



COVID-19 Pandemic and Swimming Pool Closures

Disclaimers:

- **This position is current as at 11am (AEST) on 25 March 2020**
- **Our position must be considered against our remit as a national peak body, with a key focus on reducing drowning and promoting safe aquatic participation**

Royal Life Saving has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 Pandemic through official sources including the Australian Government Department of Health, and State/Territory Government Departments of Health.

Governments have now called for all swimming pools to close by midnight 25th March 2020. This includes all non-essential education services. It may allow for the continuation of swimming pools in the setting of Allied Health Facilities.

Royal Life Saving estimates that there are more than 1,077 aquatic facilities, the majority of which are owned by local councils and more than 1,176 swim schools, including many small businesses that will be required to close today.

The Aquatic Industry, including Swim Schools, employs approximately 67,000 frontline workers, almost half of the workforce are casual employees and three-quarters are female, and 40% are between the ages of 18 to 24 years.

Royal Life Saving estimates that more than 1.5 million children aged 0 to 14 years participate in organised swimming (lessons, coaching) outside of school programs every year, and there are more than 106 million individual swimming pool visits annually.

The Aquatic Industry, including Swim Schools, provides many social, economic and health benefits to Australians of all ages, and has done so for generations. The financial impacts of a 6-month closure are estimated to be \$900m in lost revenue, and \$430m in lost wages. This does not include the thousands of small businesses that support aquatic facilities in their supply of goods and services.

This is a challenging time for many working or relying on the Aquatic Industry, including Swim Schools. This Industry makes a substantial contribution to community health and wellbeing.

To the Federal, State and Territory and Local Governments, we urge that you:

- Take steps now to ensure that every pool that was open on 1st March 2020 will be operational, has a skilled workforce and is ready to re-open when they are given the green light to do so
- This means ensuring that these vital swimming pools and Swim Schools are maintained during this period of closure. Pools left to fall into disrepair are very difficult and costly to re-instate. They are prone to damage and failures. Long-term closures will have significant impacts on health, safety and wellbeing
- Ensure that funds are available to retain key operational staff, whether directly employed by councils, or facility operators. These staff will be required to ensure pool maintenance

To the Aquatic Industry workforce, we say:

- Royal Life Saving will make available various online professional development programs which may help you to retain and build your skills, ready for when swimming pools re-open
- Renewal dates for CPR, First Aid and Pool Lifeguarding certifications and accreditations related to the Aquatic Industry that lapse between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2020 will be extended. Where trainees are unable to complete training and assessment requirements due to COVID-19 Pandemic, existing certifications and accreditations will be extended until 1 July 2020, pending a further review of public health advice



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To parents, we say:

- Water Safety remains critical, especially if you have a home pool and with children at home
- Keep Watch, actively always supervise children, especially children aged 12 to 24 months
- Pool fences and gates must be in good working order
- Young children should not be left to be supervised by older children
- Royal Life Saving has a breadth of water safety education resources available online
- We will soon publish a guide with ideas to help educate and occupy children during this period

To recreational swimmers, we say:

- We fully appreciate the need to swim, to maintain fitness, and for mental health and general wellbeing. We love to swim too, but you must take steps to minimise any risk to you or to others. Swimming in open and inland waterways presents substantial risk of drowning and other injuries.
- Please observe all closures, only swim in supervised areas, never swim alone and avoid alcohol around water

For over 125 years, Royal Life Saving has advocated that swimming and water safety lessons, a daily swim for fun, fitness and good health, that the aquatic and swim school sectors are essential.

Our challenge today, and in coming days, is to ensure the welfare of staff, family and those close to us.

In coming weeks and months, we will work to ensure that the Aquatic Industry and Swim Schools are ready to bounce back into service, as millions of people will again be desperate for a swim, and to enrol their children in swimming and water safety lessons.

At this difficult and evolving time, it is essential that we all follow the public health guidance provided by Governments at Federal, State and Territory levels.

Justin Scarr

Chief Executive Officer

We declare the following:

- Our Members deliver education and training services to schools, pools and community
- Two Members operate public aquatic centres
- Two Members operate a total of 3 swim schools
- We receive Government funding which supports our efforts to develop industry safety guidelines
- We love aquatics, are committed to industry and community safety is paramount