

Onsite Wastewater Management Systems: What Is a Land Capability Report?

Land Capability Assessments (LCA's) are detailed written reports that assess the various aspects of development sites, including the way it is proposed to be developed in the absence of reticulated sewer. The primary focus of an LCA is to determine the viability of onsite wastewater management by considering the risk presented to public health, the environment and local amenity. An LCA provides vital information on site-specific limitations for onsite wastewater management, as well as suitable management strategies to reduce impacts of the system on its surrounds.

Objectives of a Land Capability Assessment

The objectives of an LCA are to:

- Assess the capability of the site to sustainably utilise and manage wastewater within the allotment boundaries.
- Assess the capability of catchments to sustainably utilise and manage wastewater within sub-catchments or specific regions.
- Determine high risk and sensitive areas within allotments and within catchments.
- Gather the relevant geographical and social information to adequately inform the process of designing the best practicable and most sustainable type of onsite wastewater treatment and effluent land application that should protect the health of the householders and the community, and protect the local environment from pollution.
- Formulate a sustainable management plan that:
 - Must be carried out by the property owner to ensure that impacts on the environment or public health do not occur or are minimised.
 - Will ensure the beneficial re-use of the treated water, organic matter and nutrients (where applicable).

Risk Assessment

There are a number of potential hazards associated with onsite wastewater management. These must be identified and properly addressed in the LCA report.

Identified constraints can include impacts on human health, allotment size, soil profiles and drainage capability, catchment contamination potential, proximity of the allotment to surface waters including seasonal creeks, dams, slope, rainfall patterns/flooding potential and even economic impacts.

When is a Land Capability Assessment Generally Required?

In the following circumstances:

- Existing properties located in sensitive areas, or on small lots sizes, where the use or wastewater output is likely to change.
- New subdivisions, boundary adjustments and rezoning where there is no reticulated sewer;
- New commercial developments; and
- New dwellings located within:
 - 40 metres of an environmentally sensitive area (habitat, wetlands, aquatic reserves, declared wilderness areas); or
 - 100 metres of a permanent water (river, stream, creek, dams); or
 - 40 metres of a temporary waterway (intermittent gully or creek).
- Where the Environmental Health Officer of other relevant government agency determines it is necessary.

Who Should Prepare a Land Capability Assessment?

Whilst there is no specific recognised formal qualification or professional affiliation, the assessor must have suitable professional training and experience, and have relevant tertiary qualifications from a reputable training institution in a discipline such as engineering or science, including soil science, agricultural science, environmental science, chemistry or geography.

More information

Visit Council's website federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au. Alternatively, contact Council Environmental Health Officer on (02) 6033 8999 or email health@federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au