

Taranaki Aquatic Facilities: Investing in Health, Connection and Community Value

Social Return on Investment (SROI) summary

February 2026

Overview

Aquatic facilities in Taranaki are doing far more than keeping people active; they are strengthening communities, improving health and delivering real economic value. This Social Return on Investment (SROI) summary report explores the impact of 4 key indoor aquatic centres supported by local councils:

- Todd Energy Aquatic Centre (TEAC)
- Hāwera Aquatic Centre
- Wai o Rua – Stratford Aquatic Centre
- Methanex Bell Block Aquatic Centre.

These facilities were selected for their proven contributions to the community's wellbeing, health and economic productivity. They are also facilities that are open to the public year-round.

Why it matters

In a time of economic pressure and shifting priorities, aquatic centres remain essential infrastructure. They support:

- physical and mental health
- social connection and cohesion
- local productivity and economic resilience.

The SROI analysis confirms that these centres are not just places to swim. They are places where communities thrive.

Methodology

This report draws on data provided by local councils and facility operators as part of the Taranaki Aquatics Network Plan. It focuses on public indoor aquatic facilities and uses a combination of spatial mapping, survey insights and human movement data to build a clear picture of facility usage and impact. The calculation is for 1 year of the provision of services to the Taranaki community (2022/2023).

Key data sources include:

- Optimal GeoSpace mapping¹ and council survey data² to define catchment areas and visitation frequency
- cell phone location data to complement council records and identify visitor origins for major facilities.

Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa conducted an SROI analysis using a model designed to capture the broad social impacts of aquatic facilities. The model reflects the diverse ways these centres contribute to community wellbeing. It has built-in checks and balances to ensure there is no double-counting or overestimation of benefits.

Stakeholder engagement was central to the process and aligned with the development of the Taranaki Regional Aquatics Plan. This involved:

- local councils
- Sport Taranaki
- community members, through surveys, meetings and consultations.³

The methodology followed the 8 principles of SROI, ensuring a transparent and accurate evaluation of outcomes.

To test the robustness of the findings, a sensitivity analysis explored:

- variations in financial costs (including renewal percentages)
- different approaches to valuing improvements in water safety, knowledge and skills.

Financial inputs were based on operating costs, adjusted for facility valuations (2024 QV) and offset by user revenue.



1 Data Consulting Limited

2 RSL Consultancy

3 As part of the Taranaki Regional Aquatics Plan.

The benefits

The benefits of Taranaki's aquatic facilities fall into 3 main categories: social, health and economic. Each category highlights the unique value these public assets bring to individuals and the wider community.

Social benefits

Aquatic activities play a vital role in building social capital and sense of community. They provide opportunities for social interaction and inclusivity. The total estimated value of these social benefits is \$10.28 million.

Enhanced social capital

Participation helps residents feel a stronger sense of community and belonging, valued at \$1.9 million.

Life satisfaction for adults

Adults engaging in aquatic activities report higher life satisfaction, valued at \$4.85 million.

Happiness

Aquatic programmes and activities contribute to the happiness and wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi, valued at \$3.48 million.

Life satisfaction for volunteers

Volunteers such as lifeguards, coaches and those supporting sports clubs also experience increased life satisfaction.



Health benefits

The health-related effects of aquatic facilities are significant, with a total estimated value of \$17 million. These benefits include improved physical health, longer life expectancy and reduced risk of disease.

Quality of life and life expectancy

Regular aquatic activity improves overall wellbeing and longevity, valued at \$14.06 million.

Disease prevention

Participation helps prevent conditions linked to physical inactivity, valued at \$1.15 million.

Individual health gains

Personal involvement in aquatic activities leads to measurable health improvements, valued at \$1.82 million.

Water safety education

Water safety programmes help reduce drowning risks, valued at \$0.04 million.

By promoting physical activity and providing preventive health measures, these facilities contribute significantly to public health and wellbeing.⁴

⁴ The water safety value was calculated by applying an 88% risk reduction rate (from international evidence on swimming lessons) to the local drowning rate, estimating the number of lives saved, and multiplying this by New Zealand's Value of a Statistical Life (VoSL) of \$10.18 million. For Taranaki, this resulted in a benefit of approximately \$44,900 for 2022/23, reflecting the region's already low drowning rate.



Economic benefits

Aquatic facilities also deliver strong economic returns, with total benefits estimated at \$6.77 million. These gains come from improved workforce productivity, reduced absenteeism, and the value of leisure activities and volunteer contributions.

Employee value

Access to aquatic facilities enhances employee wellbeing and performance, valued at \$4.59 million.

Reduced absenteeism

Regular participation leads to fewer sick days and higher productivity, valued at \$1.5 million.

Volunteer contributions

The replacement value of volunteer time and effort is estimated at \$0.69 million.

These economic outcomes reinforce the role aquatic facilities play as important contributors to regional prosperity and wellbeing.

Financial cost of facilities

The total input for the 4 aquatic facilities was \$28 million per annum, which includes local government operational spending, cost of volunteers and capital investments, as well as a proportion of Taranaki household expenditure.

The total cost of constructing and operating the 4 aquatic facilities (excluding household expenditure) is estimated at \$10.5 million per year. This figure includes capital, renewal and maintenance costs, averaged over the facilities' expected 50-year lifespan.

Despite these ongoing financial commitments, the analysis shows that the social value generated outweighs the investment.

The total social value created through investment in Taranaki's aquatic facilities is estimated at \$34 million.

The net social value is calculated by subtracting total financial inputs (including capital, operating and maintenance costs) from the total social value.

This strong return on investment highlights the long-term value aquatic facilities have as essential community infrastructure.

Calculating the impact for Taranaki region 2023-2024

Calculating net social value for the Taranaki aquatic facilities region

\$34 million - \$28 million = \$6 million

in outcomes

in inputs

in net social value

Calculating the SROI ratio

For every \$1 spent on investment in public aquatic facilities, \$1.22 worth of social impacts is generated for the Taranaki region.

\$34 million of outcomes ÷ \$28 million of inputs = \$1.22

Overall impact

The total social value generated by investment in aquatic facilities in Taranaki is \$32 million. For every dollar spent on these facilities, \$1.22 worth of social value is created.

Investment in aquatic facilities in the Taranaki region is \$25.6 million.

SROI = \$1.22

For every \$1 spent on investment in aquatic facilities in Taranaki, \$1.22 worth of social impacts is generated.

This value reflects the wide-ranging positive impact of aquatic facilities on health, life satisfaction and economic productivity. By continuing to maintain and expand these facilities, and ensuring they remain affordable and accessible, local councils can help build healthier, more connected communities across all socioeconomic groups.

Our findings also reinforce the vital role accessible aquatic facilities have in promoting community wellbeing and confirm they deliver strong social returns on investment.

Conclusions

The Taranaki Aquatic Facilities SROI summary report demonstrates the significant social and economic value these public facilities bring to the region. They deliver strong social and financial returns, playing a vital role in fostering healthy, inclusive and connected communities. Aquatic facilities are essential for community wellbeing and cohesion. While they require substantial investment, their social benefits far outweigh the costs – equating to a 22% return on investment.

Maintaining and improving existing infrastructure is generally more cost-effective than building new facilities. For Taranaki, this means prioritising upgrades and ongoing maintenance to protect long-term value and avoid the higher costs associated with deferred maintenance. Additional water space and facility types should be considered based on community needs and aligned with the Taranaki Network Plan. By keeping these facilities accessible and affordable, local councils can continue to maximise social returns, enhancing wellbeing for residents across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

This report provides valuable insights into the broad benefits of aquatic facilities and offers practical guidance for strategic planning and future investment.

Recommendations for the sector

This study identified the need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to data collection to support robust SROI modelling. Key recommendations include:

Breadth and depth of data collection

Improve data collection methods to capture the full impact of aquatic facilities, particularly consistent, high-quality user data, that better measures social, health and economic outcomes.

Track physical activity guidelines

Implement systems to accurately monitor how facility users meet physical activity guidelines, improving the valuation of health benefits.

Understand added benefits of accessibility

Deepen understanding of the additional value created by accessible facilities that promote inclusivity and equitable access.

Value outcomes for young people

Develop strategies to better capture and value the positive impacts of aquatic activities for young people.

Incorporate culturally distinctive outcomes

Ensure that outcomes specific to Māori and Pasifika communities are recognised and integrated into impact measurement.

Advocacy and use

The insights from this report provide strong evidence for continued investment in aquatic facilities. The social, economic and health benefits align with councils' strategic goals and support informed, evidence-based decision-making.

The Taranaki aquatic facilities SROI summary report is a valuable resource for stakeholders, policymakers and community leaders. By understanding the broad benefits these facilities deliver, stakeholders can make informed decisions that maximise social returns on investment and support healthy, connected communities.

Ongoing investment in public aquatic infrastructure will help ensure the Taranaki region remains a vibrant, inclusive and active place to live. Prioritising affordable and accessible facilities will continue to deliver substantial social and economic returns.



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The SROI analysis was developed alongside the Taranaki Regional Aquatics Plan, contracted to RSL Consulting, with Optimal GeoSpace visitation data provided by Data Consulting Limited.



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