On-site Sewage (Septic) Management System

### On-site Sewage Management Legislation

Properties where connection to town sewer is not available rely on on-site sewage management systems (OSMS) to treat and dispose of effluent on-site.

On-site sewage management (OSM) involves the treatment of household wastewater followed by the release of treated effluent into the environment through disposal trenches or irrigation areas.

OSMs include:
- Septic tanks and disposal trenches
- Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS)
- Wet composting or worm farm systems and
- Sandfilter, reedbed or other alternate systems
- Dry composting

Under the Local Government Act 1993, owners are required to obtain Council approval for the operation of an OSMS and must comply with conditions of approval.

In order to control and regulate OSMS, Council introduced and implemented the On-site Sewage Management Strategy, included as Appendix II in Kempsey DCP 2013, which sets performance standards and related maintenance and reporting requirements.

### Health Implications

A failing OSMS, or inappropriate use of OSMS, can have adverse impacts such as:
- The spread of disease by bacteria, viruses, parasites and other organisms found in effluent
- Contamination of ground and surface water
- Degradation of soil and vegetation
- Decreased community amenity, caused by odours, insects and vermin

Reforms for the management of OSMS were introduced by the NSW Government in 1998, following the Wallis Lake Hepatitis outbreak in 1997. The Hepatitis outbreak resulted in one death and over 400 people being infected by the virus. The outbreak was directly linked to sewage effluent contamination of the lake from failing OSMS.

Council’s On-site Sewage Management Strategy was adopted in 1999 and a subsequent inspection program was introduced, with the implementation being partly funded by registration and inspection fees.

### Why the changes?

The changes to the OSM program have been influenced by:
- The need for an improved inspection program with optimal environmental and health outcomes for all residents within Kempsey Shire.
- The cost of running the OSM program to be spread equitably across all owners of OSMS within the Shire.

Council’s annual levy of $77.00 for a single dwelling (or multiples of $77.00 per system), $154 for small commercial systems and $307.50 for large commercial systems, will be collected from each property with an OSMS (as adopted in Council’s Fees and Charges 2018 - 19).

The levy will be listed as a separate item on the annual rates notice.

On collection of the levy an annual approval to operate an OSMS will be issued.

The approval will contain a detailed list of conditions that are required to be met by the owner of the system and will be specifically related to the type of OSMS on the property.

It is then the obligation of the owner of the system to ensure that the conditions of the approval are met. A risk-based inspection program will continue to be carried out to monitor compliance of existing OSMS.

If the OSMS is non-compliant and works are required, the owner will be given a time frame for works to be completed.

If works are still required at the expiration of the time period then a $138 re-inspection fee will be charged.
Thinking of Installing an OSMS?

Prior to undertaking OSMS works a Section 68 application and drainage diagram proposal must be lodged with, and approved by Council. Section 68 documentation can be found on Council’s website under Communications, Forms, Septic Tank: Approval to install an OSMS. Installation works must be undertaken by a qualified licensed plumber and comply with appropriate standards and guidelines.

What does the OSMS levy cover?

- Inspection of all areas of the Shire including remote areas, and rectifying any possible threats to the environment and / or public health (associated with failing OSMS).
- Development of a more widespread and thorough inspection regime (including remote areas of the Shire).
- The focusing on high risk and repeat non-compliance systems, where OSMS may be posing a threat to the environment and/or public health.
- This will result in greater environmental and health outcomes that will benefit the whole community.
- The OSMS levy allows the cost of the monitoring program to be spread equitably across all users, based on potential risks to the environment.

The funding will also be used for further improvements, such as;

- Expanding water quality monitoring programs
- A comprehensive review of Council’s On-site Sewage Management Strategy Development Control Plan
- OSM Risk Mapping of the Shire
- OSM land capability mapping for rural/residential land release strategies and public education.

The successful implementation of OSM reforms have contributed to environmental improvements and a reduction in public health risks to owners of OSMS as well as all Macleay residents.