

THE FUTURE OF OUR POOLS STRATEGY 2014-2024

Adopted by Council 23 June 2014



Wollongong 2022 Community Goal:

*“We are a healthy community
in a liveable city”*

WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

Our current provision of public swimming pools and tidal rock pools is based on facility and service provision approaches which were common throughout the 1950s-60s. This historic approach focused on 50m or 25m outdoor swimming pools catering mostly for recreational and lap swimming.

Recognising that aquatic recreational activities have evolved over time, this strategy has been developed to ensure that our future provision of pools and the services offered within our aquatic facilities address current and future unmet aquatic recreational needs as well as continue to meet the demands for recreational and lap swimmers. We are focused on our pools being attractive and well utilised recreation destinations.

This strategy contributes to our community goal, ‘We are a healthy community in a liveable city’ and will help us to achieve the Wollongong 2022 Community Strategic Plan objective of increasing participation in recreational and lifestyle activities. This Strategy will also assist Council in delivering aquatic recreational opportunities in alignment with Council’s commitment to achieving financial sustainability.

Austinmer tidal rock pool

HOW WE'VE DEVELOPED THIS STRATEGY

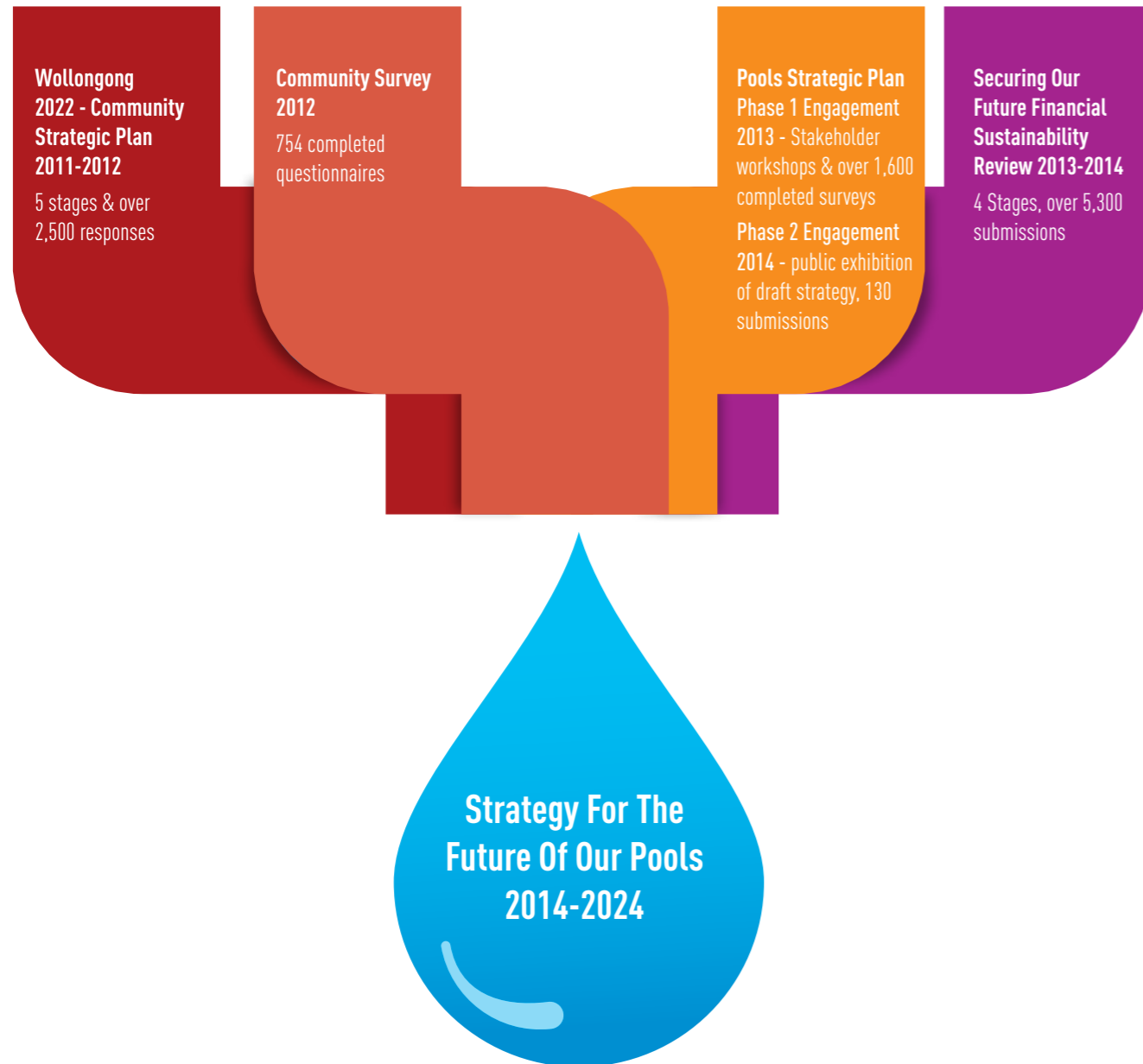
To assist in the development of the Strategy for the Future of Our Pools 2014-24 we engaged Strategic Leisure Group in 2013 to undertake a wide range of engagement activities with residents, staff, key stakeholders and visitors based on our nine supervised public pools.

In addition to this body of work we have used the substantial amount of community feedback we've collected over recent years to help develop this report. We received valuable feedback on our pools and tidal

rock pools through the development of Wollongong 2022 Community Strategic Plan and the Securing Our Future Sustainability Review, as well as ongoing feedback through our Community Surveys.

We'd like to thank everyone who has provided input to help us make Wollongong an even better place for aquatic recreation.

Here is a snapshot of how this document has been informed...



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR CURRENT SUPPLY OF PUBLIC POOLS?



Our Supervised Pools

- ➔ Council's Aquatics Services oversees eight outdoor public swimming pools.
- ➔ Helensburgh, Western Suburbs (Unanderra) and Berkeley pools are our three fresh water chlorinated facilities offered to the community free of charge and open during the designated swimming season.
- ➔ Seven of our nine public swimming pools are 50m pools, while Helensburgh and Beaton Park pools are 25m pools.
- ➔ We also operate three outdoor salt water pools at Thirroul, Continental (Wollongong) and Port Kembla free of charge. Continental Pool is year round, while Thirroul and Port Kembla are open to the public during the designated swimming season.
- ➔ Council also manages one indoor heated pool facility at Beaton Park Leisure Centre. Beaton Park Leisure Centre is the only pool that currently offers a broad diversity of usage types.

- ➔ Dapto, Corrimal (both outdoor pools) and Beaton Park Leisure Centre (indoor pool) are our three fresh water heated facilities that have entrance fees and are open year round.

Our Tidal Rock Pools

- ➔ Wollongong local government area features nine tidal rock pools.
- ➔ Our tidal rock pools are located at Coalcliff, Wombarra, Coledale, Austinmer, Bulli, Woonona, Bellambi, Towradgi, and North Wollongong.

Our Swimming Season

- ➔ Our designated swimming season typically operates from the commencement of the September public school holidays until 24 April each year (In 2013-14 Council resolved to extend the season at Thirroul and Port Kembla up until 31 May).

Current provision of pools



seven of our nine supervised swimming pools are 50m pools, while Helensburgh and Beaton Park pools are 25m pools.

WHO IS OUR COMMUNITY?

- ➔ Our estimated population is 203,044 and this is projected to grow to 221,664 by 2024. Most growth will occur in Wollongong and the West Dapto New Release Area.
- ➔ Our median age of 38, is the same as the NSW average.
- ➔ We experience a slightly higher index of disadvantage than the NSW average with some areas having a significantly higher level of disadvantage, predominantly in the south and south western suburbs of the City.
- ➔ Compared to NSW as a whole, we have a markedly higher proportion of people aged 20-24 years; a lower proportion of children under 15 years and adults in the 35-44 age group; and a higher proportion of older adults (65+).
- ➔ Some suburbs have significantly higher proportions of 0-14 year olds (mostly in the north and south west) and older adults aged 65+ (mostly in the south and south west).

What this means....

A number of implications could be drawn from the population profile. In areas with high populations of young people there could be a greater demand for leisure water/ adventure water and learn-to-swim opportunities.

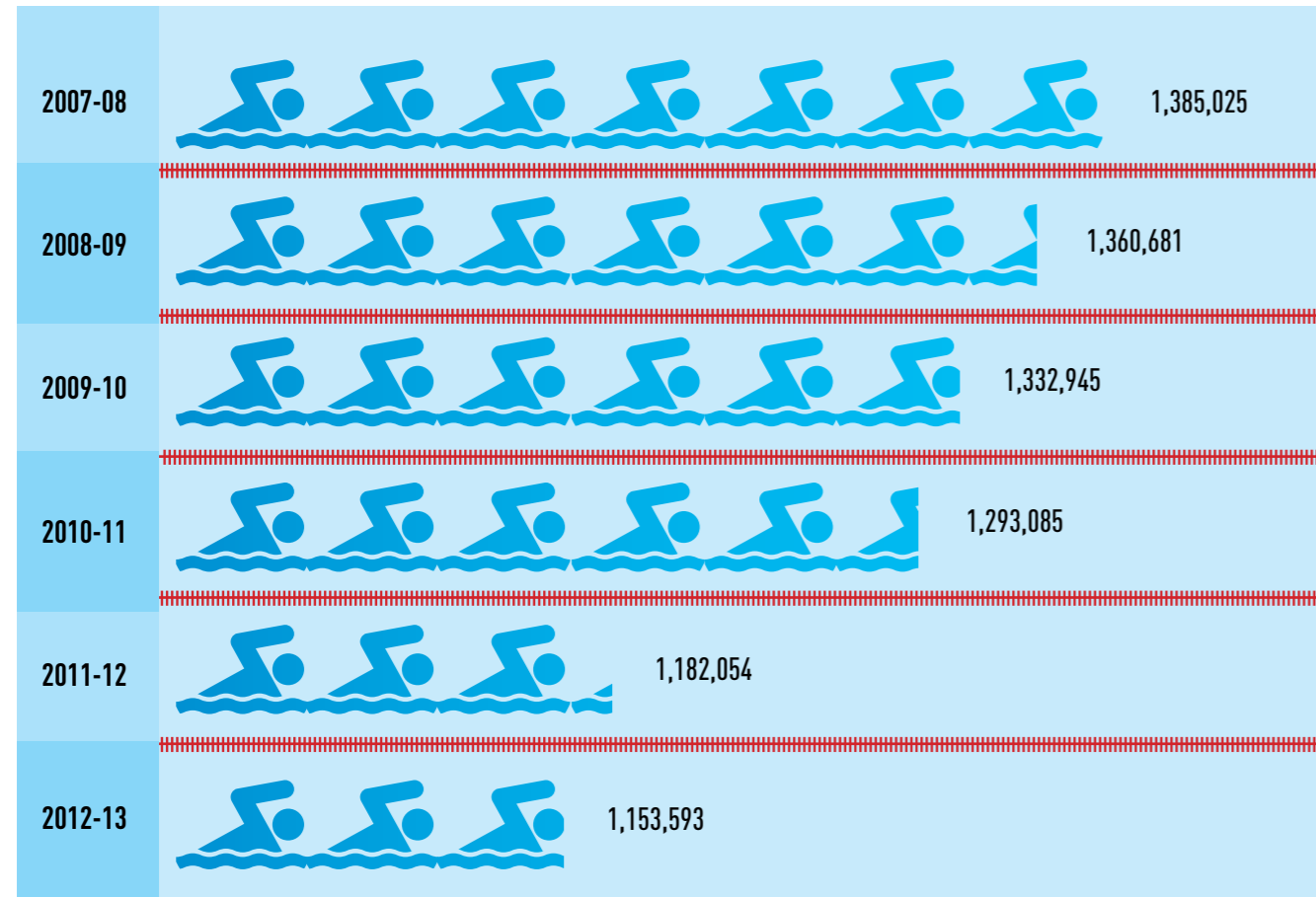
Suburbs with higher levels of disadvantage are likely to have greater price sensitivity and demand for free or low cost activities.

The high proportion of 20-24 year olds suggests a likely demand for fitness swimming, general fitness and heated, year round water.

Access to heated water, indoor pools, and aquatic programs are often sought by children and the older adult populations (e.g. suitable for therapeutic and low impact activities).



Total Attendance all Supervised Pools 2007-2013



Source: Wollongong City Council attendance figures 2007-2013. Attendance figures are based on either point of sale, electronic counters or approximate attendance observations.

WHO USES OUR SUPERVISED POOLS?

- ➔ There were an estimated 1,153,593 attendances to our supervised pools during the 2012-13 swimming season.
- ➔ Patronage has been gradually declining over the last 6 years, dropping by 17% since 2007-08.
- ➔ The largest declines in patronage since 2007-08 have been at Berkeley Pool (43% drop) and Dapto Pool (21% drop).
- ➔ Our 2012 Community Survey indicated that 65% of respondents had not visited a free public swimming pool and 72% had not visited a heated public swimming pool (fees applied) in the previous 12 months.
- ➔ Beaton Park pool attracts a diverse range of users including Learn to Swim, aqua-aerobics and rehabilitation.
- ➔ Despite falling attendances, annual visitation for all pools, except Berkeley and Beaton Park, far exceeds industry benchmark comparisons. It is likely that free entry is a major contributor to attendance levels with four of the five most highly patronised pools having free admission. Three of these are supervised ocean pools.
- ➔ Supervised swimming pools are a base for local swimming clubs and professional swim coach services.

WHO USES OUR TIDAL ROCK POOLS?

- ➔ Our tidal rock pools are popular with local early morning and evening lap swimmers.
- ➔ Many of our tidal rock pools are home to a number of winter swimming clubs.
- ➔ Our tidal rock pools are also popular with visitors to the region.
- ➔ Our 2012 Community Survey indicates 63% of respondents had not visited a tidal rock pool in the previous 12 months.
- ➔ Given the location of our tidal rock pools in open public spaces with no controlled access, we are unable to estimate attendance.

Many of our tidal rock pools are home to a number of winter swimming clubs.



Woonona tidal rock pool

Frequency	Tidal Rock Pools	Supervised Free Pools	Supervised Heated Pools
Monthly	15%	16%	15%
Up to 9 Times	2%	5%	2%
Up to 6 Times	7%	5%	3%
Up to 3 Times	13%	10%	9%
Not in the Last 12 Months	63%	65%	72%

Source: 2012 Community Survey, IRIS Research

Relationship to Council's Strategic Planning

The Wollongong 2022 Community Strategic Plan identifies the need for better/upgraded infrastructure. To help address this, on 17 February 2014, Council resolved to pursue operational efficiencies, service level adjustments, increasing fees and charges, and investigating rate rises. To allow Council to direct more funds towards the renewal and the replacement of our community assets such as public swimming pools. The community engagement process undertaken as part of the Securing Our Future project highlighted the following key sentiments from the community, specific to our pools:

- ➔ The existing supply and service level of all our pools should be retained.
- ➔ The swimming season for supervised public swimming pools should not be decreased.
- ➔ Our supervised public swimming pools are an integral aspect to the community's health and social wellbeing.
- ➔ Our tidal rock pools are iconic to Wollongong and provide a drawcard for tourism for the region.

WHAT YOU TOLD US

Through the range of various feedback opportunities undertaken over recent years you have told us:

Supervised Pools

Our 2012 Community Survey indicates:

- 81% of respondents (n=136) were highly satisfied with our public swimming pools (free entry); and
- 74% of respondents (n=107) were highly satisfied with our heated public swimming pools.

Previous community consultation on our supervised public swimming pools also suggests:

- Port Kembla Pool received the highest user satisfaction level.
- Beaton Park received the lowest user satisfaction level.
- The main reason for visiting our public pools is for lap swimming. The exceptions are Thirroul Pool which is mostly visited for recreational swimming and Beaton Park given it is an indoor pool and offers a wide range of activities/programs.

Cleanliness

The things that people most frequently mentioned that they like about our supervised public swimming pools were:

- Appropriateness for fitness/ lap swimming
- Cleanliness/ presentation/ maintenance
- Location
- Free entry/ reasonable cost
- Family friendly areas
- Year round opening
- Salt water (ocean pools)
- Friendly staff

The most common demands to emerge from a pool users survey and stakeholder consultation that was undertaken during 2013, were:

- Upgrading or modernising
- Improve or introduce heating/enclose pools
- Additional water space/water play features
- Improve access for people with disabilities
- Upgrade change rooms (e.g. hot water, hot showers, storage/ lockers, power points)
- Upgrade or introduce café/kiosk

Friendly staff

- Attend to maintenance items (e.g. pumps, pipes, painting)
- Improvements such as gym/grandstand/shade/diving blocks
- Provide for higher level competitions
- Extend swim season/opening hours
- Broaden range programs/activities (e.g. learn-to-swim, holiday programs, aqua fitness)
- Retain or reintroduce free entry

Tidal Rock Pools

Our 2012 Community Survey indicates:

- 49% of respondents (n=379) consider tidal rock pools to be of high importance.
- 65% of respondents (n=140) were highly satisfied with our tidal rock pools.
- A total of 66% of respondents agreed with maintaining the current levels of service across all supervised swimming pools and tidal rock pools.

Iconic

UNDERSTANDING OUR FINANCIAL STATUS

Given that the majority of our supervised outdoor public pools have free entry, the cost recovery levels for our nine supervised pools range between 0-43% which is below industry benchmarks. In the period 2009-12 the median expenditure across these supervised pools was \$6.21m per annum, while the median income was \$0.98m per annum, representing a net annual subsidy of \$5.23m and a cost recovery level of 15.9% per annum.

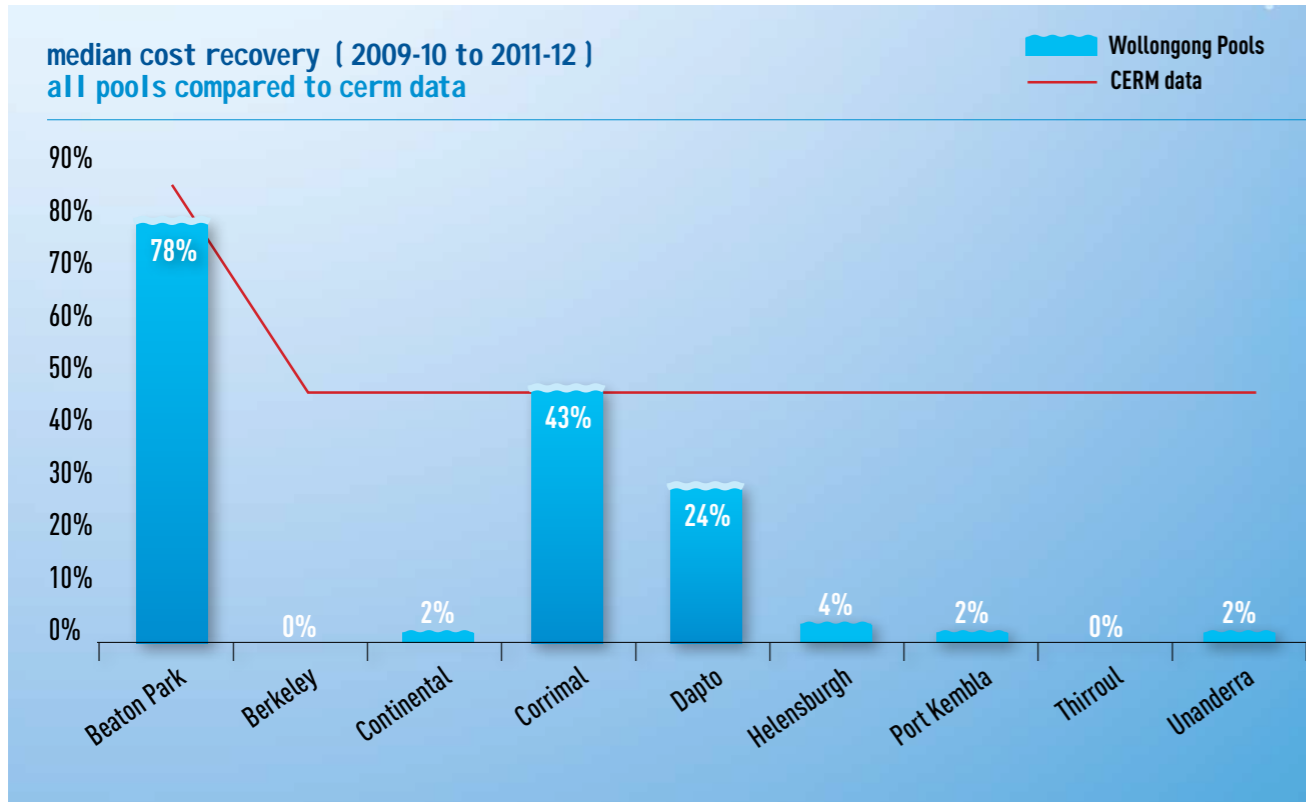
Of our heated pools, Beaton Park Pool (78%) and Corrimal Pool (43%) have cost recovery levels in line with industry benchmarks, whereas Dapto Pool (24%) has a cost recovery level well below.

Across all supervised pools over the period 2009-12, the net Council subsidy per user visit was \$4.05, ranging from a high of \$9.71 at Berkeley Pool and \$8.50 at Dapto Pool to \$1.83 at Beaton Park Pool.

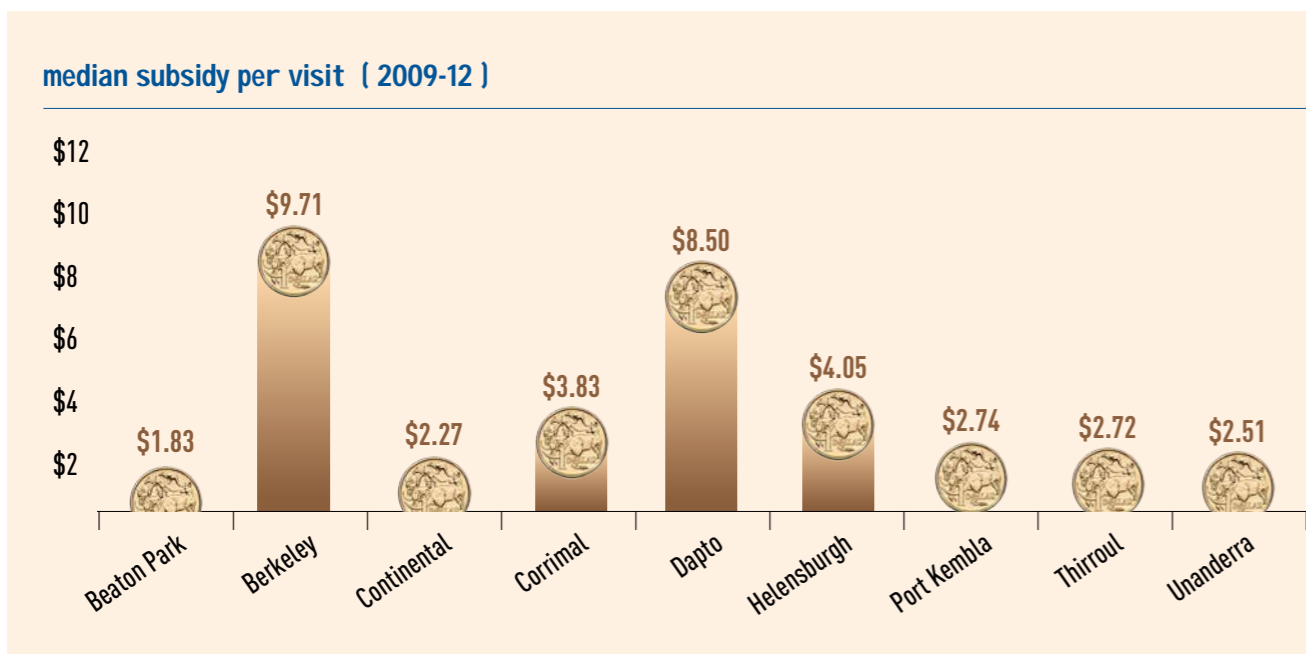
Financial Snapshot 2012-13

	Operational Expenditure (\$'000)	Income (\$'000)	Operational Net Cost (\$'000)	Capital Expenditure (\$'000)
Free Supervised Pools (6)	3,027	48	2,979	Total across all pools
Heated Supervised Pools (2 excluding Beaton Park pool)	2,578	433	2,145	
Tidal Rock Pools (9)	398	0	398	
TOTAL	6,003	481	5,522	946

The above figures are 2012/13 operational actuals and do not include depreciation costs.



Source: Wollongong City Council financial performance and attendance results 2009-2012 & Centre for Environment and Recreation Management (CERM) results 2009-2012.



Source: Wollongong City Council financial performance and attendance results 2009-2012.

WHAT WE HAVE FOUND

Our Community

- Our community is seeking more contemporary aquatic recreational opportunities, including interactive water play for children.
- Indoor aquatic facilities available to the public and their associated programming opportunities are limited and the available water space at Beaton Park Pool is beyond capacity during peak periods.
- Our pools need to facilitate a wider range of leisure activities that cater for different age and interest groups, acting as community destinations.
- Unlike most other local government areas, 6 of our 9 supervised pools have no admission fees.
- Port Kembla and Continental pools have an iconic status in the eyes of users.
- A strategic approach is required to suitably respond to the age and condition of our tidal rock pools and the associated rising costs of renewal and maintenance of these assets.
- Our tidal rock pools are much loved and highly valued by users.
- We have dated and limited asset information on the condition of our tidal rock pools.
- A large number of our residents do not currently utilise our pools and we need a fresh new approach to our pools to encourage wider use.
- Most of our supervised pools are a traditional 'old generation' design and, excluding Beaton Park and Port Kembla pools, do not feature contemporary design features.
- Our existing pool operating hours are not conducive to sections of the community who seek access to our pools before and after work hours.

Our Pools

- We have a large number of 50 metre supervised public pools which cater well for lap/fitness swimming.
- Financial resources for new infrastructure are limited and commercial opportunities may offer opportunities to subsidise capital costs for improvements.
- A number of our pools are located in close proximity to each other and are lacking differentiation in terms of design features.
- Introducing new infrastructure and/or services at our pools may mean we need to introduce fees.
- Our supervised pools are considered to be clean and well presented.
- Historical attendance figures at outdoor pools closely correlates to seasonal weather variations.

Industry Trends

Many Councils across Australia are confronted with the challenge of ageing swimming pools, increasing annual maintenance costs and, more often than not, falling attendance.

The primary focus in modern aquatic facility design is on expanding the facility mix to include a combination of 'wet' and 'dry' options. These include heated water spaces that accommodate a range of activities such as lap swimming, aquatic programs/ learn-to-swim, adventure water, 'leisure water' with interactive water play elements and beach entry, café with quality furnishings and menu choices, merchandising/ retail areas, health and fitness centres, wellness services, multi-purpose program spaces and meeting rooms.

Contemporary aquatic leisure facilities are becoming community destinations and meeting points for a range of physical activity and socialising needs. These types of facilities provide more reasons for people

to visit and stay longer, thus facility viability is improved. Beaton Park and Port Kembla exhibit a number of the design characteristics of new generation pools.

Given major increases in energy and water costs in recent years (and predictions of higher energy costs into the future) aquatic and leisure facilities are also seeking to incorporate modern, environmentally sustainable features.

Demand for longer season times and/ or opening hours emerged during the 2013 consultation process. September to April is the common season for outdoor pools with winter closures. The 2012 extension of the swim season to the end May at Port Kembla and Thirroul Pools provides a comparatively more generous season. The existing daily opening times at our supervised pools are not uncommon compared to elsewhere, however there is a trend towards people wanting to access pools before and after work.

Achieving Our 10 Year Vision

'Wollongong City is host to a variety of highly used diverse and appealing aquatic recreational opportunities that meet our community's needs of today and their desires of tomorrow'

KEY PRINCIPLES

In order to achieve our 10 year vision, 6 key principles will guide our approach towards the planning, provision and management of all pools within the Wollongong LGA.

1 DIVERSITY: A diverse range of aquatic recreation opportunities are available for all to enjoy, assisting in promoting healthy living.

Key Actions:

- 1.1 Prepare a master plan for pool expansion/upgrading Beaton Park as the premier year round indoor facility and program pool in the Wollongong LGA.
- 1.2 Undertake recreation planning to facilitate aquatic/leisure facility development at West Dapto.
- 1.3 Prepare a master plan for future redevelopment of Corrimal pool.
- 1.4 Explore innovative and interactive water/leisure play options at existing pools where considered appropriate.
- 1.5 Maintain opportunities for lap swimming while encouraging events and activities that further activate facilities and establish them as community hubs for social interaction.
- 1.6 Continue to maintain Berkeley pool until such times as it reaches the end of its lifecycle and engage with the community to explore varying the form of aquatic opportunities (e.g. water play space).
- 1.7 Explore new program opportunities and innovative activity options to encourage healthy living, enhance user experience and increase patronage and new revenue streams at our supervised swimming pools.

2 ENGAGEMENT: Our community is involved in the planning, use and renewal of our aquatic facilities.

Key Actions:

- 2.1 As part of Council's annual planning process, provide opportunities for pool users to provide input and advice on improvements and operational management issues.
- 2.2 Undertake project specific community engagement activities when planning for major facility developments.
- 2.3 Establish a community notification process for events, temporary pool closures and maintenance works.

3 PROMOTION: Our community and visitors have access to current information on our city's aquatic recreation opportunities.

Key Actions:

- 3.1 Develop a marketing and promotions plan for all of our pools.
- 3.2 Work with other organisations to promote our pools to attract programs that will deliver economic and social benefit to the region.
- 3.3 Continue to promote water safety education across all pools (e.g. RLSSA Parental Keep Watch, hypoxiation).

4 SUSTAINABILITY: A sustainable based approach is undertaken in the planning and management of our current and future aquatic facilities.

Key Actions:

- 4.1 Implement an ongoing program of proactive maintenance at all pools to ensure asset longevity.
- 4.2 Undertake detailed condition assessments on all pool infrastructure to enable informed asset renewal planning and maintenance programming.
- 4.3 Continue to invest in the programed renewal of our existing tidal rock pools.
- 4.4 Investigate options for greater flexibility of operating hours across pools that responds to community demand in a cost neutral manner.
- 4.5 Our pool amenities and facilities will incorporate elements of good design and wise use of water resources.

5 EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT: Our pools are effectively managed with a strong focus on the customer's experience and public safety.

Key Actions:

- 5.1 Ensure our aquatics staff are professional, customer focused, innovative and business driven.
- 5.2 Review on a regular basis Council's fee structure (fees and non-fees) across aquatic services.
- 5.3 Ensure our pools are cleaned and water quality maintained to an appropriate standard that allows continued community access and maintains a reputation of Wollongong's pools as having high water quality.
- 5.4 Undertake regular access and safety audits across all pools to ensure public safety is maintained and our pools are accessible to all existing and potential users.

6 PARTNERSHIPS: We are open to exploring partnerships which value-add to our aquatic recreation opportunities.

Key Actions:

- 6.1 Explore commercial opportunities at Continental pool that support the provision of aquatic services (e.g. kiosk/café/restaurant).
- 6.2 Explore potential funding partners to contribute to capital improvements of new and existing infrastructure.
- 6.3 Provide opportunity for private sector involvement to deliver services and business opportunities where they complement existing pool infrastructure.

We'd like to thank everyone who has provided input to help us make Wollongong an even better place for aquatic recreation.

You can view this strategy and the supporting document 'Future Options and Strategic Plan for Council's Public Swimming Pools', Strategic Leisure Group on our website:

www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au