

Septic Tank Setbacks Cheat Sheet

Australian planning distances at a glance — for tiny homes, granny flats & off-grid builds

Why setbacks matter

Setbacks protect drinking water, neighbours and your own dwelling from the risk of wastewater contamination. Every Australian council enforces them, and getting the tank position wrong is the most common reason a septic application is rejected. Use this sheet as a planning starting point — your licensed plumber confirms the exact figures for your soil type, slope and council.

Typical minimum setbacks (metres)

Feature	Septic tank	Absorption trench
Habitable building (your dwelling)	3 m	6 m
Boundary fence	1.5 m	3 m
Driveway / vehicle access	3 m	3 m
In-ground swimming pool	3 m	6 m
Bore or well (drinking water)	15 m	50 m
Dam, creek or watercourse	15 m	30–100 m
Stormwater drain	6 m	6 m
Embankment / cutting (downslope)	3 m	12 m
Underground services (water, power)	1 m	1 m
Large trees (root intrusion)	3 m	3 m

Figures shown are typical Australian minimums drawn from AS/NZS 1547 and common council guidelines. Many councils require larger setbacks on steep, sandy or high-water-table sites. Always verify before excavating.

Site factors that change the numbers

- **Slope:** sites over 10% slope usually need extra downslope setback to the trench.
- **Soil type:** sandy soils drain fast and need bigger separation from waterways; clay soils need longer trenches.
- **Water table:** a high or seasonal water table can rule out trench dispersal entirely — an alternative system may be required.
- **Bushfire BAL rating:** tanks above ground require fire-rated coverings in BAL-29+ zones.
- **Flood-prone land:** lids and risers must be sealed and weighted to prevent flotation.

Quick siting checklist

- Tank is downhill of the dwelling (gravity flow to the inlet).
- Tank lids stay accessible for pump-out — no decks, slabs or carports above.
- Trench is downhill of the tank, on stable ground, no vehicle traffic over it.
- All distances above are measured to the nearest edge, not centre to centre.
- Council application lodged before excavation begins.

Need a tank? Bush Billabongs supplies 1500L three-chamber polyethylene septic tanks from \$949 AUD with self-service pickup across NSW, QLD and VIC. Visit bushbillabongs.com.au or email info@bushbillabongs.com.au.

This guide is general information only and does not replace professional advice. Always confirm requirements with your licensed plumber and local council.