

Sports Facility Closure Policy

1. Introduction

Council manages an array of sportsgrounds with varying playing surfaces, soil types, drainage and irrigation infrastructure which accommodate an assortment of sports with distinct playing requirements. Due to this diversity the assessment of sporting grounds for their capacity to cater for use is not a one size fits all approach.

This policy describes the considerations and principles for the closure of sporting fields and associated facilities. The aim of the policy is to provide equitable access and safe playing conditions for users while sustainably managing available sports facilities.

2. Policy Objectives

This policy aims to define the conditions of use when sports fields are recommended for closure during inclement weather and/or rectification/renovation works/other needs. It provides clear direction as to the accountability of user groups and ensures access to Council's sports fields is maximised for community use.

Council's priority is to provide equitable and sustainable provision and allocation of grounds that are fit for purpose. Council applies a risk management approach to the management of grounds and in particular to the decision to close sportsground facilities when ground conditions dictate.

This policy provides a clear framework for decision making regarding sportsgrounds closures in order to:

- To provide a responsible, consistent, transparent, and equitable process for the use of
- Council sports fields and associated facilities
- Pro-actively manage sportsgrounds in order to prevent damage and over-use, ensuring the long-term sustainability of multi-purpose sportsgrounds
- Ensure the safety and well-being for all users of the grounds
- To provide certainty and accurate and timely information to the community concerning sportsgrounds closures across the Yass Valley local government area
- To provide agreed principles to prioritise use and management of sports fields and associated facilities managed and/or owned by Council
- To provide clear direction which is consistent with other Council policies, local laws, and relevant legislation, affecting the use of sports fields and facilities, including the Community Sports Facility Booking Policy.

3. Scope

This policy applies to sports grounds and associated facilities located within the Yass Valley local government area which are owned and/or directly managed by Council.

4. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Damage	Physical harm to the turf surface/playing surface and /or soil profile, above and beyond normal wear and tear that forces a ground to be closed by Council and rectification works to be undertaken.
Rectification Works	Works undertaken by Council to repair damage to the playing surface of the sportsground outside of the programmed maintenance regime.
User Group	Any peak body, club/association, school, or hirer that has approval from Council to utilise its sportsgrounds.

5. Policy Provisions

5.1 Closure Considerations

Council has the authority to close any sportsground facility should they be damaged, adversely affected by wet weather, planned scheduled works or operational and other needs.

User groups do not have the authority to use grounds during the closure for any training or competition purposes including the area surrounding each sportsground. Use of the sportsground when the surface is wet dramatically increases the damage to the ground surface. Council will restrict lighting access to sporting grounds during closure periods.

Any user group in breach of this policy will (at the discretion of Council) be charged per offence as outlined in Section 9 – Penalties and Council’s Fees and Charges.

The decision to close facilities is not one that is taken lightly. It is accepted that a range of considerations may trigger closures as outlined below.

- Current condition of sportsgrounds/facilities. Council will undertake visual and physical inspections to determine subsoil moisture, grass coverage, existing damage or wear and the risk of unacceptable impacts
- The weather, during prolonged and/or extreme weather conditions (e.g. severe drought, wet weather and/or flooding) based on data from the Bureau of Meteorology
- Safety and the potential for injury to users
- The sport played and the potential for damage to the playing surface
- Closure classification – It is acknowledged that different sporting uses and levels of competition and training have varying impacts on playing surfaces and that some sportsgrounds are more resilient to damage than others. Council will investigate any potential closure to determine if the closure is to be applied to all facilities within the Yass Valley local government area or to individual facilities only.

5.2 Guidance for User Groups

As outlined in this policy Council will close grounds where required on a case-by-case basis. In instances where Council has deemed grounds will remain open after a wet weather event or where unexpected rainfall eventuates and closures cannot be implemented at short notice, it is the responsibility of the user group to deem the facility safe for their intended purpose. User groups may choose to suspend training or play to prevent injury to players or to protect the integrity of the playing surface.

In all circumstances, user groups will need to determine the fitness of a sportsground for training/play according to their own policies and risk considerations.

The following information is provided as a guide to assist user groups in making a decision to suspend play due to unsafe or unsuitable ground conditions.

Inspection of grounds

Grounds should be inspected by user groups, preferably the day before a booking, especially where there has been regular rain leading up to the event. All grounds should be inspected prior to training and match days with the following three main issues taken into account for grounds which may warrant suspension of training or play.

- **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. Safety issues relating to standing water should also be considered. Stagnant water sitting in muddy puddles can carry bacteria that can cause illness.
- **Substantial damage to grounds:** User groups need to consider the benefits of one day of training or match play and possible resulting damage to a sportsground, which could see that location closed requiring maintenance for a number of weeks and the effect of that decision making on other sports and codes. If in doubt, user groups are encouraged to cancel fixtures wherever possible. Exercising caution will ensure grounds are still suitable for play for the duration of the season.
- **Amount of rainfall:** Rainfall leading into training and competition should be considered. Due to varying composition of subsoils and other factors, some sportsgrounds can absorb heavy or persistent rainfall and remain fit for training or weekend competition; other grounds may be impacted by a rainfall event the night before training or a weekend fixture. User groups should take into consideration the rainfall during the week, the night before and the forecast for the day of training/competition when making decisions.

Any inspection for condition should consider:

- **Grass cover:** During winter grass cover will deteriorate, especially where repeated training is undertaken on specific parts of grounds. During wet weather, grounds are likely to wear more and if a decision is made train or play on wet ground with low grass cover, then this may cause significant damage to the field with consequences for future availability.
- **Ground softness:** It is recommended that clubs consider cancelling training/competition if there is any sinking into the field when walking on it or when standing still/walking water rises to the surface. The only exception to this would be if the area affected was small and the rest of the field was firm and poor grass cover is not an additional issue.
- **Surface water:** It is recommended that user groups consider suspending training/competition if there is any surface water visible on the field. The appearance of surface water means that the ground has reached a saturation point of 100% and the surface will be damaged very quickly if used. The exception to this would be if the area affected was small and the rest of the ground was firm, and no other issues such as ground softness and poor grass cover are evident.

- **Amount and type of activity:** A full day competition will have a significant impact during wet weather. Grounds can be damaged very quickly over 1 or 2 weekends with heavy use and wet weather. Juniors and seniors impact the ground differently, with junior levels generally causing less impact. User groups may decide to prioritise junior games over senior games for the long-term benefit of the sport when it comes to making decisions about cancelling games. Alternatively, user groups may decide to prioritise the higher-level fixtures if this is their priority to manage impacts to planned fixtures.

6. Review

This policy will be reviewed once each term of Council or as needed in response to any change of circumstances including changes in legislation.

7. Legislative and Legal Framework

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following:

Legislation	Local Government Act 1993
Policies and procedures	Yass Valley Council Community Sport Facility Booking Policy 2024 (DRAFT)

8. Responsibilities

Council Officers will:

- Inform of ground closures as soon as a decision has been made via social media, email correspondence and signage erected at affected facilities
- Work with user groups to reach the best possible arrangements
- Provide all necessary administrative support for the operation of this policy
- Develop and document any procedures for the effective implementation of this policy
- Keep sufficient records to enable monitoring of compliance with this policy and provide information required for Integrated Planning and Reporting purposes and internal organisational performance measurement.

User Groups will:

- Not use a facility for any activity at any time during a closure period
- Inspect and evaluate grounds for suitability of use prior to training/competition
- Inform Council if upon inspection the grounds are not fit for purpose
- Work with shared users in a positive and supportive manner

9. Penalties

The following steps will be undertaken where a user group has failed to abide by Council's Sports Facility Closure Policy.

Council will:

- Inspect the sports ground
- Establish culpability in consultation with the user group/s and notify the relevant party in writing of the damage to the facility and the Council's completed or intent to undertake rectification works
- Charge a penalty fee based on the fee structure outlined within Council's Fees and Charges document and any additional costs for any rectification works
- Issue an invoice for the penalty fee and rectification works in writing to the user group involved
- Resume the responsibility of scheduled maintenance and monitor for ground closures

If penalty fees are not paid within the terms of the invoice the user group may be denied access to Council facilities.

10. Approval History

Review Date	Report to Council	Minute No.	Exhibition Period	Adoption	Rescission Date

11. Ownership and Approval

Responsibility	Role
Author	Recreational Assets
Owner	Recreational Assets
Endorser	Executive Management Team
Approver	Council