has two sporting fields and the following table allocates time frames to apply to each field.

	Junior aged u/12 or less	Older age groups
Rugby league/league tag	Total match time 4.5hrs/day	Not permitted without Council approval
Soccer	Total match time 6.0hr/day	Total match time 6.0hr/day

These controls provide a level of certainty for organizing committees while providing a level of protection to the playing surface by restricting the daily time that fields are in use. They are subject to any other Council direction regarding the use or closure from an inspection by Council Officers as to the condition or suitability of the sporting field related to this policy.

Where separate approval has been provided by Council to a user group the Council may issue 'Terms and Conditions for Use of its Sporting Fields - specifying requirements for 'Ground Inspection' and 'Ground Closure'.

PENALTY- FAILURE TO ABIDE BY GROUND CLOSURE RULING

The procedure for fining or restricting a user group shall be as follows:

- Damage will be inspected and photographed.
- Establish culpability in consultation with the user group.
- Determine the fine based on the cost to restore the sports fields.
- Issue the fine in writing to the offending user group.

If a fine is imposed and not paid the offending user group will not be permitted to use any Council controlled sporting field.

Note: In some instances where damage to the ground is excessive, Council may close the ground to enable necessary remediation works to be undertaken.

TERMS:

User Group Local Sporting Club/Association, School or hirer

VERSION CONTROL AND CHANGE HISTORY

Version	Date	Action
V1.0	26/6/2018	Adoption of Policy