

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Aquatics Options Paper



South Gippsland
Shire Council

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.



Eucalyptus, (genus Eucalyptus)

Summary

For generations, local pools have been part of summer in South Gippsland, providing a place to learn to swim, cool off on a hot day, and catch up with neighbours.

Council is proud to manage public pools and wants to keep providing great places to swim well into the future.

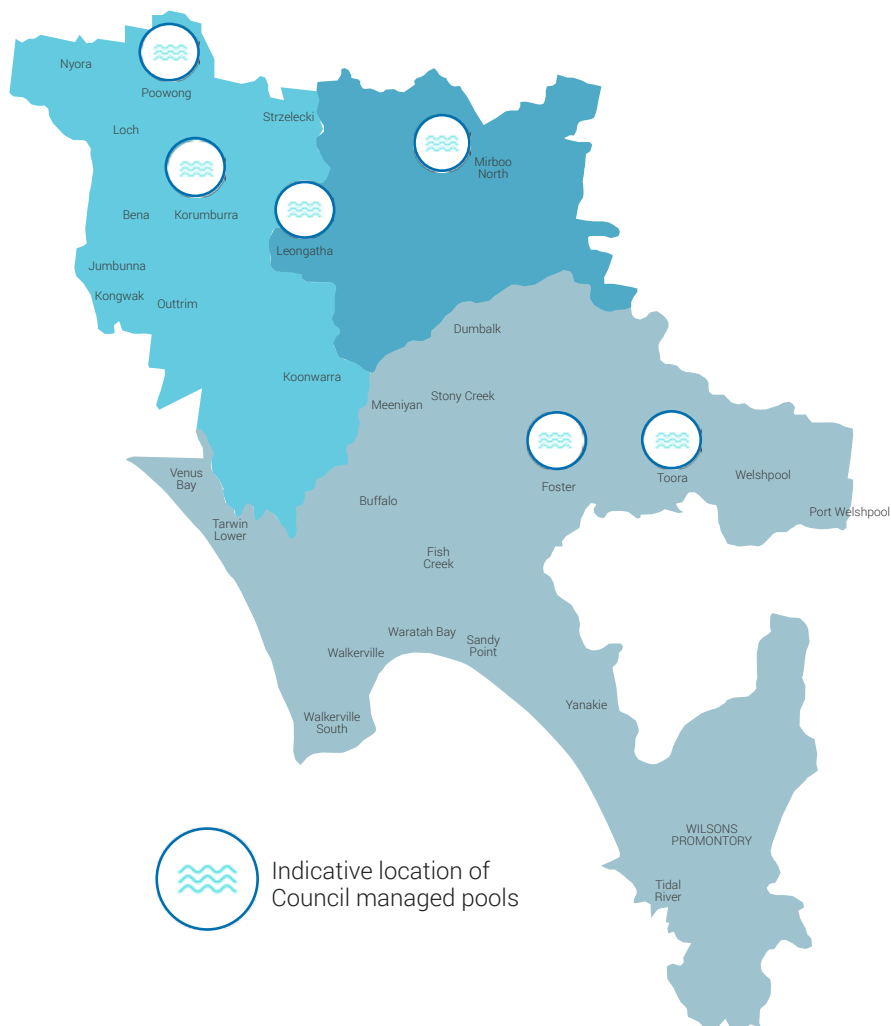
To continue to do this means confronting a difficult reality ahead. Pools are ageing, several are being used less than they once were, and the cost of running and renewing them rises every year.

This document sets out an open and transparent snapshot of where pools stand today, the challenges, the opportunities and choices ahead. It shows that several sites are nearing the end of their working life, and that the cost of each swim at some pools would be high because of the future investment they would need to keep the service running.

Council is facing increasing costs to maintain and renew its swimming pools. Sustaining the six venues over the next 15 years is estimated to cost \$78M: \$37M already committed in the Long-Term Financial Plan for operations, maintenance and capital, plus a further \$41M for full renewal. Three of the sites are at, or near, the end of their useful life.

We currently have many pools relative to the size of our population, with around one pool for every 5,184 residents. Some pools are used less than others and major investment will be needed in the future.

Council is considering options that may include reducing the number of aquatic facilities, including the potential closure of one or more pools.



This document is the starting point of an ongoing conversation with our community. It is intended to outline the current condition of the pools, and the costs involved in the operation of our aquatic facilities.

We are seeking feedback that will assist in informing future decisions that need to be made to ensure the financial sustainability of the municipality.

Council will engage further with the community about the long-term challenges Council is facing regarding the operation and renewal of all infrastructure assets. These conversations, along with feedback on this document, will help inform future decisions to be made by Council.

For six pools over 15 years



What Council would need = \$78M
What Council currently has = \$37M
What's the future GAP? = \$41M

Purpose

At the June 2026 Council Meeting the 2026/27 Annual Budget and Council Plan were adopted. The Council Plan actions focus on three main themes.

- **Leading with integrity**
- **Developing a sustainable future**
- **Empowering communities**

A key strategy of the 'Leading with Integrity' theme is to ensure Council's financial sustainability through prudent management and strategic planning.

To support this the following action was identified for the 2026/27 financial year:

Finalise development of an options paper on the current and future needs of Council's aquatic facilities, informed by community engagement, to guide long-term investment and service provision.

Over the past decade Council's approach to aquatic facilities has been to continue to maintain the status quo. However, with rising operational costs, declining use at some venues, rapidly ageing infrastructure and ever increasing capital renewal costs this approach needs to be reconsidered.

Without a planned approach to the provision of these facilities, the likelihood of infrastructure failure and/or compromising the financial sustainability of Council increases every year.

1.10m.

Role of Aquatic Facilities in the Community

For decades, Council's pools have been far more than concrete and water. They are where children take their first strokes, where families spend long summer afternoons, and where friendships are formed that last a lifetime. They have kept our communities healthy and active, brought people together, and taught generation after generation the water safety skills that save lives. Local communities have poured pride into these places, with dedicated volunteers giving thousands of hours to keep the pool in their town open.

The benefits of aquatic facilities include:

- Health and fitness, giving people the opportunity to enjoy the physical and mental benefits of being in active, safe and welcoming spaces that support social inclusion and a sense of connection for all members of the community.
- Opportunities to participate in aquatic activities for recreation, competition or sport.
- Community development, which adds to social capital and creates connections in communities.
- Water safety education and water confidence programs that can reduce the incidence of drowning.



Leisure:

- Family fun, play and relaxation
- Community events
- Social connection

Fitness

- Structured fitness classes
- Aqua aerobics
- Lap swimming
- Recovery and physiotherapy

Sport

- Swimming clubs and schools
- Training and competitions

Education

- Swimming lessons
- Water safety
- Swimming sports

Aquatic Facility Use

Aquatics Assets Portfolio

There are six pools managed by Council in South Gippsland:

- **Foster** Outdoor pool.
- **Korumburra** Outdoor pool.
- **Leongatha** South Gippsland SPLASH Indoor Leisure Centre.
- **Mirboo North** Outdoor pool.
- **Poowong** Outdoor pool.
- **Toora** Outdoor pool.

Other than SPLASH, the pools are legacy assets that pre-date council amalgamations in the 1990s. Six pools for approximately 31,109 people is a very high number of aquatic facilities per head of population, particularly when compared to other Gippsland municipalities.

It is important to recognise the dedication of previous generations to develop outdoor pools for their local communities.

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 five outdoor 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 the pools has been transferred to Council.

These committees and groups have made a significant contribution to the pools in their towns:

- Friends of Foster Pool
- Korumburra Swimming Club.
- Friends of Mirboo North Pool.
- Friends of Poowong Pool
- Toora Pool Committee.

Korumburra Indoor Pool (Private Asset)

It is worth noting that the Korumburra Indoor Pool is operated by the Korumburra Swimming Club and is located on the outdoor pool site. The club has a land lease with Council and is responsible for the construction, operation and maintenance of the facility.

The club receives a financial maintenance contribution from Council of approximately \$6,000 per annum to support the maintenance of the facility. Along with other aquatic facilities, this pool is rapidly ageing, with no capital funds set aside by Council to support its renewal or eventual replacement. As such there can be no guarantee that the Korumburra Indoor Pool will be able to continue to operate in the long term.



Expenditure Categories

Aquatic facilities expenses are divided into the following categories:

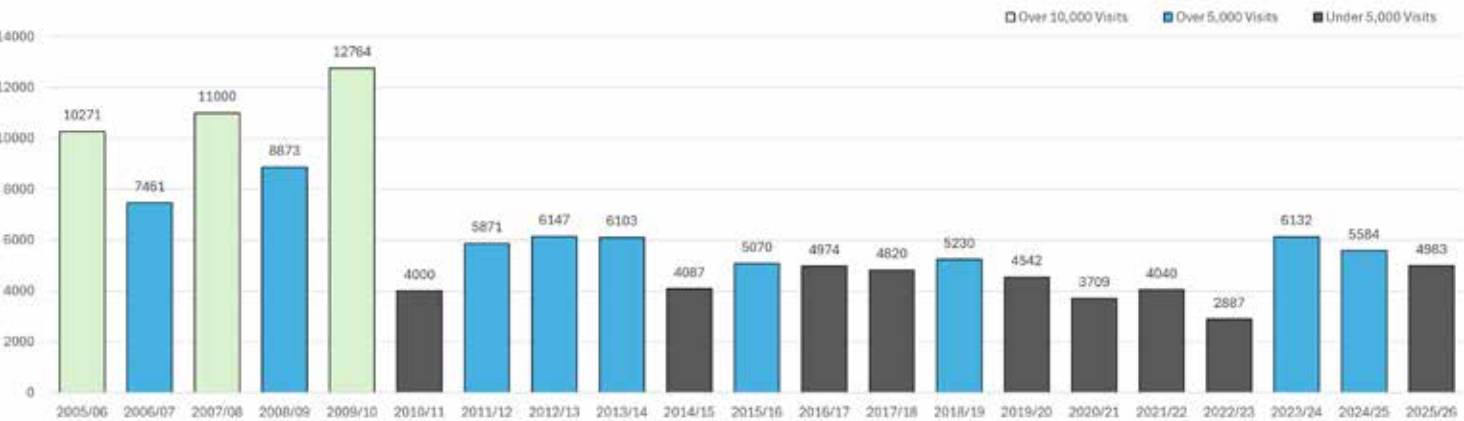
Costs	Descriptions	Examples
Operations	The ongoing cost of opening the doors each day during a season.	Staffing, cleaning, utilities, water treatment, insurance, compliance.
Maintenance	Keeping what you have running properly and avoiding bigger failures.	Routine servicing, minor repairs, plant and equipment upkeep.
Capital Renewal	The eventual "big ticket" replacement of major components (often needed every 15 to 25+ years depending on the asset).	The ongoing cost of opening the doors each day during a season.

Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

Foster Pool

25m solar heated main pool and learn to swim heated pool.
Crown Land – Council as Committee of Management
Opened: 1990
Dates of operation: Mid-December until end of February

Pool Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$92,849	\$11,822	\$104,671	2,887
2023/24	\$120,127	\$37,388	\$157,515	6,132
2024/25	\$104,429	\$55,893	\$160,322	5,584
2025/26	\$110,109	\$18,764	\$128,873	4,983



Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

Korumburra Pool

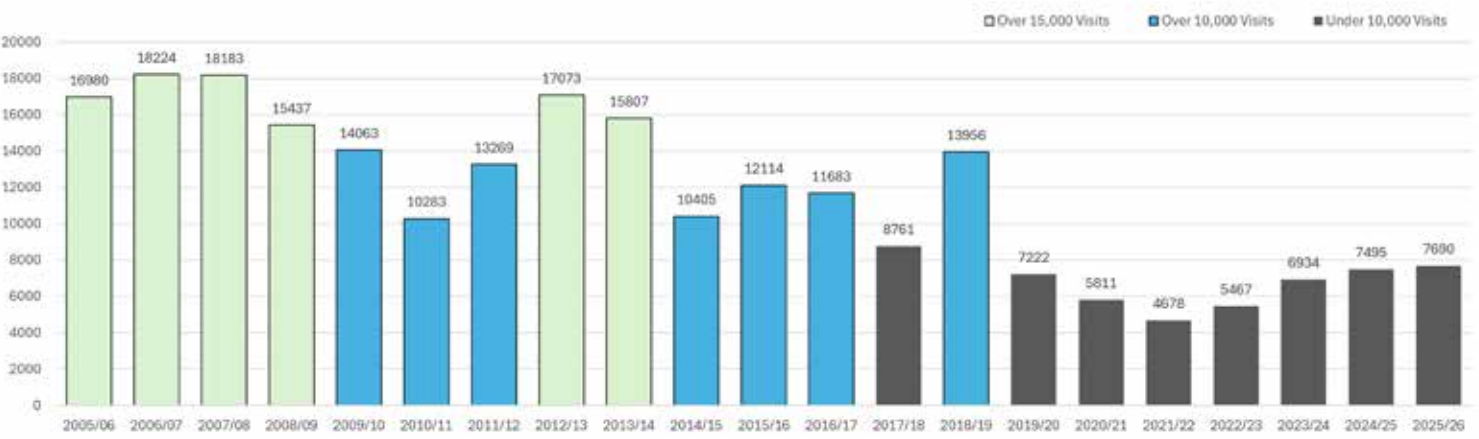
50m solar heated pool and solar heated toddler pool.

Council Owned Land

Opened: 1964

Dates of operation: Early December until Labour Day

Pool Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$95,843	\$30,954	\$126,797	5,467
2023/24	\$128,380	\$18,861	\$147,241	6,934
2024/25	\$128,895	\$5,310	\$134,205	7,495
2025/26	\$133,801	\$29,200	\$163,001	7,690



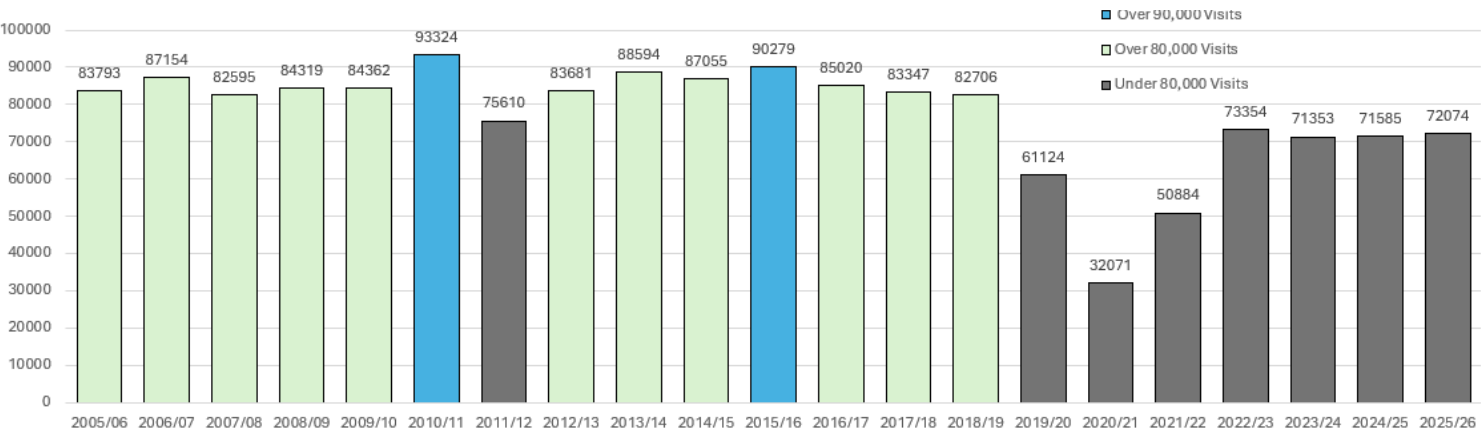
Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

SPLASH (Pool Only)

Gas heated 25m main pool, learn to swim heated pool and heated toddler pool.
Crown Land – Council as Committee of Management
Opened: 2005
Dates of operation: Year Round

Note:
The data from 2022/23 to 2025/26 represents pool-only usage. The graphs detail pool user attendance. In a small number of years, this data was not available so the percentage from other years was used to calculate the attendance figure.

Pool Only Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$580,895	\$35,439	\$616,335	73,354
2023/24	\$752,258	\$48,866	\$801,151	71,353
2024/25	\$651,518	\$77,495	\$729,013	71,585
2025/26	\$717,172	\$56,429	\$773,601	72,074



Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

Mirboo North Pool

25m heat pump heated main pool, learn to swim heated pool, splash park.

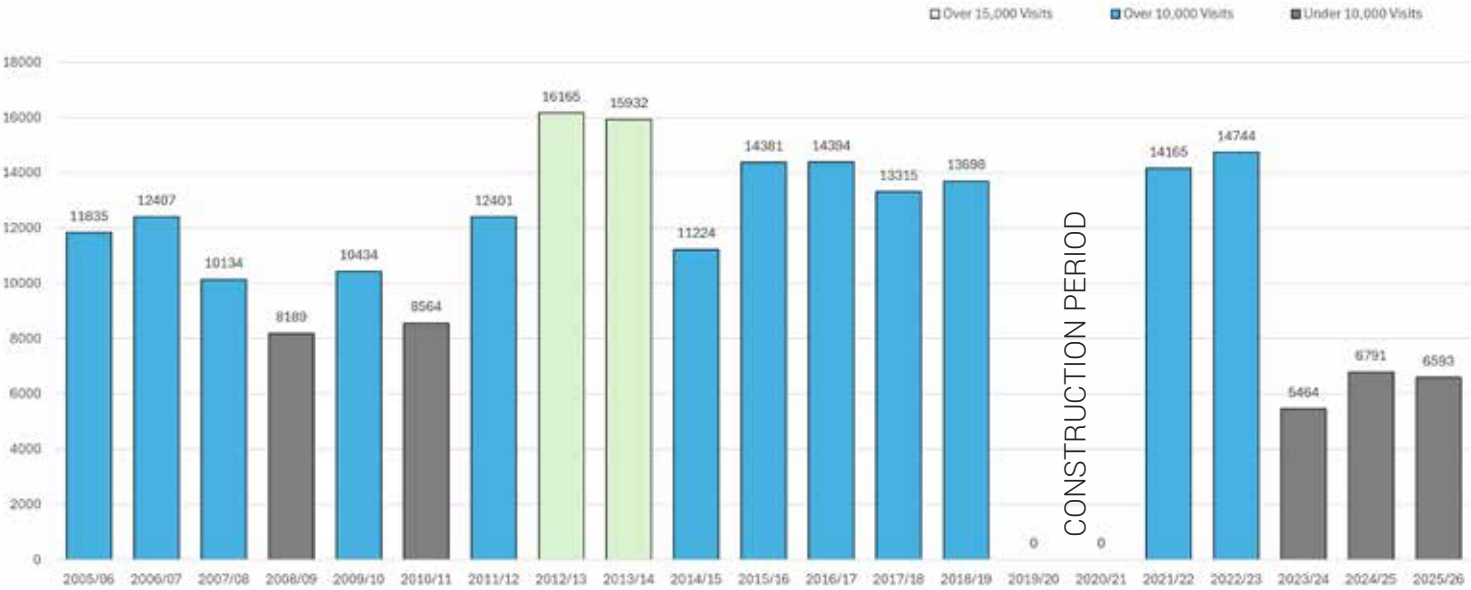
Council Owned Land

Opened: As a swimming hole in 1903. Redeveloped in 2021.

Dates of operation: mid-November until end of March

* Early season close 2023/24 and late season open in 2024/25 due to natural disaster

Pool Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$154,755	\$3,037	\$157,792	14,744
2023/24	\$112,683	\$12,227	\$124,910	5,464
2024/25	\$107,817	\$4,871	\$112,688	6,791
2025/26	\$128,894	\$39,345	\$168,239	6,593



Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

Poowong Pool

33m solar heated main pool and solar heated toddler pool.

Council Owned Land

Opened: 1963

Dates of operation: Early December until Labour Day

Pool Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$72,830	\$25,344	\$98,174	2,088
2023/24	\$90,760	\$16,254	\$107,014	2,265
2024/25	\$94,171	\$12,435	\$106,606	2,297
2025/26	\$97,602	\$14,754	\$112,356	2,392



Current Visitation, Operation and Maintenance Cost summaries

Toora Pool

25m Covered heated main Pool, 12m learn to swim heated pool and splash park

Council Owned Land

Opened: 1970

Dates of operation: early October until mid-April

Early season close 2024/25

Pool Attendance



Year	Operations	Maintenance	Total	Attendance
2022/23	\$171,820	\$32,118	\$203,938	23,283
2023/24	\$176,284	\$40,118	\$216,402	24,307
2024/25	\$179,158	\$76,872	\$256,030	22,228
2025/26	\$195,095	\$67,731	\$262,826	20,677



Aquatic Facilities vs Shire Population

In 2025, the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia State of Aquatic Facilities in Australia report indicates that *"The national average aquatic facility provisioning ratio is 1 aquatic facility per 12,826 population"*. In South Gippsland the provision level is almost 2.5 times greater than that at one pool for every 5,184 people.

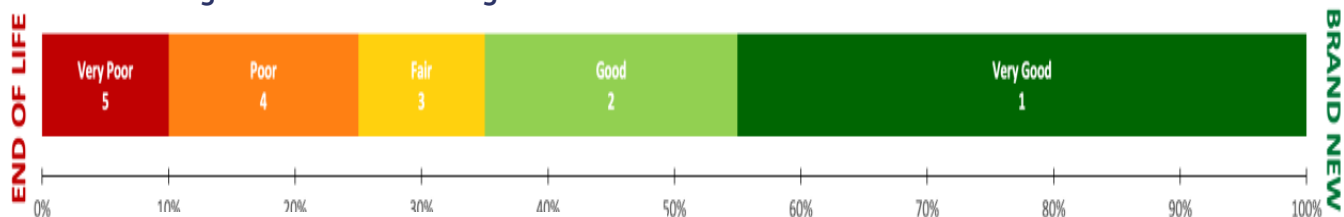
Council	Population	Leisure Centres	Outdoor Pools	Population Per Pool
South Gippsland	31,109	1	5	5,184
Other Gippsland Councils				
Bass Coast	45,000	2	0	22,500
Baw Baw	62,000	2	4	10,333
East Gippsland	49,500	2	2	12,375
Latrobe	77,000	4	2	12,833
Wellington	46,500	1	5	7,750
Comparable Regional Councils				
Colac Otway	22,273	1	1	11,137
Horsham	20,736	1	1	10,368
Mitchell	66,311	1	3	16,578
Moira	30,540	1	1	15,270
Swan Hill	21,207	1	4	4,241
Wangaratta	30,169	1	1	15,085
Warrnambool	36,150	1	1	18,075
Wodonga	46,561	1	1	23,281
Larger Regional Councils				
Ballarat	124,543	1	2	41,514
Bendigo	129,491	2	8	12,949
Geelong	299,735	4	3	42,819

Asset Condition and Cycle

Asset Condition is a strong determinant in the decision making regarding aquatic facilities. Remaining Useful life is an overall indicator of how quickly intervention is required. Facilities that do not have a chemical delivery bay will require short-term investment to continue to operate.

Location	Building Condition	Pool Plant Condition	Pool Shell Condition	Overall Years of Remaining Useful Life	Chemical Delivery Bay
Foster	3	3	4	5	Further investment required
Korumburra	4	5	5	0	Further investment required
Leongatha - SPLASH	3	2	2	20	Yes
Mirboo North	1	1	1	50	Yes
Poowong	3	2	5	5	Further investment required
Toora	2	4	3	20	Yes

Understanding the Condition Rating



1. Very Good

Free of defects, only planned and/or routine maintenance.
Only routine maintenance is required.

2. Good

Minor defects, increasing maintenance required plus planned maintenance.
Minor maintenance required.

3. Fair

Defects require regular and/or significant maintenance to reinstate service. *Significant maintenance required to return to an acceptable level of service.*

4. Poor

Significant defects, higher order cost intervention likely.
Significant renewal / upgrade required.

5. Very Poor

Physically unsound and/or beyond rehabilitation.
Immediate action required. Asset / component requires replacement.

Financial Sustainability

To be able to continue to provide services and facilities to the community, Council must remain financially sustainable.

While currently in a sound financial position, maintaining this financial strength in the future will not be possible without changes being made.

Victorian councils are operating in an increasingly complex environment, shaped by rising costs, ageing infrastructure, growing service demands and increasing community expectations.

Key pressures include:

Revenue not keeping pace with costs

Annual rate increases are limited by the Victorian Government's rate cap, which has been set below CPI in recent years. Over time, this has had a compounding effect, with Council's revenue not increasing in line with the rising cost of delivering services.

Construction and materials costs:

Construction and material costs have increased faster than the rate cap in recent years. As a result, the same level of investment now delivers less work than it did previously.

Ageing infrastructure

Many Council assets require significant investment to remain safe, functional and fit for purpose. The forecast cost of renewing or replacing this infrastructure is increasing and is expected to exceed the funding currently available.

Without changes, the gap between Council's income and the cost of maintaining existing services and infrastructure will continue to grow.



Did you know?

Local government in Australia receives just 4 cents out of every dollar of taxation yet delivers around 25 per cent of all government services, with increasing service expectations and cost shifting from other levels of Government.

Trends in Aquatics

In 2025, the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia released the State of Aquatic Facilities in Australia report, which highlighted the following issues:

- Ageing infrastructure, particularly outdoor pools built in the 1950s, 60s and '70s.
- High replacement costs, which are compounded by the seasonal nature of venues and declining usage.
- Limited funding opportunities.
- Rising operational costs that are not being offset by increased usage.
- Work demands and lifestyle choices lead people to expect flexible opening hours and a greater variety of affordable activity options at high quality, accessible facilities. In addition to SPLASH in Leongatha, South Gippsland residents have access to year round municipal public pools in Churchill, Warragul, Wonthaggi, Traralgon, etc.
- 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 younger users.

The impact of these trends is particularly challenging for South Gippsland's outdoor pools. Not only are they losing their appeal, but ageing infrastructure and increased operational costs are also challenging their financial sustainability. As expectations increase and attendances decline, the pools may not be viable without significant funding for upgrades.

In recent years, there has been a shift in trends for outdoor aquatic facilities:

- Development of splash park/water play spaces to replace ageing outdoor pools.
- Very few stand-alone outdoor pools are being developed.
- Most new outdoor pools are co-located with indoor venues that offer year-round use and health and fitness spaces (gyms/program rooms) to generate additional usage and income.

"Despite their immense social, health and economic value, nearly 500 public pools are approaching the end of their operational lifespan, placing additional pressure on local governments and facility operator to secure funding for maintenance and redevelopment."

State of Aquatic Facilities in Australia 2025



Strategic Challenges

Council’s outdoor pools were constructed several decades ago and require significant investment to address deteriorating structures, ageing plant and equipment, accessibility upgrades, and compliance with contemporary safety standards.

Many Victorian councils are facing similar challenges in maintaining and operating these facilities in a financially sustainable manner. It is difficult to balance competing priorities across a broad range of infrastructure assets, including roads, community buildings, sporting facilities, parks, and drainage networks.

Rising operating costs are placing further pressure on Council budgets. Expenses associated with staffing, utilities, maintenance, and regulatory compliance have increased significantly in recent years.

Seasonal usage also impacts on developing adequate justification for investing significant capital funds in these facilities. As these facilities operate only during the warmer months, it often means that they are sitting empty and unused for up to nine months of the year.

The historical development of Council’s outdoor pools also means there is inequity in their provision. While some towns have access to pools within their communities’ other areas face significant travel burdens to be able to access these facilities.



State of Aquatic Facilities in Australia 2025

Future Capital Renewals

Based on current asset condition, the future capital works requirements for each venue have been identified. The following table identified the work required at each venue over the next 15 years. The projected net cost per visit if this investment is made, is also outlined. These are estimates and subject to construction cost fluctuations.

Full renewal	Proposed Works	Capital Renewal	Projected cost per visit (over 15 years)	Estimated Overall Life Left
Poowong	Replacement of all pool, plant and building assets with new infrastructure	\$10M	\$275.56	5
Foster	Replacement of all pool, plant and building assets with new infrastructure	\$10M	\$145.56	5
Korumburra	Construction of new pool shells, new plant rooms, pipework and pool filtration equipment, major refurbishment / replacement of existing building structures	\$18M	\$138.00	0
Toora	New pool plant and heating equipment	\$2M	\$18.13	20
Splash	Mid-life refurbishment	\$5M	\$14.93	20
Mirboo North	No major capital works planned	-	\$11.56	50

Note: Mirboo North's projected cost per visit over the next 15 years is expected to decrease as attendance gradually returns to pre-storm levels.

External Funding Opportunities

When looking to access external means of funding aquatics, the following offerings apply:

Type	Description
Operations and ongoing maintenance (effectively unfunded)	No recurrent State grant subsidises the day-to-day operating cost of a council pool. Operating deficits are met from Council's own rates.
Capital renewal and upgrades (the main external source)	Local Sports Infrastructure Fund (LSIF) Open to all Victorian councils; grants of \$40,000 to \$500,000 for smaller components, not full renewals. Previous rounds of this program have included better pools category but with funding cap of generally \$3 million, which is focused on increased participation. Council would need a sound business case to support applications. State Budget allocations and election commitments Large pool projects are often funded through negotiated, one-off budget commitments rather than a standing program; politically driven and unpredictable. Federal contributions Typically election commitments, varying from hundreds of thousands to tens of millions; not a reliable planned funding line.

Community Considerations

Council understands that local pools are much more than physical infrastructure. They are places where generations of residents have learned to swim, families have spent summer days, friendships have formed and communities have come together.

We also recognise the significant contribution made by local volunteers, swimming clubs and community groups to establish, support and advocate for these facilities over many decades. This history and community connection are important considerations for Council.

At the same time, Council has a responsibility to be open about the challenges facing our aquatic facilities.

The cost of maintaining and renewing ageing infrastructure is increasing, while usage patterns are changing. Some facilities will require significant investment if they are to continue operating in their current form. Council must also consider the full range of services and infrastructure that communities across the Shire rely on.

This means difficult decisions about the future of aquatic services lie ahead.

No decision has been made about the future of any individual pool.

This Options Paper is the beginning of a conversation with the community about the challenges Council is facing and the choices that may need to be considered.

Council wants to hear from people who use the pools regularly, occasionally or not at all. We want to understand what aquatic facilities mean to different communities, how they are used, what people value about them, what concerns people have about possible changes and what ideas the community may have.

The views of people who do not use aquatic facilities are also important. The investment required is significant and must be considered alongside the many other services and assets Council provides across the Shire.

This conversation needs to consider more than the future of individual buildings. It must also consider water safety and learn-to-swim opportunities, health and wellbeing, social connection, accessibility, community identity, travel distances, the needs of different age groups and Council's broader financial sustainability.

There will not necessarily be easy answers.

Community feedback will not, on its own, determine the outcome, and this consultation is not a vote on whether individual pools should remain open. Council will consider community views alongside asset condition, visitation, operating costs, future capital requirements, available funding and the broader needs of the whole Shire.

The purpose of this consultation is to ensure future decisions are well informed. This is the start of the conversation, not the conclusion.

Council will consider the feedback received and continue engaging with the community as it works towards a sustainable approach to aquatic facilities across South Gippsland.

Next Steps

- Community consultation from 21 September to 6 December 2026.
- Letter to households in the municipality with an invite to a survey.
- Dedicated page to be established on Council's website.
- Community feedback to be presented to Council for consideration.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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Shire Council