



Background

Impact of the pandemic

We cannot discuss the work of the NAIC without firstly acknowledging the deep cutting and wide range of impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic which have carried on through 2021 and look to heavily impact 2022 as well.

Swim schools and local pools across the country have been hit hard by mandated closures and restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. This threatens to have tragic consequences for many Australians in the coming summer and beyond. Lockdowns have led many swimming teachers and pool lifeguards to leave jobs they love in search of whatever stable work they could find. Staff shortages are impacting on many businesses and communities. This impact is worse in regional areas where swimming pools play an important part in summer fun. That's a blow to them, to the industry, and potentially to the economy. But it's a blow to the safety of our society too. Given the Australian lifestyle, swimming is a vital life skill. Not being able to swim diminishes the enjoyment of life and puts lives at risk, now and in the future.

NAIC Actions

On the 13th August 10th September and 13th October Royal Life Saving Australia (RLSSA) convened the National Aquatic Industry Committee (NAIC) and/or its sub-committees. The focus in the second half of 2021 was advocating the broader health social and economic benefits of the aquatic industry to remind policy makers of the impact the industry has in communities and assisting facility owners and operators with a transition to safe operating in a post-vaccine 'living with covid' Australia ahead of summer. The committee met and workshopped various strategies and resolved to take action in the following areas on behalf of the national aquatic industry:

Renewed Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPO) Hub Launched

In July 2021, the GSPO hub was relaunched in conjunction with a new RLSSA website.

The new hub made finding key information in the GSPO easier than ever before by incorporating a search function and easier navigation. In addition to this, the hub now holds various management tools and webinar recordings to assist with making aquatic facility operations safer and more current with industry and community standards.

Social Health and Economic Value of the National Aquatic Industry Report

RLSSA published a report into the Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian Aquatic Industry, prepared by PwC Australia in partnership with RLSSA and on behalf of the National Aquatic Industry Committee. This was a historic report about the importance of the aquatic industry within Australian society. It came at important crossroads with lockdowns, looming federal elections and an Australia considering the best way to transition to a new covid-vaccinated society and economy all resulting in a complex regulatory and policy environment. The report found the aquatic industry:

- Is a driver of economic activity throughout Australia, employing the equivalent of 33,600 full time employees and adding \$2.8 billion to gross domestic product (GDP);
- Is a generator of \$2.5 billion in health benefits, ranging across a reduction in the burden of disease, improved mental health outcomes, reduced absenteeism, and reduced childhood drowning; and,



- Is a provider of \$3.8 billion's worth of social benefits such as: enhancing an individual's leisure time or creating increased life satisfaction; by bringing people together; supporting more vulnerable groups; and supporting early learning.

The report was published and sent to federal MPs, senators and ministers as well as key officials and received significant positive feedback including letters from the highest levels of the Australian Government acknowledging the industry and its importance in the Australian community. RLSSA would like to thank industry partners who contributed data to the report to inform the economic modelling. The report and associated collateral is available here:

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/Aquatic-Risk-and-Guidelines/aquatic-research/Health-Social-and-Economic-Value-of-Aquatic-Industry>

COVID-19 Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations

The NAIC was provided with an executive summary of external expert health advice on the four-stage Australian reopening plan. The committee resolved that developing and authorising industry standard guidance for transitioning to 'living with covid' would be prudent in advocating an organised and cohesive national approach to aquatic facility safety, despite the variances in local state and territory health advice, rules and regulations. Over the course of several meetings and consultation forums including:

- NAIC Consultation
- National GSPO Subscriber EDM
- [News story published on RLSSA website](#), social media and Australasian Leisure Management
- NAIC Member Communications and channels

Over 150 individual pieces of feedback were provided by the national aquatic industry and collated and presented to the NAIC for review. Each entity / person providing feedback was provided with a written response to their feedback. RLSSA would like to thank the many colleagues who contributed to these Guidelines and the NAIC member organisations for their input and facilitation of feedback.

The NAIC voted to endorse the updated Guideline on 13th October 2021 which was [published](#) on 22nd October 2021 in the GSPO portal.

Basic Life Support / CPR During COVID-19

As the focus shifted to safe reopening of aquatic facilities, RLSSA had been in touch with NAIC regarding adjustments to basic life support (and CPR) as a result of COVID-19 and our 'living with covid' paradigm. The NAIC expressed a view that RLSSA should refer the matter to the Australian Resuscitation Council (ARC). ARC expressed the view it should be referred to National Covid-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce (NC19CET) (of which the ARC is a member). RLSSA wrote to NC19CET regarding three considerations in particular: CPR for the paid first responder, drowning victims and children.

The NC19CET reviewed RLSSA/NAIC's submission between October and late December and wrote to RLSSA in late December having adopted a position and publishing an updated flowchart for first aid providers (including aquatic industry staff) for basic life support during COVID-19. This [peak medical advice](#) is recommended to be followed by all aquatic industry owners and operators when providing basic life support to patrons of aquatic facilities.



Social Impact of Aquatics Report

On 10th November 2021, RLSSA on behalf of the National Aquatic Industry Committee launched its second aquatic industry advocacy report for the year– The Social Impact of the [National Aquatic Industry Report](#). The report found the industry provides many benefits including health and wellbeing, increasing social connection, providing safe environments for swimming and education, facilitating social cohesion in communities and providing significant employment benefits. The report found that public pools mean more to communities now than just being a place to swim; for many communities their pool is a central hub where people come together.

RLSSA would like to thank the many colleagues who contributed to this report. RLSSA provided soft copies of this report to federal MPs, senators and ministers as well as key officials. There has been a significant interest from policy makers, academics and industry organisations alike in the findings of this report, including requests to partner on future research.

Inland Waterway Safety Guidelines

With over 100 drowning deaths in rivers and lakes each year, representing the most drownings of any aquatic location, it has been a major focus of 2021 to develop safety guidance for the ownership, management and use of inland waterways to reduce the likelihood of drowning and serious aquatic injuries. New Guidelines were drafted by RLSSA and [were released for public consultation](#) on 26th November 2021.

The guidelines have been developed following a decade of research into drowning incidents in Australia's rivers, lakes, creeks, and other inland waterways. The guidelines emphasise risk management, the development of local water safety plans and community consultation. They also provide information on minimum water safety qualifications and training for employees as well as guidance on supervision ratios and similar requirements for users recreating and for providers of structured programs.

Life is Better When We Swim

Before the pandemic we all had concerns that almost half of children graduating from primary school each year can't swim 50 metres or float for two minutes – a basic national swimming and water safety benchmark. Disturbingly, Covid-led closures and other impacts on families have amplified this long-term trend of children in this critical age group not taking or finishing swimming lessons too soon.

Through ongoing structured swimming lessons, especially for children aged 8-12, we can ensure all our children are proficient and safe around water. It is a life investment; we will be equipping them to make better decisions in and around water as teenagers and in adulthood.

To make a start, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia under advice of the NAIC and other partners has created We Swim, a movement to inspire parents across Australia to take action to ensure their children enjoy all the benefits of swimming, from the fun stuff like splashes, dives and races to the many health and safety benefits of being in the water.

In bringing communities back together, the aquatic centres also continue their essential role in ensuring Australian families can enjoy summer in and around the water - and do so confidently and safely. Aquatic facilities and aquatic partner organisations can either sign up to be a supporter of We Swim and use the free marketing materials aimed at attracting and retaining aquatic facility customers



via the [We Swim Website](#) or via existing arrangements with Royal Life Saving State and Territory member networks.

Updates to Skill Sets and Units of Competency (2022)

The NAIC has been provided with a list of skill sets and units of competency which will need updating in the GSPO in 2022. Initial feedback has been constructive, but RLSSA anticipates this will require some working through in the new year.

Fit for purpose guideline (2022)

Following advice from the NAIC earlier in 2021, we will look to kick off a project early in 2022 to develop Guidelines for 'Fit For Purpose' Aquatic Facility Design & Operations to assist the industry in advocating to leisure planners, aquatic facility designers and builders on the practicality and sustainability of certain aquatic facility designs and their impacts on operating sustainably responsible aquatic facilities to last their full asset lifecycle of 50 years and remain fit-for-purpose. A taskforce has been set up for this purpose and will drive this important piece of work with the assistance of RLSSA and a consulting partner.

Safe & Enjoyable Holidays

On behalf of RLSSA and the NAIC, we wish all those working in and using the aquatic industry a safe and enjoyable holiday period.



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