



Policy to implementation -Continuous improvement of Water Sensitive Design at the small scale

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Overview

MidCoast Council (in the former Great Lakes area) has had a Water Sensitive Design (WSD) Development Control Plan (DCP) in place since 2012. Councils DCP requires all development to address water quality targets including single dwellings. This paper considers the effectiveness of applying the policy to single dwellings outlining Councils innovation in process development and continuous improvement. When the DCP was first introduced, staff focussed on working with local consultants and designers to ensure WSD plans were consistent with the DCP requirements. The next phase of the improvement process has involved revising the policy and undertaking an audit of WSD on single dwellings. Staff have engaged with users of the policy proactively seeking feedback on areas for improvement. The latest revision of the policy focussed on making it easy for the end user rather than simply an assessment tool. Significant improvements to the policy have reduced any ambiguity by providing greater clarity for customers on what is required to provide when submitting a development application. These improvements have also made it easier for staff to assess development applications. An audit of the assessment process for single dwellings identified key areas for improvement including certification of raingardens, administrative processes, private certifier non-compliance and builder construction methods. To address these results, a training and engagement program involving staff, private certifiers and builders has been tailored to meet their specific needs. This has resulted in more engaged builders and private certifiers with the hope that flow on effects will be seen in DCP compliance and well-constructed raingardens over time.

Objectives

Improve the WSD policy for clearer interpretation and improved implementation

Identify and address areas for improvement within the development assessment and certification process for WSD on single dwellings

Identify on ground compliance of WSD plans for single dwellings

Method

The policy review followed 5 years of implementation. User feedback was collated and the detailed review of the policy involved integrating these improvements into a revised policy. This policy was road tested at workshops with other departments, Councillors and publically exhibited with feedback from local planning professionals.

The audit of the policy implementation focused on single-dwellings receiving any occupation certificate during 2015/16 period. A desktop assessment of the approval process was conducted and certification compliance for both Council and Private Certifiers assessed. Sites where raingardens were situated in the front-yard were followed up with drive-by inspections to determine compliance in the field.

Results

The revised policy is now easier to use. It is categorised by development type, clarifies exemptions, provides links to online mapping identifying pre determined stormwater strategies, includes provisions for non-reticulated sites and removes WSD requirements for low risk development types.

The audit identified 'problem areas' in the lodgement of plans and certification process. Key issues included lack of provision of certification of raingardens from builders, use of approved plans in construction, developments approved without raingardens, interim occupation issued (contrary to conditions of consent). Drive by inspected showed reasonable compliance with the policy despite the process issues identified.

Conclusions

With the new policy it is easier to assess development applications as there is greater clarity on where the policy applies and what is required. To further improve policy implementation, conditions of consent have been revised, guidance materials are provided for a greater variety of situations (eg steep sites, sites with no connection to stormwater drainage) and examples of innovative raingarden design promoted.

To improve policy implementation, training and engagement of builders, Private Certifiers and building surveyors was necessary. The process of final inspection has been improved with a development of checklist and ongoing 1:1 engagement with builders to assess their understanding and improve construction of raingardens.