

State of Australian Aquatic Facilities 2025

Benchmarking Social, Health & Economic Value, Access Equity & Sustainability

> EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Australian Aquatic Facilities 2025 report provides a data-driven analysis of the current profile, state, challenges, and opportunities facing aquatic facility planners, owners and operators and governments. Using authoritative data sources this report presents a comprehensive assessment of the sector's impact, recent funding landscape and sustainability challenges.

KEY FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

1. Aquatic Facilities: Social & Economic Value



421 million visits annually to 2,103 publicly accessible aquatic facilities across Australia



The social value of aquatic facilities has increased to **\$12.84 billion per year**, up from \$9.1 billion in 2021, and is inclusive of health, social, and economic benefits



Each visit to an aquatic facility **generates \$30.50** in economic benefits, reflecting improved health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and community engagement



Drowning remains a major public health concern, with 323 fatalities in 2023/24. **Community access** to public pools has been a key to the Australian approach to water safety and drowning prevention for generations.

2. Infrastructure Challenges & Investment Needs

- > There is new data on the average ratios of aquatic facilities to population.

AVERAGE AQUATIC FACILITY TO POPULATION RATIOS (APPROX)

Capital Cities: 1:20,000

Regional Cities: 1: 12,000

National average: 1:13,000

- > People living in many regional and outer-metropolitan areas lack access to aquatic facilities for lessons, leisure and fitness. This gap in access contributes to social inequities. New data shows a need for better planning frameworks that account for geographic distribution and population growth projections.
- > More than 6 million Australians (24%) must drive more than 10 minutes to reach a public pool; this figure is projected to rise to 7.3 million (29%) by 2032.
- > 1.8 million Australians (7%) are more than 20 minutes away, highlighting the growing equity issue in public pool access.
- > Analysis of Commonwealth investment shows \$1.79 billion allocated across multiple programs, with \$297.54 million (16.62% of total community infrastructure funding) going towards aquatic infrastructure in 2023 and 2024.
- > While previous research identified 500 public pools are approaching the end of their lifespan with no national plan to address this, this report has found local governments are under significant financial pressure, with programs falling short of the demand. A dedicated funding stream for public pool feasibility plans, maintenance, upgrades and new facilities is likely needed.

3. Workforce Challenges & Safety Concerns

- > Lifeguards responded to a 12.5% increase year-on-year in major incidents responded to by pool lifeguards. While causation is unclear, increased usage, a green workforce, fragmented approaches to training and accreditation and declining swimming skills post-COVID are likely to be influencing factors.
- > There is an increasing trend of public aggression and abuse towards aquatic staff, requiring improved workplace protections, training and accreditation systems and support.

4. Sustainability & Climate Action

- > Aquatic facilities are major energy consumers, requiring systematic upgrades to reduce environmental impact.
- > The majority of pools still rely on natural gas, necessitating more programs for electrification and renewable energy adoption.
- > Water waste and energy inefficiency remain key concerns, with leaks, evaporation, and outdated filtration systems contributing to excessive resource consumption.
- > Leading facilities showcase the potential for fully sustainable, net-zero energy operations.

> KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a National Public Pool Investment Program

- > Secure sustainable, dedicated funding to upgrade, expand, and replace aging aquatic facilities.
- > Prioritise equitable access, focusing on growth areas and underserved communities.
- > Ensure investment in energy-efficient, climate-resilient pools.
- > Support feasibility studies for low-resource councils and disadvantaged communities.

2. Develop a National Public Pool Planning Framework

- > Guide state and local governments on equitable planning and investment in aquatic facilities.
- > Implement systematic needs assessments to ensure investment decisions are focused on population growth, access through the asset lifespan, and fit for purpose design, and prevent overinvestment in areas with limited demand.

3. Strengthen Workforce Protections & Professional Development

- > Strengthen approaches to auditing and assessment of safety and quality outcomes at aquatic facilities and training providers.
- > Strengthen industry licensing / accreditation schemes, empowering workers and ensuring quality training and accreditation outcomes.
- > Strengthen supports for aquatic workers who may face abuse and aggression through industry-wide measures.

4. Implement National Sustainability Standards for Aquatic Facilities

- > Support widescale electrification and energy efficiency upgrades.
- > Invest in water-saving technologies such as ultra-fine filtration and leak detection systems.
- > Adopt baseline national energy and water benchmarks for public pools, incentivise accelerated improvements to reduce ecological footprint.