



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Strategic Direction for Aquatic Facilities in South Gippsland 2015 - 2020

July 2015



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INTRODUCTION

South Gippsland Shire Council provides a high level of aquatic facility provision in South Gippsland. This level of provision is reflective of the value Council and community place on the benefits provided by aquatic facilities. Council has allocated \$28 million over the next 15 years to support provision of aquatic activity through these facilities.

This document outlines a strategic direction for the provision of aquatic facilities in South Gippsland based on Council's Asset Management principles. This document has been informed by the current Strategy (2012), the development of master plans for four facilities since 2012 and the "Vision For Foster Pool" developed by the foster community in 2015.

CURRENT PROVISION

There are currently six public swimming pools within the Shire of South Gippsland that are operated by Council. Five of the pools are seasonal outdoor pools with the remaining pool being the indoor leisure centre SG SPLASH.

The current Council managed pools in the South Gippsland Shire area comprise:

- Poowong Outdoor Swimming Pool;
- Korumburra Outdoor Swimming Pool;
- Foster Outdoor Swimming Pool;
- Mirboo North Outdoor Swimming Pool;
- Toora Outdoor Swimming Pool; and,
- SG SPLASH – Leongatha.

The service level provision of five outdoor pools and one indoor leisure facility to service a rural community of 28,000 represents a high level of aquatic facility provision when compared to other Gippsland municipalities and is generally higher than similar Victorian municipalities

Bass Coast Shire	1 pool for every 32,000 people
Latrobe City	1 pool for every 12,600 people
Baw Baw Shire	1 pool for every 7,700 people
Wellington	1 pool for every 6,700 people
South Gippsland	1 pool for every 4,700 people
Colac Otway Shire	1 pool for every 14,000 people (2 pools)
Moyne Shire	1 pool for every 7,000 people (3 pools)
Corangamite Shire	1 pool for every 3,000 people (6 pools)

There are also two other facilities within the municipality operated independently of Council. These are Korumburra Indoor Pool operated by Korumburra Swimming Club, and Grassy Spur (near Foster) Outdoor Pool operated by a community committee on behalf of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

The primary activities at the aquatic facilities include:

- Water Safety Education / Learn to Swim
- Social Interaction
- Fitness and physical activity
- Recovery / Physiotherapy
- Fun
- Lap Swimming
- Aqua Aerobics
- School and Swim Club Training and Competition
- Community events

The physical and mental health benefits provided by aquatic facilities to users of all ages are well recognised. The community interaction, connection and local pride developed as a result of these facilities is also particularly important to the local community.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The current high level of service provision for pools in the Shire is primarily a result of the dedication of previous generations to develop facilities for the local community. Many of the pools were built and/or funded by community members for the benefit of the local community.

The passion and dedication of volunteers to raise funds, construct, maintain and operate these facilities has resulted in venues that are highly valued by the community.

All 5 seasonal pools were initially managed directly by the local communities, generally via a local swimming club. Over time the responsibility for ongoing management, maintenance and improvement of these pools has been transferred to Council, with Council initially appointing volunteer Special Section 86 committees to manage day to day operations the pools.

There are no pools now managed on behalf of Council by volunteer committees, but the local communities are still expressing a strong desire to remain involved. Council can continue to support this high level of community involvement by establishing pool support groups in place of Section 86 Committees.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided for terminology used within the strategy:

Operation:	Activities associated with undertaking the day-to day operation of the service.
Maintenance:	Required actions for retaining an asset as near as practicable to its original condition to maintain the level of service (e.g. repair a pump).
Renewal:	Is broken into three categories being Replace, Renovate and Redevelop.
Replace:	Replace individual components of an asset to its original state or capacity. (e.g. replace a pump with a like pump).
Renovate:	Renovate the existing assets with modern day plant, equipment and facilities to achieve the same level of service (e.g. undertake renovation works as guided by a master plan).
Redevelop:	Redevelop the entire site. (e.g. demolish existing and rebuild the total facility).
Upgrade:	Replace an asset or a component of an asset which improves the service level. (e.g. replace a pump with a larger pump).
Extension:	Creating a new asset or adding to the pre-existing asset (e.g. increase the size of the change room).
Condition Intervention Level:	Assets condition has deteriorated to the point where its service is compromised.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

The Draft Strategy was presented to Council on 25 March and then released for public comment. Submissions on the Draft Strategy were received until 23 April. Ten written submissions were received, and the Combined Pools Advisory Committee provided feedback at its April 2015 meeting. Direct public presentations were made to Council by the Mirboo North Pool Committee and the Foster Pool Committee during April and May.

TRENDS IMPACTING ON PARTICIPATION

In relation to recreation generally, people's work and lifestyle lead to an expectation of flexible opening hours, a greater variety of activity options which are accessible to people of all abilities, high quality facilities and services at an affordable price.

Seasonal, ageing, outdoor facilities are becoming less attractive to use. The removal of diving boards, necessary for risk management, has further reduced the use of some facilities by the younger users.

Research has shown that people over 40 years of age are not high users of outdoor pools and that new demand is being placed on providing warmer water areas as well as pools suitable for therapy and older adult exercise.

The impact of these trends is particularly challenging for South Gippsland's outdoor pools. The traditional outdoor pools are not only losing their appeal but ageing infrastructure and increased operational costs are challenging their financial viability. As expectations increase and attendance declines, the viability of pools that do not have a major investment in infrastructure upgrades is likely to decline further. However, the ability of some seasonal pools in South Gippsland to reverse this trend of declining participation is noted and encourages Council to support continued involvement by volunteers at the seasonal facilities.

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

The following strategic principles will assist to guide the provision of aquatic facilities within South Gippsland Shire:

1. Swimming pools are strongly valued by towns and their surrounding communities.
2. Water safety education, fun, physical activity, health improvement and social interaction are the primary benefits of providing aquatic facilities.
3. Council demonstrates its commitment to aquatic facilities through a substantial annual funding allocation and expects the community to support and maximise the use of these venues.
4. The cost of providing these facilities has and will continue to escalate with limited scope to increase entry fees without impacting on affordability.
5. Council will work in partnership with the local community to actively promote all pools in the Shire and develop a range of programs and activities that increase utilisation within the projected budget allocations.
6. SG SPLASH provides year round aquatic facility access and services the municipality. Council will continue to plan for and investigate opportunities to extend and improve the services provided.

7. Council will maintain its operational, maintenance and capital investment in all Council managed outdoor pools with a focus on renovation.
8. Council's future capital investment in outdoor pools will be informed through the development of Master Plans (including Asset Management Plans) for each facility.
9. Council will consider supporting well developed proposals for capital extension/upgrade at the outdoor pools where community and/or external funding can provide a significant proportion (70%) of the total project cost. Council will assess the impact on ongoing operational expense that will need to be borne by Council when considering any such proposals.
10. Prior to seeking external funding for capital extension/upgrade of any facility, a report will be presented to Council for consideration providing details of the proposed development, the local community financial contribution and the level of financial and in kind support required from Council including the ongoing operating cost to Council.
11. Trigger points activated by reduced use, major infrastructure or equipment failure, legislative changes, increased operational cost above long term financial plan projections and non-compliance with issues of public safety will result in a review of the facility (in consultation with the community and local Pool Support Group) and a report prepared for the Council to consider its future viability, which may include closure of the facility.
12. Council will consider transferring ownership and management of local pools to the community after trigger points have been activated and appropriate investigations undertaken show that Council can no longer justify provision of the service and where the local community can demonstrate to Council's satisfaction their capacity to take on this function for the long term. Council would cease to have any responsibility for the pool from the date of transfer.
13. Council will consider transferring ownership and management of an outdoor pool to a local community if approached by that community, and where the local community can demonstrate to Council's satisfaction their capacity to take on this function for the long term. Council would cease to have any responsibility for the pool from the date of transfer.
14. There are no Council plans to construct new pools in other communities within the shire.

ASSET MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Council's asset management framework details the goals and objectives of the Council in relation to asset management and the best asset management practices required for responsible management of the Council asset portfolio. The key objectives are:

- Provision for the delivery of agreed levels of service to the community in a sustainable and cost-effective manner;
- Defining the types and standards of services to be provided, the target levels of service and the measures used to monitor service delivery performance;
- Responsible management of infrastructure assets through efficient use of public funds;
- Adopting sustainable asset management practices; and,
- Making sure the requirements of the relevant legislations are complied with.

The key elements of the asset management process are:

- **Levels of Service:** Specifies the services and levels of service to be provided by Council.
- **Future Demand:** How this will impact on future service delivery and how this is to be met.
- **Asset Rationalisation:** Optimisation of the asset portfolio to meet the agreed level of service.
- **Life Cycle Management:** How Council will manage its existing and future assets to provide the required services
- **Financial Summary:** What funds are required to provide the documented level of service for Council services.
- **Monitoring:** How the plan will be monitored to ensure it is meeting Council's objectives.
- **Capital Extension or upgrade** refers to works undertaken that increase the level of service provision eg: constructing an extra child's pool or diving pool would be seen as an upgrade. Renovating change rooms with similar facilities but more in line with current standards such as improved access or hot water would not be classed as an upgrade.

FACILITY / STRATEGIC SERVICE LEVEL

Municipality Wide Service Facility

This type of service attracts people from throughout the municipality. Council's SG SPLASH facility provides a municipal wide service. It delivers a year round indoor heated facility. The complex accommodates lap swimming, school swimming carnivals; learn to swim programs, water fitness and children's play. The facility incorporates a sport stadium providing for a range of court sports and school holiday programs. The indoor heated environment provides scope for the development of a hydrotherapy pool. The ongoing development of SG SPLASH is in accordance with the current master plan.

Local Service Facility

This type of service attracts people within the local area and surrounding districts. The Toora, Mirboo North, Foster, Poowong and Korumburra outdoor pools are seasonal facilities servicing the local community and surrounding districts during the warmer months of the year. These facilities provide for lap swimming, school carnivals, learn to swim and children's play. The surrounds provide a family friendly outdoor environment where community and specific aquatic events can be held.

Toora, with its heated, covered pool also provides for aqua aerobics and rehabilitation sessions and Korumburra is unique in having the only 50 metre pool in the municipality. Mirboo North has extensive grounds including electric barbeques and provides a park like setting, and attracts people from surrounding areas including Latrobe Valley and Leongatha who are seeking this type of setting for aquatic activity.

The provision of five local service facilities within the municipality is considered to be high when benchmarked against other municipalities. Refer to data provided in the introduction section of this document.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF OUTDOOR POOLS

Transfer of ownership and management of any of the five local pools will be considered after trigger points have been activated and appropriate investigations undertaken show that Council can no longer operate a specific pool and where that community can demonstrate the capacity to take on this role, or where a community directly approaches Council requesting a transfer to the community and where that community can demonstrate the capacity to take on this role.

Council is committed to working with communities where a pool exists to encourage good use of the facility. Where Council can no longer justify the ratepayer expense to continue a pool service the community will be given an option to take over ownership of the facility and undertake the ongoing management of the facility, either via the groups' resources or by engaging a suitable external body. The option for a community to take ownership of a

pool facility and responsibility for its ongoing management will also be considered by Council if a community directly approaches Council requesting a transfer of its pool to the community.

A community may choose to establish a new not for profit incorporated entity with the express purpose of owning and managing a local swimming pool.

Council would require a community group proposing to take over ownership and management of the pool to provide a 5 year Business Plan outlining how this group will operate the pool including:

- organisational governance structure;
- season length;
- operating hours;
- capacity to run the pool;
- staffing structure;
- evidence of broad community support;
- policies that will encourage use of the facility by all members of the community;
- cash flow projections
- capacity to fund essential maintenance;
- wind up process if the organisation fails; and
- steps to be taken by the organisation if the pool proves unviable and the new operators decide to close the facility or withdraw from provision of the service.

Council would have no role in or responsibility for management of a pool after handing over ownership to the local community,

Council Obligations if a Pool is being considered for transfer to the Community

Council will provide a clear statement of intent that it will close the pool if a new owner and operator cannot be found, and that it will not accept the pool being returned to Council if the new owner is unable to continue to operate the pool. If the pool is located on Crown Land, Council will investigate the potential of purchasing the land from the Crown and gifting it to the community or assisting the new owner and operator to enter into a direct lease arrangement with DELWP.

- Council will provide to the prospective Community organisation a detailed history of the facility.
- detailed schedules of plant and facility maintenance undertaken by Council over the previous 5 years and a schedule of what Council would expect to provide over the coming 5 years if Council was continuing to operate the facility

- Advice on expected works required to maintain the pool shell and essential operational equipment e.g. filters and pumps.
- An agreement would need to be reached regarding the investment required by Council for the pool to be transferred at a reasonable and functional standard and the works undertaken prior to transfer.
- Council will provide direct assistance to the prospective community organisation with development of their 5 year Business Plan.
- Council would need to clarify ownership of land and pool structure and options for transfer of ownership.
- An agreement would need to be reached regarding the ongoing financial support by Council for the operations of the pool, which would include annual reporting against an agreed minimum level of participation.
- An agreement would need to be reached regarding Council's support for the community entity to seek capital grant funding for pool improvements, noting that the Council will not make provision of any capital improvements in its forward Capital Works program.

If an agreement is finalised for transfer of a pool to community ownership but unforeseeable major plant breakdowns or structural issues arise related to the pool shell within the first year of community ownership Council would demonstrate goodwill in considering the circumstances, the level of additional investment required and whether the facility should be closed.

POOL CLOSURE

- In the case where there was no viable community interest in taking over the ownership and management of the pool, the pool will be closed.
- Where the land is owned by Council a decision regarding demolition of the pool and reuse of the site would need to be made.
- If the land is owned by the Crown negotiations would occur for Council to relinquish the role of Committee of Management.
- Any resultant sale of the land and pool would be managed through a public tender process.

POOL OPERATION REVIEW TRIGGERS

Activating any of the following trigger points will identify the need to consider the future operation of a facility.

- The facility operator is not able to achieve compliance with public safety; water quality or OH&S requirements within the proposed maintenance and capital works budget allocations;

- Legislative changes which require additional investment beyond current projections;
- Breakdown of pool filtration, pool shell or critical infrastructure;
- Failure to operate within the identified annual operations budget; and/or,
- Drop in attendances by 20% for two consecutive seasons based on average attendances from 2009/10 through to 2014/15.

Once a facility activates one or more of these trigger points Council will allocate resources towards a detailed review of the facility (in consultation with the community and local Pool Support group) and make a recommendation to the Council with regard to its future viability, which may include closure of the facility.

ADVICE TO THE COMMUNITY ON DETAIL OF TRIGGERS

Council will provide the community and pool user groups, including swimming clubs, information about the established triggers including:

- Why the triggers exist,
- What is measured,
- How it will be measured,
- When it will be measured, and
- How the information will be communicated.

WHEN A TRIGGER POINT IS ACTIVATED

- A meeting with the local Pool Support Group will be convened to discuss the trigger, possible reasons why the trigger has been reached, its implications for Council including potential closure, and to look for possible solutions.
- Council is briefed on the issue.
- Information displayed at the specific pool for general pool users to be advised that the facility is experiencing difficulties with operating at the required level, why this is a problem for Council and encouraging ideas on how the issues involved can be addressed.
- Local media, including relevant social media, is directly advised by Council that the facility has reached a trigger point, with as much detail being provided as possible.
- A report to Council with information related to the trigger point and possible alternatives and solutions including those suggested by the pool committee. This report may indicate that the issues causing the trigger are easily rectified or it may identify a major issue which can only be rectified by a substantial investment that is not within the Long Term Financial Plan.
- The report may recommend that Council review its continued involvement in the provision of the service with an option of closure of a facility, in which case a process of constructive community engagement will be initiated on alternative operational and management options including transfer of ownership and management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council continue to support the provision of aquatic facilities in recognition of the significant health, education and social benefits they provide to residents and visitors to the municipality.
2. That Council recognise aquatic facilities are one element of a range of community facilities and services. Future planning with the community needs to consider and prioritise all services and facilities prior to the commitment of significant capital resources.
3. Any of these trigger points may identify the need to review the continued operation of the facility:
 - 1) The facility operator is not able to achieve compliance with public safety; water quality or OH&S requirements within the proposed maintenance and capital works budget allocations;
 - 2) Legislative changes which require additional investment beyond current projections;
 - 3) Breakdown of pool filtration, pool shell or critical infrastructure;
 - 4) Non Compliance with the identified annual operations budget; and/or,
 - 5) Drop in attendances by 20% over two consecutive seasons based on average attendances from 2009/10 through to 2014/15.
When developing a Council report after a trigger is activated exceptional circumstances will be considered, such as very cool summers impact on attendance, or emergency incidents leading to closure of a pool for an extended period.
4. Council will consider transferring ownership and management of local pools to the community if activation of a trigger results in Council resolving to withdraw from provision of a specific service, where the local community can demonstrate to Council's satisfaction their capacity to take on this function for the long term. Council would cease to have any responsibility for the pool from the date of transfer.
5. Council will consider transferring ownership and management of local pools to the community if directly approached by a community and where the local community can demonstrate to Council's satisfaction their capacity to take on this function for the long term. Council would cease to have any responsibility for the pool from the date of transfer.
6. Council will continue to plan for and investigate opportunities to extend and improve the services provided at SG SPLASH.
7. Council will maintain its operational, maintenance and capital investment in all Council managed outdoor pools with a focus on renovation.

8. Council will directly manage or engage suitably qualified and experienced contractors for all Council owned and managed pools.
9. Council revoke the delegations of the current swimming pool Section 86 Special Committees, and establish community support groups for each facility to assist with promotion, broad community use and advice on effective operation of individual pools.
10. Future capital investment in outdoor pools will be informed through the master plans (including Asset Management Plans) developed for each facility.
11. Council will consider supporting well developed proposals for capital extension/upgrade at the outdoor pools where community and/or external funding can provide a significant proportion (70%) of the total project cost. Council will assess the impact on ongoing operational expense that will need to be borne by Council when considering any such proposals.
12. Prior to seeking external funding for capital extension/upgrade of any facility, a report will be presented to Council for consideration detailing the proposed development, the local communities financial contribution and the level financial and in kind support required from Council including the ongoing operating cost to Council.
13. Council will work with pool support groups and the community to maximise attendance and use of the aquatic facilities through promotional initiatives and the development of a range of programs and activities. The Pool Contractors will meet with the pool support group at least twice per year. Funds accumulated by former Section 86 Special committees will be retained for use at the individual pool concerned.
14. That a review of this document be undertaken in 2019/20.

