

The State of Aquatic Facility Infrastructure in Australia

Rebuilding our Aging Public Swimming Pools



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

ABOUT ROYAL LIFE SAVING

Royal Life Saving is focused on reducing drowning and promoting healthy, active and skilled communities through innovative, reliable, evidence based advocacy; strong and effective partnerships; quality programs, products and services; underpinned by a cohesive and sustainable national organisation.

Royal Life Saving is a public benevolent institution (PBI) dedicated to reducing drowning and turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: advocacy, education, training, health promotion, aquatic risk management, community development, research, sport, leadership and participation and international networks.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging recognising their continued connection to land, waters and communities.



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> OUR VISION

**A water-loving nation
free from drowning.**



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Cover: Horsham War Memorial Pool,
National Library Australia



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

KEY FINDINGS: STATE OF SWIMMING POOLS

In Australia, in 2022, there are **1,306 public pools** built and owned by government and 807 publicly accessible pools provided by the private sector.

79%

of aquatic facilities located in areas with the lowest SEIFA decile are publicly owned.

74%

of aquatic facilities located in areas with the highest SEIFA decile are privately owned.

77%

of aquatic facilities in regional areas are publicly owned.

The average public pool in Australia was **built in 1968**.

500 (40%) of public pools will reach the **end of their lifespan this decade**.



\$910 million annually would be the likely social, health and economic cost should 10% of aquatic facilities fail to be renewed by the end of this decade.

\$8 Billion

is needed to replace Australia's **500 aging public pools**, whose functional lifespan will end by 2030.



A further **\$3 billion** will be needed to replace facilities ending their lifespan by 2035.

\$10 Million

The basic cost to replace an outdoor swimming pool.

64%

of all renewal or new aquatic facility construction is currently financed by local government.

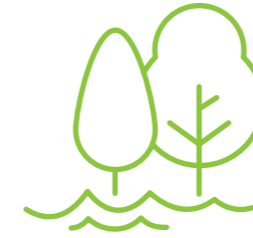
Many Councils struggle to afford to maintain or replace swimming pools, and increasingly councils are considering closing their pools.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Beyond a straight 'like-for-like' replacement of all aging aquatic facilities, which is likely unrealistic, several case studies show opportunities to rethink the Australian approach to aquatic facility provisioning in Australia.

These include:

- > Prioritising function over form and keeping new designs simple, modular and scalable.
- > Exploring new ways of funding swimming pool infrastructure, such as Public-Private-Partnerships, which can spread both risks and rewards.
- > Considering lowering access barriers to increase the use and impact of existing aquatic facilities. In some cases, removing entry fees has resulted in net neutral operating costs while increasing asset utilisation and social value.
- > Exploring opportunities for local governments to collaborate and partner on aquatic facility provisioning and sharing of costs and benefits.
- > Considering how the private sector can provide benefits traditionally serviced by local governments while being mindful that some activities and facilities require subsidies, such as lap swimming and recreational swimming.



Regional and remote communities are most at risk of missing out on updated or new aquatic facilities.



Rising energy costs and labour shortages pose a serious threat to the ongoing availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities across Australia.



Closing community pools is inherently very unpopular and consistently aggravates community sentiment and mobilises communities towards involvement in the political process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The awareness and knowledge of the significant health, social and economic benefits the aquatic sector's services deliver are increasing significantly due to the work of the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA) in association with PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia and Swinburne University. These organisations, and other peak bodies, have provided evidence highlighting the importance of aquatic facilities to Australia. The significant contribution that aquatic facilities deliver is now indisputable through quantifiable data, and we are also more informed about the number and the profiles of aquatic facilities across the country.

What is far less known is the state of the aquatic facilities and the likely timeframes for their upgrade and replacement. The research in this report provides us with important information about the age and condition of these important assets; however, its findings are extremely concerning.

In the next 10 years, up to 40 per cent of public aquatic facilities that local governments own will need to be replaced at a cost of over \$8 billion. While this determination is based on a sample size of 20 per cent of facilities and in some cases involves desktop assessment of the age and condition of facilities, it does provide sufficient cause to raise our serious concern that this will become a pressing issue in the near future requiring significant focus and investment.

Of the approximate 1,300 public aquatic facilities [3] across the nation that are available for swimming, most are funded and built by governments. While state and federal governments regularly make funds available for local governments to apply for through grants, they contribute to less than one-third of the total aquatic project cost on average. Consequently, based on the assessment of current aquatic infrastructure, local governments across Australia will collectively need to fund the balance of \$5.3 billion in aquatic facility capital costs over the next 10 years, assuming state and federal governments continue to make funding available at the current rate.

These facilities are essential for the provision of learn-to-swim, water therapy, leisure, physical activity and swimming, which are activities that over 5,000,000 Australians regularly attend [4]. In addition to these benefits they are places that create social cohesion [5]. They are an essential service for our communities to access now and, most importantly, into the future.

Regional and remote councils seem the most exposed, often providing multiple aquatic facilities across a large area. It has increasingly been these rural communities, but not exclusively, that have been presented with the prospect of pool closures and who have actively resisted. It is also clear from additional Royal Life Saving research that regional and remote communities are at higher risk of drowning in inland waterways and most benefit from access to swimming and water safety programs, made possible by local public swimming pools in most cases. It is clear that communities will protest at the prospect of their pool being closed and are vulnerable to the effects of pool closures - and this scenario is becoming more widespread as a large proportion of our aquatic infrastructure rapidly approaches the end of its lifespan.

Additional funding from state and federal governments is clearly the default remedy, however there are several approaches identified in this report that warrant further examination.

Options that should be strongly considered include:

- › Encouraging, facilitating and potentially providing financial assistance to the private sector to reach beyond the delivery of swim lessons, and to make privately owned facilities available for recreational, leisure and fitness swimming to the broader community.
- › Exploring how public and/or private schools might build and share their aquatic facilities.
- › Encouraging and facilitating greater cooperation between councils.
- › Better understanding how sports clubs and associations who may seek aquatic facilities for their sports might also consider collaborative approaches to the development of such facilities.
- › Reviewing how state and federal governments plan and allocate funds to support aquatic facility developments.

RLSSA is now seeking to bring together representatives from the aquatic sector and governments to better understand the situation we are about to confront and to explore what the sector needs to be able to ensure all Australians continue to have access to a publicly-available aquatic facility.

The following are the objectives that RLSSA sets out to achieve through the development of this report:

- › To clearly understand the state and profile of aquatic infrastructure within Australia, including historical and current contexts of aquatic infrastructure.
- › To understand the key challenges and opportunities confronting the sector with respect to aquatic infrastructure.
- › To effectively engage with the sector to ensure information obtained is up to date and reflective of the current environment.
- › To advocate the need to address aquatic infrastructure needs across Australia, so that no child or person misses out on swimming for fun, fitness or education.



In the next 10 years, up to 40 per cent of public aquatic facilities that local governments own will need to be replaced at a cost of over \$8 billion.



Method and Scope

The information in this document compiles desktop research and telephone interviews with pool owners, operators, designers, builders and consultants. In addition, modelling was provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers to support conclusions drawn from a statistically significant sample size of the Royal Life Saving National Aquatic Facility Database, which assists with estimating the average age of aquatic facilities across Australia accurately.

In addition, modelling provided by Turner and Townsend and Leisure Management Excellence was used to calculate the average cost of refurbishment and/or replacement of aquatic facilities. This modelling was then used to estimate a conservative total figure needed to replace the 40 per cent of aquatic facilities which have reached or are nearing the end of their functional lifespan.

Additional information by way of literature review and case study analysis has been included to provide reference to alternative models of aquatic facility ownership and operations and support this report's main conclusions.

This report analysed the location of publicly-accessible pools against the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index. The SEIFA index ranks areas in Australia according to relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage.

The indexes are based on information from the five yearly Australian Census.

Limitations of this Review

Royal Life Saving engaged a consulting and research partner, Leisure Management Excellence, to complete the majority of this research. The analysis and findings of this report do not constitute legal advice, nor should they be relied upon as such. It is purely the opinion of Royal Life Saving and its research partner on the need for increased understanding of the state of and investment in aquatic facilities across Australia. You and/or your organisation should seek legal advice concerning any matter you and/or your organisation may have and conduct your own due diligence in relation to any matter you and/or your organisation may have.

This report comprises reviews of primarily publicly accessible information. It should be noted that some information may not be publicly accessible. For example, it is possible that some aquatic facilities identified as being in a poor state of repair may in fact have had significant investment that is not on the public record.

The findings contained in this review are not definitive or exhaustive and should not be interpreted as definitive. It is a synthesis and analysis of key data and case studies surrounding the state of the aquatic facility infrastructure in Australia.





CONDENSED HISTORY OF PUBLIC POOL CONSTRUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

While it is well established that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a deep connection to water and are known to have participated in swimming and aquatic recreation in Australia for thousands of years, according to historians [6], Australia's early public baths were constructed in Melbourne and Sydney. One of the first was the heated Natatorium Baths in Sydney, built in 1888. Before this time, Australians bathed and swam in the many rivers, ocean beaches, lakes and dams [6].

In the 1930s, several public pools were built across Australia as governments recognised the importance of swimming as a desirable skill for all Australians to master, citing reasons of health, fitness and safety [14]. The drive to construct new pools was also due to drowning deaths in unsafe open water conditions as well as ongoing outbreaks of infectious diseases due to the unhygienic water quality of existing swimming sites [6].

Australia's international reputation for producing successful competitive swimmers also enhanced the interest in swimming pools and grew the community's acceptance of swimming as a respectable sporting and leisure pastime [6]. Family swimming was also being promoted as a pursuit to be encouraged, believing this would create better-behaved communities. Pools were becoming more modernised, and elements such as lighting, bathing boxes and even water slides were becoming more common in the late 1930s, as was the use of reinforced concrete in construction, filtration and chlorination systems [6].

Most local municipalities in cities such as Melbourne had some form of swimming pool prior to World War II. Underwater lights were often installed to enable swimming into the evening, and spectator seating was added. In 1944, a contentious Victorian government report was produced that debated the merits of seasonal outdoor pools in contrast to fully enclosed facilities, a topic that continues to be debated today [6].

Pools were generally built next to local parks and near public transport and increasingly offered bike racks. The need to better cater for children was also recognised and was consequently addressed between the 1950s and 1970s through the provision of toddler and diving pools. During this phase, the Olympics were hosted in Melbourne [6]. Along with the event came a groundswell of interest in the provision of 50-metre pools, which were constructed at various locations across the country. Between 1950 and 1959, over 50 pools were built in Victoria alone, followed by a further 70 in the 1960s. In Western Australia, a government grant program called 'The Ribbon of Blue' saw many pools built in the Western Australia Wheatbelt region during this time [6]. The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw enormous growth in the number of swimming pools constructed across Australia [12], which has culminated in most of these pools now being at the end of their useful life and requiring an urgent review [6].

In the 1970s and 1980s, government funding was focused on indoor aquatic facilities because they were recognised as being better able to cater for unstructured and diverse usage [6]. Government funding during these years was directed away from outdoor, single-use pools and towards indoor, multipurpose aquatic leisure facilities [6], a trend that continues to this day.

In the 1980s and into the new millennium, pool complexes, particularly indoor ones, became larger and were developed with many more leisure water spaces. Learn-to-swim pools were also becoming more prevalent, consistent with the objective of creating greater opportunities for more diverse usage by the community. This trend has continued to the current day, with indoor waterslides, wave pools and water playgrounds becoming increasingly popular, as have warm water pools and new approaches regarding the provision of rehabilitation and relaxation pools.

Over the past 60 years in Australia, pools appear to have progressed through three phases of focus in design and services, from competition and fitness to fun and leisure, and now wellness and rehabilitation.

THE KEY ISSUE: DECADES OF DECLINE

Australians love the water, and they love their public swimming pools. This is not surprising as over five million Australians (or one in five of us) [4] regularly swim, while many others participate in a range of physical and recreational activities which are based on being able to swim.

Australia's love of water-based activities is legendary and is used to attract significant economic activity through tourism. This love affair is not just the result of the many beautiful beaches and waterways in this great land. It can also be largely attributed to the boom in the construction of aquatic facilities following the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. After the Games, a proliferation of public pools were built right across the nation, particularly in regional areas.

With over 333 million visits to public pools each year [1], we know that Australians love their swimming pools, yet many of them are under threat, particularly in regional areas. Changes to populations and demographics, a lack of local government resources, and decades of decline have seen many pools close or become under threat of closure. There would be few of us who, at some stage, have not heard of or been a part of a local 'save the pool' campaign. Members of the public fight to see these critical community assets maintained so the current and next generation of Aussie swimmers can swim, relax, have fun and exercise at these much-loved facilities.

Of these aging swimming pools, many are unable to meet their communities' needs adequately and, in some instances, are no longer operational or safe to remain open. Increasingly, many can no longer comply with Australian and Royal Life Saving standards, including filtration and circulation rates and water quality management. As a result of rusted and broken underground pipes, cracks in pool tanks and non-porous concrete pool shells, many older pools leak significant amounts of chlorinated water into groundwater, making its way into natural waterways and basins. Leaking pools are not sustainably responsible options for governments as the cost of topping up leaking pools and heating and treating water to ensure it is up to the regulated public health standards further compounds the cost crunch to maintain these critical community assets.

In many cases, no fit-for-purpose assessments have been conducted, nor have any major engineering or environmental assessments been carried out.

Over 500 Australian public swimming pools require replacing in the next 10 years.

While the life expectancy of a public swimming pool is 50 years, a small number continue to be serviceable beyond this. However, this report has found that the vast majority of the pools built during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are reaching or have reached the end of their operational life. In Australia, approximately 500 (or approximately 40 per cent) of public swimming pools require replacement in the next 10 years. This problem is likely to deepen and become of greater concern due to the continued population growth and increased demands on infrastructure that accompany the development of new areas.

This problem is an even greater challenge for ageing aquatic infrastructure within regional areas where 58 per cent of Australian public pools are located [1]. With demand for swimming facilities ever-increasing and the unwillingness of the Australian community to allow their pools to close, the expectation upon local government, who carry the primary responsibility for funding and maintaining aquatic facilities, will only continue to increase.

The combined operational expenditure on swimming facilities and the ever-increasing costs of replacing them places a tremendous strain on local governments to make this vital community infrastructure available. While there are state and federal government funding schemes, many councils cannot secure funding or receive amounts that provide minimal contributions towards the total project. Consequently, councils must invariably generate, on average, 60-70 per cent of the upfront capital costs of most aquatic facility developments as well as all ongoing maintenance costs.

Even a basic outdoor public swimming pool costs at least \$10 million to replace.

According to an assessment by Turner and Townsend, a major Australia public swimming pool building services company, \$10 million is the minimum amount it costs to replace a relatively basic outdoor public pool (dollar amount accurate at the time of writing).

In order to replace, renew and/or upgrade the 500 pools at the end of their life, significant investment is needed and possibly the exploration of alternative service models for the delivery of aquatic facilities to be identified and implemented. Without both of these, it is likely that the number of swimming pools in Australia will significantly reduce over the coming decade. Most importantly, the opportunities for Australians to access the important social, health and economic benefits of public swimming pools will diminish. The opportunities for healthier lifestyles, social interaction and children learning to swim will be lost.

Annually, visitations will be reduced by hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars will be lost in economic benefits, and there will be an increase in health and social costs associated with the reduction in social value derived from aquatic facilities. The Australian public will likely bear the costs of inaction if there is a significant reduction in the availability of public swimming pools. This will be felt acutely in regional, remote and low-socio-economic areas, which are already in urgent need of additional support.

The loss of 10% of aquatic facilities would result in loss of \$910 million annually in social, health and economic benefits.

It is estimated that the loss of 10 per cent of aquatic facility infrastructure in Australia would result in a loss of \$910 million annually in social, health and benefits. Solutions to this problem are critical not just for the aquatic industry but for all levels of governments and communities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEALTHY AQUATIC INFRASTRUCTURE

There are a multitude of health, social and economic benefits that are attributable to the availability of an aquatic facility, including the opportunities they provide for children and adults to learn essential swimming and water safety skills, the contribution to healthier lifestyles and, importantly, the avenues they provide for social connections.

A recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and Royal Life Saving (RLS) found that the aquatic industry contributes \$9.1 billion annually in health, social and economic benefits to Australia [3]. Another joint report by RLS and Swinburne University of Technology found that aquatic facilities and their programs play a critical role in creating social connections and reducing social isolation for at-risk community members [5].

Water Safety

As a result of the aquatic industry's activities and the work of the Australian Water Safety Council, the rate of drowning deaths in the 0 to 4 age group has reduced from 4.28 to 0.76 per 100,000 from 1998 to 2020, while within the 5 to 14 age group, the fatal drowning rate has dropped from 0.6 to 0.27 [7]. The PwC report notes that this reduction is primarily due to increased swimming capability and water safety education of children, and it was calculated that the corresponding avoidance of drowning has annual benefits valued at \$174 million in avoided health costs [3].

Education programs such as Keep Watch At Public Pools and Watch Around Water, which are now in place in most public aquatic facilities, have also reinforced the importance of child supervision which is then replicated in other settings.

Most schools now facilitate swimming and water safety programs at local pools, with these school lessons fulfilling an important role in water safety, as do the aquatic facilities' primary learn-to-swim programs. The public swimming pool is essential for the delivery of learn-to-swim for not just children but for adults to continue to build their swimming competency and confidence in the water. It also provides a place of social connection, fun and physical activity.

Access to swimming lessons and safe places to swim is undoubtedly far more challenging, if not prohibitive, for the 11 per cent of Australians who do not live within a 20-minute drive of an aquatic facility [3]. With the prospect of pool rationalisations and/or closures, this percentage will likely increase, as will the number of children that are deprived of the opportunity to learn the essential skills of being able to swim and survive.

Social Value and Impact

In the study and report by RLS and Swinburne University, it was noted that for many aquatic facility users, the pool and/or its programs may be the only opportunity for regular and genuine social interaction for many members of the community, particularly those who have been identified as being vulnerable, or at higher risk of drowning, or who do not engage in any other physical activity outside of aquatics [5]. PwC and RLS found that there is a \$4.87 social return on investment for every dollar spent on aquatic facility operations in capital cities and a \$2.18 social return in regional Australia [3]. Other benefits that were not quantified included increased social cohesion, early childhood learning and long-term enjoyment of water.

PwC has calculated the collective value of these social benefits to Australia as \$3.8 billion per year. Swimming was also noted as a sport that provides people with a 44 per cent higher increase in subjective wellbeing compared to the average for other sports [3].

The social value achieved through the programs and services delivered at aquatic leisure facilities is increasingly becoming better understood, but arguably could be better incorporated into the planning for aquatic infrastructure as is proposed by Simetrica-Jabobs in their publication titled: "Before and Beyond the Build: A Blueprint for Creating enduring social value at scale through infrastructure investments" [8]. Within the document they note: "we have a major opportunity to take a look at infrastructure investments through a collaborative and deeply strategic lens and to consider how we leverage these new models and approaches to design, deliver/build and operate infrastructure in a way that could support us to tackle some of today and tomorrow's most pressing challenges". As identified later within this report, the current funding approach appears somewhat adhoc, and not overly strategic in consideration to the significant social value that could be realised, if better planned for.

Employment

Research by RLS has shown that the aquatic industry employs 67,000 people across Australia in roles such as lifeguards, swimming and water safety teachers, aquatic technical operators, duty managers, aquatic program instructors and customer service officers. Each year, 40,000 new staff enter the aquatic sector workforce, of which 73 per cent are female. Sixty-three per cent of the workforce are casual or part-time. However, the 67,000 employees' total hours of work equate to 33,600 full-time equivalent employees [9].

An important element of the employment profile of the workforce is that approximately 22 per cent of the aquatic industry workforce are aged between 15 and 24 [10], which equates to 14,500 employees.

The total direct economic impact, which is predominantly generated through compensation paid to employees, has been estimated by PwC to be valued at \$1.4 billion annually [3].

Health Benefits

The PwC Report further established that the aquatic industry provides health benefits worth \$2.5 billion per annum [3], comprising the following benefits:

- Improved mental health outcomes
- Improved physical health outcomes
- Reduced absenteeism
- Avoidance of drownings

These health benefits are derived from the range of programs and activities available within aquatic centres, including swimming, aqua aerobics, hydrotherapy and other water-related exercises.

It has been established that 83 per cent of Australians aged 15 or over do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines [11], and as such, aquatic leisure facilities have an enormous role to play in addressing this lack of physical activity. A weekly visit to the pool has been found to take most people out of the 'physically inactive' category and generates \$26.39 in health savings per visit [12].

For those over 65 years of age, the Aus Play Sports and Physical Activity Reports reveal that 20 per cent of this age group obtain their physical activity at aquatic facilities [4]. This is a significant contribution by the aquatic sector, noting that over 40 per cent of the disease burden is attributed to adults aged 65 and over, for whom swimming, hydrotherapy and other aquatic activities are highly-popular forms of physical activity.

The overall physical health benefits attained by the reduced occurrences of disease due to attendance at aquatic facilities have been valued by PwC at \$1.65 billion per year.

Type II diabetes, bowel cancer, uterine cancer, dementia, coronary heart disease, breast cancer and stroke are all diseases associated with sedentary behaviour. Participation at aquatic facilities can reduce the likelihood of developing such conditions. Regular exercise also reduces stress and improves the mental wellbeing of individuals. Physical activity helps reduce the risk of developing mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression by 26 per cent. The PwC report has calculated that the reduced cost of mental health conditions as a result of aquatic facilities has an annual value of \$238 million. It also notes that 11 per cent of Australian swimmers use swimming as an avenue to help improve their mental health.

As detailed in this section of the report, the benefits of aquatic facilities highlight the enormous contribution of swimming pools to the health and wellbeing of Australians. It is important to note that PwC has solely assessed the contribution of the swimming pools across Australia. However, it should be noted that public swimming pools are increasingly co-located within leisure facilities that offer health and fitness programs within gymnasiums, fitness studios and sports stadiums. This contributes significantly to social, health and economic value and the health and wellbeing of the communities in which they are located.

"Many public swimming pools are multi-purpose, with dry-based fitness, stadium and gym health, social and economic benefits not included in the research to date. These additional dry facilities contribute greatly to the health and wellbeing of the communities in which they are located and are often built around the availability of the swimming pool."

AQUATIC INFRASTRUCTURE PROFILE

There are approximately 2,113 aquatic facilities across Australia that are publicly accessible, of which 1,306 are built and owned by government and 807 are provided by the private sector [1].

This provision equates to an aquatic facility for every 12,200 people. While some areas are well serviced, regional and remote areas are less likely to be as well-catered for, and in most cases, comprise the 11 per cent of Australians who live further than a 20-minute drive to such a facility [3].

The privately owned, publicly accessible facilities are generally private swim schools that operate within privately owned or leased buildings. Swim school operations are a profitable venture that can justify the significant capital and operational expenditure required for a swimming pool. The provision of non-programmatic swimming opportunities, including lap swimming and recreational water activities, are generally not profitable and, as such, are not generally available within the privately owned, publicly accessible aquatic facilities. As such, most non-programmatic swimming activities are almost universally only available within government owned premises, often referred to as public pools.

Public swimming pools can generally be categorised in the following manner:

- Outdoor swimming pools.
- Indoor swimming pools.
- Leisure/recreation/aquatic centres with indoor pools.
- Leisure/recreation/aquatic centres with outdoor pools.
- Leisure/recreation/aquatic centres with indoor and outdoor pools.

This report analysed the location of publicly-accessible pools against the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index. The SEIFA index ranks areas in Australia according to relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. The indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Australian Census.

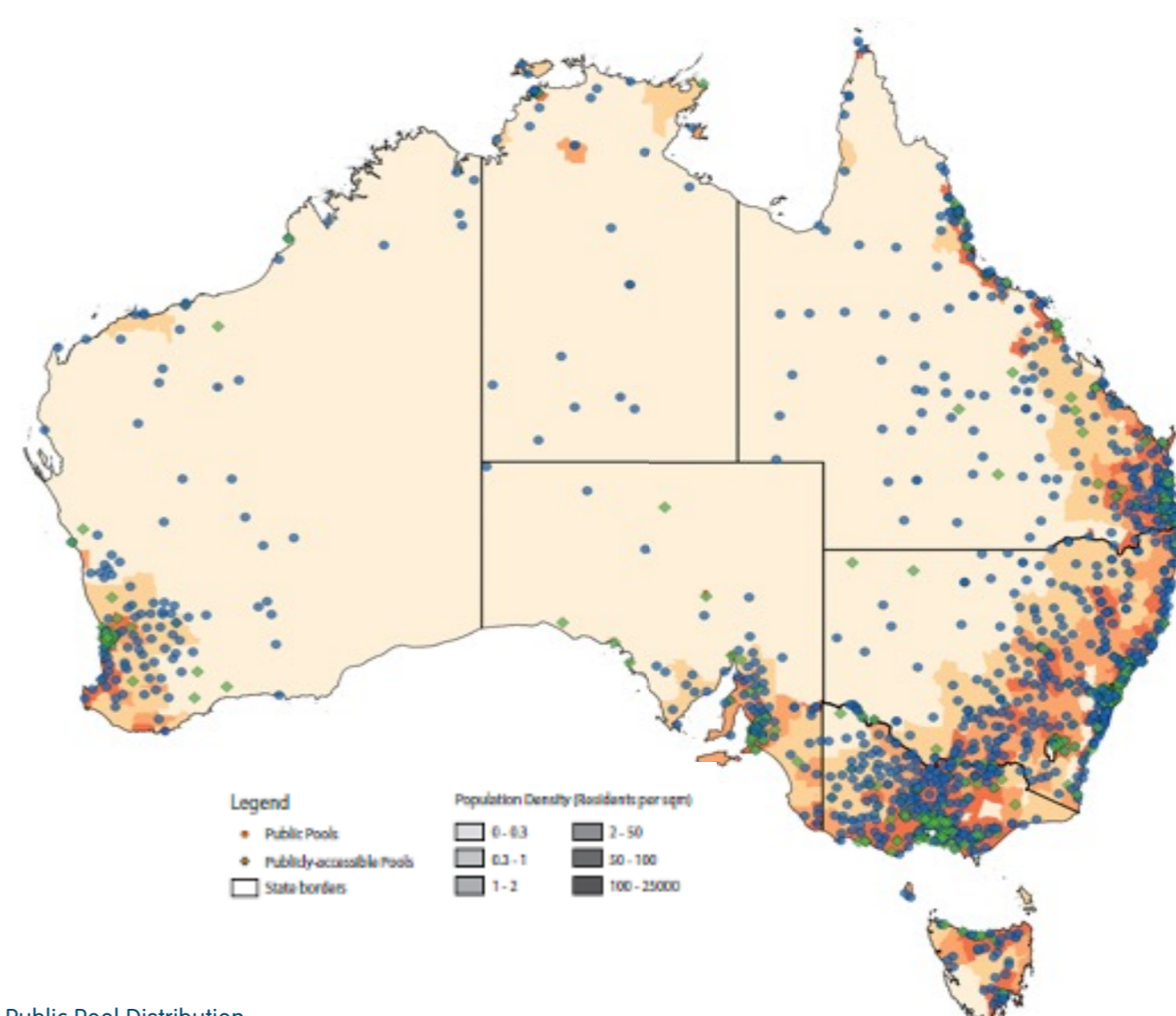
The analysis found that public pools are more likely to be located in regional areas than privately-owned swimming pools and are more likely to service lower socioeconomic areas.

The analysis of publicly-accessible aquatic facilities [1] found that:

- › 79% of aquatic facilities in areas with the lowest SEIFA decile were publicly owned.
- › 74% of aquatic facilities in areas with the highest SEIFA decile were privately owned.
- › 77% of aquatic facilities in regional areas were publicly owned.
- › Only 15% of aquatic facilities in areas with the lowest SEIFA decile were commercial learn-to-swim facilities.
- › Only 14% of aquatic facilities in regional areas were commercial learn-to-swim facilities.
- › 78% of aquatic facilities in areas in the bottom three SEIFA deciles (1-3) were publicly owned.
- › 57% of aquatic facilities in areas in the top three SEIFA deciles (7-10) were privately owned.
- › 54% of aquatic facilities in areas in the bottom three SEIFA deciles (1-3) were public outdoor swimming pools.
- › 37% of aquatic facilities in areas with the highest SEIFA decile (10) were public pools.
- › 37% of aquatic facilities in areas with the highest SEIFA decile (10) were commercial learn-to-swim pools.
- › 25% of publicly-accessible aquatic facilities in areas with the highest SEIFA decile (10) were private education institution pools or privately-owned health club pools.

State / Territory	Number of facilities			Number of people per aquatic facility	% within a 20-minute drive
	Public	Publicly-Accessible	Total		
QLD	285	168	453	11,400	85%
NSW	445	213	658	12,400	89%
VIC	290	280	570	11,750	94%
WA	129	79	208	12,800	87%
SA	76	44	120	14,750	88%
TAS	42	8	50	10,800	67%
ACT	11	12	23	18,750	100%
NT	28	3	31	7,950	63%

Table 1: Summary of Public and Publicly-accessible swimming pools across Australia 2022 [1]



Public Pool Distribution

AQUATIC FACILITY OPERATIONS: GENERALLY UNDERWRITTEN BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT

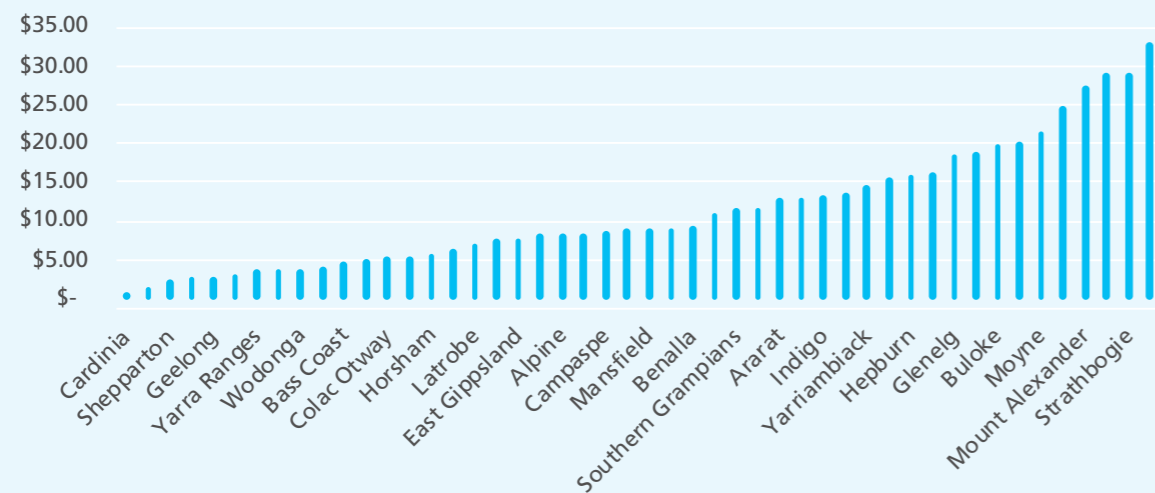
In addition to the significant capital costs of building and upgrading or replacing aquatic facilities, many incur operating losses that need to be underwritten by local government.

Case Study: Victorian aquatic facilities' local governments' subsidy-per-visit rate

Victorian local governments are required to publicly report on the performance of their aquatic facilities in accordance with a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) [13]. One of the KPIs is subsidy per visit.

The table below provides a case study on all regional Victorian councils and highlights that all these councils provide their operations at a deficit. Therefore, they are providing an operational subsidy for all attendees. The subsidy varies from \$1.00 per visitation to \$33.00 per visitation.

The higher subsidy-per-visit rates are generally incurred at councils with low populations and low densities, and are invariably councils that solely operate outdoor pools.



Source: Victorian Government: Know your Council: Aquatic facilities

The operating deficits requiring councils to subsidise their aquatic facilities are increasing due to a range of factors, many of which have further increased due to COVID-19. These factors include increased inflationary pressure, particularly on energy prices and employee wages, and a rising repayment rate on current borrowings.

While energy expenses, which can exceed \$1 million per year in large aquatic facilities, have significantly escalated in the past few years, other expenses, including labour costs, have also been increasing. It is now apparent that due to significant labour shortages and the need to attract staff, wage rates are likely to increase, creating even greater financial pressures. In addition, the current natural gas price inflation, the main source of public pool heating in Australia, poses a significant threat of more pool closures, and fewer resources are available to renew aging infrastructure.

Without further intervention, services are likely to be cut, compounding the loss of social, health and economic benefits to Australians due to aquatic facility operations.

While expenses continue to increase, the total income of aquatic facilities has generally decreased. This decrease is a consequence of a decline in health and fitness memberships due to the impact of COVID-19. Historically, the significant operating losses incurred in the aquatic areas have been somewhat minimised by the strong performances of the health club. However, most centres have not yet been able to regain the membership numbers they attracted pre-COVID-19.

Increased COVID-19 protocols and other increasing compliance requirements have also resulted in additional financial pressures. Councils are not only struggling with the need to maintain, upgrade or replace their facilities but with having to underwrite the annual operating deficits.

Rising energy costs and labour shortages pose a serious threat to the ongoing availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities across Australia.

AQUATIC INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS AUSTRALIA

While there is now extensive literature on aquatic facilities and swim schools that demonstrate the important social, economic and health benefits they provide to Australians of all ages, little information exists regarding the history of renovation, value, condition, or future building and replacement requirements of these facilities.

This research has undertaken desktop research on 254 facilities and conducted around two dozen case study interviews of pool owners to determine the level of investment made in public pools as a general estimate.

Australian Local Government National State of the Assets Report

Australia's Local Government 2021 National State of the Assets (ALGA) report produced by the Australian Local Government Association [14] noted that at the end of the 2019/20 financial year:

- Local governments across Australia had control of a \$523 billion asset portfolio.
- The Buildings category (including aquatic facilities) represents 16% or \$91 billion.
- Within the buildings category, \$9.2 billion are in poor condition.
- 10% of community infrastructure assets are in poor condition.
- 9% have poor function requiring an upgrade.
- 9% have poor capacity and/or utilisation.
- Councils in rural and remote areas are more likely to hold an 'older' stock of infrastructure assets.

The Report Notes:

"Despite a steady increase in renewal spending, the proportion of local government infrastructure in poor condition was not going down, indicating an increased need for councils to move into a major renewal phase over the coming 20 years to sustain service levels."

The information in the ALGA report provides a valuable, high-level insight into local government infrastructure but does not provide detailed information which enables a clearer understanding of the state of aquatic facilities' infrastructure.

Australia's Local Government 2021 National State of the Assets

Shining a spotlight on Australia's Local Government Infrastructure Assets

Technical Report



Australian Local Government Association
SEPTEMBER 2021

PREPARED BY THE INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC WORKS ENGINEERING AUSTRALASIA (IPWEA)

Infrastructure Australia

Infrastructure Australia is the nation's independent infrastructure advisor that was established in 2008 to advise governments, industry and the community on the investments and reforms needed to deliver better infrastructure for all Australians.

The organisation's vision for 2036 is to have infrastructure that improves the sustainability of the country's economic, social, environmental and governance settings, builds quality of life for all Australians, and is resilient to shocks and emerging stresses.

Infrastructure Australia has developed a reform agenda within their report titled: 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan, which focuses on population growth, adaptation to climate, risk, building resilience, stimulating employment, driving economic productivity, embracing a diversity of places and social equity [15].

The plan specifically addresses social infrastructure, noting that the arts, culture and recreation facilities define Australian cultural identity. Furthermore, the plan recognised that the public spaces (such as parks and waterways) improve physical and mental health and make communities more liveable.

The report's key findings and recommendations are summarised below.

Australian Infrastructure Plan - Key Finding

Governments should strategically coordinate, plan and evaluate the delivery of social infrastructure and ensure consistent and standard approaches to delivery and planning.

Recommendations:



All levels of government should collectively plan to bring these areas to life by including them in transport planning and precinct development and renewal.



A consistent national social infrastructure valuation framework needs to be established to appropriately capture, prioritise, measure and assess the total economic value of social infrastructure so investment is more effective.



Governments should take a considered, strategic and standardised approach to evaluating the quadruple-bottom-line benefits of social infrastructure sectors by considering both their separate and their combined economic value.



Social infrastructure assets should be multi-functional so different groups can use them for different purposes. Good examples are school facilities such as halls, pools and sporting fields, in both the public and private sectors.



The costs of failing to provide the necessary aquatic infrastructure can have a significant impact on the prevalence and impacts of preventable disease.

"Recreational infrastructure such as playing fields, swimming pools and sports centres help to relieve the significant economic burden of preventable disease on the health system by encouraging physical activity.

These infrastructure assets also contribute to a healthy community by providing a hub for connection. A 2019 Australian study found the burden of physical inactivity on annual health expenditure can be as high as \$840 million. It also costs the economy up to \$15.6 billion in annual production losses" [16]

In 2020, about a half of all local councils who had responsibility for a building portfolio had an asset management plan in place to help prioritise their capital and operations/ maintenance investments. This is the same result as in 2015 [14]. The Institute of Public Works (IPWEA) do however argue within their white paper titled: "Best Practice Asset Management of Essential Public Infrastructure" [17] that there is a significant need in Australia to improve the skills of asset managers and government's approach to infrastructure planning, recommending the following actions be taken:

1. All levels of government commit to educational programs that raises the capacity and asset management practice (to achieve an industry wide uplift in skills)
2. Federal and state governments reactivate the Local Government Financial Sustainability – National Consistency Frameworks (and report on the outcomes), to improve asset improvement decisions
3. Federal government to require certain levels of proficiency in asset management practice when providing funding to state and local government
4. State and territory governments audit the long term financial plan of each local government to ensure alignment with the asset management plan lifecycle forecasts
5. Local government be required to audit and report the state of their infrastructure as a requirement to receive federal grants
6. Asset management to be recognized as a profession

Note: The recommendations have been summarised. Refer to the white paper for the recommendations in their entirety [17].

FEDERAL FUNDING

National funding for aquatic facility infrastructure (previous five years)

Federal Government funding for the past five years has fundamentally been available through three main schemes.

1. Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Fund

The Local Roads and Community Fund was a \$2.5 billion scheme that provided funds in three phases, commencing in July 2020 and concluding in October 2021.

The primary objective of the fund was to:

- Strengthen the sustainability, capacity and diversity of our cities and regional economies, including facilitating local partnerships between all levels of government and local communities, implementing reforms that stimulate growth and providing grants and financial assistance.

The intended outcomes of the LRCI Program were to:

- Provide stimulus to protect and create local short-term employment opportunities through funded projects following the impacts of COVID-19.
- Deliver community benefits, such as improved road safety, accessibility and visual amenity.

Reporting on the allocations of these funds provides details regarding the local governments that received funding. However, minimal information is available regarding the nature of the projects funded. It would seem that while the funds did include community infrastructure, the program details did not specifically reference aquatic or leisure facilities, and the examples did not align with aquatic facility building or redevelopment works.

2. Building Better Regions

The Building Better Regions funding scheme had two main streams:

- The Infrastructure Projects Stream: Supports projects that involve the construction of new infrastructure, or the upgrade or extension of existing infrastructure
- The Community Investments Stream: Funds community development activities including, but not limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans, leadership and capability-building activities

The program consisted of six rounds of funding, totalling \$1.334 billion. The first round commenced in January 2017, and the final round will conclude in mid-2022.

Detailed information regarding the successful applicants, the funds they received, and a project description are available (round six grants have yet to be allocated).

A review of the first five rounds reveals that some aquatic centres were funded and that the total amount of the first five rounds was \$38.64 million, or 3.4 per cent of the available funds. The allocation to aquatic facility works per round is as follows:

Round	Total Funds - \$ Mil	Funds allocated to aquatic Projects - \$ Mil	% of funds allocated to aquatic projects
1	220	7.7	4.7%
2	208	11.5	5.5%
3	197	4.9	2.5%
4	205	5.24	2.6%
5	294	9.3	5.6 %

Table 2: Building Better Regions Grant Funding (2017 – 2022)

Aquatic Facility Infrastructure Projects Funded Through The Building Better Regions Program

Round	Funded Entity	Project Title	Project Description	Location	State	Amount Funded	Total Project value
1	Lachlan Council	Tottenham Pool Multipurpose Facility Project	Construction of a café with an outdoor dining area, office with first aid facilities and upgrade to existing amenities including toilets and change rooms.	Tottenham	NSW	\$181,450	\$461,450
1	Spinal Life Australia Ltd	Construction of the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre, Cairns QLD	A purpose-built Centre to provide allied health services for people with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities. The Centre will include a hydrotherapy pool and gymnasium.	Cairns North	QLD	\$4,400,000	\$8,800,000
1	Shire of Northam	Northam Aquatic Facility	Construction of the new Northam Recreation Centre, that will include a 50 meter, 8 lane outdoor public swimming pool and family leisure pool	Northam	WA	\$3,200,000	\$8,060,000
2	Blayney Shire Council	Blayney CentrePoint Sports and Leisure Facility Upgrade	The project will upgrade the facility including disability upgrades and upgrade to the 'learn to swim' pool.	Blayney	NSW	\$1,900,000	\$3,890,000
2	Apollo Bay Aquatic Centre Inc	Making a Splash: Community Pool becomes indoor, heated Aquatic Centre	The project will upgrade the existing outdoor 25m community pool into an indoor, heated facility for all year swimming.	Apollo Bay	VIC	\$180,000	\$400,150
2	Wangaratta Rural City Council	The Wangaratta Aquatic Plan for the Future.	The project will redevelop and update the Wangaratta Indoor Sport and Aquatic Centre to include a 50m outdoor pool, splash play area and indoor hydrotherapy pool.	Wangaratta	VIC	\$4,400,000	\$12,503,500
2	Shire of Toodyay	Toodyay Sport and Recreation Precinct	The project will develop a sport and recreation precinct that will include sporting fields, change rooms and an aquatic centre in the Toodyay region of Western Australia.	Nunile	WA	\$4,710,000	\$11,785,670
2	Shire of Trayning	Redevelopment of Trayning Aquatic Centre	The project will redevelop and expand Trayning's Aquatic Centre into a multi-user facility to include alfresco dining, café, shelter, meeting room, change rooms and multi-purpose space.	Trayning	WA	\$363,317	\$734,635
3	Barossa Village Inc	Community Hydrotherapy Pool	The project will construct a community hydrotherapy pool facility for the Allied Health Centre affordable outcomes for the community.	Nuriootpa	SA	\$400,000	\$1,044,908
3	Griffith City Council	Griffith Regional Sports Precinct (Stage One) - Westend Oval/ GRLAC	The project will establish a Regional Sports Hub facility through the expansion and revitalisation of the Westend Oval and Regional Aquatic Centre	West Griffith	NSW	\$4,500,000	\$24,800,000
4	Shire of Jerramungup	Jerramungup Swimming Pool Upgrade Project	The project will deliver a new public swimming pool and supporting infrastructure to replace current pool facilities	Jerramungup	WA	\$2,100,000	\$4,200,000
4	Armidale Regional Council	New England Regional Hydrotherapy Centre (NERHC)	The project will provide a new hydrotherapy pool precinct within the Armidale Monckton Aquatic Centre.	Armidale	NSW	\$2,316,224	\$3,773,819
4	Lachlan Council	Lake Cargelligo Swimming Pool Amenities Upgrade	The project will replace the existing dilapidated 1970s amenities building with a modern, low-maintenance facility.	Lake Cargelligo	NSW	\$825,000	\$1,100,000
5	Blue Mountains City Council	Katoomba Swimming Pool upgrade project	The project will upgrade an existing public pool and its surrounds.	Katoomba	NSW	\$499,000	\$998,000
5	City of Palmerston	Construction of SWELL (Swimming, Wellness, Events, Leisure, Lifestyle)	The project will renovate and upgrade an aquatic centre.	Moulden	NT	\$5,000,000	\$15,000,000
						\$34,974,991	\$97,552,132

Table 3: Building Better Regions Grants Scheme: Funded Aquatic Facility Infrastructure Projects (2017 - 2022)

3. Female Facilities and Water Safety Stream Program

The objectives of the grant were to:

- Remove barriers to participation for women in sport.
- Increase access to community swimming facilities.

The intended outcomes of the grant were:

- An increase in sporting facilities that provide female change rooms and amenities.
- An increase in the number of girls and women participating in sport at all levels.
- An increase in community swimming facilities.

Note: this program did not permit local government to apply.

Grant Funding Breakdown:

- 2019-20 FY \$20 M (GST exclusive)
- 2020-21 FY \$40 M (GST exclusive)
- 2021-22 FY \$40 M (GST exclusive)
- 2022-23 FY \$50 M (GST exclusive)
- Total \$150 M (GST exclusive)

The following lists all projects that were funded under this scheme:

Funding Recipient	Project Title	State	Description	Amount (\$M)
City of Mandurah	Mandurah waterfront pool	WA	Construction of a new estuary pool on the eastern foreshore	7
Coffs Harbour City Council	Sportz central upgrades	NSW	Upgrade and expansion to provide an additional court and improvements to the existing facility	6.3
North Sydney Council	North Sydney swimming pool	NSW	Redevelopment of the pool and amenities	10
Richmond Valley Council	Casino pool	NSW	Upgrade of pool area and change rooms	3.2
City of Swan	Ellenbrooke Pool and Recreation Centre	WA	Construction of a 25 m Lap pool, learn to swim pool, informal pools and other stadium and group fitness works	25
City of South Perth	South Perth aquatic Centre	WA	To provide an integrated multipurpose sport and recreation facility with indoor and outdoor Aquatics	20
The Uniting Church	The Lakes college swimming pool development	QLD	The construction of a 25 m swimming pool and facilities	2
Greater Geelong City Council	Bellarine aquatic Centre pool	Vic	Construction of a new 50 m swimming pool and associated amenities	10
Port Macquarie Tidal Pool Committee	Port Macquarie tidal pool	NSW	Construction of a title pool and associated amenities	4.5
Georges River Council	Kogarah War Memorial swim pool	NSW	Replacement of current leaking pool	5
Surf Coast Shire Council	Torquay pool	Vic	Construction of an indoor swimming pool and facilities	20
City of Wanneroo	Northern suburbs aquatic facility	WA	Details to be determined pending outcome of feasibility study	5
			TOTAL	118

Table 4: Female Facilities and Water Safety Stream: Funded Programs (2019 – 2022)

Further to the availability of defined Federal Government funded grant schemes, it is common during election cycles for political parties to commit to funding local, state and national programs and capital works. The following are aquatic facility developments that, during the election campaign, the Australian Labor Party (who subsequently formed a majority government) committed to:

Name	Additional \$ (M)	State / Territory
Alkimos Aquatic and Recreation Centre	25	WA
Boyne Tannum Aquatic Recreation Centre	15	QLD
Carnegie Memorial Swimming Pool	15	VIC
Casuarina Pool	7.5	NT
City of Kingston Aquatic and Leisure Centre	20	VIC
Diamond Creek Outdoor Pool	1.5	VIC
Ellenbrook Swimming Pool	5	WA
Fawkner Pool	0.5	VIC
George Town Aquatic Centre	15	TAS
High Wycombe Community, including Aquatic Centre	Unclear	WA
Kalgoorlie-Boulder Outdoor Pool	8	WA
Katherine Aquatic Centre	10	NT
Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre	1	NSW
Noble Park and Dandenong swimming pools	20	VIC
North Bellarine Aquatic and Leisure Centre	20	VIC
Total	163.5	

Table 5: Australian Labor Party Election Commitments to Aquatic Facility Infrastructure during the 2022 Election Campaign (2022)

The state and territory distribution for the two Federal Government funds where aquatic facility funding can be established, as well as the ALP federal election commitments, are as follows:

	Building Better Regions	Female Facilities and Water Safety	Government Election Commitments	Total
NSW	\$10,221,674	\$29,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$40,221,674
WA	\$10,373,317	\$57,000,000	\$38,000,000	\$105,373,317
NT	\$5,000,000	\$0	\$17,500,000	\$22,500,000
VIC	\$4,580,000	\$30,000,000	\$77,000,000	\$111,580,000
QLD	\$4,400,000	\$2,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$21,400,000
SA	\$400,000	\$0	\$0	\$400,000
TAS	\$0	\$0	\$15,000,000	\$15,000,000
ACT	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	\$34,974,991	\$118,000,000	\$163,500,000	\$316,474,991

Table 6: State distribution of all federal government funded or commitments to Aquatic Facility Infrastructure in the past 5 years (2017 – 2022)

STATE FUNDING

In addition to Federal Government funding opportunities, state governments also have funds available for local government programs and capital works. As the following summary of state funding opportunities highlights, there is significant diversity in the total amount of funds, the amounts per project, and the specificity of the funds to aquatic facilities from state to state. On face value, no government has a specific stream of funding which is dedicated to aquatic facilities. Although many state and territory funds are more broadly available for regional projects, local infrastructure, or alternatively to cover the range of sports and recreational activities, such as the recently announced Multi-Sport Community Facility Fund in New South Wales Month/Year.

It is also important to note that the various schemes are not recurrent but instead available for one to three years, with long-term predictability regarding future funds rarely a feature of such schemes.

New South Wales

Infrastructure Grants: Sport and Recreation
Grants of between \$50,000 and \$300,000.
Specific reference to the funding of swimming pools.

Restart NSW Fund

\$2.2 billion funding 750 local projects.
Includes funds for local and community infrastructure projects being delivered by local government, non-government organisations and other entities.
Primarily funds health, water, roads, education and tourism.

The Greater Cities and Regional Sport Facility Fund

Provides grants from \$100,000 to \$1 million for projects such as lighting, amenity and changeroom upgrades.

NSW Regional Sports Infrastructure Fund

Provides grants of between \$1 million and \$10 million for regional sports hubs or regionally significant sports facilities.

NSW Multi-Sport Community Facilities Fund

Provides grants of between \$1 million and \$5 million to a range of organisations which provide community sport, sporting associations and organisations providing sport and recreation programs.

Fund total: \$200 million.

Northern Territory

Remote Sports Program

Primarily funds programs rather than infrastructure.

Queensland

Sport and Recreation- Queensland Recreation Centres

2021/22 fund total: \$2.4 million.

Sport Female Facilities Program

Fund total: \$15 million.

Sports Infrastructure Program

2021/22 Fund total: \$8.7 million.

Active Gameday Projects Fund

Fund total: \$9.7 million.

Projects funded: 104

Example: Heating for Mareeba Aquatic Centre

South Australia

Local Government Infrastructure Partnership Program

Fund total: \$100 million.

Funding is provided dollar for dollar. Therefore this funding provides for \$200 million of works.

Proposed infrastructure projects must contribute to the future economic growth of the region, support the Government's Growth State agenda, improve local infrastructure facilities for businesses and community organisations to enable them to grow in the future, or upgrade key community facilities.

Tasmania

Infrastructure Fund (Dept of State Growth)

127 Projects funded. One aquatic project awarded funds. Huonville Pool shade structure for \$50,000

Victoria

The Regional Infrastructure Fund

Provides funding of between \$20,000 and \$3 million excluding GST.

Fund total: \$88 million.

Provides grant opportunities across five funding streams:

- Indoor stadiums and aquatic facilities.
- Female-friendly facilities
- Community sports lighting.
- Community facilities.
- Planning.

Community Sports Infrastructure Loans Scheme

Provides organisations access to government-guaranteed loans of between \$500,000 and \$10 million for community sport and recreation infrastructure.

Western Australia

Community Sporting and Recreational Facilities Fund

Administered by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries.

Fund total: \$12.5 million.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Key Points:

- Local governments contribute the majority of capital investment in new aquatic facility construction at 64 per cent.
- State and federal governments contribute lesser shares respectively.
- The contribution level for each project and/or each level of government is inconsistent.

To better understand the general level of funding that each tier of government provides for aquatic infrastructure, a review has been undertaken to examine the funding composition. The review included 14 recently funded projects or projects that have been committed.

As the table highlights, the funding of new and redeveloped aquatic facilities varies considerably from project to project. However, the majority of capital costs are borne by local government in most cases.

64%

of all capital investment in new aquatic facilities is contributed by local governments

PROJECT	LOCAL GOVT (\$ M)	STATE GOVT (\$ M)	FEDERAL GOVT (\$ M)	BUSINESS (\$ M)	TOTAL PROJECT (\$ M)
Yawa Rosebud Aquatic Centre (Vic)	45		5		50
Northern Aquatic and Community Hub (Vic)	44.84	8.5	8.26		61.6
Surf Coast Aquatic and Health Centre (planned) (Vic)	5.25	13.5	20		38.75
North Bellarine Aquatic Centre (Vic)	5.5		10		15.5
Parramatta Aquatic Centre (NSW)	50.1	38.5			88.6
Goulburn Aquatic Centre (NSW)	20	10			30
Batemans Bay Regional Aquatic, Arts and Leisure Centre Proposed (NSW)	4	26	25		55
Pimpama Sports Hub (QLD)	94				94
Mount Morgan Aquatic Centre (QLD)	2	4.5			
Southern Cross Aquatic Centre (WA)	4.9	0.7		0.05	5.65
Exmouth Paltridge Memorial Swimming Pool (WA)	3.45	0.75			4.2
Salisbury Recreation Precinct/ Outdoor Pool (SA)	7.2	7.2			14.4
Doone Kennedy Hobart Aquatic Centre (Tas)	0.75	2.65	3.4		6.8
Casuarina Aquatic and Leisure Centre proposed (NT)	25				25
TOTAL	311.99	112.3	71.66	0.05	489.5

Table 7: Composition (\$) of 3 tiers of government contributions towards recently funded aquatic infrastructure projects (2019 – 2022)

PROJECT	LOCAL GOVT	STATE GOVT	FEDERAL GOVT	BUSINESS
Yawa Rosebud Aquatic Centre (Vic)*	90%		10%	
Northern Aquatic and Community Hub (Vic)	73%	14%	13%	
Surf Coast Aquatic and Health Centre (planned) (Vic)	14%	35%	52%	
North Bellarine Aquatic Centre (Vic)	35%	0%	65%	
Parramatta Aquatic Centre (NSW)	57%	43%		
Mount Morgan Aquatic Centre (QLD)	67%	33%		
Goulburn Aquatic Centre (NSW)	67%	33%		
Batemans Bay Regional Aquatic, Arts and Leisure Centre Proposed (NSW)	7%	47%	45%	
Pimpama Sports Hub (QLD)	100%			
Southern Cross Aquatic Centre (WA)	87%	12%		1%
Exmouth Paltridge Memorial Swimming Pool (WA)	82%	18%		
Salisbury Recreation Precinct/ Outdoor Pool (SA)	50%	50%		
Doone Kennedy Hobart Aquatic Centre (Tas)	11%	39%	50%	
Casuarina Aquatic and Leisure Centre proposed (NT)	100%			
AVERAGE CONTRIBUTIONS	64%	23%	15%	0%

Table 8: Composition (%) of 3 tiers of government contributions towards recently funded aquatic infrastructure projects (2019 – 2022)

CURRENT COSTS OF INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE/REPLACEMENT

Key Points:

- Over \$8 billion is needed this decade to maintain the current aquatic facility provisioning in Australia.
- It is estimated that around 500 council-owned aquatic facilities will require replacement within the next 10 years based on their age and the level of maintenance/renewal investment across the sector.
- The cost for these facilities to be replaced or renewed at today's dollar will be in the vicinity of \$8 billion to \$8.3 billion.
- Those aquatic facilities requiring replacement in 10 to 15 years will require up to a further \$3 billion.

The methodology applied to determine the approximate capital costs for the replacement of ageing aquatic infrastructure commenced with an initial audit of the 2020 Royal Life Saving Society - Australia database of all Australian aquatic facilities, with a primary focus on the public facilities owned by local government. The audit established that as at June 2022, there were 1,263 local government aquatic leisure facilities (indoor and outdoor) across Australia.

A desktop condition and scale/size assessment was undertaken on 254 of these facilities, representing 20 per cent of all public facilities, and included facilities across all states and territories. They were selected in proportion to the distribution of pools across the country. The condition assessment of the facilities was based on the age of the pools with consideration to major maintenance, upgrades and refurbishment work that the council had made public.

Pools that were over 40 years old and that had no major works undertaken were classified as in poor condition and likely requiring replacement in the next 10 years.

All 254 sample pools were also graded from Level 1 to Level 7 based on the size and scope of facilities. From a single outdoor pool graded as a Level 1 centre to a centre with an indoor 50-metre pool, three additional indoor water spaces and an equivalent dry area footprint rated as a Level 7.

An average replacement cost for all seven levels of pools was then established based on the advice of an experienced quantity surveyor (Turner and Townsend). They provided an approximate mid-point cost for replacement of each based on budgets and actual capital works for each facility level.

The results from the 20 per cent of pools assessed were then extrapolated across the total of 1,263 pools to establish likely costs for future works on all public aquatic facilities.

These replacement costs do not include new aquatic facility requirements for those suburbs and towns with significant population growth and warrant further aquatic infrastructure.

Victoria and New South Wales have the most significant needs within the next 10 years, with both requiring in excess of \$2.5 billion to replace aquatic facilities that will no longer be operational, safe or align with community expectations.

Ageing aquatic infrastructure and the current challenge of the requirement for significant investment are not unique to Australia. England, which had a similar boom in building aquatic facilities in the 1960s and 1970s, finds itself in a very similar situation.

In 2021, Sports England commissioned a report titled *A Decade of Decline: The Future of Swimming Pools in England*. It highlighted the fact that based on an average lifespan of 38 years, aquatic facility numbers in the past decade declined by 67 and that if continued, the total number of pools could reduce by 2,000 pools or 40 per cent in the next 20 years.

This would result in 3.86 million people being "shut out of the activities they love" [18].

Up to \$8. Billion is required for the replacement of ageing aquatic infrastructure in the next 10 years



POOL CLOSURES

Key Points:

- ▶ Many Councils struggle to afford to maintain or replace swimming pools and attempt to close community pools.
- ▶ Closing community pools is inherently very unpopular, consistently aggravating community sentiment and mobilises communities towards involvement in the political process.

As pools age, the prospect of closures appears to be becoming more prevalent.

The Campaspe Council in northern Victoria has been forced to consider rationing their pools after they proposed to close up to seven of their eight outdoor pools, including Colbinabbin, Lockington, Tongala and Stanhope. The Council has estimated it would cost more than \$8 million to continue running all eight pools over the next 15 years, putting their future as a council at risk. Due to enormous community pressure, the Council have deferred a decision regarding the future of these pools [19].

Further north in Bendigo, the community fought to save the Golden Square Pool from demolition in 2013 [20], while residents from Strathbogie Shire in north-east Victoria have developed working groups to create their own pool rescue plans [21].

Across the New South Wales border at the Greater Hume Council, two pools (Henty and Holbrook Pools) are being considered for closure however have now been saved through a Federal Government grant that eased the financial pressure [22].

Recently, the Wattle Range Council in South Australia announced it would allocate \$250,000 to build new recreational facilities in Nangwarry rather than spend an estimated \$400,000 to upgrade the town's ageing pool. A Save the Nangwarry Pool online campaign attracted more than 1,000 people, more than double the town's population [23]. This type of community campaigning frequently occurs when pools are flagged for closure.



Riverina Herald, "700 Dip Into Pool Petition" 4th May 2016



Herald Sun Article: "Campaspe Council: Pools in 7 country Vic Towns to Close" 15th January 2022

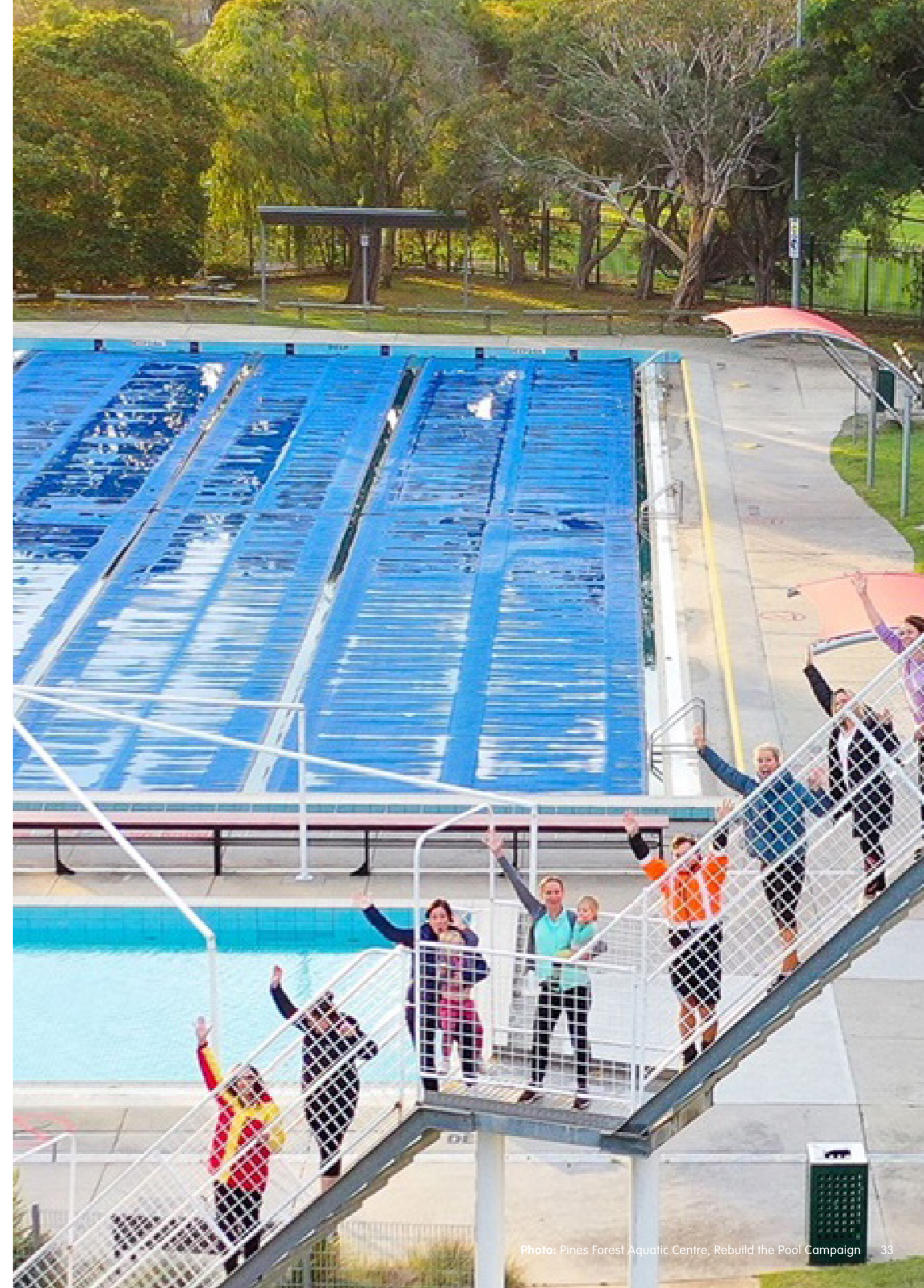


Photo: Pines Forest Aquatic Centre, Rebuild the Pool Campaign 33

▶ PRIMARY SERVICE MODELS

The primary approach for building or replacing aquatic facilities across Australia is for the local government to develop an aquatic facility strategy and undertake a feasibility study and/or business case to assess the demand and sustainability of a new or replacement facility. An estimation of costs is established, and generally, funding applications are made for state and federal government assistance.

Consideration is also given to the level of funding the council has access to and can contribute towards the initiative. The following section details such ventures by councils at a number of locations across Australia and attempts to document some of the exceptional outcomes that these aquatic facilities have been able to achieve.



CASE STUDY 1: GURRI WANYARRA WELLBEING CENTRE – VICTORIA

The City of Greater Bendigo opened the Gurri Wanyarra Wellness Centre in October 2018. The facility is located in Kangaroo Flat, six kilometres north of the Bendigo CBD. The Council own another aquatic facility in Eaglehawk but have no aquatic facility in central Bendigo, which is naturally the geographic centre of Greater Bendigo.

The facility cost Council \$32.2 million to build, which stands out as an exceptionally low cost for the range of facilities when comparing the capital costs to other similarly-sized facilities built in Australia in the past three years. While Gurri Wanyarra is of a similar footprint and contains similar amenities and facilities to Gunyama Park Aquatic and Recreation Centre in the City of Sydney, the costs were less than a third of the City of Sydney facility.

The City of Bendigo was committed to minimising costs and did so based on a primary focus of simplicity in design. Council have described the design as “building a box”, not dissimilar to a warehouse. This approach to design ensured that architectural costs were minimised and the lack of complexity of the building enabled local tradespeople to undertake the majority of the building works at lower rates than if larger companies had been engaged from Melbourne or Sydney.

The simpler design also enabled Council to assume full responsibility for project management. It has been subsequently acknowledged that the approach may have contributed to some increased operational costs relating to maintenance and utilities. However, it has been the source of great interest from several other councils looking at aquatic infrastructure replacement and eagerly seeking to understand how capital costs can be minimised.

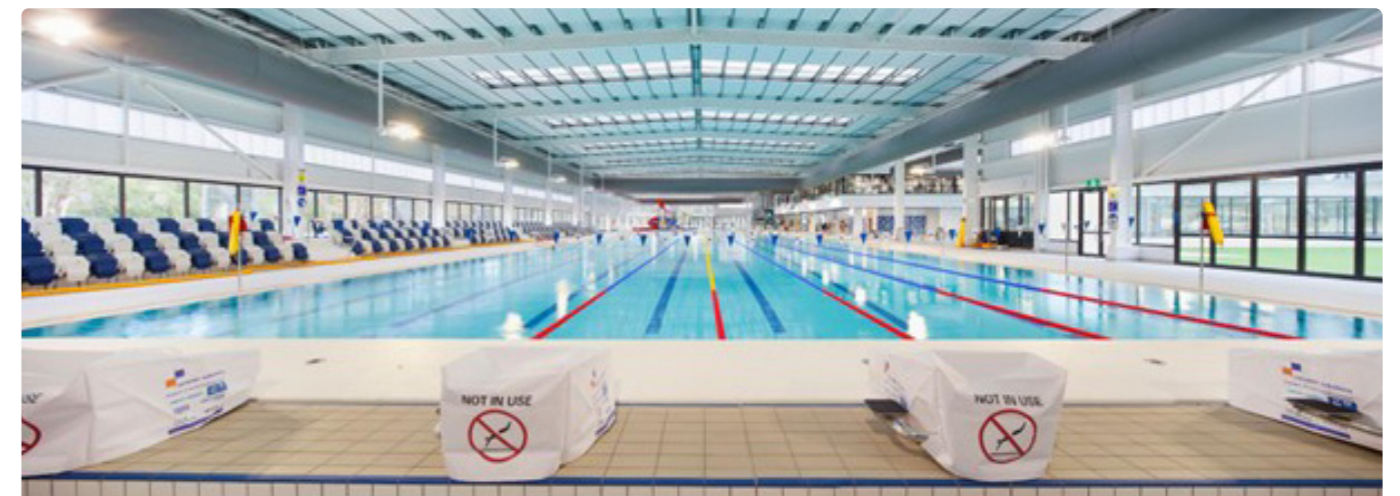
Gurri Wanyarra Wellness Centre is a state-of-the-art health and leisure facility that offers the following facilities [24]:

- Indoor 50-metre, 8-lane heated pool with moveable boom
- Warm water pool
- Spa, sauna and steam room
- Learn-to-swim and toddler’s pool
- Fully equipped 560-square-metre health club
- Group exercise
- Childcare
- Cycling studio
- Zero depth splash park area
- Birthday parties
- Cafe
- Exercise physiology
- Personal training

A key feature of the facility’s service offering is an allied health program that is fully integrated with the health and fitness services. Belgravia Leisure, which manages the centre, created a then-industry-leading partnership with an allied health provider. The partnership was the first of its kind in formally integrating general practitioners and other allied health professions within a community leisure and aquatic facility.

Within this one-stop structure, the theory is that a community member can complete their journey to better health from early diagnosis through to engagement in physical activity as prescribed by their exercise physiologist (EP). The initiative also provides opportunities for the advancement of research concerning the link between chronic illness and the preventative physical activity services that can significantly improve such conditions.

Gurri Wanyarra Wellbeing Centre





CASE STUDY 2: BALGO POOL – WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In Western Australia there are remote communities where the State Government have taken a leadership role in the construction and operation of public swimming pools.

Balgo is one of Australia's most remote Aboriginal communities, located in the south-east Kimberley, approximately 1,780 kilometres north-east of Perth and 900 kilometres south-southwest of Darwin. The community, with a population of around 460 people, lies on the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert and on the western edge of the Tanami Desert

The Balgo swimming pool features:

- 25 x 6-lane lap pool
- 10m x 6m dedicated LTS area
- Walk-in beach entry
- Separate toddlers pool with spray features
- Full shaded
- Grassed areas and BBQ
- Toilets and changerooms
- Building containing plant room, first aid, office space and storage.

Work commenced on the Balgo pool and facilities in September 2018, and the project was completed on 29 March 2019 at the cost of \$7 million.

During its construction phase, the Balgo pool provided employment opportunities for 17 members of the community, including eight apprentices.

Funding for these pools aligns with the state government's health, education and community development portfolios. Health research found the incidence of skin sores and ear infections decreased and the application of a no-school, no-pool policy by school principals increased in school attendance. Further benefits include increased physical activity levels and enhanced community cohesion. The Royal Life Saving Society of WA (RLSSWA) also delivers vocational training along with mentoring and traineeship opportunities. Pool entry is free.



CASE STUDY 3: GUNYAMA PARK AQUATIC AND RECREATION CENTRE – NEW SOUTH WALES

The Gunyama Park Aquatic and Recreation Centre is the largest pool complex built in Sydney since the 2000 Olympics.

The City of Sydney approved the project in 2015 along with a \$50 million budget. However, the final project budget was \$106 million following delays and construction cost increases.

Tenders were called for, and the final winning design was selected due to its sustainability and seamless integration of an urban beach pool into a park and surrounding native landscape, inspired by the area's former wetlands.

Situated in Zetland, in the City of Sydney's new Green Square development, the expansive, state-of-the-art complex is said to be Australia's most accessible and sustainable facility of its kind.

The centre is the first in Australia to hold a Green Star rating. Gunyama Park is now recognised as a leader in sustainability, featuring an energy co-generation system to heat and power the centre, significantly reducing its carbon footprint and making it cheaper to run each year. Solar panels on the centre's roof are connected to the local electricity network, allowing any surplus electricity to power buildings in the neighbouring community and cultural precinct [26].

Gunyama Park Aquatic Centre features:

- 50-metre heated outdoor pool set within a larger, irregular-shaped artificial beach pool
- 25-metre heated indoor program pool for swimming lessons
- Indoor leisure pool with a range of interactive toys, including water spraying devices and tipping buckets
- Heated hydrotherapy pool
- Health and fitness centre and covered outdoor yoga deck
- A full-size outdoor synthetic multipurpose sports playfield
- A fully equipped gymnasium and outdoor training circuit

Editor note: This facility's inclusion as a case study is not due to the financial model but rather its approach to sustainability and accessibility.

CASE STUDY 4: SCOTTSDALE AQUATIC CENTRE (DORSET COUNCIL, TASMANIA)

The Scottsdale Aquatic Centre, located in Tasmania's north-east, was officially opened in December 2021. The Dorset Council redeveloped the outdoor aquatic facility at the cost of \$7 million. The upgrades included refurbishment of the Centre's eight-lane, 25-metre pool, a learner's pool, a toddler's pool for children under five years of age and an outdoor water play area (the largest in Tasmania), featuring small and larger slides and water dump buckets.

According to the media reports, the upgrade was long overdue, as the pool was probably 15 years past its use by date, and the upgrades are giving it a new life. The upgrade was made possible by a \$3 million grant from the Tasmanian Government, with the remaining \$4 million funded by the Dorset Council [27].

Unlike most public pools, the pool has historically been free for the public to access and continues to have no entry fee following the redevelopment. The Council's primary objective is to see that the usage of the facility is maximised, and it is the Council's view that to charge entry fees is incongruent with this objective.

The Southern Grampians Council in Western Victoria has also trialled free entry before permitting free entry to all eight of their outdoor pools. Initial results have indicated that the net costs of operation have not been significantly impacted. Noting the reduced staffing costs at reception and based on subsidy per visit, their performance has improved significantly since the introduction of free entry due to the marked increase in attendances.



Scottsdale Pool (The Examiner, 27th November 2021)



CASE STUDY 5: PIMPAMA SPORTS HUB (CITY OF GOLD COAST, QUEENSLAND)

Pimpama Sports Hub is an integrated aquatic, sporting and community precinct that provides significant social and community benefit to the northern Gold Coast. With the population expected to more than double by 2036, the City has recognised that it must provide a range of sporting and social infrastructure to existing and future residents.

The Pimpama Sports Hub has become an important sporting and community facility that is a place to engage in social, cultural, recreational and educational activities.

The Pimpama Sports Hub was constructed on a 14-hectare site and has been designed as a 2-stage development. The first stage comprised a clubhouse, 12 sports courts spanning almost one hectare, six court shade structures, a new community park and an events space catering for 3,000 patrons. The sports facilities have been designed with the intent of hosting both local and regional level events.

Phase 2 was completed in December 2021 and included:

- Community centre with multipurpose hall, meeting and function rooms
- Tennis centre with eight competition standard courts
- 25-metre indoor pool
- Indoor learn-to-swim pool
- Indoor warm water pool
- 50-metre outdoor pool
- Outdoor children's water play
- Café Change rooms
- Crèche
- Fitness centre

It is projected that the Hub will attract 750,000 visitors annually.

Other unique elements of the Hub include:

- Events park with a natural amphitheatre
- One-kilometre distanced marked walking trail
- Community park
- Six EV Chargers for electric vehicles
- 1,924 solar power, battery storage and co-generation systems provide 100 per cent of the annual electricity required at the site.

The project also had a significant local economic benefit, with 409 jobs generated during construction [28].

Editor note: This case study has been included to demonstrate that some Councils recognise the important role of social infrastructure in responding to growth, and are able to fund the delivery of significant infrastructure, however, this is likely out of reach for the majority of Australian Councils.

Pimpama Sports Hub (InsideGoldCoast)



In Australia, there are 1,306 local government-owned public pools, which are in addition to the 807 privately owned facilities that are publicly accessible. The overwhelming majority of the privately owned and publicly accessible aquatic facilities are operated as swim schools.

When operated in an area with a large catchment population, swim schools can be especially profitable, hence the private sector's interest in providing such facilities. However, the provision of lap swimming pools by the private sector is almost non-existent as it is generally not financially profitable and generally requires subsidising. Consequently, if government does not subsidise lap swimming and recreational swimming facilities in some way, they are usually not available to the public.

The following case studies profile facilities and their operations at various locations which challenge the traditional local government-owned and operated model. Facilities that do this broaden the opportunities for the public to access aquatic facilities:

CASE STUDY 1: SANDRINGHAM FAMILY LEISURE CENTRE STATE (CITY OF BAYSIDE, VICTORIA)

The Sandringham Family Leisure Centre comprises a stadium, gymnasium and swimming facility. These three program areas, which the City of Bayside built and owns, have been separately leased to third parties. The aquatic facilities, which BlueFit management agency leases, are operated similarly to other council-owned aquatic facilities. BlueFit provides lap and recreational swimming, with entry fees and hours of operation similar to neighbouring council-operated aquatic facilities.

The pool and health club, which Goodlife management agency leases, and the stadium are all operated under a commercial lease of 10 years duration. By operating under a lease rather than a management contract, Council has limited control over the operations. But as the landlord, Council has maintenance obligations and is also presently looking at potential upgrade works for the facility.

The operators of the pool and the health club offer a range of accessible and inclusionary programs. All social media and discussions with Council would suggest that the public consider the facility to be operated in line with a traditionally operated local government facility.

Sandringham Family Leisure Centre (Bluefit Swimming 2022)



CASE STUDY 2: THE PARKS RECREATION AND SPORTS CENTRE (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

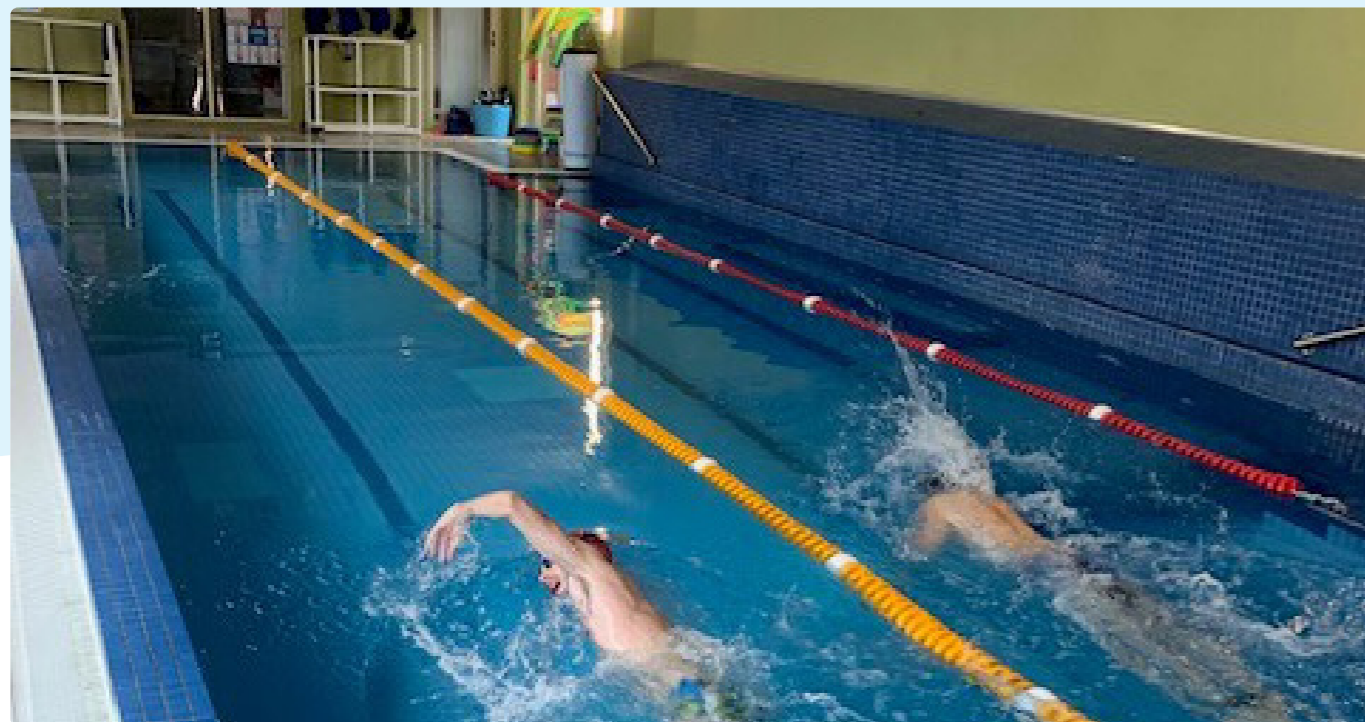
State governments across the country build and operate state sports facilities. They are either directly managed or operated through state-appointed trusts or other entities. Facilities built, owned and operated this way include the Melbourne Sports Aquatic Centre, Brisbane Aquatic Centre, Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre and SA Aquatic and Leisure Centre. These facilities generally host state, national and international sporting events that require coordination with other state bodies. As such, the responsibility for the construction and ongoing provision by state entities is understandable.

While the Parks Recreation and Sports Centre was constructed and is owned by the South Australian Government, it is not a base for a sports institute like other state aquatic and leisure facilities, nor does it host state or national events. The range of facilities includes a 25-metre pool, program pool and zero depth wet play area similar to what would be found in most local council-owned metropolitan aquatic leisure facilities.

The Parks Recreation and Sports Centre is located in Angle Park, 10 kilometres north of the Adelaide CBD, and is one of two aquatic and recreation centres owned by the State Government along with the FINA standard South Australian Aquatic and Leisure Centre. The site was originally a state-owned education, arts and recreation hub, which included a sports stadium and a gymnasium. In 2013, the site was largely sold off, but the government was pressured to retain the recreation centre. This was then converted into a more modern leisure centre which then had the pools added to it.

The Parks Recreation and Sports Centre (YMCA 2022)





Paddles to Swim (Private swim school in Legana, Tasmania)



Fleurieu Aquatic Centre

CASE STUDY 3: WEST TAMAR COUNCIL (TASMANIA)

As noted earlier in the report, there are over 800 publicly-accessible pools in Australia that are not local government-owned public aquatic facilities but rather privately-owned businesses that the public can access [1].

In West Tamar in Tasmania, three privately owned indoor swimming pools are available for public access. In addition, there is also a primary school that has a pool that has limited opportunities for public use.

Of the three privately-owned swimming pools, the access permitted is as follows:

- A 2-lane indoor 25-metre pool, predominantly operated as a swim school with limited access for swimming by competition swimmers.
- A 10.5m x 5.5m pool located at a resort that the public can attend for swimming (limited due to length), water aerobics and swim lessons.
- A 10m x 5m private pool is available for hire, swim lessons, aqua aerobics and recreational/lap swimming.

While the private sector provides all indoor aquatic opportunities, the West Tamar Council solely offers a heated outdoor pool (33-metre pool, learner's pool and toddler's pool).

Additionally, the Launceston Leisure Aquatic Centre is in the neighbouring municipality and provides an extensive range of aquatic programs in both indoor and outdoor pools.

The West Tamar Council has not facilitated the provision of the indoor pools, and essentially the Council residents are fortunate that the private sector has chosen to locate in the area and offer services that might traditionally be only made available by Council.

These circumstances are not unique, with this situation present throughout Australia, although with varying degrees of indoor swimming being made available. This case study highlights that the private sector has shown itself to fill a void in indoor aquatic service provision in some isolated cases. This raises the prospect of increased council involvement in the establishment phase.

With ongoing engagement, there may exist the scope for a broadening of services offered by the private sector to cater more for communities' indoor pool needs without councils being the builders and owners of the facilities.

CASE STUDY 4: CITY OF VICTOR HARBOR AND CITY OF ALEXANDRIA PARTNERING TO FUND AND CONSTRUCT THE FLEURIEU REGIONAL AQUATIC CENTRE LOCATION (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

The Fleurieu Regional Aquatic Centre is a unique aquatic facility because it was equally funded by two councils. The \$21 million project was a joint initiative of the City of Victor Harbor and Alexandrina Council, which both committed \$6.5 million.

The project also received \$8 million in funding support from the State Government's Community, Recreation and Sport Facilities Program and a land donation from Beyond Today, a local property developer. As the mayors of both councils noted in a joint statement: "An investment of \$6.5 million by one council would not procure much in the way of major new infrastructure, but together \$13 million leveraged significant grant funding to make a \$21 million project possible" [29].

In 2013, the Alexandrina and Victor Harbor communities were provided with an opportunity to consider concept plans for the Fleurieu Aquatic Centre and the financial commitment required to deliver the project. In addition to this consultation, a Community Reference Group was established in 2014 to provide input into the functionality and operations of the Aquatic Centre. This was made up of 17 community members across the two councils from local schools, swim school providers, allied health care providers, retirement facilities, childcare providers, sporting clubs and other community groups.

The City of Victor Harbor and Alexandrina Council created the Fleurieu Regional Aquatic Centre Authority, which is a regional subsidiary established under Section 43 of the Local Government Act 1999 by its Constituent Councils. The Authority was established in August 2015 to enable joint ownership and management of the Aquatic Centre.

The Fleurieu Aquatic Centre is located on the councils' border, and its facilities include:

- 25-metre, 8-lane swimming pool
- Multi-use program pool
- Multi-Use hydrotherapy pool
- Outdoor splash park
- Fitness facility
- Crèche
- Café
- Outdoor barbecues

The project received the Community Partnerships and Collaboration Award at the Local Government Professionals Australia Federation Awards in 2016 [29].

CASE STUDY 5: BAROOGA SPORTIES HEALTH AND FITNESS CENTRE (BAROOGA, NEW SOUTH WALES)

The Barooga Sporties Health and Fitness Centre was significantly impacted by COVID-19 and was at risk of closure. The facility, which a local not-for-profit sports association owns, includes several health and fitness facilities and programs but also offers a 25-metre indoor pool that operates at a deficit.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the health and fitness centre at Barooga Sporties was well patronised, with approximately 50,000 visits each year.

Barooga is located on the New South Wales side of the New South Wales and Victoria border. However, a large proportion of customers are residents of the Moira Shire, which is located in Victoria. In mid-2021, the prospect of the pool's closure was mooted; however, Council identified a substantial groundswell of community support from both sides of the river for this facility to remain open. The sports club approached Berrigan Shire Council to provide an operational subsidy to enable the club to continue to operate. It agreed, but on the condition an identical commitment was provided by the Moira Shire Council.

After some consideration, the Moira Shire Council voted to grant Barooga Sporties Health and Fitness Centre up to \$100,000 over two financial years to subsidise the provision of the indoor heated pool facilities, thereby matching the contribution from Berrigan Shire [30].

The facility has been renamed Barooga Aquatic and Recreation Centre, or BARC. All parties recognised at that time that providing an indoor 25-metre pool in a rural community could be very expensive. Benchmarking undertaken by the aquatics industry has found that the average cost of providing an indoor heated pool in communities of less than 10,000 people is around \$275,000 per annum (not including depreciation). The Sporties Group noted at the time that through their members, they still owned and operated the facility and continue to provide the majority of the funding required for its operation, highlighting that operational costs solely for the pool are \$170,000 per annum.

Both Councils have emphasised that the support is only for two years while the club takes on the onus to ensure the facility is viable and sustainable into the future.

Barooga Aquatic and Recreation Centre



INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

While seeking to simply maintain the aquatic facilities that local governments currently own and/or operate, consideration needs to be given to how they may cater to changing community needs and be responsive to consumer trends which present further challenges and opportunities.

The International Associations for Leisure Facilities (IAKS) is recognised as a leading international aquatic sector association that seeks to bring industry leaders from around the world together to share their experiences and learnings for the growth and development of the sector worldwide. In 2020, IAKS produced a report titled: IAKS Future Trends for Pools [31].

Within this report, the following trends were identified:

- › Swimming as a sport and as an activity is regaining increased popularity.
- › The importance of swimming lessons is increasingly being recognised, resulting in increased attendance.
- › Water exercise is increasing in popularity.
- › The importance of providing fun activities for children and families is evident in the current design and the corresponding increased participation.
- › Improved facilities design for inclusivity.
- › Increased demand in space for socialising, in recognition of the positive social impacts of aquatic centres.
- › More ecologically sustainable facilities are being built.
- › Communities expect facilities to be more safe and secure.
- › There is increasing competition for funds to build facilities, which has resulted in examples of innovative partnerships.
- › There are improving economics of facilities, often as a consequence of multicomponent facilities.
- › There are increased examples of digital transformation, including increased individualised marketing and virtual reality water slides.
- › Scarcity of land is impacting the opportunities to provide facilities.
- › There is an increased fight for talent with challenges attracting the appropriate skill set for the delivery of aquatic services.
- › Design is constantly evolving to improve the user experience and ensure patrons' loyalty.

NEXT STEPS

This report, while limited in large part to the desktop review and of available historical data and interviews with swimming pool owners and operators, has nevertheless reaffirmed the widely shared anecdotal views of the sector: that up to 40 per cent of Australia's aquatic facilities are nearing their end of life. The replacement of these facilities is likely to exceed \$8 billion and is an issue that requires further review and significant and coordinated action.

It is recommended that two key actions be undertaken now to respond to the findings and insights gained through this report:

1. Broaden the capability and understanding of the sector's approach to infrastructure investment and work with industry and governments so this problem can be addressed

Leaders from within the aquatic industry sector, including state and federal governments and representatives from Infrastructure Australia, should come together to review the insights revealed within this report and other sources, with the aim of developing a common understanding of the issues and the range of actions and recommendations that could be used to address the issues raised, as well as exploring strategies and opportunities to ensure continued provision of aquatic facilities across Australia is sustainable into the future.

2. Conduct a thorough analysis of the state of aquatic facility infrastructure across Australia

As the most significant investors and beneficiaries of aquatic facility infrastructure, governments should comprehensively address the absence of available data on the condition of aquatic facilities across Australia and seek ways to maximise returns on investment in aquatic facility provisioning.

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