



National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium 2025

Event Report

› 27 & 28 March 2025



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA



Australian Government

> POSITIONING STATEMENT

Bringing people together to **eliminate drowning** and **empower communities** to be safe around water.

> WE BELIEVE

Drowning is preventable.

Being able to swim is a human right.

Having the skills to enjoy the water safely is essential.

Access to safe places to swim contributes to happy, healthy, connected communities.



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

> FOREWORD

Aquatic facilities sit at the heart of Australian communities. They are places of joy, learning, connection and, above all, safety. From children learning to swim to older Australians staying active and connected, our public pools and aquatic centres play an essential role in community wellbeing and drowning prevention. Yet across the country, these vital places face mounting challenges: ageing infrastructure, inequitable access, rising costs, workforce pressures, and disconnects between community needs and facility planning.

The *National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium 2025*, facilitated by Royal Life Saving Society – Australia on behalf of the National Aquatic Industry Committee, brought together more than 100 leaders from government, industry, architects and consultants, academia and community. Across two days, participants explored practical solutions, shared lessons from recent projects, and helped shape the early contours of a National Aquatic Infrastructure Framework that responds to Australia's diverse and evolving needs.

This report captures the depth and breadth of those discussions – reinforcing the case for nationally coordinated planning and investment, while respecting the unique character of each community. It reflects our shared ambition: that every Australian, regardless of postcode or background, has access to safe, sustainable, inclusive aquatic facilities – now and into the future.

We thank all speakers, facilitators, and attendees for their collaboration and expertise, and extend our sincere appreciation to the organisations that made this event possible. In particular, we acknowledge the support of sponsors, Commercial Aquatics Australia (VIC), whose contribution enabled important networking and exchange, Life Saving Victoria for generously hosting the symposium, Myrtha Pools who have supported further research into the state of aquatic infrastructure and Lynxight.

We also thank individuals and organisations who contributed to the program planning from: IAKS ANZ, Otium Planning Group, Warren Green Consulting, Warren and Mahoney and the National Sports and Physical Activity Convention.

Together, we can save local pools, boost their community impact – and ensure that aquatic infrastructure continues to reflect the best of Australian community life.

Dr. Justin Scarr
Chief Executive Officer
Royal Life Saving Society – Australia



› EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium 2025 convened over 100 industry leaders to shape a national framework for aquatic facilities. This report captures eight thematic sessions focused on sustainability, inclusion, planning, and innovation.

Key findings include:

- › Australia faces a growing gap in access to aquatic facilities.
- › Community co-design and local identity are essential to successful facility planning.
- › Strategic, long-term funding and lifecycle planning are urgently needed.
- › Innovative retrofits and new technologies can extend facility lifespans.
- › A national framework should support, not override, local decision-making.
- › Design for inclusion, safety and accessibility must be embedded from inception.
- › Volunteers and clubs are critical infrastructure partners.

Emerging Tensions and Diverging Views

While the symposium reflected broad consensus, several areas of tension and unresolved debate emerged:

- › The balance between investing in new builds vs. retrofitting ageing facilities.
- › Centralised regional hubs versus smaller, locally embedded pools.
- › How prescriptive a national framework should be.
- › The reliance on volunteers in areas where paid staff are unsustainable.
- › The role of technology in replacing versus supporting staff in supervision.

Next Steps

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia, in collaboration with the National Aquatic Industry Committee and stakeholders, will:

- › Establish a working group to co-design the National Aquatic Infrastructure Framework.
- › Develop planning tools and case studies for councils and operators.
- › Undertake further research on infrastructure gaps and needs.
- › Release a draft framework for consultation by the end of 2025.
- › Continue advocating for sustained investment in aquatic infrastructure.

› OVERVIEW

The National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium (27–28 March 2025, Melbourne) convened over 100 leaders from governments, leisure planning consultancies, architecture firms, engineering firms, academia, and the aquatic industry. Hosted by Royal Life Saving Australia (RLSSA) on behalf of the National Aquatic Industry Committee, the two-day forum was a pivotal step toward developing a national aquatic facility infrastructure framework.

Across eight thematic sessions, participants explored contemporary challenges and shared case studies, innovations, and lessons learned. The discussions underscored the urgent need for a coordinated, industry-driven national framework to guide future investment and development of aquatic facilities. Each session's insights reinforced this call: without strategic action, many communities risk having poor access to aquatic facilities and ageing, unsafe infrastructure. With collaboration, innovation and coordinated planning and funding, Australia can ensure every community has access to safe, sustainable, and inclusive aquatic facilities.

The following summaries outline each session and highlight key themes confined to that session's content.



› **National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium 2025**
27 & 28 March 2025

› DAY 1 - SESSION 1: ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT (9:15AM – 10:45AM)

SPEAKERS

Dr Justin Scarr, CEO, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia

Darryl Condon, Managing Principal, HCMA Architecture + Design (Canada)

RJ Houston, General Manager – Capability & Industry, RLSSA

Dr William Koon, National Manager – Drowning Prevention Strategy, RLSSA

KEY INSIGHT – DARRYL CONDON

- › Shared insights from Canadian community-centred design projects, emphasising the need for aquatic facilities to serve as inclusive social infrastructure rather than purely recreational venues.
- › Highlighted how co-located, multipurpose hubs can build civic pride and reduce barriers to access, particularly when designed with equity, dignity, and belonging in mind.
- › Provided case studies showing that success stems from deep community engagement, challenging binary thinking around form vs. function or wellness vs. sport.
- › Advocated for purpose-built centres of belonging that reflect local identity and prioritise design for those most often excluded from public space.
- › Shift in Canada has been to shallower, warmer more leisure-focused water throughout.



PANEL:

STATE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING LANDSCAPE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Panellists:

- Philip Saikaly, Lead Director Community Sports Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation Victoria
- Victoria MacKirdy, CEO, City of Victor Harbor
- Sue McGill, Director – Participation Growth, Australian Sports Commission
- Kate Maddock, Managing Director, Otium Planning Group
- Ben Manning, Senior Manager – Advisory and Consulting, Solucio

THEMES

- › Aquatic facilities are key enablers of opportunity, but we need to think more about the non-user and how to engage them
- › Community value of aquatic facilities is deeply rooted and often under-recognised
- › International models suggest benefits from integrating aquatic centres into broader community infrastructure, and adopting a network approach
- › Strategic, long-term funding mechanisms are required across all three levels of government

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- › 6 million Australians have poor access to public pools – this gap is growing
- › Local governments are finding the capital and operating costs extremely challenging to wear over the long run, even with outsourced operations
- › International models demonstrate significant benefits of co-located aquatic facilities within multi-use community hubs with integrated community services, whether under one roof or in a precinct model
- › International models demonstrate the benefits of a networked model for aquatic facilities across an LGA or region, where individual facilities adopt a particular focus (e.g. competitive sport facilities vs leisure spaces), rather than trying to cater to everyone at each facility
- › Ageing infrastructure and increasing construction costs are constraining delivery.
- › Funding programs are needed for longer-term asset planning and lifecycle sustainability

Framework Link

This session laid the case for a coordinated national framework to articulate aquatic facilities as essential social infrastructure, establish minimum planning principles, assist in reducing duplication and inefficiency, support sustainable and inclusive access in both growth and under-resourced community, and support the adoption of a network model for pool infrastructure delivery.



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

National Aquatic Facility Infrastructure Symposium 2025
DAY 1 PART 1

27 & 28 MARCH

Acknowledgement
of COUNTRY

PEOPLE OF THE
WATERWAYS AROUND
HERE, WE COULD
LEARN FROM

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

DR JUSTIN SCARR, CEO RLSA

BRINGING
PEOPLE
TOGETHER
TO SOLVE
PROBLEMS



IT'S ABOUT
COMMUNITY
INFRASTRUCTURE
"A KEY ENABLER OF
OPPORTUNITY"

NEED FOR
WATER SAFETY
BEGAN IN OUR
EARLIEST TIMES

PIONEERS, SHIPWRECKS
DROWNINGS

FIRST PROGRAMS
BEGINNING IN FIRST
LOCAL PUB

THINGS ARE
BETTER
THAN 10
YEARS
AGO

SUPPORT
THE LOCAL
POOL!



SESSION 1

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT

FUTURE
FOCUSED

GROWING
UNEQUAL
ACCESS
SUBURBS
UNDER
PRESSURE

STRATEGIC
INVESTMENT
REQUIRED

AGEING



HUGE
ECONOMIC
BENEFITS
LOST!

SAFETY &
WELLBEING
HEALTH

THEY DO
GREAT
WORK AND
CONNECT
COMMUNITY

WE NEED TO
CONTINUE ADVOCATING
ENERGY BENCHMARKS

FRONT LINE... WE MUST
ADDRESS
ABUSIVE
BEHAVIOUR
TOWARD
POOL STAFF



RJ HOUSTON
GENERAL
MANAGER,
CAPABILITY AND
INDUSTRY
RLSA



DR WILLIAM
KOON
NATIONAL
MANAGER -
DROWNING
PREVENTION
STRATEGY
RLSA

POOL DESERTS

INSIGHTS INTO ACCESS BARRIERS TO
AUSTRALIAN AQUATIC FACILITIES

CANADIAN APPROACH

TO COMMUNITY CENTRES, CASE STUDIES, MUNICIPAL SYSTEMS
& TENSIONS BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND COMPETITION

DARRYL CONDON, MANAGING PRINCIPAL,
HCMA ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

WE NEED
LONG TERM
THINKING



LEVERAGING PUBLIC GOOD

INCREASING
THE SOCIAL
ASPECT OF
WATER

Engagement



INTEGRATED
& CONNECTED

CO²
TARGETS!

THEY SHOULD
BE PART OF
A NETWORK

WE ALSO HAVE
AGEING
INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMUNITY BUILDING
IS THE BASIS FOR
FACILITIES, NOT SPORT!

STRONG
CONNECTION
BETWEEN INDOOR
& OUTDOOR
SPACE



HIGHER
ENERGY
PERFORMANCE

CARBON
OFFSETTING
& RENEWABLES

INTEGRATING ARTS, CULTURE, HOUSING, WELLBEING

WE HAVE
RESPONSIBILITIES
TO FIRST PEOPLES

MAKE SPORT
FOR EVERYONE

CONNECTION

WE BOTH HAVE VAST COUNTRIES

PANEL DISCUSSION

WE NEED FEDERAL GUIDANCE FOR EVERYONE AROUND FACILITY VALUE

AGEING
INFRASTRUCTURE
MAKES IT TOUGH
OUT THERE!

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS
CARRY MUCH OF
THE BURDEN

INCLUDING FUTURE
COSTS. WE NEED TO
BROADEN OUR ABILITY
TO UNDERSTAND AND
ACTION.

ADJUST LANGUAGE

WE NEED A FUNDING
FRAMEWORK WITHOUT
POLITICS

DO YOUR
COST/
BENEFIT
ANALYSIS

THERE'S A
PERFECTLY
GOOD GYM
DOWN THE
ROAD...



DO WE REALLY
NEED FACILITIES
OF THAT SIZE?

"IF IT WAS
ONLY US,
WHAT WOULD
WE DO?"

INFRASTRUCTURE PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE

INCREASING CONSTRUCTION
COSTS

"SQUEEZING!"
WE NEED TO
SEE FACILITIES
BECOME
SELF SUFFICIENT

DON'T
DUPLICATE
FACILITIES

INNOVATIVE THINKING
THERE IS NOT
ONE MODEL
...OR SILVER
BULLET

PARTNERSHIPS

COUNCILS
WORKING
TOGETHER

WHEN NEITHER
CAN SUCCEED ON
THEIR OWN

JOINT
VENTURES
CO-LOCATING

CENTRES FOR ACTIVE LIVING
LEVERAGE SOCIAL LICENCE

> SESSION 2: LESSONS FROM RECENT PROJECTS (11:15AM – 12:30PM)

PRESENTATIONS:

Brett Diprose, Associate Principal, Warren & Mahoney

Jessie Pigott, Venue Manager – Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre, Clublinks

Tim Goward, Specialist Project Manager, Service Gold Coast

Tammy Beck, Executive Director, Williams Ross Architects

Amanda Locke, Manager Swim Sport and Leisure, City of Greater Geelong

Daniel Pike, CO.OP Studio

Kim Critchley – Unit Manager Aquatic and Leisure Services, Merri-bek City Council (with support from Jarryd Murphy)

THEMES:

- > Strong community consultation and local identity can shape more inclusive and resilient centres
- > Retrofitting older facilities is achievable and often more affordable than rebuilds, however, in the long run can create more challenges
- > Integrated precinct planning can increase community engagement and usage
- > Funding constraints and political influences shape project scope and feasibility significantly, with some projects noted as receiving too much capital funding, or capital funding tied to facilities that did not align with local community needs, where operations have limited long term feasibility
- > Flexibility, accessibility, and sustainability are key design principles

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- > Each facility reflected unique planning, political, and social contexts — reinforcing the need for flexibility in planning tools and frameworks, however, some form of guidance on what would have been appropriate for community archetypes may have assisted in ensuring fit-for-purpose outcomes and reduced the influence of politics on decision-making
- > Stakeholder alignment and community input were cited as critical to successful delivery
- > Sustainability features such as solar, all-electric systems, and water reuse are now expected in new and refurbished facilities

Framework Link:

Supports a flexible yet principles-based approach to planning and infrastructure typologies within the national framework.





SESSION 2

LESSONS FROM RECENT PROJECTS

NORTHCOTE AQUATIC CENTRE

BRETT DIPROSE ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL, WARREN AND MAHONEY

JESSE PIGOT
CENTRE MANAGER, NORTHCOTE AQUATIC
AND RECREATION CENTRE

IT'S ABOUT TEAM
ALIGNMENT

SHIFTING THE MODEL
TO CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

IT'S MY
FAVOURITE
PART
OF THE DAY

MAKING IT
EVERYONE'S
3RD PLACE
... HOME,
WORK,
US

CONSCIOUS ABOUT
BREAKING SILOS

AN INVESTMENT
BACK INTO THE
HEALTH SYSTEM
SOCIAL VALUE

CREATING BETTER, HAPPIER LIVES
CREATING PROACTIVE SOLUTIONS

PALM BEACH AQUATIC CENTRE

COLLABORATION
IN DESIGN RIGHT
UP FRONT

EXCEEDING
FUNDING &
OPERATIONAL
COST
EXPECTATIONS

FIT-FOR-PURPOSE
WITH INCLUSION
IN MIND

WE CREATED
LOCAL
EMPLOYMENT
AND ENGAGEMENT
DURING CONSTRUCTION

IN FUTURE,
INTEGRATING
SERVICES
IN FACILITY
... RATE PAYING
ETC

... A HUB

CONNECTION

TIM GOWARD
SPECIALIST PROJECT
MANAGER,
SERVICE GOLD COAST

ADDRESSING
AGEING
DEMOGRAPHIC
- DESIGN AND
OPPORTUNITIES

WELLBEING

UTILISING ALL SPACES
TO TAP INTO THE
COMMUNITY

BREAKING INITIAL
BUSINESS MODEL
EXPECTATIONS

ADAPTING
TO COMMUNITY
NEEDS AND
TIMES

INFORMING DESIGN

WE'VE BECOME
THE INNER-CITY
BEACH
... A SPORTS &
RECREATION
POWERHOUSE

FAWKNER LEISURE CENTRE

COUNCILERS MAKE
DECISIONS FOR US

1 POOL FOR
30,000 PEOPLE

FACILITIES HAVE
TO COMPLIMENT
EACH OTHER,
ACCOMMODATING
DIVERSITY

WHAT HAPPENS
IN THE NORTH
DOESN'T FLY IN
THE SOUTH

ON GOING FINE-
TUNING & TRAINING

BWARE
LIFE CYCLE MAINTENANCE COST CHALLENGES

THE OLD
CENTRE WAS
PIECEMEAL,
THINGS ADDED
OVER TIME

CHALLENGES
AROUND
AGEING
POPULATION

WE STAGED
THE OPENING
PROCESS TO
GET THE NEW
FACILITY GOING
EARLIER

WE WENT OVER
BUDGET
AND HAD TO
DESIGN FOR
LATER PHASES
NOT GOING AHEAD

WE'VE HAD
INCREASES IN
MEMBERSHIP &
PARTICIPATION,
EVEN AFTER
18 MONTHS CLOSED

CAFE WAS
CRITICAL!

JARRYD MURPHEY
AQUATICS AND LEISURE
PROJECT MANAGER,
MERRI-BEK CITY COUNCIL

SHADY AREAS,
SUSTAINABILITY
AND ENVIRONMENT
BUILT INTO DESIGN

MAKE SURE VARIATIONS
ARE INCLUDED TO AVOID
DELAYS BY RETURNING
TO COUNCIL

GEELONG AQUATIC CENTRE

DESIGN
CHALLENGES
AROUND
FUNDING
CONSTRAINTS
LED TO
INNOVATIVE
THINKING

... THERE IS NO
ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL
APPROACH

FLIPPING THE
8-LANE MODEL
SIDEWAYS
TO ACCOMMODATE
USE REQUIREMENTS

HEAT PUMPS
PLACED NEAR
POOL FOR
SAVINGS AT
THE CONCEPT
STAGE

DOES THE SOLUTION
NEED TO BE A
50 METRE POOL?

TAMMY BECK EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LAWSON ROSS ARCHITECTS

AMANDA LOCKE MANAGER SWIM,
SPORT AND LEISURE
CITY OF GEELONG

CARNEGIE AQUATIC CENTRE

BIT'S
ADDED AND
ADDED ON

IT WAS OLD,
56 OLYMPIC ERA
BUT THERE WAS
STILL LOVE FOR IT!

FACILITATING
INTEGRATION
& WELLNESS

ACOUSTICS IS A
BIG THING!

MAKING IT
APPEALING
TO COME

WORKING
THE FACILITY
HARD AND
COMPACT

OUT-OF-
HOURS
USE

EVEN IF
IT WASN'T
GIVING US
WHAT WE
NEEDED

... WE WANT
THE NEW
BUILDING TO
GIVE US FAMILIARITY
AND HERITAGE FEEL

... REMOVING AGGRESSIVE
ELEMENTS, UNFAVOURABLE
THINGS

GREENING &
PLANTING

FOCUSING ON
NET ZERO
OPERATION
... ENSURING
GREEN STAR
DOCUMENTATION

MIKE
MCGRATH
PRINCIPAL AT
CO-OP STUDIO

> SESSION 3: PLANNING MODELS, FRAMEWORKS & REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

PRESENTATIONS:

Warren Green – Managing Director, Warren Green Consulting

Dr John Tower – Victoria University

Ricki Jones – Principal Consultant, Data Consulting

Michelle Nolland – Executive Director, LARCAN

PANEL: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN ACCESS, INCLUSION & USER GROUPS

Panellists:

Carly Sanders – Head of Product and Performance, the Y Victoria

Sam Watson – General Manager - Government & International Relations, Swimming Australia

Matthew Haanappel OAM PLY – Acting General Manager – Operations, WynActive

Dr Carleigh Yeomans – Director – Sport Innovation Research Group, Swinburne University

THEMES:

- > Systematic planning models are needed to link facility development with health, inclusion, and community objectives
- > Inclusive facility and program design must be embedded from inception
- > Regional and remote contexts require differentiated strategies and supports

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- > Evidence-based planning leads to better alignment with user needs and service objectives
- > Inclusion considerations — from physical access to program diversity — must be prioritised during early planning, and backed up by policies and procedures
- > Early engagement with marginalised and underrepresented users is critical to achieving equitable access

Framework Link:

A framework should give additional consideration to regional and remote planning and provide guidance on inclusive design principles





SESSION 2

LESSONS FROM RECENT PROJECTS CONTINUED...

WORKSHOP 1: ESTABLISHING THE PRINCIPLES & SCOPE FOR A NATIONAL AQUATIC FACILITY INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK

POOLS SHOULD BE SEEN AS PART OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

LIKE SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS...



AUSTRALIA IS TOO VAST TO HAVE COMPLETELY EQUITABLE POOL ACCESS

WHAT DOES EQUITY MEAN IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA?

START WITH WHAT COMMUNITIES NEED. HEALTH BENEFITS, CONNECTION

Engage stakeholders early
"TAKE THEM ON THE JOURNEY"



DIVERSITY
NEURO-DIVERSE, FRIENDLY DESIGN

USER GROUP
SERVEYS TO REALLY UNDERSTAND NEEDS

ENSURE FEATURES ARE FIRST TRIED AND TESTED BY USER GROUPS

EFFICIENCY - FOCUS ON PASSIVE PRINCIPLES FIRST

SCOOP FROM A LARGER POOL

SAFETY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ISSUES "OF THE DAY"



DEFINE AND FOCUS ON EMBEDDING ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS AT DESIGN STAGE



AVOID A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL FIT-FOR-PURPOSE DEVELOPMENT

MORAL COMMUNITY BENEFIT

LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED TO CREATE INTEGRATED FACILITIES

OFTEN HARD TO NAVIGATE

DETAILED NEEDS ANALYSIS
CONSIDERING PRESENT & FUTURE

LOOKING AT HEALTH & WELLBEING SUSTAINABLY

BUILD IN KPIs & SOCIAL IMPACTS

CO-LOCATION & MULTI FUNCTIONAL

MAKE THEM ECONOMICALLY ACHIEVABLE & SUSTAINABLE

HOW? - GOOD URBAN PLANNING?

SHOPPING CENTRE MODEL?

OPERATIONAL SAFETY MODELS
TRAINING & EXPERTISE

EMBRACE DATA INSIGHTS FOR OPTIMISATION



LOOK AT THINGS THAT COULD UTILISE POOL WASTE
SHARING INFRASTRUCTURE TO REAP EFFICIENCY

SESSION 3

PLANNING MODELS FRAMEWORKS AND REGIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

LESSONS LEARNED

HAVE AN ACTIVATION STRATEGY, UNDERSTAND AND ALIGN WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS

VICTORIANS HAVE BECOME SPECTATORS

SOCIAL ISOLATION IS ADDING TO CHALLENGES

MOST INACTIVE AND MULTI CULTURAL ... SO THERE'S A LOT WE CAN DO!

HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE USE?

PARKING IS A SIGNIFICANT ACCESS ISSUE

TEENAGERS WANT GYMS
WE'RE MORE FOCUSED ON THERAPY

UNDERSTAND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
... ALLIED HEALTH SCHOOLS, SPORT, TAL...

PRESS HARD ON PLANNING PROCESSES

WE NEED TO CREATE SOCIALLY INTERACTIVE PLACES



WARREN GREEN
MANAGING DIRECTOR
WARREN GREEN CONSULTING

GETTING THE DEMOGRAPHIC ACCESS RIGHT IS IMPERATIVE TO THE PROJECT

WORKING WITH PLANNING & COUNCIL

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE PEOPLE JUST GOING ALONG TO WATCH

... WE NEED TO MAXIMISE! IT'S BETTER COMMERCIALY CREATING HUGE ATTENDANCE POTENTIAL

50M POOLS = LESS USE & ATTENDANCE

MY HEAD IS OUT OF THE WATER. SOCIALISING

TAP INTO THE FUNDING POWER. POOLS AREN'T JUST POOLS

EUROPEAN POOLS ARE BUSIER IN WINTER

IT'S HOW LONG IT TAKES TO DRIVE ... NOT HOW FAR!

WE NEED TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN EVIDENCE AND CURRENT PROCESSES

LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR LGA BOUNDARIES

WE NEED OPERATIONAL COST BENEFITS ANALYSIS FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

ENTIRE COMMUNITY NEEDS?
LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR LANE



PANEL

STANDARDS ARE NOT A PLANNING PROCESS!

WHAT'S THE PLAN TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

NOT ABOUT ACHIEVING A GREAT PLAN



› DAY 2 - SESSION 1: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

PRESENTATIONS:

Dr Elizabeth Taylor – Senior Lecturer in Urban Planning and Design, Monash University

Dr Rebecca Olive – Vice Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, RMIT

PRESENTATION INSIGHTS:

- › Shared research on the history and geography of grassroots campaigns to save suburban swimming pools, highlighting their emotional and symbolic value in Australian communities.
- › Demonstrated how local pool closures have sparked protest, political mobilisation, and identity formation, revealing that pools are often perceived as more than just recreational infrastructure — they are civic landmarks and places of shared memory.
- › Challenged the assumption that larger, regional aquatic centres always deliver better access and outcomes – instead urging consideration of proximity, walkability, and public transport access.
- › Emphasised the emotional, cultural, and environmental significance of swimming spaces beyond their fitness utility.
- › Discussed how aquatic facilities can support relational wellbeing, especially for women, non-binary people, and culturally diverse users.
- › Called for design that fosters everyday participation and connection – not just performance or exercise – and warned against assumptions that all users feel safe or included in aquatic spaces.



PANEL:
WHEN IT COMES TO COMMUNITY AQUATIC AND RECREATION CENTRES, IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

Panellists:

Kelly-Sean O'Connell – Project Manager, City Venue Management

Brooke Atkins – Executive Director, LARCAN

Kara Monaghan – State Manager VIC / TAS, Belgravia Leisure

PANEL SUMMARY:

- › Larger centres often offer some efficiencies but should not displace essential local pools.
- › Explored whether large-scale regional centres deliver better outcomes than smaller community pools.
- › Emphasised that both large hubs and small local pools serve different but essential roles.
- › Highlighted that there is no single optimal model, but that consultation that includes operators often results in more sustainable facilities for the long run due to stronger financial returns.

PANEL:
CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SAFE DESIGN FOR AQUATIC FACILITIES

Panellists:

Craig Roberts – General Manager - Drowning Prevention & Education, Royal Life Saving NSW

Alek Olszewski – Senior Manager – Aquatic Industry Services, Life Saving Victoria

Nikki Thornhill – State Manager, Royal Life Saving Queensland

Kate Barnett – Health Safety & Environment Manager Recreation, the Y Victoria

PANEL SUMMARY:

- › Addressed gaps in safe design including better supervision lines of sight, glare reduction and being more pragmatic about pool depths, such as shallower pools for communities with lower swimming competency.
- › Highlighted need for continuing to evolve safe design guidelines aligned with staffing realities and emerging technologies.

PANEL:
CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

Panellists:

Travis Doye – Acting Executive Officer, Leisure Institute of Western Australia Aquatics (LIWA)

Kimberley Nitschke – General Manager - Property, Fleet and Emergency Management, Townsville City Council

Ray Smith – Senior Leisure Services Officer, City of Greater Bendigo (views presented by facilitator)

Kacey McEwen – Chief Brand Officer, Lifeguarding Services Australia

PANEL SUMMARY:

- › Regional and remote facilities face enormous challenges such as isolation, reduced availability of professional staff, services, suppliers, maintenance.
- › Networked support - such as bundling management tenders for multiple facilities in a region - and/or centralised mobile response resources – like the RLSWA model for remote pools and centralised industry labour hire support - are ways to enhance the feasibility and sustainability of regional and remote operations.

Framework Link:

Informs framework guidance on community value, consultation, facility scale, safety, and regional and remote considerations, reinforcing network models and thinking.



RESEARCH INTO 'SAVE THE POOLS' CAMPAIGNS

SESSION 1

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

SWIM MELBOURNE: MAPPING PLACES TO SWIM IN MELBOURNE

Safety -
always
be
attentive

DEBRIS?
CURRENT?
WHAT'S
UNDERNEATH?

I NEVER
SWIM
ALONE IN
THE OCEAN

... WHO WILL I WATCH
WHO WILL WATCH ME?

REBECCA OLIVE
VICE CHANCELLOR'S
SENIOR RESEARCH
FELLOW, RMIT

RESEARCHING
INEQUITIES IN
OUR ACCESS TO
FACILITIES
AND OUR
RELATIONSHIP
WITH SWIMMING

HOW DOES IT
HAPPEN IN
MELBOURNE?

- FRESH WATER
- SALT WATER
- POOL INFRASTRUCTURE

WITH SOME
KIND OF
INFRASTRUCTURE

**SWIMMING
IS GREAT
FOR MENTAL
HEALTH**

POSITIVE
FEELINGS

SPORT
NO LONGER
DOMINATED
BY MALES

BE AWARE
OF THE ROLE
IT PLAYS IN
LGBTIQ+
LIVES

AND THE
ENVIRONMENT

WALKABILITY
... 20 MINS IS
TOO FAR!

MORE
WORK
NEEDED TO
MAKE
WATERWAYS
SAFE!

THE POWER OF WATER
... AND SOCIOECONOMIC
DISADVANTAGE

LOCAL VS
CENTRAL
... IT'S AN
OASIS!

IT'S ABOUT
IDENTITY!

SOCIAL
CAPITAL
- WE NEED A LOT
TO RUN THEM

SAFETY
PEOPLE MIGHT
SWIM IN PLACES
UNSAFE, WITHOUT
A LOCAL POOL

LONG-TERM IMPACTS
OF FAILING TO
UPGRADE

DEMOLITION AND
LOSS OF SITE!

IN ICELAND THEY SAY
IT'S NOT A TOWN IF
THERE'S NO POOL!

30-40 YEARS AGO
THERE WERE STRONG
FEELINGS ABOUT
POOL CLOSURES

DEMOGRAPHIC
INEQUITY

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

THESE CAN BE
CENTRES OF
COMMUNITY LIFE!

WHAT
DECISIONS
ARE MADE,
AND WHY?

There's a
LOT AT STAKE

RESEARCH ONGOING - GET IN TOUCH



SENIOR LECTURER IN
URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN
MONASH UNIVERSITY

EVERY
NEIGHBOURHOOD
SHOULD HAVE
A POOL!

SHIRES
AMALGAMATE
... AND NOW THEY
ONLY NEED ONE
POOL!

CHANGING POLITICAL
AND FINANCIAL
LANDSCAPES

POOLS CLOSE
AND BECOME
CARPARKS
NOT UNCOMMON

DR ELIZABETH
TAYLOR

WHEN IT COMES TO COMMUNITY AQUATIC AND RECREATION CENTRES, IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SAFE DESIGN FOR AQUATIC FACILITIES

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

WE'VE SEEN A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH, WITHOUT OVERLAYING NEEDS OF COMMUNITY ... YOU WANT TO OPEN AT FULL CAPACITY ALL THE TIME!

PLUG AND PLAY...
DO WE STILL NEED 5000 MANY COLD 50M POOLS?
HAVE THOSE DESIGN CONVERSATIONS EARLY

NEEDS?
MAIL IT WITH CUSTOMERS AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS
AT A DETAILED LEVEL
GYMS CAN BE GOOD AND CHANGE THE USE DYNAMIC

PLAN
KIDS CAN COME & BE SAFE WITHOUT PARENTS ... AND LEARN SAFETY
FOR DECADES AHEAD
MAINTENANCE PLANS

LISTEN
HAVE THE END-USER CONSULTATION
RETROFITTING IS MUCH HARDER!
MORE PROCESS FOCUS ON THIS

PUT YOURSELF IN ACCESSIBILITY-CHALLENGED SHOES

I DIDN'T CHOOSE SAFETY, SAFETY CHOSE ME!
IT STARTS AT HOME!
WITH THE RIGHT MESSAGES

OPEN WATER
MORE PARTICIPATION - LET'S LEARN THE RISKS AND SAFETY
VULNERABLE PEOPLE

SYDNEY - 9120 MOST AT RISK ...

DESIGNING FOR SWIMMING CLUBS IS A DIFFERENT THING ...

HELIOPHORE SAFETY IS NOT UNLIKE FACILITY SAFETY
OUCH!
AGE TRANSITIONAL DEPTHS
MAKE THEM VISUALLY APPEALING

SIMPLIFY
SIGNAGE INFO BOMBARDMENT
A LOT OF GROUPS DON'T READ SIGNS

YAY!

GOOD DESIGN, MONEY SAVED ON LIFE GUARDS
WELLBEING SPACES

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES & ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF SAFETY?

Clear SIGHT LINES?
KIDS MOTOR SKILLS, SLIPPING, JUMPING, FALLING IN
CAN WE GET TO THE DEEP END QUICKLY?

Visual BARRIERS

THEY NEED SOME LOVE.
WELL USED & DETERIORATING
VULNERABLE
... STAFF AND TRAINING CHALLENGES OVER VAST DISTANCES

LARGER OPERATORS
NEED MORE THAN ONE FACILITY TO JUSTIFY INVOLVEMENT
CONNECT & TALK WITH OTHERS FURTHER AFIELD
CREATE BONDS

OPERATION AND REACTIVE MAINTENANCE COSTS FALLING ON COUNCILS
THE SERVICE MODEL?
NEEDS TO BE UNIQUE, BESPOKE

NORMALISE OPERATIONS TOO!
I CAN'T WORK 60 HOURS A WEEK
GENERATIONAL MANAGEMENT CHANGES IMMINENT

EVERY COMMUNITY IS DIFFERENT
PROTECTION?
LIFEGUARD SAFETY, TRAINING & INFRASTRUCTURE IS GETTING RISKIER & WORSE
VIOLENCE & ABUSE
REFLECTION & EMPATHY SHOULD BE A STRONG ELEMENT

OUR CONTEXT:
- WE'RE A SECOND THOUGHT!

Takes 50000 LONG ... AND THE COST!

› SESSION 2: SUSTAINABILITY

PRESENTATIONS:

Derek Harbinson – Director, Negawatt Projects

Nick Yannakis – Director – Aquatic Services, Beca

PANEL: SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Panellists:

Steve Meikle – Managing Director, Commercial Aquatics Australia (VIC)

Alexia Morgan – Manager, Sustainability and Environment, Belgravia Health & Leisure Group

Alan Pears – Australian Alliance for Energy Productivity

THEMES:

- › Energy efficiency and emissions reduction are now baseline expectations.
- › Whole-of-life financial and environmental planning is critical.
- › New and retrofitted facilities can drive long-term sustainability outcomes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- › Benchmarking and continuous improvement must be embedded into design and operations.
- › Lifecycle costing and energy modelling help optimise design choices and justify upfront investments.
- › Innovations like all-electric builds, smart water systems, and integrated renewables can significantly lower operating costs.
- › Glazing should be minimal.
- › Framework must support sustainability without compromising user experience.

Framework Link:

Supports the inclusion of sustainability benchmarks, minimum standards, and lifecycle planning in the framework.



CURRENT CASE STUDIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSTAINABILITY

SESSION 2

SUSTAINABILITY

GLOBAL WORK TO BENCHMARK ENERGY AT AQUATIC FACILITIES LESSONS FROM IAKS

WE ARE SOOO FAR BEHIND EUROPE IN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY CONSUMPTION



Melbourne is NOT TOO COLD

HUGE SAVINGS

TRANSITIONING TO SOLAR PANELS AND EFFICIENCY
... DOUBLE GLAZING
... MONEY BACK FROM POWER COMPANIES

BUILDING-AIR FLOW
CHEAPER DOUBLE-GLAZE UPGRADE

INSULATION

THE SHIFT:

PROPANE HEAT PUMPS ARE THE THING

BUILD DIFFERENTLY, FASTER WITH LESS MATERIAL

CUTTING DOWN HOT SUN-FACING WINDOW AREA

GLARE!

BENCHMARKING

GET GREAT ENERGY DATA DASHBOARDS ... SHELL HAS ONE

BWARE CHEMICALS WITH HUGE CO₂ EMISSIONS WHEN THEY BREAK DOWN IN THE ENVIRONMENT ... AMMONIA



DEREK HARBINSON
DIRECTOR, MEGAWATT PROJECTS

BENCHMARKING

NOT ALL FACILITIES ARE THE SAME

... SO HOW DO WE DO IT?

VALIDATE BY DATA-DRIVEN RESULTS

PEOPLE WANT TO

way over
TYPICAL ENERGY!



DEFINE TARGETS FOR E.I. BUILDS

ENSURE IT'S WITH EFFICIENT ENERGY

HAVE FUN

DATA IS THE KEY

DO IT MORE, SHARE FAILURES & SUCCESSSES

DO BETTER TOGETHER

IT'S HAPPENING BETTER IN CANADA, NEW ZEALAND



NICK YANNAKIS
DIRECTOR - AQUATIC SERVICES, BECA

... SOOOO SLOW TO IMPROVE HERE

SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

PANEL

WINTER GAS SHORTAGES

GAS PRICES
CLIMATE EMERGENCY DECLARED

SUSTAINABILITY DONE RIGHT SAVES YOU MONEY

SKI-INDUSTRY IS REALLY SUFFERING

A REVOLUTION



WE NEED TO DO MUCH BETTER TRAINING FOR ARCHITECTS



HEATING 1 LITRE IS LIKE RUNNING A KETTLE FOR 20 MINUTES



DOUBLE GLAZE WINDOWS ARE NOT AS GOOD AS INSULATED WALLS

DOORS LEFT OPEN FOR FRESH AIR

STAFF TRAINING!

UNNECESSARY BACKWASHING

45 MINUTE SHOWER!



WE NEED TO SEE THE BMS

DATA

MAKE SURE YOU OWN & HAVE ACCESS

WE NEED A LONG PROCESS OVER TIME

HOW IS IT EFFECTING CLIMATE CHANGE?

THE WORK REALLY STARTS WHEN THE FACILITY OPENS

COMPLEX SYSTEMS NEED EXPERT HANDOVER ... 6 MONTHS OF EXPERTS TRAINING & SUPERVISING

TALK TO THE EXPERTS

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE INVOLVED



> SESSION 3: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

PRESENTATIONS:

Jeremy Smith – General Manager – Commercial, Fluidra Australia

Chiara Cenati – Business Development Manager, Myrtha Pools

Dan Mulvey – General Manager, Lynxight

Jason Hellwig – CEO, Swimming Victoria

THEMES:

- > Available technology and digital solutions can improve safety, sustainability, cost, flexibility and efficiency.
- > Modular and retrofittable infrastructure expands feasibility and lifecycles, particularly in constrained contexts.
- > Innovation should prioritise access, engagement, and operational excellence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- > Technologies like steel pool tanks, pop-up swim walls, movable floors and AI monitoring can make centres more programmable, safer, inclusive and cost-effective.
- > Smart design improves adaptability, usability and changing program demands over time.
- > Renovation technologies (e.g. stainless-steel linings) allow rapid and lower-cost renewal (\$650k for a 50m pool) with 25-year lifespan extensions.

Framework Link:

- Encourage use of technology solutions which increase the flexibility and feasibility of aquatic facilities.
- Framework should include innovation case studies/toolkits.
- Framework should promote adoption of proven, scalable innovations.





SESSION 3

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

CASE STUDIES IN TECHNOLOGIES
MAKING POOLS MORE
ACCESSIBLE, FLEXIBLE AND
SUSTAINABLE

**MANUFACTURE
& SUPPLY**

THE ONLY REASON
FACILITIES EXIST
IS BECAUSE OF US
OUR INDUSTRY
IS IN TROUBLE

EGO
PREFERENCES
MOTIVATIONS?

FOCUS NOT ON
SELLING BUT
SOLUTIONS



KEEP
REDISIGNING
TO FIND IT!

AIM FOR BEST
COMMUNITY
AND OPERATIONAL
OUTCOMES

SOLUTIONS WILL
COME WHEN WE
LEAVE OUR
EGO AT THE DOOR



ACCOMMODATE
AS MANY USER
GROUPS AS
POSSIBLE



CASE STUDIES IN APPLYING A.I.
TO MAKE OPERATIONS MORE EFFICIENT

**A.I. SHOULD BE SEEN
AS AN INFRASTRUCTURE
ENHANCEMENT**
NOT A TECHNOLOGY ADDITION

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE
DETECTED MORE THAN
25 SECONDS SUBMERGED



OPTIMISE
LIFE GUARD
DEPLOYMENT

IT'S IN
EVERYTHING
WE DO

DROWNING IS
A PROCESS
- 6 TIMES FASTER
RESPONSE JUST
BY USING A.I.

HEAD COUNTS!

HUGE!
FASTER
RESPONSE
TIMES WITH
A.I. HELP

ANALYSE
USE AND
INFORM
OPERATIONS

ENERGY USE, S
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

WE NOW
HAVE THE
DATA, WE
NEED TO WORK
ON HOW WE USE
IT!



NOT JUST
ABOUT
SAFETY

3 MAIN CHALLENGES

AGEING
INFRASTRUCTURE

ACCESS
INEQUALITY

COMMUNITY
DIVERSITY

TECHNOLOGICAL
SOLUTIONS

WE'RE STILL
BUILDING
LIKE
50 YEARS AGO

NEW TECHNOLOGY
IS AVAILABLE FOR
EFFECTIVE
REFURBISHMENT

THE SHELL REMAINS,
RENOVATION PANEL
IS THE WATER PROOFING
IN AND
OLD POOL...

RENOVATION
CAN REBUILD A
50 METRE POOL
IN 5 WEEKS
AT LOWER COSTS
25 YEAR WARRANTY
SINGLE POINT CONTACT

**CASE STUDIES IN RENEWING
REGIONAL AND REMOTE POOLS**

CAN BE DONE
IN EVERY REGION
IN AUSTRALIA

INNOVATIVE
SOLUTIONS &
SHORT CLOSING
& WORK TIMES

ULTIMATELY A
STAINLESS STEEL
POOL MANUFACTURER
HOW CAN THE PRIVATE
SECTOR HELP?

WE BELIEVE IN
COMMUNITY
BUILDING



MYRTHA
STRUCTURES
ADDRESSING
DIVERSITY &
DIVERSE
DESIGN



CHIARA
CENATI
BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER
AUSTRALIA,
MYRTHA POOLS

**DEEP DIVE INTO RENEWING
EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE
WITH MATTOLI**

INDUSTRY
STANDARD
BEST
PRACTICE
SOLUTIONS

SPECIALISTS IN
SHOCKING CORROSIVE
ENVIRONMENTS
& WASTE WATER

INNOVATIVE
SOLUTIONS

EXPERTISE?
... HOW MANY
FACILITIES ARE
RUN BY 4 PEOPLE?!

PREVENTATIVE
MAINTENANCE
IS THE SOLUTION

AND THE
RIGHT PEOPLE
TO EXECUTE IT

Mattioli

KEEPING POOLS
OPEN, AND
GETTING THEM
OPEN SOONER

STRENGTH IN
COLLABORATION
THE RIGHT PARTNERSHIPS
MAKE IT HAPPEN

IN REFURBISHMENT
WHAT ARE WE TRYING
TO FIND?

IT'S GREAT TO GET
DATA, BUT WHAT'S
THE PATH FORWARD?

IS THE
MONEY
REALLY
THERE?

GET IT RIGHT, IT'S
CHEAPER IN THE
LONG RUN

SOLUTIONS
MYRIAD
VARIABLES

COSTS
FINANCIAL
PLANNING



JASON
HELLWIG
CEO
SWIMMING
VICTORIA

> WORKSHOPS: FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES & FACILITY COMPONENTS FOR VARYING COMMUNITY PROFILES

THEMES:

- > Defining the purpose, users, and scope of a national aquatic facility framework.
- > Establishing core values: inclusion, safety, sustainability, access.
- > Ensuring the framework supports, not overrides, local planning decisions.
- > Facility provision must respond to community profile, scale, proximity, and need — not population alone.
- > Basic aquatic functions (e.g. learn to swim, aquatic play) must be universally accessible.
- > Strong appetite for community-led planning tools that empower rather than prescribe.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- > The framework should balance structure with flexibility, enabling diverse local responses.
- > Emphasis on functions, not facility types — aligning infrastructure with community outcomes.
- > Static provision tables risk oversimplification; any typology should include narrative, caveats, and logic pathways.
- > Stakeholders strongly endorsed flowcharts, case studies, and planning examples to support application.
- > Framework should recognise informal use, volunteer-led programs, and the role of clubs.
- > Some calls to reconsider access to under-utilised and ultra-low resourced pools through tech-assisted supervision or peer-led use models.
- > Lifecycle costing and sustainability should be normalised in planning — including financial and carbon considerations.
- > Desire for clarity around minimum vs. enhanced service offerings, including hybrid and hub-and-spoke models for urban and regional areas.
- > Participants stressed that the framework should be an enabler of good decisions, not a rulebook.

Framework Link:

Informs a multi-layered, narrative-based framework with embedded planning tools, adaptable typologies, and inclusive guidance that reflects place identity, community priorities, and long-term viability.



> ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

Attendees were invited to share real-time feedback via Slido across both days of the symposium. In total, 31 comments were submitted. Most feedback was constructive and positive in tone, offering practical suggestions and highlighting some emerging tensions and broader reflections on the aquatic sector's direction. The comments ranged from specific facility ideas to big-picture observations about community needs and industry priorities.

In addition to these two workshops were held to share insights and discuss the needs of a future framework.

Access and Equity

A recurring theme was the need to ensure aquatic facilities are accessible and welcoming to all. Participants emphasised making pools affordable and reachable for everyone – across different ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds, including those in rural or low-resource communities. Many noted that no community should be left behind, calling for reduced barriers (financial, physical, cultural) so that “every Australian, no matter their background or ability, has the chance to learn to swim and enjoy their local pool.” Attendees stressed that equitable access isn't just a social goal but fundamental to water safety outcomes nationally.

Sustainability

Sustainability was frequently mentioned as both an environmental and economic imperative. Comments called for greener, more energy-efficient facilities to future-proof aquatic centres. Attendees suggested measures like solar heating, better insulation, water recycling systems, and other eco-friendly innovations to reduce the carbon footprint of pools. Several noted that investing in sustainable design and technology now will pay off through lower operating costs in the long run, making facilities more financially viable. This theme underscored that environmental responsibility and cost-efficiency can go hand-in-hand in aquatic infrastructure.

Role of Clubs and Volunteers

Many audience reflections acknowledged the vital role of swim clubs and volunteers in keeping facilities running and communities engaged. Participants praised volunteers as the backbone of learn-to-swim programs, local swim meets, and outreach activities – especially in regional areas. At the same time, they noted these groups are often stretched thin. There were calls to better support and empower volunteers (and the clubs they run) through training, resources, and recognition. This would help sustain programs and prevent burnout. One attendee noted that “without our volunteers, half our programs wouldn't exist”, underscoring that any future plans must consider the needs and contributions of these community champions.

Planning Tools and Frameworks

Another key theme was the desire for improved planning frameworks and tools to guide aquatic infrastructure development. Attendees were optimistic about the proposed national framework, hoping it would provide consistent guidance on facility planning, design, and funding priorities. Many felt a shared framework (or set of best-practice guidelines) could help local councils and operators avoid “reinventing the wheel” for each new project. However, participants also cautioned that one size does not fit all – any national plan should be flexible enough to adapt to local context. Aligning planning efforts with community needs and future demographic trends was seen as crucial. In short, the feedback called for planning approaches that are strategic but not prescriptive, allowing each community to define what works best for them within a common guiding vision.

Safety and Design

Comments also focused on safety, inclusive design, and user experience. Participants urged that new facilities (and renovations) incorporate modern safety features and universal design from the outset. Examples included zero-depth entry pools and ramp access for seniors and people with disabilities; adequate shade and seating for comfort; clear sightlines for lifeguards; and family-friendly change rooms. Attendees felt that considering safety and accessibility early in the design process would make facilities more welcoming and reduce risks. There was also discussion of designing spaces that can flexibly accommodate both recreational swimmers and organised sports, without compromising safety or useability. Overall, the consensus was that good design can greatly enhance both safety and inclusivity, ensuring everyone feels comfortable using aquatic centres.

Cultural Value of Pools

Finally, many reflections touched on the cultural and community value of aquatic facilities. Attendees described local pools as “more than just a place to swim” – they are social hubs and often part of the identity of a town or suburb. Several comments noted that community pools serve as intergenerational meeting places, where families, friends, and neighbours connect. They host school carnivals, celebrations, and informal gatherings that strengthen social bonds. Especially in regional areas (or suburbs without many other facilities), the local pool can be “the heart of the community.” This feedback highlighted that when planning infrastructure, we must remember the intangible benefits – community pride, wellbeing, and social cohesion – that pools foster, in addition to their sporting or recreational roles.

Commonly Highlighted Terms



Representative Attendee Quotes:

- “No matter your age, ability or background, you should have the chance to learn to swim and enjoy your local pool.” – Community participant
- “Investing in solar heating and water recycling for our pools isn’t just green – it saves money in the long term.” – Local council attendee
- “Our volunteers are fantastic but stretched thin. We need better support so community swim programs keep thriving.” – Regional swim club volunteer
- “I’m excited about a national framework – it could stop us reinventing the wheel each time a new pool is planned.” – Council planner
- “Design with safety and inclusion in mind from the start. Features like ramps, zero-depth entries and universal change rooms make a huge difference.” – Aquatic facility manager
- “Our local pool is more than a place to swim – it’s where the community comes together. It’s part of our town’s identity.” – Rural council representative
- “It’s great to see everyone – from government to industry – on the same page about making aquatic centres more accessible and sustainable.” – Industry attendee
- “There’s a real tension between building new pools and fixing old ones. We need to balance both so no community misses out.” – Local government delegate
- “One size doesn’t fit all when it comes to pools. Every community has unique needs, so we need flexibility in planning.” – Metropolitan council participant
- “Make sure to consult the community early on – local people know what they need in a pool.” – Community member

Overall, the audience feedback provides valuable grassroots insight as the National Aquatic Facility Infrastructure Framework is developed. The comments reinforce the need for a flexible, empowering and inclusive approach to future infrastructure planning. By heeding these suggestions – from prioritising broad access and sustainability, to supporting volunteer networks and honouring the community value of pools – a framework can be better aligned with on-the-ground needs.

In essence, attendees affirmed that a one-size-fits-all solution will not work; the framework should empower communities with guidance and options to create aquatic facilities that best fit their unique context.

This inclusive, adaptable approach will help ensure Australia’s aquatic infrastructure meets diverse local needs while working toward our shared national goals.

> CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium 2025 served as a critical platform for framing a new, community-first approach to aquatic infrastructure across Australia. The event affirmed that while local needs and contexts differ, the underlying goals are shared: to create safe, inclusive, sustainable, and accessible places where Australians can connect with water, build life skills - especially water safety skills, and experience the social, health and cultural benefits of aquatic participation.

This report synthesises a wide range of contributions – from emerging technologies and retrofit case studies, to regional planning strategies and inclusive design principles. It also draws attention to the importance of a guiding national framework: not to override local decision-making, but to support it with shared principles, planning tools, and investment models that help local governments and industry partners deliver fit-for-purpose outcomes.

As we look ahead, Royal Life Saving Australia remains committed to working with our stakeholders to co-design and progress the National Aquatic Infrastructure Framework. We extend our thanks once more to the speakers, workshop facilitators, and the participants who generously shared their experience and vision.

This report is not a conclusion, but a beginning. We look forward to continuing this work together – to ensure that every community in Australia has access to the aquatic infrastructure it deserves.

> ATTENDEES

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia Representatives

- Dr Justin Scarr – Chief Executive Officer – Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
- RJ Houston – General Manager - Capability & Industry – Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
- Dr William Koon – National Manager of Drowning Prevention Strategy – Royal Life Saving Australia
- Marty Moran – National Manager Industry Safety – Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
- Shaun Jackson – National Manager – Training and Workforce Development – Royal Life Saving Society – Australia

Royal Life Saving Society Member Organisation Representatives

- Alek Olszewski – Senior Manager – Aquatic Industry Services – Life Saving Victoria
- Andy Dennis – General Manager – Aquatic Capability – Life Saving Victoria
- Bernadette Neal – Aquatics Manager – Royal Life Saving NSW ACT TAS
- Craig Roberts – General Manager – Royal Life Saving NSW ACT TAS
- Nikki Thornhill – State Manager – Royal Life Saving Society Queensland Inc
- Paul Barry – Executive Director – Royal Life Saving Society Queensland Inc
- Paul Shannon – Executive Advisor – Life Saving Victoria
- Travis Doye – General Manager, Aquatic Safety & Workforce – Royal Life Saving Western Australia

Government Representatives

- Amanda Locke – Manager – Aquatics Sport and Leisure – City of Greater Geelong
- Angela Casey – Executive Manager Sports & Recreation – Northern Beaches Council
- Belinda Mills – Aquatic Supervisor – Cabonne Council
- Craig Tobin – Aquatic Centre Supervisor – Western Downs Regional Council
- Danielle Leckie – Joint Venture Officer – Alexandrina Council
- David Jeffrey – Senior Director, Planning and Infrastructure – Sport and Recreation, ACT Government
- Gerald Dixon – Aquatic and Leisure Services Manager – City of Ballarat
- James Madder – Team Leader Recreation – Frankston City Council
- Jarryd Murphy – Senior Project Manager – Merri-bek City Council
- Kim Critchley – Unit Manager Aquatics, Leisure and Community Venues – Merri-bek City Council
- Kim Marshall – Team Leader Aquatics and Leisure – City of Kingston
- Kimberley Nitschke – General Manager – Townsville City Council
- Lachlan Start – Recreation and Aquatics Officer – Buloke Shire Council
- Leah Bassett – Leisure Services Manager – Sutherland Shire Council
- Melissa Trent – Facilities Leisure Officer – Wyndham City Council
- Nicole Harvey – Coordinator Operations and Venues – Western Downs Regional Council
- Peter Leckie – Team Leader Leisure Facilities Management – Wyndham City Council
- Phil Saikaly – Lead Director Community Sports Infrastructure – Sport and Recreation Victoria

- Reannon Wilson – Leisure Facilities Officer – Wyndham City Council
- Ryan Strickland – Coordinator Business Support – Lake Macquarie City Council
- Samantha Ishizuka – Senior Recreation Facilities Officer – Hobsons Bay City Council
- Sarah Horgan – Manager, Recreation and Sport Planning – Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing
- Simon Kable – Team Leader, Pool Operations – Sutherland Shire Council
- Sue McGill – Director – Participation Growth – Australian Sports Commission
- Victoria MacKirdy – CEO – City of Victor Harbor

Aquatic Industry Representatives

- Alexia Morgan – Manager Sustainability – Belgravia Health and Leisure Group
- Antonio (Tony) Aloï – General Manager – Mattioli – Aquatic Sports and Recreation
- Becky Gemenis – Executive Assistant – IAKS ANZ
- Blake Pearl – Technical Director – AIS Water
- Brad Maunsell – CEO – AUSTSWIM
- Carly Sanders – Head of Product & Performance – The Y Victoria
- Carolyn Veldhuyzen – Manager/Board Director – iSwim Immanuel College
- Cath Bellchambers – Partnership Manager – HealthySwim Australia
- Craig Hortin – Head of Sport & Recreation – YMCA South Australia Inc
- Daniel Mulvey – General Manager – Lynxight
- David Stennett – Maytronics / Aquatics Only
- Gary Toner – Executive Officer – Swim Coaches & Teachers Australia
- Georgie Nichol – Executive GM – AUSTSWIM
- Hayley Burke – A/Aquatics & Community Participation Manager – Western Leisure Services – Wynactive

> ATTENDEES

Aquatic Industry Representatives Cont.

- Jarrah Wynne – Operations, Risk, Health & Safety Manager – Peninsula Leisure
- Kara Monaghan – Senior Business Operations Manager – Belgravia Leisure
- Kathy Parton – CEO – Aquatics and Recreation Victoria
- Lee Moore – Chief of Sales and Marketing – AIS Water
- Liam O'Brien – Regional Operations Manager – Aligned Leisure
- Luke Daly – CEO – Australian Swim Schools Association
- Matthew Haanappel – Acting GM Operations – Western Leisure Services
- Melanie Holt – Manager Sports and Leisure – Barooga Aquatic and Recreation Centre
- Michael Clancy – Business Development – BlueFit
- Nicky Sloan – COO – City Venue Management
- Nikiesha Pilgrim – Facility Manager – West Wimmera Aquatics
- Pejman Talebi – Head of New Business – Aquatic Achievers
- Richard McLean – Assets and Facilities Manager – Western Leisure Services
- Sam Watson – EGM – Government and International Relations – Swimming Australia
- Selma Barlow – President – Swimming SA
- Stan Wall – CEO – ARI NSW
- Tess Craigie – Area Manager – Merri-bek – The Y Victoria
- Tony Arbidans – Owner – All Pool Solutions
- Tracy Maff – Facility Manager / Swim School Owner – ATM Aquatics
- Vanessa (Tess) Pemble – Swim School Manager – ATM Aquatics
- Wayne Pollock – President – ASSA

Expert / Consultant Representatives

- Alan Pears – Innovation Lead – A2EP
- Bruce Mackay – Otium Planning Group
- Byron Kerr – General Manager – Trisley Hydraulics Services
- Darryl Condon – Managing Principal – hcma architecture + design
- Daniel Pike – Associate – CO-OP Studio
- DENIS PONTIN – Managing Director – RMP and Associates
- Derek Harbison – Director – Negawatt Projects
- Duncan Hutton – Treasurer – LIWA Aquatics
- Jacob Brown – GM – Specialised Engineering Technologies
- James Moynes – CTO – Specialised Engineering Technologies
- Kate Maddock – Managing Director – Otium Planning Group
- Marc Mackellin – State Manager – Roejen Services
- Matthew Drysdale – Strategic Director – The OCD
- Michael Cook – Principal – Watch This Space Design
- Michelle Nolland – Executive Director – LARCAN and IAKS ANZ
- Mike McGrath – Principal – CO-OP Studio
- Neil Davey – Principal – MLEI Consulting Engineers
- Nick Yannakis – IAKS ANZ
- Paul Stafford – CEO – Roejen Services
- Ricki Jones – Director – Data Consulting
- Sally Jeavons – Director and Principal Planner – @leisure Planners
- Serhan Halil – Principal – MLEI Consulting Engineers
- Steve Meikle – Managing Director – Commercial Aquatics Australia
- Tammy Beck – Director – Williams Ross Architects
- Warren Green – Director – Warren Green Consulting

Community / Academic Representatives






- Dr Carleigh Yeomans – Director – Sport Innovation Research Group – Swinburne University
- Dr John Tower – Honorary Research Fellow – Victoria University
- Dr Liz Taylor – Senior Lecturer – Monash University
- Dr Rebecca Olive – Senior Research Fellow – RMIT University

Sponsors and supporters

Royal Life Saving Australia extends its thanks to the National Aquatic Industry Committee and event and program supporters:

- Commercial Aquatics Australia (Vic) / Steve Meikle (sponsor)
- Myrtha Pools / Chiara Cenati (sponsor)
- Lynxight / Daniel Mulvey (sponsor)
- Australasian Leisure Management magazine / Nigel Benton (media partner)
- Warren Green Consulting (program supporter)
- Otium Planning Group / Kate Maddock (program supporter)
- IAKS Australia & New Zealand / Michelle Nolland (program supporter)
- Smart Connections Consulting / Martin Sheppard FCIMPSA, MSAPIA (program supporter)
- Warren And Mahoney / Brett Diprose (program supporter)
- LIWA Aquatics / Travis Doye (program supporter)
- Life Saving Victoria (event hosting)

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