



Beachwatch

State of the beaches 2023–24

Hunter region

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency Boss Lady Creative Designs created the People and Community symbol.

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Recreational water quality has been monitored in the Hunter region since 1996 by Hunter Water Corporation, with some sites monitored as a requirement of Environment Protection Licences. This report summarises the performance of 17 ocean beaches in the Hunter region of New South Wales, providing a long-term assessment of how suitable a site is for swimming.

In 2023–2024, 100% of swimming sites in the Hunter region were graded as Good or Very Good. These sites were suitable for swimming for most or almost all of the time. This is an excellent result, similar in performance to the previous year.

Hunter region summary

2023–2024

Monitoring water quality for swimming in New South Wales



Merewether Beach

Photo:
Beachwatch/DCCEEW

The water quality of beaches and other swimming locations is monitored under the NSW Government’s Beachwatch programs to provide the community with accurate information on the cleanliness of the water and to enable individuals to make informed decisions about where and when to swim. Routine assessment also measures the impact of pollution sources, enables the effectiveness of stormwater and wastewater management practices to be assessed and highlights areas where further work is needed.

Swimming sites in New South Wales are graded as Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor or Very Poor in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s 2008 *Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Waters*. These Beach Suitability Grades provide a long-term assessment of how suitable a beach is for swimming. The grades are determined from the most recent 100 water quality results (2–4 years’ worth of data depending on the sampling frequency) and a risk assessment of potential pollution sources.

See the section on **Quality assurance** in the Statewide Summary for results of the quality assurance program.

Recreational water quality has been monitored in the Hunter region by Hunter Water Corporation since 1996.

A **quality assurance** program ensures the information collected and reported by Beachwatch and its partners is accurate and reliable.

Rainfall impacts

During 2023–2024, 17 ocean beaches were monitored in the Hunter region.

Rainfall is the major driver of pollution to recreational waters, generating stormwater runoff and triggering untreated discharges from the wastewater treatment and transport systems. Changes in rainfall patterns are reflected in beach water quality over time due to variation in the frequency and extent of stormwater and wastewater inputs.

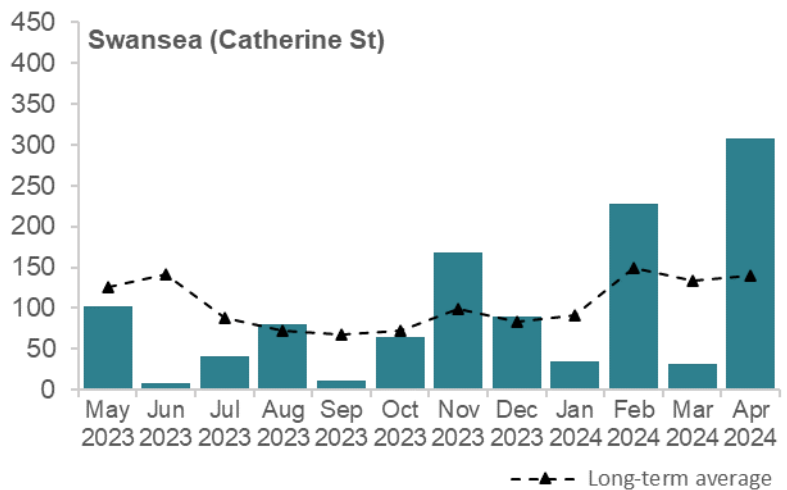
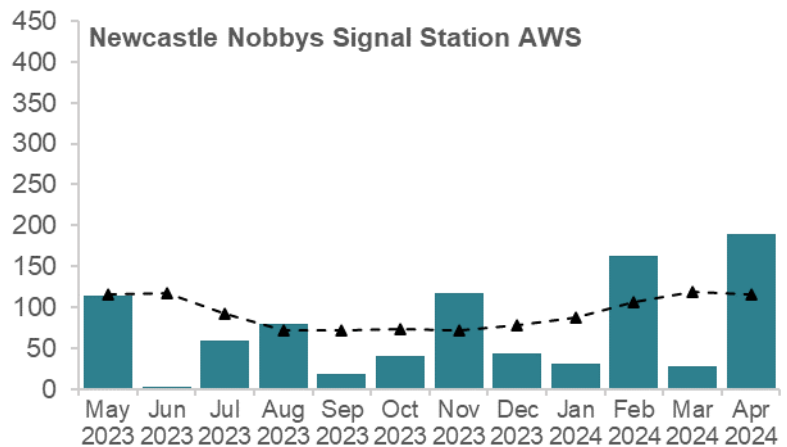
The Beach Suitability Grades for 2023–2024 are based on water quality data collected over the last 2–4 years. Rainfall over this period has been diverse:

- 2020–2021: variable rainfall with some very wet months
- 2021–2022: average to below average rainfall, except for some wet months, including a very wet March and associated flooding
- 2022–2023: prolonged dry weather periods broken by heavy rainfall at times, and a very wet July
- 2023–2024: average to below average rainfall and isolated wet months.

See the section on **How to read this report** on page 32 for an explanation of the graphs, tables and Beach Suitability Grades.

Rainfall in the Hunter region was average to below average from May to October 2023. Relatively low rainfall conditions followed through summer and autumn, except for some above average rainfall in November 2023 and February and April 2024. Swansea recorded its highest April daily rainfall of 114 mm on 6 April, due to the combination of a deep coastal trough and low pressure system.

Hunter region rainfall



Beachwatch issues daily **beach pollution forecasts** to enable beach goers to make informed decisions about where and when to swim.

Pollution forecasts for the Hunter beaches can be accessed via the Beachwatch website, email subscription, X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook.

Health risks

Contamination of recreational waters with faecal material from animal and human sources can pose significant health problems to beach users owing to the presence of pathogens (disease-causing micro-organisms) in the faecal material. The most common groups of pathogens found in recreational waters are bacteria, protozoans and viruses.









Exposure to contaminated water can cause gastroenteritis, with symptoms including vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach-ache, nausea, headache and fever. Eye, ear, skin and upper respiratory tract infections can also be contracted when pathogens come into contact with small breaks and tears in the

skin or ruptures of the delicate membranes in the ear or nose.

Certain groups of users may be more vulnerable to microbial infection than others. Children, the elderly, people with compromised immune systems, tourists, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are generally most at risk.

Beach Suitability Grades for Hunter region

Swimming site	Site type	Beach Suitability Grade	Change
Port Stephens Council			
Zenith Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Box Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Fingal Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
One Mile Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
City of Newcastle Council			
Stockton Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Nobbys Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Newcastle Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Bar Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Merewether Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Burwood North Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Burwood South Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Lake Macquarie City Council			
Glenrock Lagoon Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Dudley Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Redhead Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Blacksmiths Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>
Swansea Heads Little Beach	Ocean beach	G	<input type="radio"/>
Caves Beach	Ocean beach	VG	<input type="radio"/>

Beach Suitability Grade					Change		
							
Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Improved	Stable	Declined

Port Stephens Council

Overall results



All 4 swimming sites were graded as Very Good in 2023–2024. This is an excellent result, and similar to previous years.

Percentage of sites graded as Very Good or Good

	2021– 2022	2022– 2023	2023– 2024	Trend
Ocean beaches (4 sites)	100%	100%	100%	—————

Four swimming sites were monitored in the Port Stephens local government area. All locations were monitored by Hunter Water Corporation, with some sites monitored as a requirement of Environment Protection Licences. Samples were collected every sixth day throughout the year.

See the section on **How to read this report** on page 32 for an explanation of the graphs, tables and Beach Suitability Grades.

Best beaches

Zenith Beach, Box Beach, Fingal Beach and One Mile Beach.

These sites had excellent water quality and were suitable for swimming almost all of the time.

Ocean beaches were the only site type monitored in the Port Stephens region.

As a general precaution swimming should be avoided during and for at least one day after heavy rain at ocean beaches, or if there are signs of stormwater pollution such as discoloured water or floating debris.



Site types in Port Stephens Council

Ocean beaches

All 4 ocean beaches were graded as Very Good in 2023–2024: Zenith Beach, Box Beach, Fingal Beach and One Mile Beach. Water quality at these sites has continued to be excellent and was suitable for swimming almost all of the time.



Beach Suitability Grades for Port Stephens Council ocean beaches

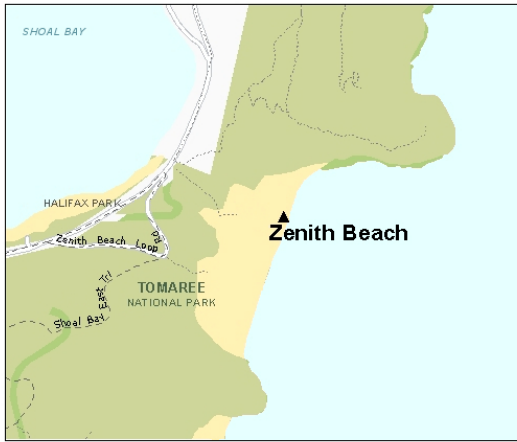
Swimming should be avoided for one day after rainfall at ocean beaches, or if signs of pollution are present such as discoloured water or flowing stormwater drains.



Sampling sites and Beach Suitability Grades in Port Stephens Council

Zenith Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Zenith Beach is 400 m long and is within Tomaree National Park. The beach is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with very few potential sources of faecal contamination.

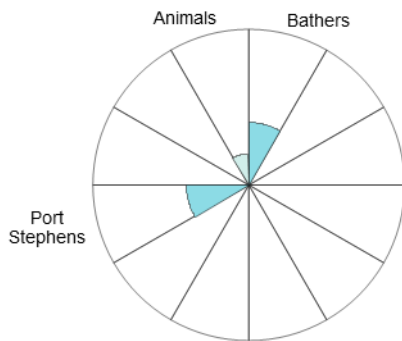
Enterococci levels had little response to rainfall and generally remained below the safe swimming limit across most rainfall categories.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

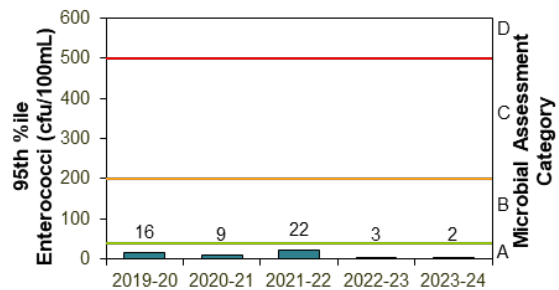
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

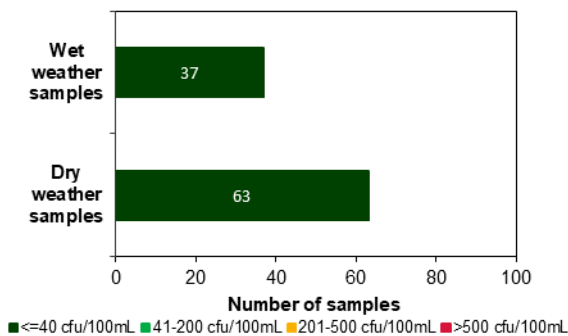
Sanitary inspection: Low



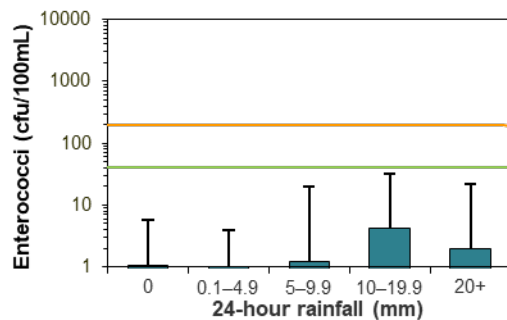
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality

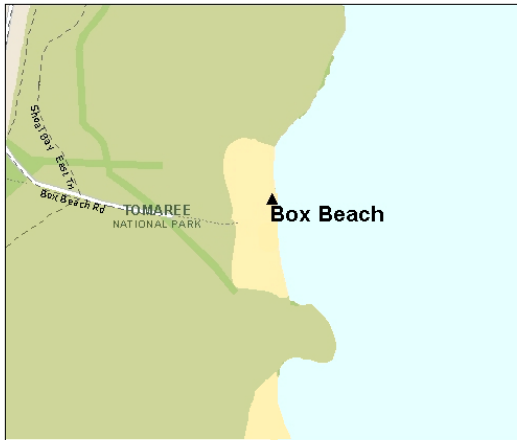


Water quality in response to rainfall



Box Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Box Beach is 350 m long and within Tomaree National Park. The beach is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with only one potential source of faecal contamination.

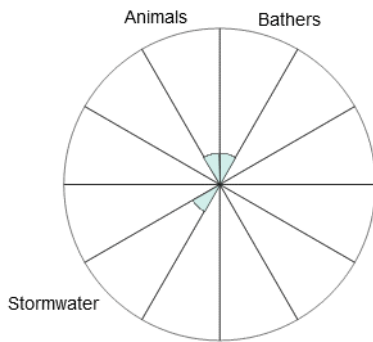
Enterococci levels had very little response to rainfall and generally remained below the safe swimming limit across most rainfall categories.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

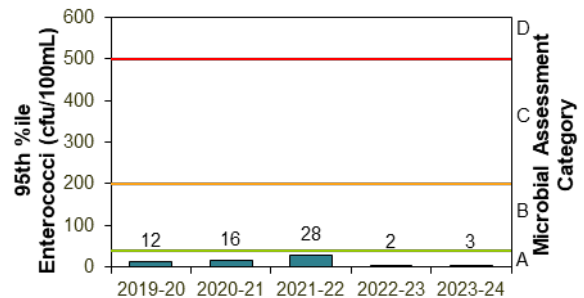
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

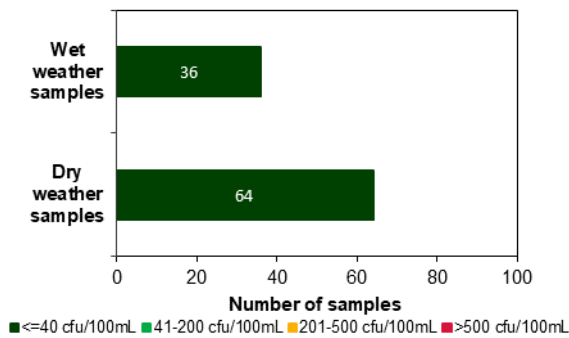
Sanitary inspection: Low



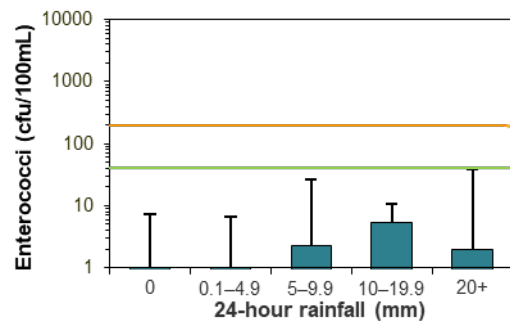
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Fingal Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Fingal Beach is approximately 2.7 km long and within Fingal Bay. The beach is patrolled from September to April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with very few potential sources of faecal contamination.

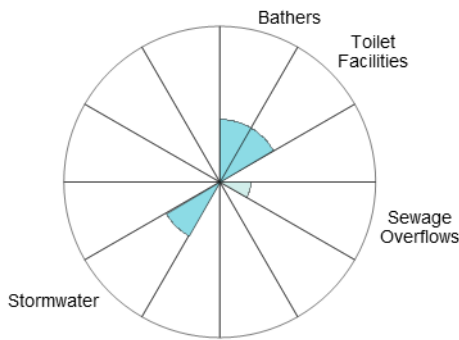
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 5 mm or more of rain.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

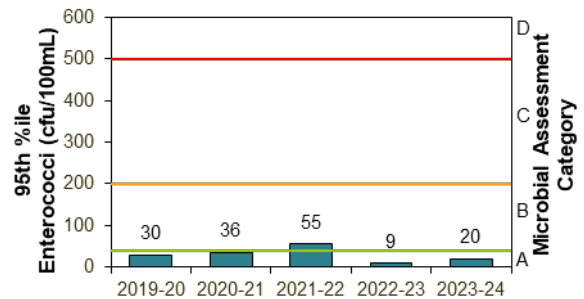
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	98%	100	Stable

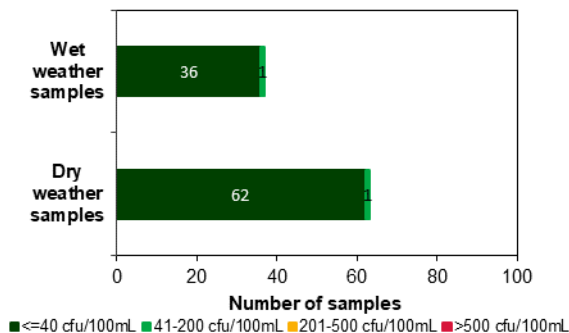
Sanitary inspection: Low



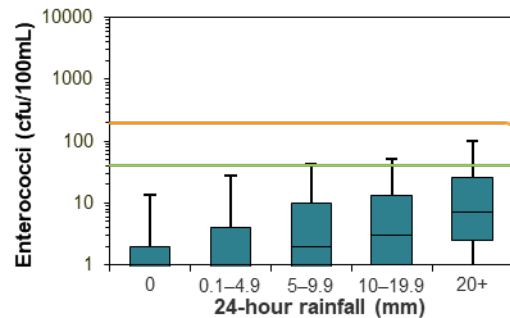
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



One Mile Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



This 1.3 km stretch of beach is at the southern end of Anna Bay and is patrolled from September to April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

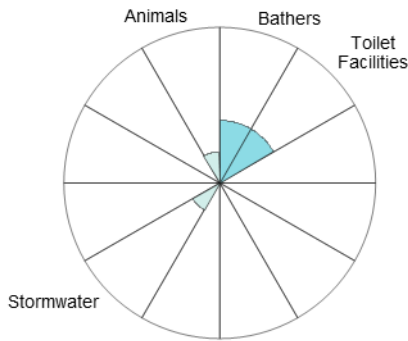
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, but generally remained below the safe swimming limit across all rainfall categories.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

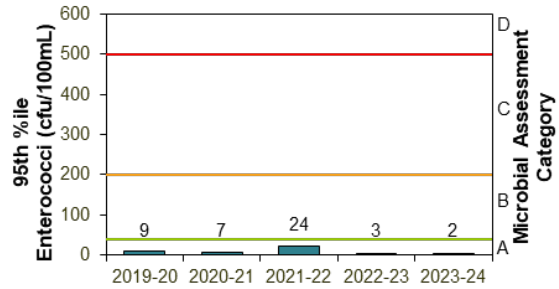
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

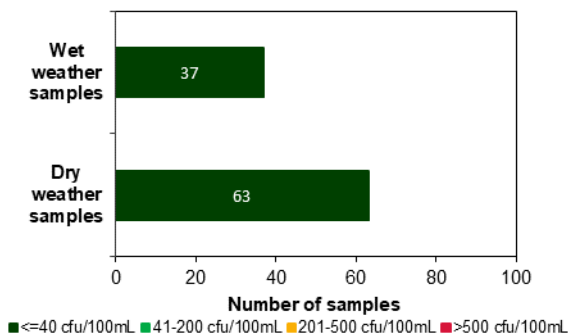
Sanitary inspection: Low



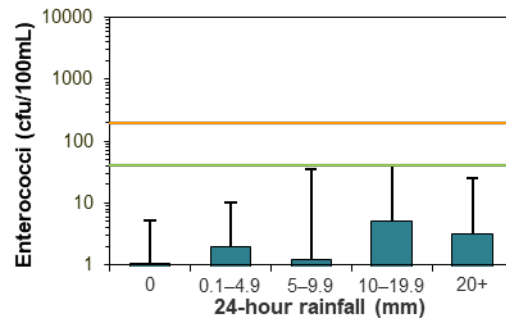
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



City of Newcastle Council

Overall results



All 7 swimming sites were graded as Very Good in 2023–2024. Excellent results have also been recorded in previous years.

Percentage of sites graded as Very Good or Good

	2021– 2022	2022– 2023	2023– 2024	Trend
Ocean beaches (7 sites)	100%	100%	100%	—

Seven swimming sites were monitored in the Newcastle local government area. All locations were monitored by Hunter Water Corporation, with some sites monitored as a requirement of Environment Protection Licences. Samples were collected every sixth day throughout the year and every third day during the swimming season at 4 sites.

See the section on **How to read this report** on page 32 for an explanation of the graphs, tables and Beach Suitability Grades.

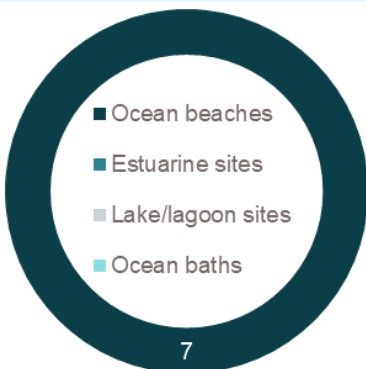
Best beaches

Stockton Beach, Nobbys Beach, Newcastle Beach, Bar Beach, Merewether Beach, Burwood North Beach and Burwood South Beach.

These sites had excellent water quality and were suitable for swimming almost all of the time.

Ocean beaches were the only site type monitored in the Newcastle region.

As a general precaution swimming should be avoided during and for at least one day after heavy rain at ocean beaches, or if there are signs of stormwater pollution such as discoloured water or floating debris.



Site types in City of Newcastle Council

Ocean beaches



**Beach Suitability Grades for
City of Newcastle Council
ocean beaches**

All 7 ocean beaches continued to be graded as Very Good in 2023–2024: Stockton Beach, Nobbys Beach, Newcastle Beach, Bar Beach, Merewether Beach, Burwood North Beach and Burwood South Beach. Water quality at these sites was suitable for swimming almost all of the time and has been of a high standard for many years.

Swimming should be avoided for one day after rainfall at ocean beaches, or if signs of pollution are present such as discoloured water or flowing stormwater drains.



Sampling sites and Beach Suitability Grades in City of Newcastle Council

Stockton Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Stockton Beach is at the southern end of a 32 km stretch of beach and is patrolled from September to April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

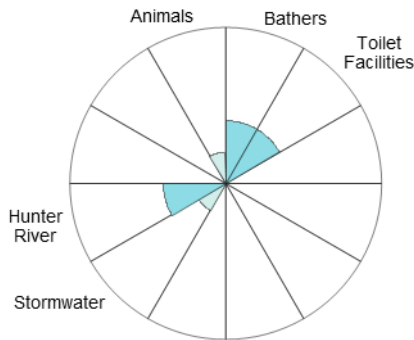
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after light rain, and often after 20 mm or more of rainfall.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

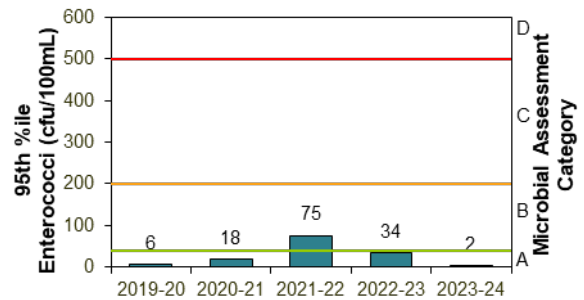
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

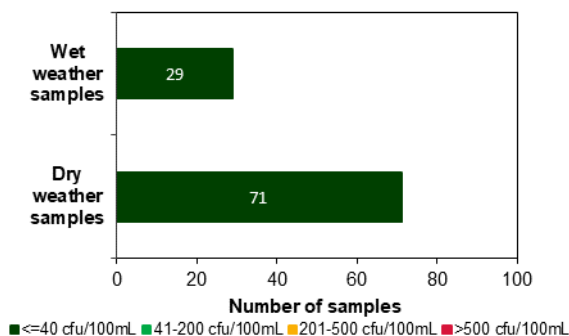
Sanitary inspection: Low



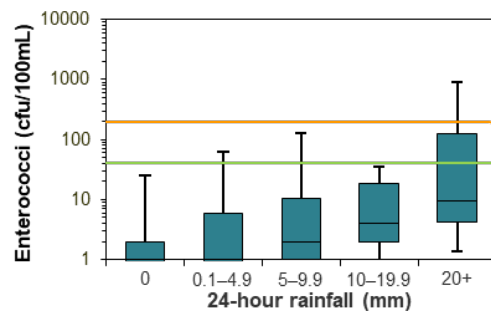
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality

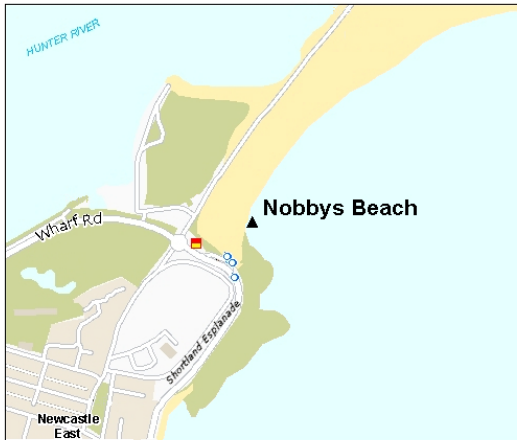


Water quality in response to rainfall



Nobbys Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Nobbys Beach is 1 km long and is patrolled year round.

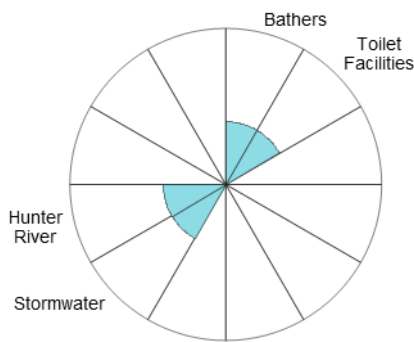
The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 20 mm or more of rain.

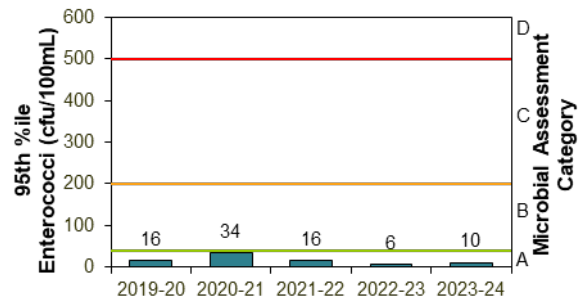
See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map. The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status	
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable	○

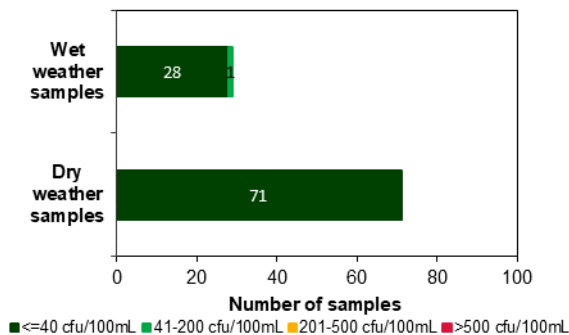
Sanitary inspection: Low



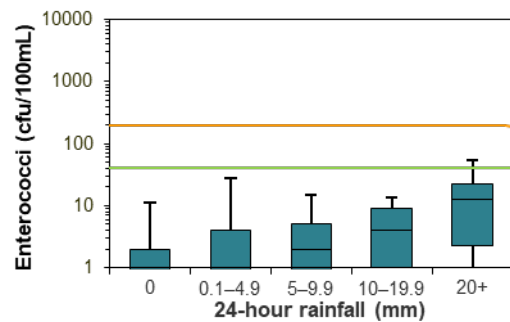
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Newcastle Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Newcastle Beach is approximately 650 m long and is patrolled from September to April.

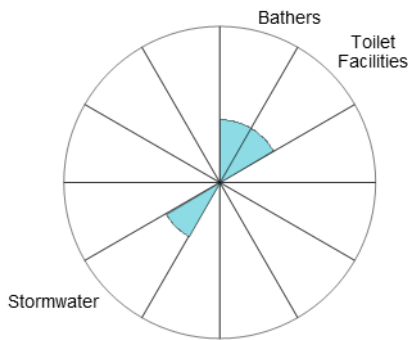
The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 20 mm or more of rain.

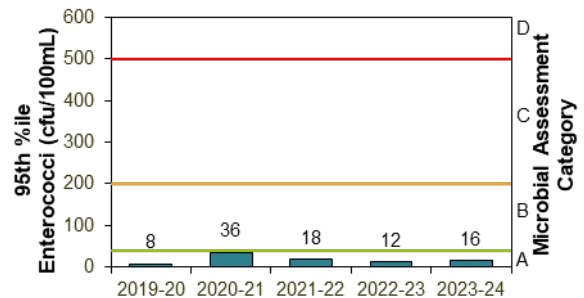
See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map. The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status	
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable	○

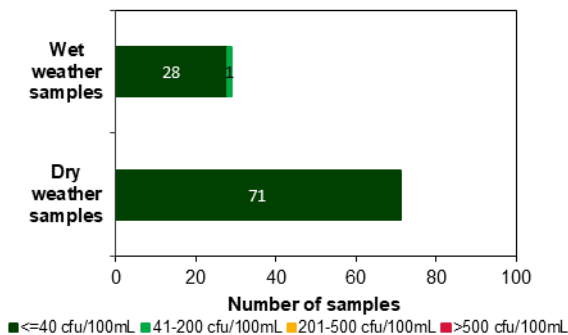
Sanitary inspection: Low



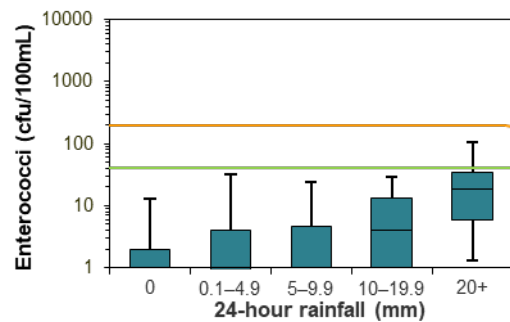
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Bar Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Bar Beach is approximately 500 m long and is patrolled all year round.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

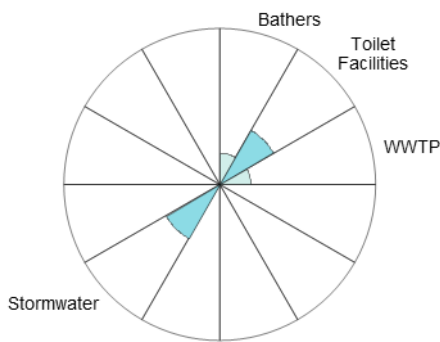
Enterococci levels generally increased with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit in response to 5 mm or more of rain, and often after 20 mm or more.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

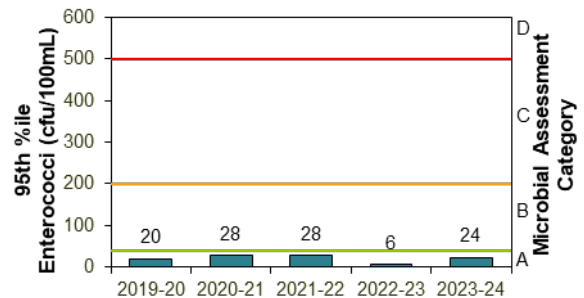
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Mar 2023 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

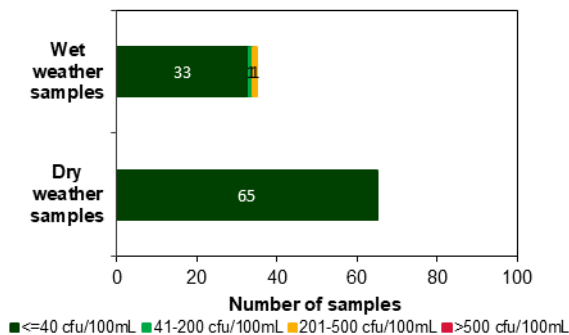
Sanitary inspection: Low



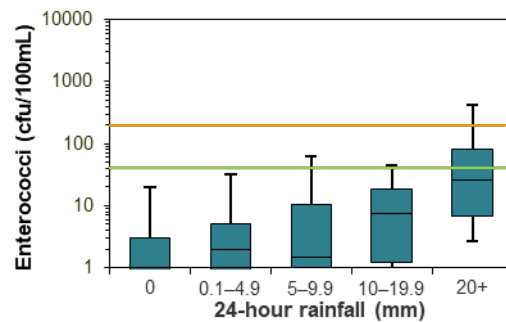
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Merewether Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Merewether Beach is at the southern end of a 900 m stretch of beach and is patrolled year round.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

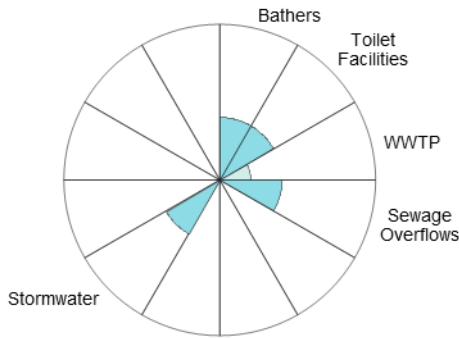
Enterococci levels generally increased with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 10 mm of rain, and often after 20 mm or more.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

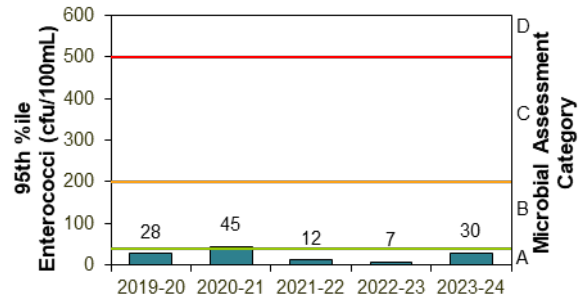
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Mar 2023 to Apr 2024	99%	100	Stable

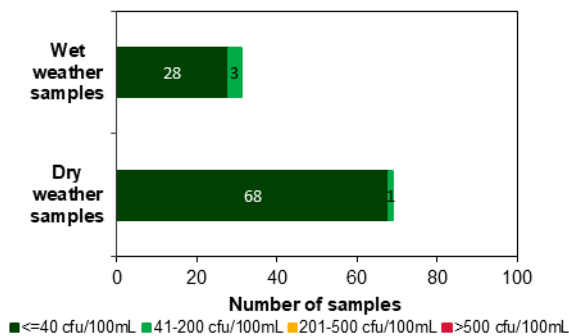
Sanitary inspection: Low



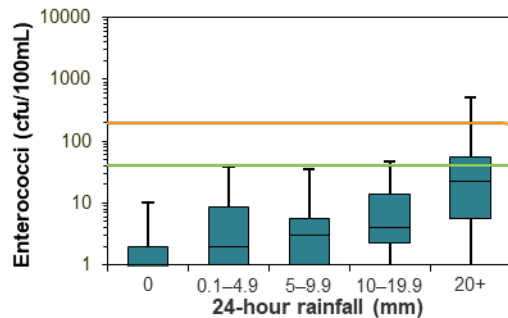
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Burwood North Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Burwood North Beach is at the northern end of an 800 m stretch of beach and is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

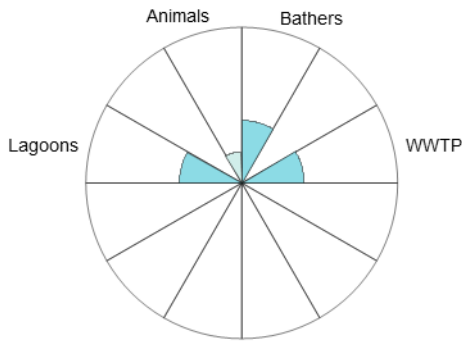
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, often exceeding the safe swimming limit in response to 20 mm or more of rain.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

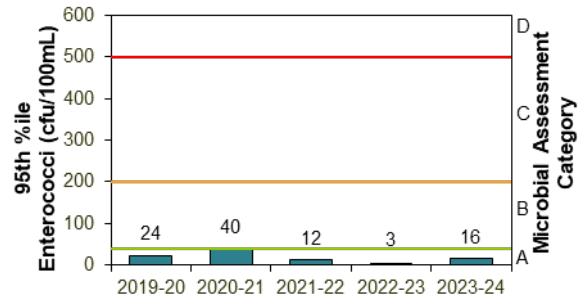
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Mar 2023 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

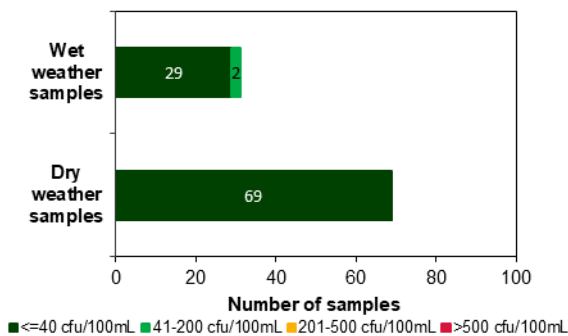
Sanitary inspection: Low



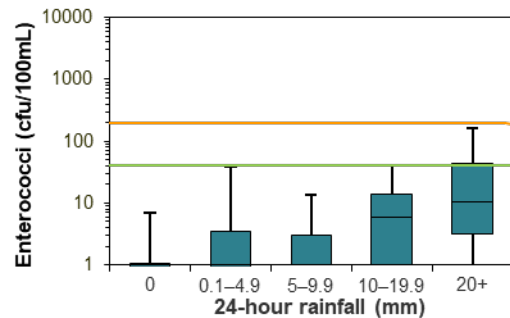
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Burwood South Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Burwood South Beach is located at the southern end of an 800 m stretch of beach and is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

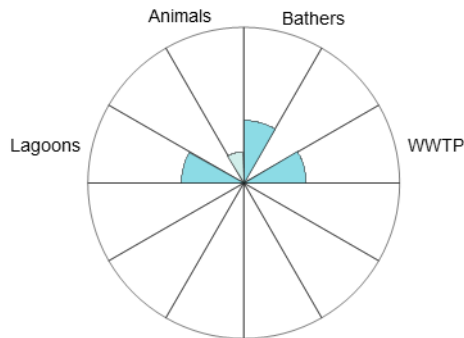
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit in response to light rain, and often after 20 mm or more of rain.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

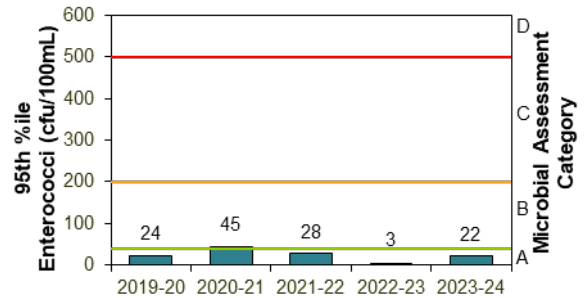
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Apr 2023 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

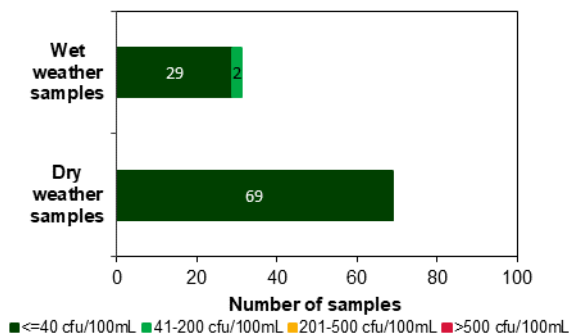
Sanitary inspection: Low



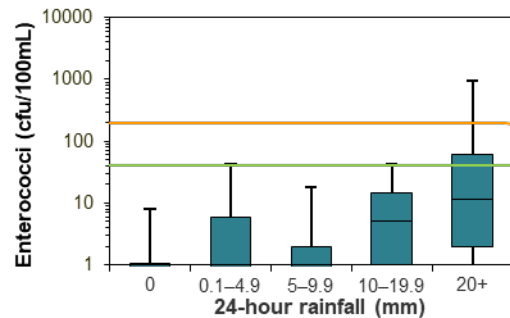
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Lake Macquarie City Council

Overall results



All 6 swimming sites were graded as Very Good or Good in 2023–2024. This is an excellent result and consistent with previous years.

Percentage of sites graded as Very Good or Good

	2021– 2022	2022– 2023	2023– 2024	Trend
Ocean beaches (6 sites)	100%	100%	100%	—

Six swimming sites were monitored in the Lake Macquarie local government area. All locations were monitored by Hunter Water Corporation, with some sites monitored as a requirement of Environment Protection Licences. Samples were collected every sixth day throughout the year.

See the section on **How to read this report** on page 32 for an explanation of the graphs, tables and Beach Suitability Grades.

Best beaches

Glenrock Lagoon Beach, Dudley Beach, Redhead Beach, Blacksmiths Beach and Caves Beach.

These sites had excellent water quality and were suitable for swimming almost all of the time.

Ocean beaches were the only site type monitored in the Lake Macquarie region.

As a general precaution swimming should be avoided during and for at least one day after heavy rain at ocean beaches, or if there are signs of stormwater pollution such as discoloured water or floating debris.



Site types in Lake Macquarie City Council

Ocean beaches



Beach Suitability Grades for Lake Macquarie City Council ocean beaches

Five of the 6 ocean beaches were graded as Very Good in 2023–2024: Glenrock Lagoon Beach, Dudley Beach, Redhead Beach, Blacksmiths Beach and Caves Beach. This is a similar result to the previous year. Water quality at these beaches is suitable for swimming almost all of the time.

Swansea Heads Little Beach continued to be graded Good in 2023–2024, consistent with the previous year. While the water quality was mostly suitable for swimming during dry weather conditions, with 89% of dry weather samples within the safe swimming limit, elevated levels often exceeded the safe swimming limit following light rainfall.

Microbial water quality has generally been more elevated at Swansea Heads Little Beach in comparison to nearby beaches for the last 5 years. This beach is located at the entrance to Lake Macquarie in a 100 m long bay bordered by a rock platform and breakwall, which may reduce flushing and dilution of contaminants compared to other nearby open ocean beaches.

Swimming should be avoided for one day after rainfall at ocean beaches, or if signs of pollution are present such as discoloured water or flowing stormwater drains.



Sampling sites and Beach Suitability Grades in Lake Macquarie City Council

Glenrock Lagoon Beach

Beach grade: VG



Glenrock Lagoon Beach is 300 m long and is located at the southern end of Burwood Beach. The beach is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered safe for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

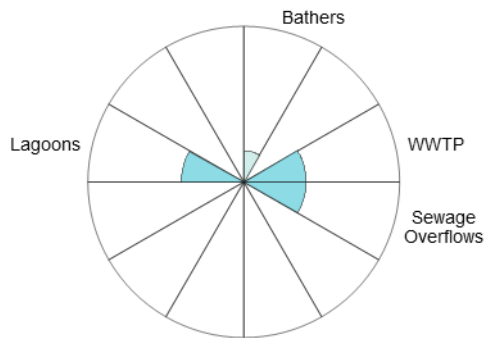
Enterococci levels increased with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after light rain, and after 20 mm or more of rain.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

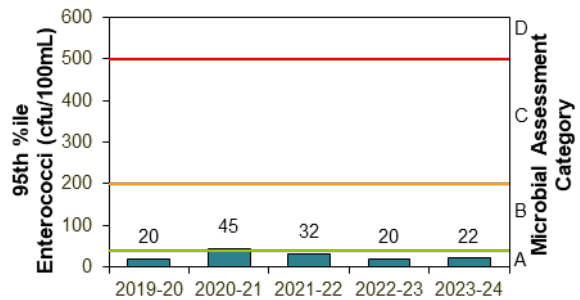
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status	
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable	○

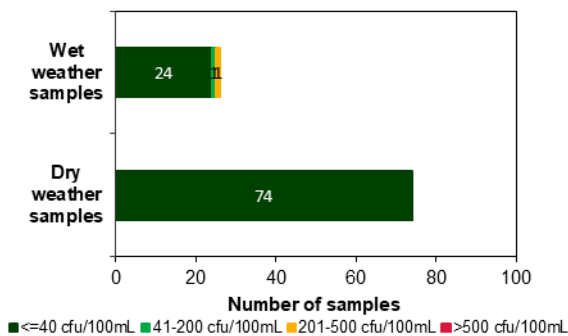
Sanitary inspection: Low



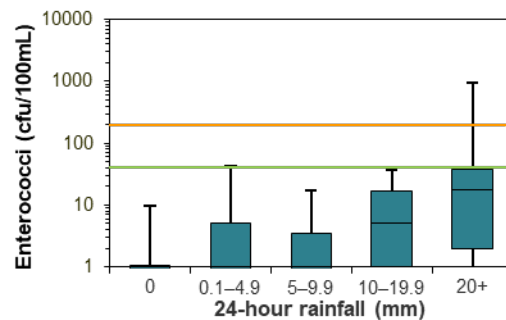
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality

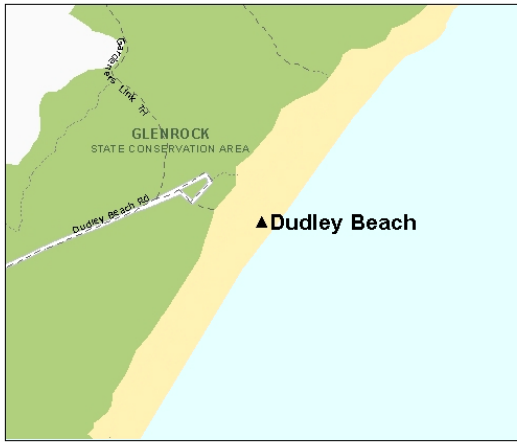


Water quality in response to rainfall



Dudley Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Dudley Beach is 1 km long and is not patrolled by lifeguards.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered safe for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

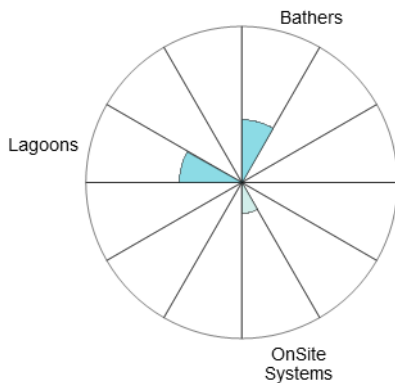
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit in response to 20 mm or more of rain.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

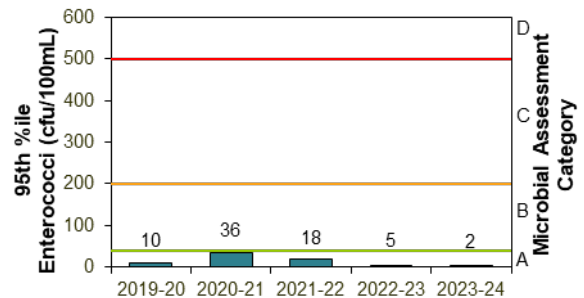
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status	
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable	○

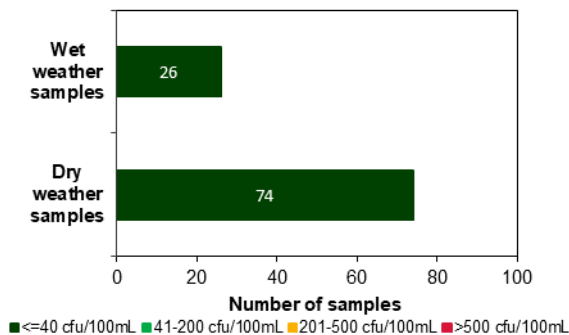
Sanitary inspection: Low



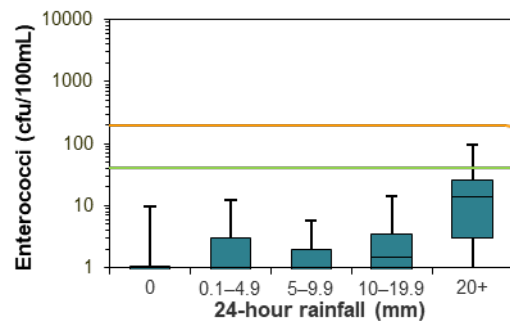
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Redhead Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Redhead Beach is located at the northern end of a 10 km stretch of beach and is patrolled between September and April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

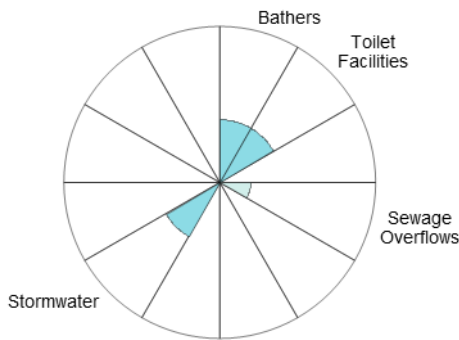
Enterococci levels generally increased with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 10 mm or more of rain.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

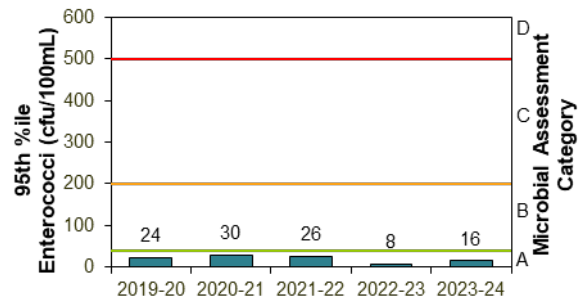
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

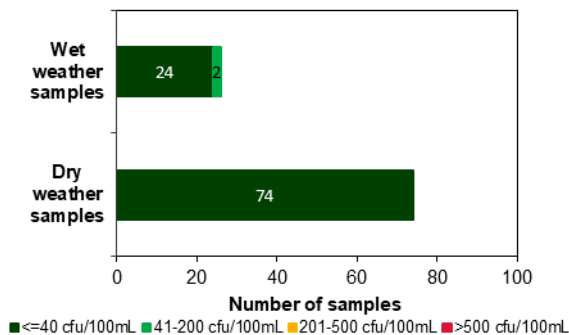
Sanitary inspection: Low



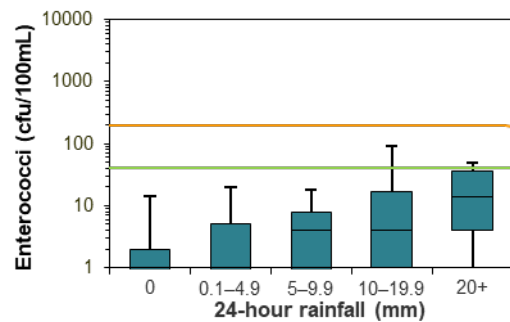
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



Blacksmiths Beach

Beach grade: **VG**



Blacksmiths Beach is at the southern end of a 10 km stretch of beach and is patrolled between September and April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of faecal contamination.

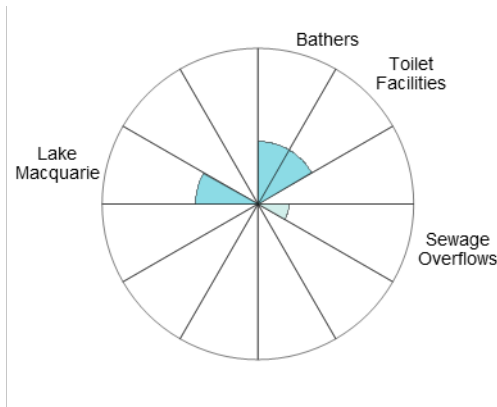
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit in response to 20 mm or more of rain.

See ‘How to read this report’ for key to map.

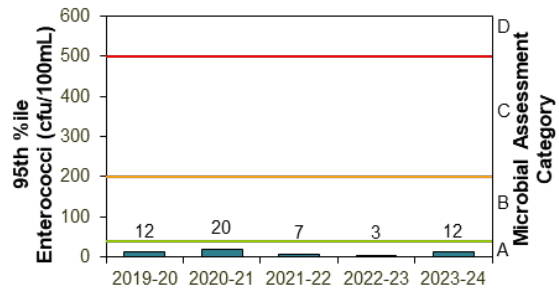
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	100%	100	Stable

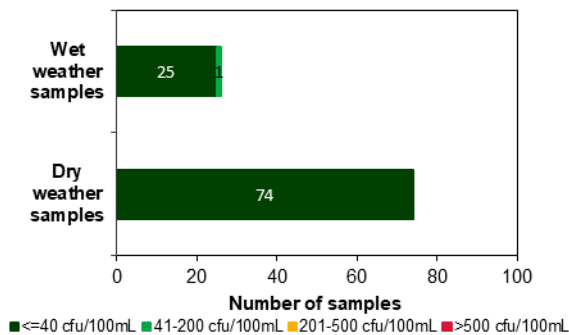
Sanitary inspection: Low



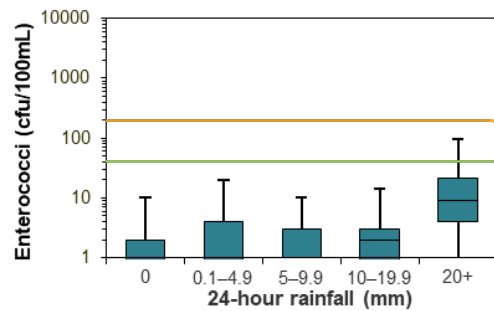
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality

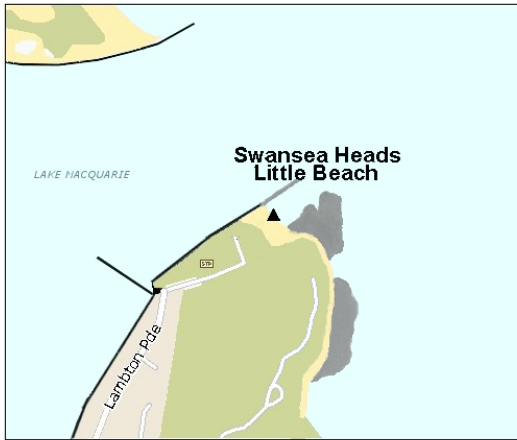


Water quality in response to rainfall



Swansea Heads Little Beach

Beach grade: **G**



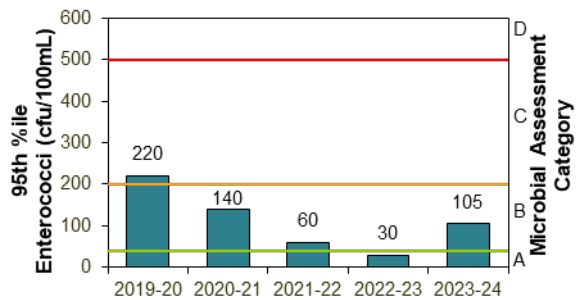
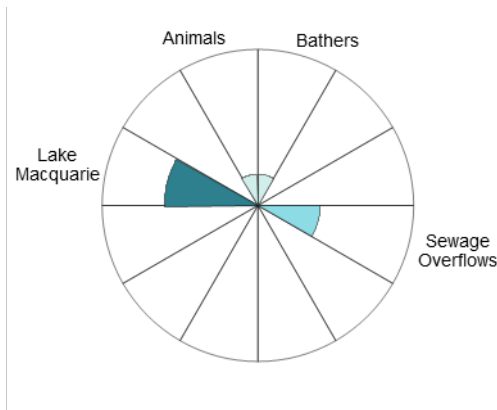
See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

Swansea Heads Little Beach is 60 m long and located on the southern side of the entrance to Lake Macquarie. The beach is patrolled from September to April. The Beach Suitability Grade of Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming most of the time but can be susceptible to pollution after heavy rain, with several potential sources of faecal contamination including outflow from Lake Macquarie. Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit across all rainfall categories. The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	89%	100	Stable

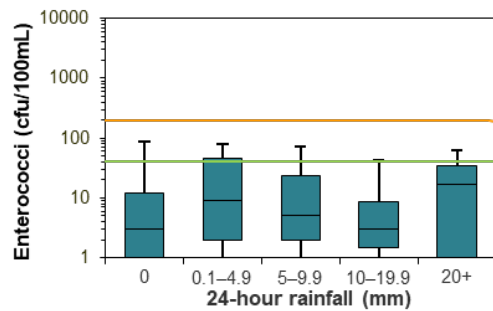
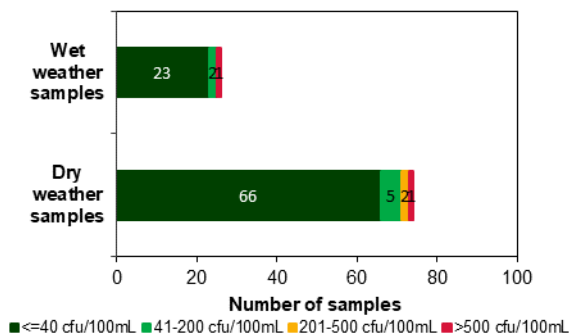
Sanitary inspection: Moderate

Microbial Assessment Category: B



Dry and wet weather water quality

Water quality in response to rainfall



Caves Beach

Beach grade: VG



Caves Beach is located at the southern end of a 1.8 km beach and is patrolled between September and April.

The Beach Suitability Grade of Very Good indicates microbial water quality is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time, with few potential sources of significant faecal contamination.

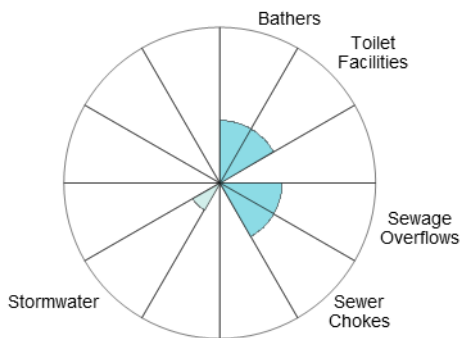
Enterococci levels increased slightly with increasing rainfall, occasionally exceeding the safe swimming limit after 20 mm or more of rain.

See 'How to read this report' for key to map.

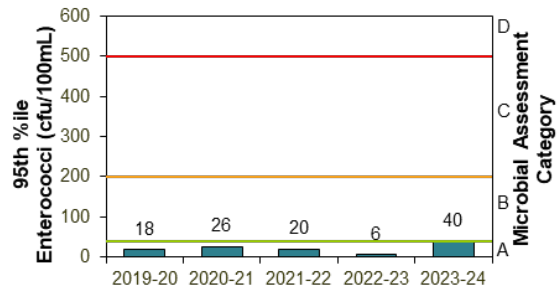
The site has been monitored since 1996.

Site type	Assessment period	Dry weather samples suitable for swimming	Water samples	Beach grade status
Ocean beach	Sep 2022 to Apr 2024	97%	100	Stable

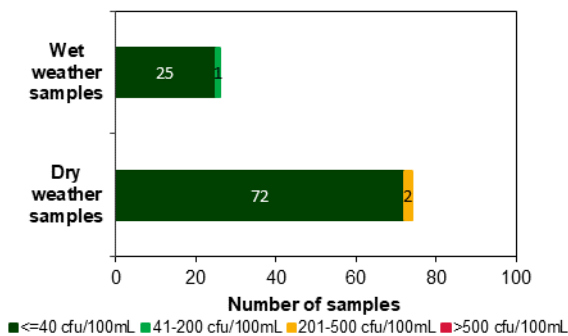
Sanitary inspection: Low



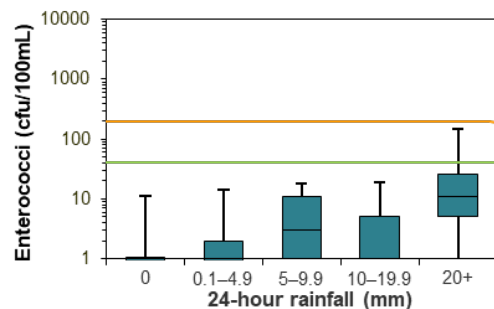
Microbial Assessment Category: A



Dry and wet weather water quality



Water quality in response to rainfall



How to read this report

Beach Suitability Grades

Beach Suitability Grades provide an assessment of the suitability of a swimming location for recreation over time and are based on a combination of sanitary inspection (identification and rating of potential pollution sources at a beach) and microbial assessment (water quality measurements gathered over previous years). There are 5 grades ranging from Very Good to Very Poor:

Very Good

Location has generally excellent microbial water quality and very few potential sources of faecal pollution. Water is considered suitable for swimming almost all of the time

Good

Location has generally good microbial water quality and water is considered suitable for swimming most of the time. Swimming should be avoided during and for up to one day following heavy rain at ocean beaches and up to 3 days at estuarine sites

Fair

Microbial water quality is generally suitable for swimming, but because of the presence of significant sources of faecal contamination, extra care should be taken to avoid swimming during and for up to 3 days following rainfall or if there are signs of pollution such as discoloured water or odour or debris in the water

Some Beach Suitability Grades in this report are **provisional**, as the information required for the analysis is incomplete due to limited bacterial data or limited information on potential pollution sources in the catchment.

P Poor

Location is susceptible to faecal pollution and microbial water quality is not always suitable for swimming. During dry weather conditions, ensure that the swimming location is free of signs of pollution, such as discoloured water, odour or debris in the water, and avoid swimming at all times during and for up to 3 days following rainfall

VP Very Poor

Location is very susceptible to faecal pollution and microbial water quality may often be unsuitable for swimming. It is generally recommended to avoid swimming at these sites almost all of the time.

Follow Up

Sometimes a location's sanitary inspection and water quality data produce incongruent results. These locations are classified as 'Follow Up'. Further assessment will be required to obtain the necessary data to provide a definite classification in accordance with national guidelines.

The guidelines

The National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines for managing risks in recreational water (NHMRC 2008) were adopted for use in New South Wales in May 2009. These guidelines have been adopted in all Australian states and territories and are supported by guidance notes developed by the Department of Health Western Australia (WA Department of Health 2007).

Enterococci

The national guidelines advocate the use of enterococci as the single preferred faecal indicator in recreational waters.

These bacteria are excreted in faeces and are rarely present in unpolluted waters. Enterococci have shown a clear dose–response relationship to disease outcomes in

marine waters in the northern hemisphere. In accordance with the guidelines, Beachwatch tests for enterococci only. The enterococci density in water samples is analysed in the laboratory using method AS/NZS 4276.9:2007 (Standards Australia 2007).

Enterococci are measured in colony forming units per 100 mL of sample (cfu/100 mL).

Beach Suitability Grades are determined by using the following matrix:

		Microbial Assessment Category			
		A	B	C	D
Sanitary Inspection Category	Very Low	Very Good	Very Good	Follow Up	Follow Up
	Low	Very Good	Good	Follow Up	Follow Up
	Moderate	Good	Good	Poor	Poor
	High	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
	Very High	Follow Up	Fair	Poor	Very Poor

* Follow up occurs when sanitary inspection and water quality data produce potentially incongruent results; further assessment will be required.

Using the Beach Suitability Grade classification matrix, sites assigned a moderate Sanitary Inspection Category can only be rated as Good or Poor, with no option of Fair grades. This can create the impression of a large change in water quality when in fact there need only be a slight increase in bacterial counts to push it over the threshold, with no significant increase in the risk to public health.

Microbial Assessment Category (MAC)

There are 4 Microbial Assessment Categories (A to D) and these are determined from the 95th percentile of an enterococci dataset of at least 100 data points. Each MAC is associated with a risk of illness determined from epidemiological studies. The risks of illness shown below are not those associated with a single data point but are the overall risk of illness associated with an enterococci dataset with that 95th percentile (Wyer et al. 1999).

Risk of illness associated with Microbial Assessment Categories

Category	Enterococci (cfu/100 mL)	Illness risk*
A	≤40	GI illness risk: <1% AFR illness risk: <0.3%
B	41–200	GI illness risk: 1–5% AFR illness risk: 0.3–1.9%
C	201–500	GI illness risk: >5–10% AFR illness risk: >1.9–3.9%
D	>500	GI illness risk: >10% AFR illness risk: >3.9%

* GI = gastrointestinal illness; AFR = acute fever and rash

Calculating the MAC

The 95th percentile is a useful statistic for summarising the distribution of enterococci data at a site. It embodies elements of both the location of the distribution (how high/low the enterococci counts are) and the scale of the distribution (how variable the enterococci counts are).

The 95th percentile values for each of the 4 Microbial Assessment Categories were determined by the World Health Organization using enterococci data collected from swimming locations across Europe. These values will represent different probabilities of illness if the distribution of enterococci data from swimming locations in New South Wales differs from the European distribution.

In recognition of this issue, Dr Richard Lugg (Department of Health, Western Australia) has developed a Microsoft® Excel tool for calculating a modified 95th percentile that takes into account the distribution of data. The WA Department of Health recommends a minimum of 65 samples, collected from a particular site over 5 consecutive years, to provide sufficient confidence and reliability in the 95th percentile data output. This tool has been used to calculate the 95th percentile values

presented in this report and has been adopted for use by other state governments in Australia.

The tool can be downloaded from the WA Government's 'Environmental waters publications' webpage, under *Forms and templates*.

Sanitary Inspection Category (SIC)

More information about the **sanitary inspection** process is available in the Beachwatch Protocol for assessment and management of microbial risks in recreational waters, found on the department's website.

The aim of a sanitary inspection is to identify all sources of faecal contamination that could affect a swimming location and assess the risk to public health posed by these sources. It is an assessment of the likelihood of bacterial contamination from identified pollution sources and should, to some degree, correlate with the bacterial water quality results obtained from sampling.

The main sources of faecal contamination considered in the sanitary inspection are: bathers, toilet facilities, wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), sewage overflows, sewer chokes, onsite systems, wastewater re-use, stormwater, river discharge, lagoons, boats and animals.

Rivers, lakes and estuaries themselves can be potential sources of faecal contamination to sites located in these waterbodies, with contaminated water from upstream or surrounding areas impacting water quality at the swimming location. This source is captured in river discharge or lagoon category, and shown as the waterbody in the sanitary inspection charts.

Through the sanitary inspection process, beaches are categorised to reflect the overall likelihood of faecal contamination. There are 5 categories: Very Low, Low, Moderate, High and Very High.



Stormwater drain flow

Photo:

Beachwatch/DCCEEW

Stormwater in urban areas often contains sewage from leakages, overflows or sewer chokes when the sewerage system fails.

Sewage overflows can occur in wet weather when the network has exceeded capacity due to rainwater entering the system. The mix of sewage and rainwater discharges from designated overflow points and drains to waterways, usually via the stormwater system. Overflows from the sewerage system can also occur in dry weather due to mechanical failure or power outage.

Sewer chokes occur due to blockages in the pipes usually due to tree roots, oil, grease or debris. This causes sewage to back up and escape via sewer inspection points, designed overflow structures or cracks in the pipes, then drain to waterways, usually via the stormwater system.

Explanation of tables

Each region contains tables listing all monitored swimming sites including site type, beach grade and change in grade from the previous year.

The following symbols are used to show the change in beach grade from the previous year:



Stable



Improved



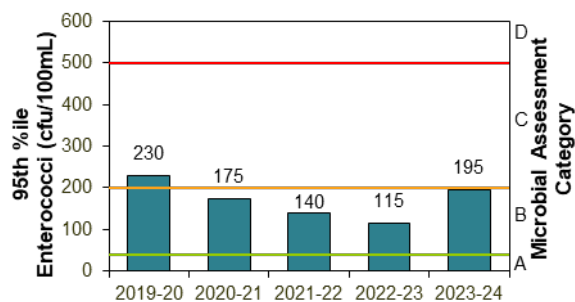
Declined

A provisional grade indicates the assessment is based on limited data collected during the assessment period and should not be compared to the beach grade from the previous year.

Explanation of graphs, charts, and information bars on beach pages

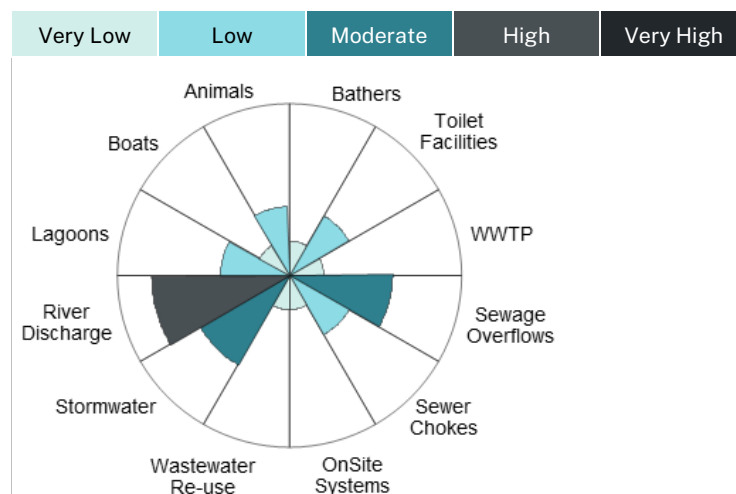
Microbial Assessment Category (MAC) chart

On each beach page, the MACs for the last 5 years are displayed on a simple bar chart. The MAC for the current year is based on enterococci data collected during the assessment period. The bars are labelled with the 95th percentile value for each year and the thresholds dividing the A, B, C and D categories are marked in green, amber and red for reference.



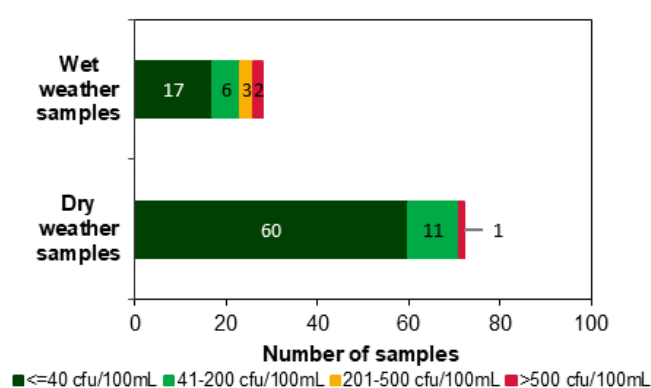
Sanitary Inspection Category (SIC) chart

The results of the sanitary inspection for each swimming location are presented in a radar pie chart. The chart shows the likelihood that each identified pollution source will contribute to faecal contamination at a swimming site, as indicated by the size and colour of the segment, ranging from very low (lightest colour) to very high (darkest colour) as shown below. The sum of these contributions is the overall likelihood, or Sanitary Inspection Category.



Wet and dry weather water quality chart

Enterococci levels in wet and dry weather conditions are presented for each swimming location as a bar graph. All data collected during the assessment period is included in the analysis. Dry weather is defined as no rainfall recorded in the previous 24 hours. Each bar is colour coded to show the number of enterococci results up to 40 cfu/100 mL, between 41 and 200 cfu/100 mL, between 201 and 500 cfu/100 mL and greater than 500 cfu/100 mL. These categories reflect the Microbial Assessment Category thresholds and are coloured on the graph as dark green, light green, amber and red respectively.

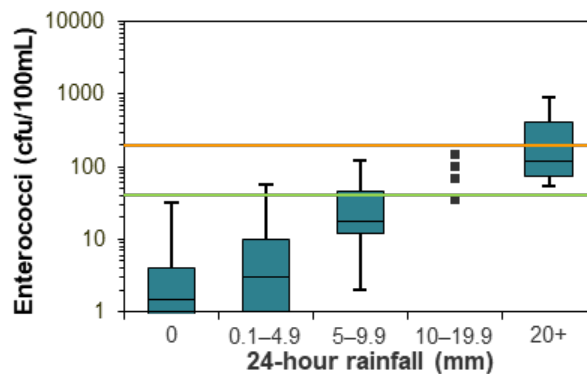


It is expected that swimming sites with lower levels of flushing will show some elevated bacterial results in dry weather samples (no rainfall in the previous 24 hours) due to the longer time needed to recover from a rainfall event. At some estuarine and lake/lagoon swimming locations the impacts of stormwater pollution on beach water quality may be detected up to 3 days after rainfall.

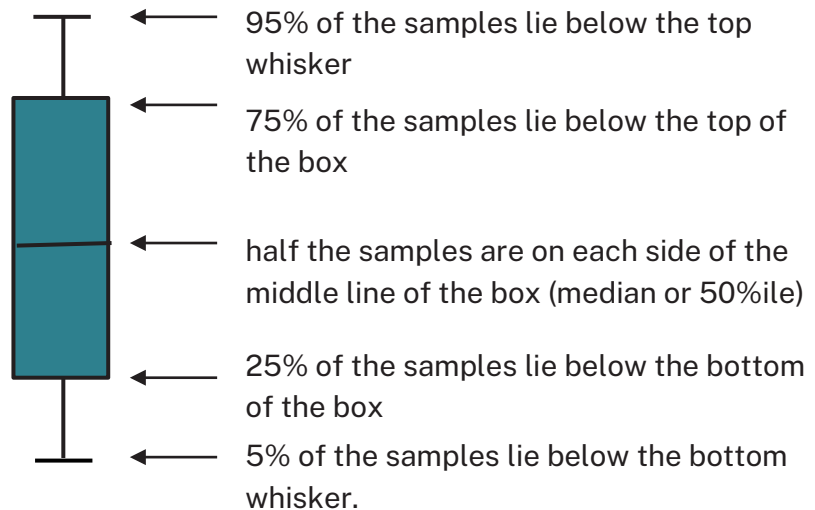
Water quality in response to rainfall

Trends in enterococci levels in response to rainfall are shown using a box plot. For reference, enterococci levels of 40 cfu/100 mL and 200 cfu/100 mL are indicated with a green and orange line, respectively. The 40 cfu/100 mL level is referred to as the 'safe swimming limit'. The enterococci data were obtained from the last 5 years of monitoring. Rainfall data were obtained from rain gauges situated close to the sample site and are 24-hour totals to 9 am on the day of sampling. If there are fewer than 5 enterococci data points in a rainfall category, individual data points are presented instead of a box plot. At sites

where many results are below the detection limit (1 cfu/100 mL), only the upper portion of the box plots will be visible.



Each part of the box plot represents a significant percentile value of the sample population:



Information bars

Information bars on each beach page provide a summary of details about the swimming site.
















The **assessment period** shows the timeframe in which the water samples were collected. The NHMRC guidelines state beach grades should be determined from the most recent 100 water quality results collected within a 5-year period. The assessment period varies between sites depending on sampling frequency.

Dry weather samples suitable for swimming (**dry weather swimmability**) shows the percentage of water samples with enterococci levels below 40 cfu/100 mL. Dry weather is defined as no rainfall in the previous 24 hours.

Swimming sites with lower levels of flushing often have a lower percentage of dry weather samples within the safe swimming limit due to the impacts of rainfall detected up to 3 days after the event.

Explanation of maps

A map of individual swimming locations is presented on each beach page. The scale of the maps is 1:10,000. Each map shows the location of the sampling site, land use and features such as surf lifesaving clubs. Potential pollution sources such as stormwater drains, sewage pumping stations, wastewater treatment plants, lagoons, rivers and creeks, are shown where accurate data is held.

Key to maps	
	Sampling Site
	Surf Life Saving Club
	Wastewater Treatment Plant
	Sewage Pumping Station
	Sewage Overflow
	Stormwater Drain
	Water
	Baths
	National Park/Reserve/ Other Park
	Built-up Area
	Sand
	Roads
	Major Roads
	Baths – Netted Area
	Breakwater/Wharf

References

NHMRC (2008) *Guidelines for managing risks in recreational water*, National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, ACT.

Standards Australia (2007) *AS/NZS 4276.9:2007, Water microbiology Method 9: Enterococci – Membrane filtration method (ISO 7899-2:2000, MOD)*, Standards Australia International Ltd, Sydney and Standards New Zealand, Wellington.

WA Department of Health (2007), *Microbial quality of recreational water guidance notes in support of chapter 5 of the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for managing risks in recreational water, 2006*, Department of Health, Western Australia and The University of Western Australia, October 2007, ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Environmental-waters-publications, accessed 23/06/22.

Wyer MD, Kay D, Fleisher JM, Salmon RL, Jones F, Godfree AF, Jackson G and Rogers A (1999) 'An experimental health related classification for marine waters', *Water Research*, 33(3):715–722.

More information

- [Beachwatch NSW on X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)
- [Beachwatch NSW on Facebook](#)
- [Beachwatch webpage](#)
- [Coastal management program progress](#)
- [Sanitary inspection of beaches](#)
- [Subscribe to daily pollution forecast emails](#)
- [WA Government environmental water publications](#)
- [Hunter Water projects](#)
- [Port Stephens Council Coastal Management Program](#)
- [City of Newcastle Coastal Management and Planning](#)
- [Lake Macquarie City Council Coastal Management Program](#)