

DRAFT YARRA RANGES AQUATICS AND LEISURE STRATEGY

Report Author: Manager Recreation Parks & Facilities
Responsible Officer: Director Built Environment & Infrastructure
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Following detailed evaluation of Yarra Ranges' current aquatic and leisure facility performance, comprehensive industry research and extensive community engagement, this report presents the draft Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy and seeks approval for community consultation.

This report also recommends permanent closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool, following its temporary closure in March 2023 due to significant structural defects posing an unacceptable risk to community. The recommendation to permanently close follows discussions with affected users, broader community consultation and comprehensive data analysis as part of the aquatics strategy development which identified:

- Significant overlapping catchment with neighbouring municipality (e.g. AquaHub is 4 km from Kilsyth Centenary Pool).
- Costly repairs to aging infrastructure, with no guarantee of success or extension of asset life.
- Declining usage, high operating and renewal costs.
- Services and assets that do not meet community expectation.

Discussions with the Lilydale Swim Club have been ongoing throughout the temporary closure. Council can support existing users of Kilsyth Centenary Pool by:

- Continuing discussions with neighbouring aquatic services to accommodate displaced users.
- Supporting additional programs and capacity for existing users in other aquatic facilities within Yarra Ranges.

- Supporting Lilydale Swim Club to train at other Aquatic Centres within Yarra Ranges.
- Providing financial support to Lilydale Swim Club to support the lane hire costs at aquatic facilities in nearby Councils.

Following decommissioning, a master planning process for Kiloran Park is proposed, which could investigate options for water play in the area.

The aquatics strategy also recommends Council progress a detailed business case for an urban facility, examining operating and funding models, including private sector investment.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Approve the release of the draft Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure for community consultation.***
- 2. Approve the permanent closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

There are no Council decisions relating to this report.

DISCUSSION

The draft Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy (Attachment 1) was developed following detailed evaluation of our current aquatic and leisure facility performance, comprehensive industry research and extensive community engagement undertaken from 27 February – 28 April 2023.

The draft Aquatics and Leisure Strategy aims to provide a diverse and sustainable network of aquatic and leisure facilities that brings Yarra Ranges residents together to access and enjoy health and wellbeing, education, fitness, leisure and play experiences.

Four **key objectives** guide the strategic direction:

- 1. Participation, Inclusion and Access*
- 2. Financial Sustainability*
- 3. Environmental Sustainability, and*
- 4. Economic Benefits.*

The strategy responds to the objectives by:

- **Providing residents with:**
 - Access to an aquatic and wellness facility within a reasonable drive time of their home.
 - Access to purpose-built warm water pools and programs pools at key indoor facility locations to support therapy, rehabilitation and learn to swim activities.
 - Development of a business case to further investigate an integrated health and wellness facility in the urban area to support the anticipated population growth.
 - Upgrade to existing infrastructure to encourage greater participation.
- **Upgrading environmental sustainability through:**
 - Deletion of gas use within aquatic facilities in line with the targets of Council's Liveable Climate Plan.
 - Reduction over time of facilities that do not meet the environmental objectives of council.
 - Inclusion of environmentally sustainable design principles and outcomes in future design for development or redevelopment, for example:
 - Rainwater harvesting system.
 - Energy efficient boiler.
 - Thermal insulation around the pool shell.
 - High levels of air tightness to improve the efficiency of the heating and cooling systems.
 - Building Management System that allows for monitoring and control of all major systems.
 - Energy-efficient lighting, which uses less energy and needs replacing less often. Skylights allow natural light in.
 - Double and clear glazing windows let heat into the building during winter.
- **Achieving financial sustainability through:**
 - Reducing, over time, Council subsidy for the operation of all aquatic and leisure facilities.
 - Recommending upgrades or new developments that are supported by an evidence-based business case and support known financial success measures.
 - Providing a range of services and programs, including some high-yield programs that have the capacity to cross-subsidise high-cost components.
 - Eliminating programs and services and facility components that do not achieve financial targets.
- **Providing economic benefits by:**

- Providing a range of services and programs to improve productivity and assist in reducing preventative health costs.
- Providing employment opportunities for residents.
- Development or redevelopment of facilities will provide a wider regional economic impact through both the construction and operational phases.

The draft Strategy has recommendations across Yarra Ranges, categorised under four defined 'districts', Urban, Hills, Upper Yarra Valley and Yarra Valley. These recommendations include:

Urban District

- Develop a business case for an Integrated Aquatic and Leisure Centre in Lilydale.
- The facility should be situated on a visible and accessible site within proximity to public transport and other key activity nodes.

The key components of the facility may include:

- Indoor lap pool
- Program pool (learn to swim)
- Warm water pool – including spa
- Interactive leisure water
- Steam and sauna dry health and wellness
- Group fitness rooms
- Gym
- Social space
- Café
- Community meeting spaces

The strategy proposes to retain the existing outdoor pool in Lilydale until an indoor integrated facility is built in the urban area or the outdoor pool fails.

Kilsyth Pool was temporarily closed in March 2023 after an independent structural report identified an unacceptable risk to community and staff from the condition of the dome.

Since the closure in March, significant effort has been made to accommodate the users impacted, including Belgravia Leisure making allowance for users at their neighbouring sites, Maroondah Leisure accommodating displaced members by increasing the capacity of their Learn to Swim program and arrangements being made to allow for temporary use of other facilities such as Knox Leisure Works and the Yarra Centre.

Taking into account the discussions with Kilsyth pool users during the temporary closure, and the lack of objective measure of viability to re-open, it is recommended Council permanently close the Kilsyth Centenary Pool and decommission the site as soon as practicable ahead of developing a master plan for future use of the site.

The key factors underpinning the recommendation to close are:

- The location of the facility on the border of the municipality results in significant overlapping and competing population catchments with Aquahub Croydon (refer to page 17 in Part B of draft Strategy)
- The facility lacks several essential components now seen in contemporary aquatic and wellness centres to meet identified needs and has declining usage. For example it lacks dry health and wellness facilities, has limited leisure water, and ranging water depths and/or temperatures.
- Aging infrastructure in need of repair, including:
 - The facility and pools do not meet council policy regarding community inclusion and access
 - Ageing pool plant infrastructure that no longer meets operational needs of the pools
 - Sub lateral failure to sand filters
 - Filtered water underground return supply pipe leaking
 - Significant leak to pool shell and associated pool balance tanks in 50m pool
 - Spa and learn to swim pool structures are delaminating and leaking
 - Dome fixture failure
 - Dome membrane showing signs of significant deterioration
 - Outdoor pools require new filtration equipment and replacement boiler due to end of life and equipment failure.
- The cost to attempt to repair the dome is at least \$550,000 with no confirmed understanding of approach, no guarantee of success (the dome fabric is beyond end of life and may be irreparably damaged in the process), no guarantee of an upper limit to work scope or cost (schedule of rates and estimated timeframe for works only provided, no fixed cost) and limited contractors capable of undertaking the work.
- Replacement of the dome for a like for like structure has been estimated at \$1.8M.
- Additional renewal investment in pool concourse, pool shell recoating, leak investigation, pipe repairs and filter replacement to enable Kilsyth to reopen and operate for 5 years is estimated to be \$2.5M.
- Since closure a defective pool shell is indicated, evidenced by the pool currently leaking 100,000L of water every week (Council is currently topping up the pool with potable water to avoid the risk of the pool tiles popping).
- If replacement is necessary, costs for the pool shell is estimated at \$2M. Repair to a 50-year-old shell is not recommended.

Council can support existing users of Kilsyth Centenary Pool by:

- Continuing discussions with neighbouring Aquatic Services to accommodate displaced users.

- Supporting additional programs and capacity for existing users in other Aquatic Facilities within Yarra Ranges.
- Supporting Lilydale Swim Club to train at other Aquatic Centres within Yarra Ranges.
- Providing financial support to Lilydale Swim Club to support the lane hire costs at aquatic facilities in nearby Councils.

Hills District:

Upgrade the Monbulk Aquatic Centre to improve disability and inclusion access and support the diverse needs of the community subject to a detailed business case. The upgrade to include the following key components:

- Additional program pool
- Upgrade to leisure water
- Extension of the gym
- New program room.

Retain the Belgrave Pool and Olinda Community Pool

Retain and monitor the ongoing usage of the facility and provide funding for the maintenance and minor renewals. The future of the pool will be reviewed once the upgrades to the MAC are completed.

Yarra Valley District:

Continue management and operations of Jack Hort in the short term and investigate the opportunity for a district facility in the long term.

Develop a business case and master plan for the Healesville Outdoor Pool. The 50m pool will provide a 50m pool for schools in the Yarra Ranges to hold carnivals and events. The infrastructure is ageing and needs to be upgraded to meet identified future needs. A master plan for the facility is required that investigates:

- Condition and life of the 50M pool shell
- Heating of the pool
- Upgrade to the changerooms
- Opportunities for the inclusion of a small interactive water play feature.

Upper Yarra Valley District:

Upgrade the Yarra Centre to support the diverse needs of the community, subject to a business case with the following components:

- New entry and café
- Extension of the pool hall to incorporate a new warm water pool, spa and accessible change facilities
- Redevelopment and expansion of gym and program rooms
- Development of an external fitness zone.

Water Play Areas

The Seville Water Play area, Warburton Water World and Lilydale Lake Water Play have proved to be extremely successful, attracting high visitation per annum. There is a need to monitor the use of the facilities and provide funding for maintenance.

Options considered

Several options for the provision of Aquatic and Leisure facilities have been considered as part of the development of the draft Aquatic and Leisure Strategy. The proposed strategy is the option that best responds to each of the objectives.

Recommended option and justification

It is recommended that the draft Strategy is supported and released for community consultation.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Execution of the strategy is premised on evidence-based business cases, with associated consideration of funding opportunities. No expenditure is locked in, and Council decisions will be required in the evaluation of specific opportunities.

A new pool and capital upgrades are likely to require significant investment, with full delivery of all new and upgrade potential in the order of \$100-\$150M. Business cases are proposed to be development commensurate with the potential level of investment.

Any business case would consider funding options including private sector investment.

The strategy also pursues reduction in operational, maintenance and renewal costs.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s):

Yarra Ranges Council Plan: 2021-2025

- **High Quality Infrastructure:** Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation.
- **High Performing Organisation:** An innovative, responsive organisation that listens and delivers quality, value for money services to our community.

The proposed provision of aquatics facilities within the draft Strategy stipulates that all infrastructure will be high quality and respond to sustainability requirements. In reviewing our aquatics offer and determining the optimal service provision we can provide these facilities in the best possible way that suit our community both now

and in the future. Reduction in ongoing operational cost while providing the community with health and wellbeing benefits will assist Council in becoming a high performing organisation.

Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025:

- Priority 4 - Increase physical activity: People have capacity to walk and be physically active in an inclusive culture; and
- Priority 5 – Improve mental wellbeing and social connections.

Aquatic and Leisure facilities provided by Council often provide low-cost options for the community to engage in physical Activity. Council leisure facilities include inclusive and all ability options not often found in other Leisure facilities. Aquatics provide a low intensity exercise option for the whole family. With greater focus on the provision of social spaces such as cafes and group fitness options, these facilities foster opportunities for social connections.

Recreation and Open Space Strategy (2013 - 2023)

The Yarra Ranges' Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS) 2013-2023, supports the management of sustainable aquatic and recreational facilities in Yarra Ranges and recognises swimming as a popular sport within the municipality.

Shire of Yarra Ranges Aquatic Facilities Strategic Plan 2001 – 2017

Indoor and Outdoor aquatic facilities will be maintained at their current service levels, providing the community with recreational swimming opportunities.

Asset Management Policy 2022-2032

Sound asset management is necessary to enable the Council to meet its responsibilities by planning to provide services to the current and future communities; encouraging and supporting the economic, environmental, social and cultural development of the municipality; providing high quality community infrastructure as an integral factor in providing liveable places that support community connection and developing assets that are responsive to the changing environment in which we live.

Eight principles are identified in this policy to guide decisions on how Council invests in the assets that support services. These are:

- Evidence based
- Appropriate Quality
- Sustainability
- Community Vision
- Fairness
- Health and Wellbeing
- Safety and Resilience
- Continuous Improvement.

RELEVANT LAW

A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) was required as per the Gender Equality Act 2020. All data collected through consultation to date has been disaggregated to facilitate this requirement. A full GIA has been completed in collaboration with Council's Gender Equity Team for the Aquatics Strategy.

The draft Strategy was developed from a whole of community perspective, including consideration of equitable opportunities for use of Aquatic and Leisure facilities by females, males and gender diverse people. Underpinning the recommendations is the objective to provide opportunities and access that encourage use of facilities by people of all ages, abilities, gender preference and cultural backgrounds with facilities that are safe, welcoming and have the potential to improve individual health and wellbeing. A specific recommendation from the GIA was to apply a gender lens, and where appropriate seek feedback from specific genders, for future infrastructure and program design that is undertaken as part of the plan's implementation.

People of different genders have varying needs, preferences, and potential benefits or disadvantages when accessing council aquatic and leisure facilities. To ensure equitable access and a positive experience for all users, it is essential for facility operators to consider and address these diverse needs, implement inclusive policies, provide gender-sensitive facilities, offer a variety of programs, and maintain a safe and welcoming environment. An inclusive approach benefits not only those with specific gender-related needs but also the facility's overall user satisfaction and inclusivity.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Council's Aquatic Portfolio represents a large investment from Council. On average over the last 5 years Council is investing approximately \$2.8M annually to operate and maintain our Aquatic facilities. Many of our facilities are reaching end of life and will need very large investment, estimated to be \$30M over the next 10 years to keep them operating at their current service levels. Implementation of the Draft Strategy aims to significantly reduce the operational cost. The capital investment to implement the strategy is significant. Council should investigate grant funding opportunities and public private partnerships to manage the capital cost of the strategy.

Social Implications

Yarra Ranges Council's percentage of people identifying with chronic health concerns is higher than the Victorian Average. One in 6 Yarra Ranges residents reports they are living with a disability. This number is expected to rise to 50% of the population aged over 65. The provision of Aquatic and Leisure facilities provides residents with an opportunity to engage in regular physical activity at a time and pace that suits them, in a supported environment. These facilities not only provide a place to exercise and rehabilitation but increasingly social spaces within these facilities provide a place for social connection.

Environmental Implications

Aquatic facilities are the most significant consumer of gas and electricity across Council facilities. Council emission projections show that gas in aquatic facilities will continue to attribute 23-25% of total gas emissions to 2030. The Aquatic Strategy aims to address the environmental impact of aquatic centres through electrification, solar and other renewable energy sources and through efficient building design to align energy use with Councils targets outlined in the Liveable Climate Plan.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Extensive community engagement was undertaken from 27 February 2023 to 28 April 2023. The campaign was both digital and face to face. Hard copies of surveys were available at Council links, libraries and Council's aquatic and leisure centres. During the engagement Council received over 2000 survey responses. Eleven survey responses were received from Schools within Yarra Ranges. Five pop-up sessions were held during this time with over 200 community members engaging with the project team. 37 Yarra Ranges residents engaged with the project team through 6 focus groups to gain greater understanding of community needs. The project team engaged Councils Advisory committees as representatives of our community. A full report detailing the consultation results are provided on Council's website. The development of the strategy has taken the results of phase 1 community consultation into consideration.

This report seeks approval to release the draft Strategy for community consultation. The proposed engagement period is scheduled to run from 25 October till 10 December.

The following activities are proposed:

- Community feedback opportunity through our shaping Yarra Ranges page
- Pop up sessions x 5
- Hard copies of the Strategy available in links and Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Centres
- Newspaper story and advertisement
- Meetings with Council's Advisory Committees
- Digital and Social media campaign.

The proposed communication and engagement plan for the draft strategy has been developed in conjunction with Councils communication and engagement teams and is in accordance with Councils Community Engagement Policy 2021.

Specific communication regarding the closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool will be undertaken with the Lilydale Swim Club and Belgravia Leisure. The community will be informed of the closure through a media statement, local newspaper and digital media.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Strategy has been drafted in collaboration with an internal PRG which represents a number of teams across Council. The project team, ELT, the PRG and Councillors have visited several Aquatic Facilities during the development of the strategy to gain insight into best practice for such infrastructure. In addition, the project team have engaged Brimbank Council and Mornington Peninsula Council to gain greater insight into the operation and performance as well as lessons learned from their aquatic facilities which have been recently constructed.

The Strategy strives for innovation in Aquatic facilities. This will be seen through the electrification of existing aquatic facilities, ESD building design, innovation in pool plant and operation. Recently, Aquatics and Leisure facilities have been intentionally co-located with other community facilities such as with a performing arts centre at the award-winning Bay Pavilions at Batemans Bay, an Aquatic and Recreation, Community, Cultural and Library complex at Riverstone in Black Town, and with leased space for allied health, adult education, and Good Shepard community support services at St Albans in Brimbank. The co-location of such facilities provides exposure to services that parts of our community may not have been exposed to, further supporting health and wellbeing. There are also efficiencies in sharing supporting infrastructure and operational efficiencies such as sharing concierge services and facilitating later operating times for allied health and community services due to opening hours and activation at Aquatic and Leisure facilities. It is strongly recommended that co-location with health services, community spaces and community facilities are investigated during site investigations to maximise benefits of this large investment.

Since the closure in March significant effort has been made to accommodate the users impacted. Belgravia Leisure has been able to make allowance for users at their neighbouring sites. Maroondah Leisure has also been able to accommodate displaced members by increasing the capacity of their Learn to Swim program. Council acknowledge that the Lilydale Swim Club has been negatively impacted by the closure of their home facility in Kilsyth. Arrangements have been made to allow for temporary use of other facilities such as Knox Leisure Works and the Yarra Centre.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Not developing an Aquatic and Leisure Strategy for Yarra Ranges carries significant risk given the ageing infrastructure and the uncertainty within the community.

If a decision to permanently close Kilsyth Centenary Pool is made, action to secure the site immediately is required to avoid escalated vandalism.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure Strategy 2023-2033 – Draft for Consultation