

SECTION 1 AQUATIC FACILITY REVIEW

Introduction

This review was initiated due to increasing anecdotal evidence that many new or upgraded pools were experiencing unanticipated problems. While some teething issues are expected, it was clear that given the large capital investment and the ongoing operating costs committed, the level of problems was more than simple teething problems. In some cases, the same problems were being repeated and the lessons from “mistakes” at one facility were not learned or passed on. It was also apparent that some new pools experienced few problems or issues and there appeared to be positive lessons that could be learned from those facilities.

Investment in aquatic centres/swimming pools by local government in New Zealand is one of the largest areas of expenditure on physical leisure. This is both in terms of capital invested and ongoing operating costs. To date, there has been little critical analysis on the effectiveness of this expenditure. SPARC’s intention is to produce a resource that would allow local authorities access to the lessons others have already learned in an endeavour to ensure the best use of scarce resources.

The intention of this report is to learn from the experience of existing pools, to promote open communication and provide information on how to maximise utility for the investment while minimising short and long term problems with public swimming pools. This review does not have the intention of promoting greater expenditure on public swimming pools. It wants to ensure that available expenditure is spent most effectively. The reviews limited scope and resourcing means there is high reliance on the limited base of information from the eleven specific pools in the review as well as any other specific examples able to be verified. The study also attempts to provide practical, working models to illustrate how different options may stack up against each other.

SPARC engaged Mr John McGuinness to undertake this project. John has been a pool manager for over 40 years while in his younger days was a NZ title and record holder. John was a member of the NZASPM for 30 years and was its chair for 3 years. John was made a life member of the NZASPM in 1989. John has been the aquatics advisor for the Hillary Commission and was a member of the committee that produced the original NZS 5826 Swimming Pools Operational Standard in 1985. John was the inaugural recipient of the Paul Stuart Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the Aquatics industry, in 1995. Most recently John was only the second recipient of the NZRA Presidents Award for outstanding contribution to the recreation industry in 2004.

When John retired from the Hutt City Council in 2005 after over 40 years of service, SPARC grasped the opportunity to have NZ’s most respected pools professional take on this project. John brings a pragmatic and practical perspective to a complex and difficult project. He is a pool manager and pool plant operator rather than a designer or theorist.

The views and observations in this report should be used to inform the debate and practise when planning for a new or substantially upgraded public swimming facility. They identify very good practise where errors or commissions have been minimised or omitted. Not all the lessons are applicable to every situation. But SPARC intends that the errors, mistakes and problems identified in this review will preclude them being repeated in any facilities built after this report is produced – or at the very least, reduced so we don't keep shooting ourselves in the foot because of arrogance, fear of criticism or hubris.

SPARC is committed to assisting local government in the provision of quality infrastructure to support the sport and recreation needs of communities. The provision of quality facilities is critical to the ongoing development of aquatic skills among New Zealanders.

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