

AQUATICS AND LEISURE STRATEGY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION OUTCOMES AND ADOPTION

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

This report:

- Provides a review of the outcomes of the final phase of community consultation to inform the draft Aquatics and Leisure Strategy,
- Provides the proposed Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure Strategy that considers the outcomes of community consultation; and
- Seeks adoption of the Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure Strategy generally in accordance with the strategy presented.

The project team presented the first draft of the Yarra Ranges Aquatics Strategy (draft Strategy) at a special Forum meeting on 13 August 2022. The draft Strategy was then further developed through comprehensive data analysis, a community needs assessment, industry expertise and technical knowledge of industry leaders.

Council approved the communication and engagement plan for the draft Strategy on 7 February 2023. Council undertook phases 1 and 2 of the community consultation between 27 February and 28 April 2023. Phase 3 of consultation occurred from October 2023 until January 2024 and included online consultation (from 25 October - 15 December), focus groups and face to face community pop ups. A full consultation summary report is available on the Yarra Ranges Shaping Page. A summary of the campaign completed for phase 3 is provided in attachment 1. Minor changes have been suggested to the draft strategy in response to community consultation, Councillor feedback and the Council decision to support the permanent closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Note the community responses to the recent consultation on the Draft Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy.**
- 2. Note the updates to the draft of Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy.**
- 3. Note the Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy includes review points, including an annual review of the implementation plan to allow Council to respond to changing circumstances.**
- 4. Endorse the Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy included at Attachment 2.**

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

The Development of the draft Strategy has been discussed at the following Council briefings:

- 24 October 2023– Council Meeting – Approval of the Draft Aquatics and Leisure Strategy for Consultation and endorsement of decision to permanently close Kilsyth Centenary Pool.

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this report is to:

- present the results from the final phase of the community consultation.
- detail the changes to the draft Aquatic and Leisure Strategy in response to consultation and the permanent closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool, and,
- seeks formal adoption of the Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure Strategy generally in accordance with the attached document (attachment 2).

Community consultation phase 3

Feedback from phase 1 and 2 of community consultation was considered during the development of the draft strategy along with detailed data analysis, and expert industry knowledge. Outcomes of this consultation can be viewed on Councils *Shaping Yarra Ranges* website.

Phase 3 of the community consultation was undertaken to seek feedback on the draft Aquatics and Leisure Strategy. The summary report (attachment 1) provides a summary of the phase 3 of consultation on the draft Aquatics and Leisure Strategy.

Council endorsed the release of the draft strategy on 24 October 2023. Consultation on the draft strategy was undertaken from 25 October 2024 to January 2024. Activities during phase 3 engagement included:

- Shaping Yarra Ranges – online survey (252 responses received)
- Advisory Group meetings
- Pop up sessions at key locations
- Social media posts
- Written submissions

During the consultation period stakeholders across various groups expressed positive sentiments towards the draft aquatic strategy, recognising its good intentions for community well-being. There is agreement on the importance of focusing on health, well-being, education, fitness, and play experiences for the community.

Results of the consultation indicate high support for the strategy vision with 66% of the respondents rating it between four and five (out of five), followed by 25.2% rating it between one and two and 8.6% rating it three. There was also strong support for the strategy objectives, with 69.3% of the respondents rating the objectives between four and five (out of five), followed by 22.3% rating them between one and two and 8.3% rating them at three. A complete summary of key themes regarding the vision and strategic objectives can be found on Councils shaping Yarra Ranges website.

Overall, the feedback provides positive recognition for the strategy's intentions, vision, objectives, and actions, however, the following points were notable areas of discussion:

- Kilsyth closure: A significant portion of the feedback highlights negative sentiments, particularly regarding the closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool.
- Council transparency: There is a perceived lack of transparency, with some feeling that decisions to close Kilsyth Centenary Pool was made without sufficient consideration of community input.
- 10-year timeframe: Feedback includes specific concerns and suggestions including the urgent need for hydrotherapy and physiotherapy warm water pools, and the desire for gyms and social spaces in the proposed aquatic facility. The 10-year plan is seen as being too distant and potentially not addressing immediate needs of the community.

Revised Yarra Ranges Aquatic and Leisure Strategy

As a result of the extensive engagement and consultation process the following changes are suggested to the strategy:

- The inclusion of the word 'safe' in the first objective to now read: Participation, Inclusion and Wellbeing: *Provide accessible, affordable, safe, and inclusive*

aquatic and leisure facilities that support diverse participation opportunities and key programming needs.

- Re-wording of recommendation 1 ‘Development of a Major integrated indoor aquatic and leisure hub that services the key aquatic and well-being needs of the Shire, subject to a detailed business case’ to include ‘The preferred location for this facility is Lilydale. If no suitable site can be located other locations within the urban area should be considered.’
- Re-wording of recommendation 2 ‘Permanent closure of Kilsyth Centenary Pool’ and removal of first action as the decision was made prior to adoption of strategy.
- Removal of percentages in success measures of objectives and replaced to align with industry benchmarks.
- Updating of Monbulk Pool Hall closure dates.
- Recognition of the different kinds of management models in operation in Yarra Ranges and the increase in participation at Olinda Community Pool in response to the Olinda Pool Committee of management Submission.
- Removal of the reference to individual private facilities.
- Updated consultation summary page to include phase 3 information.
- Entire strategy reviewed and updated to make the document easier to read.

Options considered

Feedback from the community included a range of different views and suggestions. Where appropriate, comments and suggestions that aligned with the objectives of the strategy have been reflected in the updated draft. Feedback that did not support the objectives of the strategy was considered and each submitter responded to and provided with an explanation. Table 9 on Page 4 of the consultation report (available on Yarra Ranges Shaping Page) provides a breakdown of key feedback and the response/implication for the draft strategy.

Recommended option and justification

Changes to the strategy have been recommended due to their alignment with the strategy vision and objectives. The strategy was developed following extensive research, consultation and engagement to determine the best provision of facilities and services within the Yarra Ranges. It is recommended that the strategy is referred to an upcoming Council meeting to seek formal adoption.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

While detailed master planning would be required to determine the cost of strategy implementation, the preferred option will represent a significant investment. A business case for the urban facility and feasibilities and master planning for district

upgrades is proposed to be undertaken for the first two years of implementation. The cost of business cases and master planning to facilitate investment (across an Urban facility, Monbulk Aquatic Centre Yarra Centre and Healesville Outdoor Pool) is estimated to be \$400,000. The budget for the Urban facility business case is proposed at \$150,000 and has been included in the proposed operating budget for FY 24/25.

The estimated full cost of the strategy implementation including the Urban facility, and upgrades to the district facilities (Monbulk Aquatic Centre and Yarra Centre), Healesville Outdoor Pool and minor improvements to other outdoor facilities may be in the order of \$100M plus.

Once complete, the implementation of the strategy is suggested to be undertaken in stages and will be subject to successful grant funding. The possibility for public private partnerships to help deliver this infrastructure should be investigated.

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 privately operated Leisure facilities. Aquatics provide a low intensity exercise option for the whole community. 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; and
- Continuous Improvement.
- Community Engagement Policy 2021.

RELEVANT LAW

A Gender Impact Assessment is required as per the Gender Equality Act 2020. All data collected through consultation to date has been disaggregated to facilitate this requirement. The full Gender Impact Assessment has been completed. The GIA recommends that the following elements are considered with a gender lens during the implementation of the strategy: education, programming, financial support, and safety.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

As suggested above, the implementation of the strategy will have significant short term economic impacts with significant investment identified. Over the long term, the investment will have a positive impact to the economy during the construction period and with the creation of permanent long term employment opportunities for Yarra Ranges residents. When fully realised, the strategy should significantly reduce the operating costs associated with the provision of Aquatic and Leisure facilities and programs.

Social Implications

The strategy aims to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of aquatic and leisure facilities to the community. The proposed upgrades to the Yarra Centre and to the Monbulk Aquatic Centre facilitate social connection and provide for social spaces to be utilised by the community.

Environmental Implications

A thorough review of current facilities has given Council a good understanding of what needs to be changed regarding the operation and the provision of current facilities in order to become more sustainable. The proposed facility provision, as well as the guiding principles contained within the draft Strategy surrounding financial and environmental viability, will allow us to contribute to climate action by lowering emissions and reducing utility usage.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has occurred twice during the development of the strategy.

The first round of community consultation resulted over 2,000 community surveys and 11 responses to our school survey completed. The project team engaged with 523 residents throughout six face-to-face information sessions as part of the consultation and engagement roadshow and interviewed a further 47 residents across 6 focus group sessions.

The second round of public consultation resulted in over 200 submissions to the online survey and engagement of over 450 community members through focus groups and at community pop up sessions.

The outcomes of the community engagement and how they have informed the development of the strategy can be seen in the consultation reports available on Councils shaping Yarra Ranges Shaping website.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The project team has collaborated with numerous Councils during the development of the Strategy including Mornington Peninsula and Brimbank Councils to learn

about the different operating models and lessons learnt from recently constructed aquatic and leisure centres. Extensive internal collaboration has also been undertaken during the development of the strategy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Councils reputational risk from the proposed strategy is significant. Closure of pools and identification of significant future investment in Aquatic and Leisure facilities can impact Councils reputation. There is a risk that Council will not secure the funds required to implement the strategy which may further damage Councils reputation.

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. Draft Yarra Ranges Aquatics and Leisure Strategy Phase 3 Consultation – Digital Summary
2. Yarra Ranges Draft Aquatic and Leisure Strategy