

## Aquatics and Community Recreation

FutureNow is an independent body that provides industry informed advice to influence skills development strategies across the Creative, Leisure and Technologies sectors. Our work assists Western Australia to be prepared with the new order skills required by the evolving economy and our changing society.

### Current Industry Environment for Sport, Fitness and Recreation Sectors

#### Training package updates and Government funding to support workforce deficit

As the sport, fitness, and recreation sectors recover from COVID-19 shutdowns in Western Australia, employment forecasts for job roles anticipate growth over the next five years<sup>1</sup>. There are however still specific subsectors, such as aquatics, where the confidence of employees to return to casual and non-essential roles are creating a workforce deficit<sup>2</sup>. The West Australian Government has responded by investing in funding relevant training, such as the fully-funded swimming instructor course for Year 12 students<sup>3</sup> and fee-free training for youth, concession students and job seekers. In addition, the National aquatic and fitness training packages have been updated to align training with the newly released principles from the Department of Health and the Australian Institute of Sport to create safe sport, fitness, and recreation operating environments. The aim to ensure the skills and knowledge of these sector workers are current, up-to-date, and aligned with industry needs.

#### Industry responses to commercial disruption

The sport, fitness and recreation industry responded to the pandemic by expanding into alternative methods of service delivery, such as fitness instructors offering online personal and group training<sup>4</sup>. This is not possible however for team sports, and many major sports are still being impacted by cancellations or rescheduling. An example of this is the Australian Masters Games which was due to be held in Perth October 2021 and is rescheduled for April 2022. In some cases, sporting events were held with no spectators. This lack of ticket sales has impacted bigger commercial sports who receive a significant amount of money from sales and aligned purchases such as merchandise<sup>5</sup>. The relocation of major sporting events, such as the AFL grand final to Perth, was an adaptive and historical solution demonstrating how this sector is considering alternative ways to deal with COVID-19 impacts and the potential loss of revenue.

#### Outdoor recreation experiencing growth in participation

Not all sectors within sport, fitness and recreation have experienced a detrimental impact on participation and workforce employment and development. Restrictions in national and international travel found more Western Australians exploring and travelling within their own state. Participation rates, especially in bush walking and mountain biking<sup>6</sup> have significantly increased. This growth trend was recognised by the State government who have increased funding towards trail development. There are also professional development programs by Trails Future being piloted to upskill and

enhance the professionalism of this growth industry<sup>7</sup>. This has been accompanied by strong strategic development, such as the *WA Hiking Strategy: Bushwalking and trail running in Western Australia 2020-2030 report*.

## Mental health benefits through sport, fitness, and recreation participation

Mental health, as well as physical health, has become a focal point in the sport, fitness, and recreation sector. Nineteen per cent of Australian's reported their mental health as either worse or much worse than before COVID-19<sup>8</sup>. The sport, fitness, and recreation industry has been a critical mechanism for providing exercise and social connection to increase individuals' mental health. Regular exercise reduces stress and improves mental health<sup>9</sup>, which is especially important when one in six Australians are experiencing depression, anxiety, or both<sup>10</sup>. Being connected to a fitness or sporting community can also enhance mental health<sup>11</sup>. During COVID-19 lockdowns the daily exercise allowance produced an increase in walking, running, cycling, bush walking and swimming activities.<sup>12</sup> Recent reports found that hikers indicated mental health as one of their major reasons they exercise outdoors in scenic nature<sup>13</sup>, and adult swimmers indicated mental health as one of the key reasons for their participation<sup>14</sup>. Sometimes a problem can occur within these sectors when staff, volunteers or participants are unaware of how to handle mental health issues. SportWest, the peak sporting industry body, has recently released a mental health framework to sporting clubs and associations.

## Sports broadcasting predicted for continual revenue increase

Continual revenue growth in the sport sector is drawn from the increasing value of broadcasting rights. This revenue flows to the sporting clubs and contributes to increased employment and facility management costs. It is estimated that whilst some of these rights were re-negotiated to be extended because of the COVID-19 period, it is still a large contributor, and is predicted to have a 5-year growth of \$12.8 billion to \$16.4 billion in revenue in 2025-6 within Australia<sup>15</sup>.

## Growing trend in yoga and pilates

Unemployment in Western Australia is at its lowest since 2013 at 3.9% and there is a new all-time high employment at 1.427 million<sup>16</sup>. If this transfers to increased household expenditure this bodes well for the sport, fitness and recreation sectors as consumers spend more money in these areas at periods of extra discretionary income<sup>17</sup>. There is a growing trend in yoga and pilates class attendance, especially among the younger female generation<sup>18</sup>. This is boosted by a growing health conscious culture<sup>19</sup>. Research has found that yoga has over 2.8 million participants across Australia and 1.2 million participating in pilates<sup>20</sup>.

## Shift towards an aging population and potential impacts on workforce and volunteer needs

The sport and fitness industry is also experiencing a shift towards an aging population. It is projected that the 15% of Australians aged 65 or older will increase to 22% by 2056. Data shows that 48% of older Australians indicated they participated in physical activity five times a week with 43% of these active in sport-related activities<sup>21</sup>. With this shift in population, there will likely be an increased need for a workforce and volunteers to service this group. This could in turn create a shortage of workers trained in creating age related sport and fitness programs.

## Aquatics and Community Recreation sectors

### Training package updates

The aquatic industry is one of the largest employers in the sport and recreation sector<sup>22</sup>. The aquatics and community recreation sectors have had recent updates to their training packages to keep up with the significant changes that have been happening in this industry. These are mainly from COVID-19, changes in equipment, and products and the need to train staff to work in multiple areas within a recreation facility<sup>23</sup>. This has resulted in a broad range of employment opportunities within these sectors.

### Shortage of swimming teachers

As mentioned, there is a shortage in swimming teachers with a predicted shortfall of around 2,000 nationally<sup>24</sup>. The government is offering funding options to address this issue. There are also roles as lifeguards, with the Australian Lifeguard Service employing over 700 across Australia<sup>25</sup>. Many are employed at community recreation centres overseeing the patrons using the pools. The challenge with this sector is most swimming teacher and lifeguard roles are casual. Nearly 50% of instructors, lifeguards, and others in the industry indicate that they have a second job<sup>26</sup> which could be a barrier to remaining in the industry and being enticed to train in the industry. Shutdowns resulted in 50,000 children missing out on taking part in swimming and water safety lessons<sup>27</sup>. There is also a flow on effect with swimming teacher shortages causing some primary schools to have to cancel their swimming lessons for students<sup>28</sup>.

### Employment opportunities

The aquatic and community recreation centres however do have a range of full-time employment options with 33,600 full time employees across Australia. Roles can include program coordinator, pool manager and centre manager. Popularity in swimming is increasing and was one of the top 5 activities during COVID-19 lockdowns when exercise was permitted. Aquatic facilities are extremely popular with approximately 5 million Australians either swimming or using these facilities for other activities such as aqua aerobics<sup>29</sup>.

### Water safety awareness and culturally diverse opportunities

Western Australia has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world and we often have access to a range of waterways and swimming pools. As a result, water safety awareness and learning to swim are important contributors to reducing the rate of drownings. In 2019/2020, 258 Western Australians were affected by drowning (both fatal and non-fatal)<sup>30</sup>. Forty percent of drownings recorded tragically involve people who were born overseas, and Aboriginal children aged 5-14 are 8.6 times more likely to fatally drown than non-Aboriginal children in WA<sup>31</sup>. The Royal Life Saving WA have a range of access and equity projects to create opportunities to break down the barriers to participation in swimming and water safety education.

### Regional communities and aquatic facilities

Aquatic facilities play a crucial role in regional communities, especially in promoting social interaction and wellbeing. Often these aquatic facilities are ideal places to visit in typically hot locations in remote Western Australia. Participation at these remote aquatic facilities have even been found to assist in promoting good behaviour among youths and increased school attendance.<sup>32</sup>

## Upgrading and addition of aquatic and community recreation facilities

Recently there has been a substantial investment in upgrading and introducing new aquatic and community recreation facilities within Western Australia. For example, the City of South Perth Council in March 2021 signed a \$20 million Federal Government grant funding for a proposed Recreation and Aquatic Facility<sup>33</sup> and Lotterywest have allocated \$867,182 to creating a Margaret River Surf Lifesaving Development Centre to enhance training and skill development in surf lifesaving<sup>34</sup>. These venues will then in turn create employment opportunities within this sector.

## Industry Developments

There are several initiatives presented recently via reports, frameworks and programs within the sport, fitness, and recreation sectors. These include:

The Australian Sports Commission Corporate Plan - 2021-2025 – This plan is targeting two key purposes. To make Australian's stronger through sport, and to build sustainable winning systems for Australian athletes. The potential to inspire Australians over the next decade is a key move and investment, particularly with Brisbane hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and several other key international sporting event such as the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 to be held in Perth.

SportWest Mental Health and Wellbeing Community Sport Framework - This framework was developed and distributed to community sporting clubs in 2021. The aim to support quality practice in mental health and wellbeing promotion initiatives, to identify ways to promote mental health and wellbeing and to provide guidance on what to consider when engaging a mental health and wellbeing program deliverer or service provider.

2022 Women Leaders in Sport Scholarship (WLIS) – Sport Australia is striving to achieve gender equity in sport. In 2019, women comprised 24% of CEOs across 63 national sporting organisations (NSOs), and 15% of high-performance coaches. Applications for the 2022 WLIS are now closed however applications for 2023 will likely be held around September and October 2022.

The Future of Sport Volunteering Insights Report 2021 – The estimated value of sports volunteers in terms of the labour they provide is \$4 billion per year. Volunteer involvement in sport was significantly impacted during the COVID-19 period. Whilst some are slowly returning to support the industry again there is concern that not enough will return. As a result, this report shares a vision of thinking and ideas to support the volunteer experience and enticement to these roles.

The Social, Health and Economic Value of the Australian National Aquatic Industry Report July 2021 – This report highlights the significant contribution of the aquatic industry to the overall wellbeing of Australians. It highlights the social benefits, which at times can be under-valued or difficult to measure. It shows that bringing people together, supporting marginalised groups and supporting early learning can be critical ways to support local communities.

## Please get in touch with FutureNow

FutureNow is continually seeking broad input from stakeholders and representatives in the Western Australian aquatics and community recreation sector. If you would be interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Creative Industries Industry Manager would love to hear from you:

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## References

Note that unreferenced information in this snapshot is based on direct consultation by FutureNow with WA industry.

All references current as at 25.1.2022

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