

Background

On the 23 November 2023 Royal Life Saving Society - Australia convened the National Aquatic Industry Committee (NAIC) to work through key industry advocacy initiatives and updates to the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPO). The committee met and discussed several issues and resolved to take action in the following areas on behalf of the national aquatic industry. The committee continues to support the ongoing need for the collaboration and coordination of the National Aquatic Industry, particularly in regards to ensuring consistency of national standards and approaches. The committee also discussed many of the challenges facing the sector as it navigates increasingly volatile and complex macro conditions.

NAIC Identified - Industry Challenges

The NAIC discussed several challenges facing the sector. These included:

- Workforce – staffing shortages, consistency and quality of staff, young workers at entry level, loss of quality / expertise at management levels, increasing diversity
- Teach-out period for Swim Teachers, transitioning to new training packages for RTOs
- Rising costs of business – increased utility costs, aging infrastructure
- Contemporary safety challenges: psychosocial safety, child safety, safety culture, occupational violence & aggression

Lowering barriers to access aquatic facilities

The NAIC discussed how the committee can best facilitate and ensure increased availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities and programs to all members of all communities, noting challenges around infrastructure, funding availability, ensuring programs and inclusive and the workforce is diverse.

Royal Life Saving will release research in 2024 which examines equitable access to public pools, while AUSTSWIM will lead a taskforce via the NAIC which looks at ensuring industry guidelines are updated to reflect contemporary approaches to access and inclusion. The latest GSPO: Training & Qualifications will incorporate early recommendations on this topic.

Child Safety Guidelines

Following earlier work, the Child Safety Guidelines are now published and available in the GSPO portal. These will come into effect from 1 July 2024.

Royal Life Saving on behalf of the NAIC thanks all of the industry members who provided feedback into this invaluable body of work aimed at making aquatic facilities safe for children and young people and assisting the industry with compliance with regulatory frameworks.

Training & Qualifications Guidelines

Following the updates to training packages and the resolution in June 22 to develop a single set of training and qualifications guidelines, three drafts were provided to the NAIC in 22-23 for rounds of feedback. The final draft was endorsed by the NAIC for publication in December 2023 and will come into effect 1 January 2024.

Scope was to include:

- No change to industry entry qualifications / training, only an update to the wording to include new packages and future-proof
- Summary table provided for 'Compliance on a page' (or two)
- Industry workforce architecture – on advice of the committee members previously, was out of scope

The qualification requirements in the guideline seeks to strike balance between essential safety obligations and navigating the VET system, especially changes and updates to skill sets and units which can be confusing and difficult to keep up with.

Wording in the guideline has been updated to ‘future-proof’ the guideline against further changes to training packages/skill sets/units, without compromising minimum requirements.

Royal Life Saving on behalf of the NAIC thanks all of the industry members who provided feedback into this invaluable body of work aimed at updating references to training products (typically skill sets and units) in GSPO to ensure accuracy and provide clarity for industry, and make it easier for pool managers to understand the basic requirements for training, onboarding, in-service training, re-accreditation and health & fitness.

Minor updates to various technical GSPOs

Various working groups were established to review and recommend updated wording to various GSPOs.

The updates were as follows:

Wearables (SV20)

- Changed from mobile phones to mobile devices (incl. smart watches)

Teaching platforms (AP7)

- Updates to teaching platform design to ensure platforms do not result in entrapment of students

Pool Hall Lighting (FD5)

- Lux levels aligned to the new Australian Standard AS 2560.2:2021.
- Scope updated to: *“This Guideline is not intended to apply retrospectively to facilities built prior to the publication of the Guidelines. It is intended however to apply to upgrades, redevelopments, maintenance and/or new developments so as to enhance and promote safe design in the future.”*

Incident data across the industry

Royal Life Saving has worked with NAIC member aquatic facility operators to gather incident data across the national aquatic industry. Royal Life Saving intends to publish this data in January.

Managing psychosocial risk

NAIC discussed again whether publishing guidance for the sector is necessary. No consensus on this was achieved. Recognised lifeguards and other rescuers face trauma occasionally in the line of duty, may have sector-specific risk. More research likely needed.

Cold Water Therapy

Royal Life Saving and AUSactive will issue guidance on how to safely manage cold water immersion therapy. Further consultation is being conducted with SPASA Australia and its members.

National Aquatic Industry Strategy 2026

The NAIC workshopped the previous strategy and current strategic priorities and will work through a process of developing an updated strategy for 2024-2026.

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