

# A Comprehensive Strategy for Activated Sludge Wastewater Treatment Facilities for Nutrient Removal Treatment

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**Abstract.** Traditional wastewater processing systems employ techniques that require a very lot of energy, so we need to get creative about doing that better and more sustainable. Activated sludge, which is found in many places around the world as a method of cleaning wastewater, is essential for removing nitrogen and phosphate. Proponents of these approaches will argue that traditional nutrient recovery methods (such as those based on physical, chemical and biological processes) are not necessarily "renewable" nor energy-efficient long-term solutions because they rely on destabilizing bio-nutrients rather than harvesting them, take a lot more energy to work through a thicker and different feed stock photo list and possess a variety of influent characteristics. In the situation, to simply optimize the biology process or operation will not satisfy new stringent discharge standards. The present study offers a complete and integrated approach for nutrient removal in activated sludge WWTPs. The developed framework includes the advanced monitoring and control strategy design along with system configuration selection and critical operating parameter optimization to improve biological N&P removal performances.

## 1 Introduction

The discharge of nitrogen and phosphorus from urban sewage treatment plants is an important environmental problem due to its direct result-causing water eutrophication, when they cause harmful algal blooms and aquatic ecosystem degradation [1]. As cities as well as the population grow wastewater treatment plants have to manage higher hydraulic and organic loads, while addressing stricter environmental laws regarding nutrient discharges [2]. Biological treatment is an attractive alternative to chemical approaches to address nitrogen, and phosphorus in wastewater. This is because there has been a rise in demand toward operating with lower value, low nutrient from concentration [3]. Activated sludge systems

remain the most widely used biological treatment method for municipal wastewater due to their relatively high treatment efficiency and operational flexibility [4]. The last few decades have seen a significant advancement in the development of biological methods for removing nutrients, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen [5], [6]. However, the efficacy of numerous operational plants is still limited by unpredictable influent, operationally bad practice and increasing energy requirements [7], [8], [9], [10]. When it comes to nutrients removal, there are several conventional approaches that typically look into the process design, microbial population dynamics, and/or chemicals substitution [11], [12], [13], [14]. While those techniques have achieved some success, they frequently do not provide a comprehensive picture that spans design, operation and control. As a result, the treatment performance does not tend to be stable in response to a load change and treatment costs may significantly increase [10], [13], [15].

The goal of this article is to suggest a certain approach to nutrient removal in WTP employing activated sludge. The proposed approach includes the advanced monitoring and control strategies, process-design alternatives, better operating windows and basic biological knowledge. This approach aims at increasing treatment capacity, maximizing nutrient removal efficiency and sustainability of the wastewater treatment plant as well.

## 2 Principles of Activated Sludge Systems' Nutrient Removal

Natural-based instead of chemical methods for nitrogen and phosphorus removal from wastewater are receiving considerable interest (Figure. 1). This is attributed to the increasing need for low-cost wastewater denitrification. To approach the low-carbon age, it is necessary to utilize new wastewater treatment processes with nutrient recovery and reduced power consumption including CO<sub>2</sub> emission [16], [17]. From this point of view, the activated sludge (AS) process as one of the dominant treatment systems now to be used some such problems. For instance, full elimination of nitrogen from ammonium necessitates complete nitrification and denitrification, operation which demands much aeration and expensive carbon addition [18], [19] (Fig. 2).

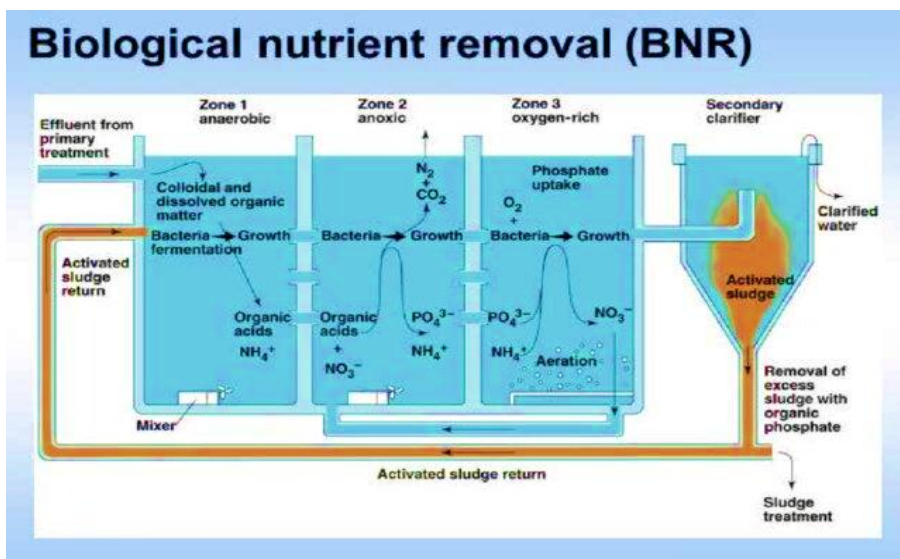


Fig. 1. Biological nutrient removal (BNR) process [20].

## 2.1 Mechanisms Nitrogen Removal

The two primary stages of the biological nitrogen removal process in activated sludge systems are nitrification and denitrification. In the aerobic nitrification process, autotrophic microbes convert ammonia to nitrite and subsequently to nitrate [3]. This process is significantly impacted by temperature, pH, solids retention time, and dissolved oxygen concentration. Inadequate control of these variables could lead to ammonia breakthrough and partial nitrification in the wastewater [21], [22]. During anoxic denitrification heterotrophic bacteria utilize organic carbon as a source of free electrons to reduce nitrate to nitrogen gas. Quickly Biodegradable carbon source and appropriate anoxia are important to give a good performance of denitrification [23]. However, poor carbon source availability is a major limiting factor for many wastewater treatment plants and substantial energy or operational input must often be made to ensure complete N-removal [22], [24].

## 2.2 Phosphorus Removal Mechanisms

In systems with activated sludge, phosphorus can be taken out by chemical precipitation, biological uptake, or a mix of the two. The enhanced biological phosphorus removal is based on the activity of organisms that accumulate phosphorus by taking in more than they need for their metabolism in both anaerobic and aerobic conditions. During the anaerobic phase, these microorganisms release phosphorus and store volatile fatty acids as polymers inside their cells [25]. These microorganisms let out phosphorus and store volatile fatty acids as intracellular polymers during the anaerobic phase [26]. During the next aerobic phase, they take up more phosphorus than they release, which causes net phosphorus removal through sludge wasting. To work, this process needs to be strictly controlled so that there are no anaerobic conditions, enough volatile fatty acids are available, and oxygen and nitrate can't get into anaerobic areas [27].

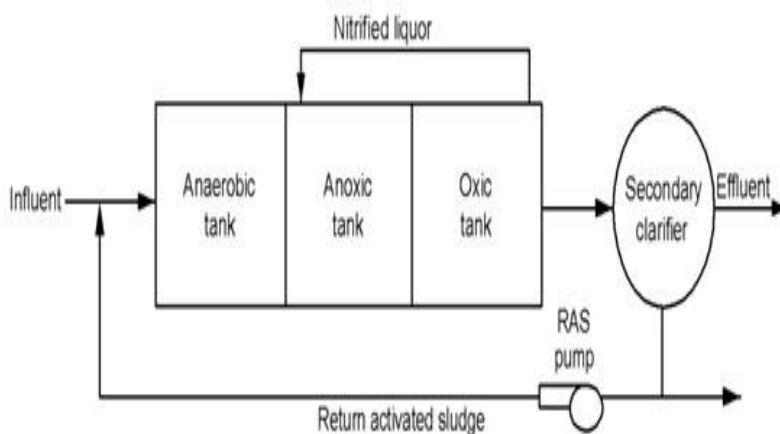
## 3 Enhanced Nutrient Removal Process Configurations

Changes in the composition of influent and competition with different microbial communities are two things that can often affect biological phosphorus removal. It needs to be part of a bigger operational plan to work well over the long term [28]. The main goal of anaerobic–oxic arrangements is to remove phosphorus, however because of low anoxic volume, they frequently show poor nitrogen removal [29]. By adding specific denitrification zones, anaerobic-anoxic-oxic systems enhance nitrogen removal; nevertheless, their effectiveness is still influenced by carbon availability and internal recirculation rates (**Table 1**) [30].

**Table 1.** Activated sludge process configurations for enhanced biological nutrient removal.

Configuration	Primary nutrient removal mechanisms	Performance aspects	Refs
<b>Anaerobic–Oxic (AO)</b>	Biological phosphorus removal via anaerobic release and aerobic uptake; limited denitrification	Effective for phosphorus removal; nitrogen removal typically limited without dedicated anoxic zone	[31]
<b>Anaerobic–Anoxic–Oxic (A2O)</b>	Combined phosphorus removal and sequential nitrification–denitrification	Improved nitrogen removal compared to AO when internal recirculation is properly managed	[32]

<b>Three-stage Bardenpho</b>	Extended denitrification and nitrification steps with PAO activity	Higher total nitrogen and phosphorus removal potential than simple A2O; greater operational control required	[32]
<b>UCT (University of Cape Town)</b>	Similar to Bardenpho with modified internal recycle to enhance phosphorus removal	Robust phosphorus removal with operational flexibility; N removal varies with configuration	[32]
<b>UCT Modified (UCTM)</b>	Further modification of UCT flow patterns to optimize N and P pathways	Improved performance under influent variability compared to standard UCT	[32]



**Fig. 2.** A typical flowchart showing the combination of processes involved.

By combining several anoxic and aerobic zones, more intricate configurations such as four-stage or five-stage systems offer increased flexibility and nutrient removal capacity [33]. These systems can't be used in small or resource-constrained institutions, though, because they need more capital investment and strict operational supervision. Setting up the process is important for getting rid of nutrients, but it doesn't guarantee the best performance on its own [34]. Recent improvements in biological wastewater treatment have led to the creation of new modifications that are meant to make the process more efficient and environmentally friendly. However, it is still hard to optimize parameters, make technology big enough for industrial application, and keep costs down [35], [36], [37].

## 4 Performance Evaluation and Environmental Benefits

In order to regulate nitrogen and phosphorus from municipal wastewater treatment and reclamation plants in the aquatic environment, biological nutrient removal is essential [38]. Recent developments demonstrate the potential of microbial community analysis to enhance energy performance and treatment efficiency in WWTPs. According to studies, certain microbial species play a major role in the biological processes that remove nutrients. The activated sludge process is a well-liked biological treatment method that effectively eliminates organic materials, nutrients, and other impurities from municipal wastewater. This

process involves adding a culture of microorganisms to the wastewater, which accelerates the organic material's breakdown [39]. Biological N removal technology is the microbial transformation of organic nitrogen into endogenous nitrogen that is assimilated into the tissues or cellular components of microorganisms. It also explains how, in anoxic or aerobic conditions, organic nitrogen is converted into smaller inorganic nitrogen molecules, which subsequently transform into gaseous nitrogen compounds released into the atmosphere [40], [41].

## 5 Challenges and Future Perspectives

The Cyclic Activated Sludge Process is a cyclical operation with significant advantages including reduction of nutrients, lower energy consumption and generally a stable process for wastewater treatment, although the cost to operate, the ability to implement technology to do business and knowing what to choose as optimal process conditions present notable challenges [42]. These obstacles include the capital cost of high tech equipment, the need for trained personnel and the integration of the process into existing systems [43]. Overall, the continual advancement of cyclical activated sludge processes has a tremendous potential to develop efficient, sustainable technologies for the treatment of wastewater and is essential to reducing water pollution and conserving environmental resource [44]. It is important to carefully monitor and manage several variables when biological N and P removal along with resource recovery techniques to maintain stable and effective treatment processes. A number of factors involved in the operation of this type of treatment process are interrelated; therefore, maintaining the stability of the system and preventing large fluctuations in load during operation is one of the key challenges associated with implementing this technology [45]. Phosphorus recovery and energy-neutral wastewater treatment are two resource recovery techniques that appear promising for next-generation treatment facilities [46], [47-51].

## 6 Conclusion

Sustainable development is supported by a water treatment technology that reduces energy consumption; improves the quality of the treated water and converts contaminants from waste products to resources. Over the years, researchers have developed new methods to grow activated sludge (biological) processes to treat wastewater containing organic and inorganic contaminants (phenols). This paper will focus on the complete method developed to remove nutrients from activated sludge treatment plants, including advanced control systems, operational optimizations, and process configurations. Future research should focus on combining microbial engineering and intelligent monitoring, improve reactor designs, and explore new methods for resource reclamation and pollution removal. This method is expected to facilitate efficient resource recycling and enhance global water resource management and ecological conservation.

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