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Aquatics Industry Snapshot

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.

A role in the aquatics industry is a fun and active job and a way to connect and help community. It can involve teaching vital water safety and swimming skills, and for those in regional hotter areas, provides a place to cool down and socialise. There is an ever-increasing focus on inclusion such as multi-culturalism, indigenous programs and accessibility.

People have broadened their swimming and recreational activity locations across pools, beaches, rivers and creeks. This occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and people continue to visit these locations in 2022. It is seen as a change, aligning with the outdoor recreation trend of more people exploring the outdoors. Safety though can be a challenge, as more people venture out and swim in isolated and unsupervised areas.

Increased Western Australian beach usage intensifies reliance on lifesaving skills and services

Since interstate and overseas travel has recommenced there has been an increase in beach usage across Western Australia. Resulting in over 5,860 volunteer surf life savers performing more than 545 rescues, 58,862 preventative actions and 2,251 first aid treatments. Surf Life Saving WA are providers not only of volunteer roles, but also professional beach lifeguard services managed under a contract with local and state government agencies. In 2021/2022 there were 75 employed lifeguards.¹ Surf Life Saving WA advertised for Lifeguard Operations Supervisors and Lifeguards in September and October 2022, as well as casual instructor positions for their SurfBabies and SurfKids programs. They offer a Rookie Lifeguard program which teaches skills directly related to employment as a lifeguard and other operational support functions.

New centre in Margaret River to enhance life saving skills

April 2023 is the predicted completion date for the new Margaret River Surf Life Saving Development Centre. This centre aims to enhance training services in water safety and awareness, first aid courses and beach rescue. These are seen as essential to coastal safety, particularly with the predicted continued growth in the Western Australian population and attendees to beaches.

Employment creation with the development of new aquatic facilities

There has been significant government funding allocation to aquatic facilities in 2022, from the \$3.2 million for the Kununurra Water Park to the \$100 million for the Perth Surf Park. The continuous development of aquatic facilities creates new healthy experiences for the community and employment opportunities. It is predicted that the Perth Surf Park, due for opening in 2025, will create 65 full time equivalent jobs.²

Concern of possible pool shutdowns due to replacement costs

There is concern that with the average Australian aquatic centre being built in 1968, 40% of public pools will reach their functional lifespan by 2030. Royal Life Saving Australia predicts that \$8 billion will be needed for investment in the replacement of these pools. If Councils and Shires are unable to fund these costs, there is concern some may have to close

pools. This will influence employment and community services related to health and wellbeing.³ On the other hand, if investment is made in these facilities it could lead to additional employment opportunities.

Barriers to attracting and retaining aquatic staff in regional areas

Industry consultation has indicated that regional areas are having trouble sourcing aquatic staff such as duty managers, lifeguards and swimming instructors. Lifeguard and swimming instructor positions are often casual, and if local staff are not available, which is often the case if there is no high school, it is challenging to entice workers from outside the local area. Even regional full time duty manager roles, with the enticement of housing subsidy and relocation costs, are struggling to find staff, particularly where housing and childcare are limited or extremely expensive. A workforce report by Royal Life Saving Australia found that most staff leave the aquatic industry due to the casual nature of the work and the lower pay. Staff do however enjoy the flexible hours, types of people working in this industry and the job role.⁴

Regional industry solutions to attracting duty manager staff

Some regional Councils are offering to pay their duty managers renewal training costs which support staff retention. It is expected though that potential new staff pay initial training costs, which can be a barrier to entry to the workforce. Some Councils/Shires are considering setting up a dual role between the aquatic centre and the Council/Shire to offer a more enticing full-time position rather than a seasonal aquatic position.

Sustainability skills in the aquatics industry leading the future trend

Aquatic facilities use significant volumes of water. The preciousness of this commodity is fostering the need for staff to introduce and enhance more sustainable practices. Impressively, a Perth swimming school (Seadragonz Swim School) is leading the way, winning the 2022 Australian Swim Schools Association's National Excellence award. This achievement was awarded for their introduction and enhancement of a range of environmental initiatives such as recycling 100% of its wastewater, using solar power and being mindful in reducing and recycling, including switching to a paperless administration system and recycling/upcycling unneeded equipment.⁵ The switch to solar power is a key energy efficiency method and a consideration for aquatic facility staff given the rising electricity costs.

In 2022, a record 48 councils State-wide were endorsed through the Waterwise Council Program. There are also aquatic participants in the Water Corporation's Waterwise Aquatic Centre Program which was created in partnership with the Leisure Institute of Western Australia.⁶

Data analytics: quantitative measures for decision making

The use of data analytics in the aquatics sector is growing and is one of the top five skills recognised across Australian industries as a priority.⁷ Employees with an ability to filter and find data, analyse data and make meaningful decisions and recommendations are increasingly in demand. At the Leisure Institute of Western Australia conference (1st August 2022) ActiveXchange was discussed as a key data management and analysis tool for establishing aquatic centre location and refurbishment decisions. Understanding how to apply this data will be a key future skill.

Changing employment demographics in the aquatics industry

In 2022, employment in the aquatics industry in Western Australia remained similar to pre-COVID-19, with 4134 staff employed in 2020/2021 and 4152 in 2018/2019. There was a significant shift in employment from permanent to casual, with 53% of staff being casual in 2018/2019 compared to 71% in 2020/2021. The ratio of females to males remained similar for swimming instructors and pool lifeguards, though there has been a shift with more males working as technical pool operators, with 53% males in 2018/2019 increasing to 70% in 2020/2021. Aquatic roles continue to consist of a younger workforce, with 50% of staff under the age of 24, and 60% of the aquatic workforce is based in the Perth metropolitan area.⁸

FutureNow advocates for aquatic workforce development solutions

In August 2022, FutureNow supported the national development of two new aquatic units and an open water lifeguard skill set. The aquatics vocational skill sets are extremely important as pathways to working in the aquatics industry, with 62% of staff using skill sets as their eligibility criteria, compared to 23% staff who have an industry accredited course.⁹ Industry indicated the importance of having this introductory skill set to allow people to gain employment and to faster meet employment industry needs during peak summer periods.

Industry consultation found the skill set additions addressed 2022 skills and knowledge gaps, such as lifeguarding in inland open waters and the management of water inflatable structures. Support was also provided to amend language surrounding required industry experience for aquatic unit assessors.

Government funding of skill sets for key aquatic job roles

The Pool Lifeguard Skill Set and Swimming and Water Safety Teacher Skill are two key skill sets that fast track those interested in gaining entry level to pool lifeguarding and swimming instructor roles. In 2020/2021 the Australia Government funded these to enable eligible students, unemployed and people aged 15—24 (with some conditions) to fill staffing gaps.

In 2022, the form to secure a place for Year 12 students to obtain the swimming instructor skill set and CPR qualification became listed on the Department of Education website: <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/become-a-swimming-instructor>. Training is fully funded and enables Year 12 students to become qualified to work teaching VacSwim in Western Australia. As well as, teach Intern Swimming lessons throughout the year. This is seen as an important contributor to managing swim instructor demand for the Department of Education.

In 2023 there are 3 skill sets which are offered for free (if eligible) in pool lifeguarding, swimming and water safety teaching and aquatic technical officer skills.

Australian Swim School Association introduces on the job swimming instructor training

In 2022, the Australian Swim School Association introduced an Australian-first teaching pathway which allows ASSA Member Swim Schools to conduct their own Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety Course. The purpose, to enable potential teachers to train on the job at their place of employment, reducing the need for potential teachers to go to an external provider to gain their qualification.

What does this all mean for skill development for the aquatics industry in 2023?

The need for career entry level skills into water safety aquatic positions, such as swimming instructor and pool lifeguard will continue to be a priority skill focus in 2023. Strategic and data analysis skills will be important in planning for future refurbishment and establishment of aquatic facilities. Offering skill development and full time employment opportunities will be important for staff retention, especially for younger and regional staff. Inclusion development skills such as teaching those with a disability and creating inclusion aquatic programs will be important. Expansion of water safety skills across different water ways including the ocean, and environmental knowledge and skills creating a sustainable work environment and service will be key in 2023.

Industry Initiative Reports 2022

[Equal access to public aquatic facilities: Guidance for local Councils, Facility Managers and the aquatic sector](#) - a report commissioned by Royal Life Saving Society – Australia was developed to review the legal and human frameworks

governing aquatic facilities in Australia. Its aim to advise on reducing barriers to accessing facilities and programs. As well as a review of discrimination laws highlighting a new non-discrimination guideline for pool operators to be aware of to ensure equal public aquatic facility access.

[The State of Aquatic Facilities Infrastructure in Australia](#) - a report by Royal Life Saving Australia predicts that \$8 billion will need to be invested in Australian aquatic centre pools. This report highlights the need for Councils and Shires to start investigating how this will be managed within their local community.

[Royal Life Saving Drowning Report 2022](#) – this report sadly indicates drowning deaths increased by 15% compared to the previous year and 24% compared to the 10-year average. It highlights the need for swimming and water safety skill development.

[National Coastal Safety Report 2022](#) – a report by Surf Life Saving Australia provides a summary and analysis of community perceptions, coastal drownings, rescues, and coastal visitations. There is a significant number of adults aged 16 or above (14.2 million) across Australia that visited our coasts this year. However sadly, there has been a 70% increase in coastal drownings since 2013/14. Again this highlights the need for continued development in training and staff along our coasts.

[FutureNow Aquatic Career Resources](#) - a case study interview of an aquatic staff member and an overview of key aquatic industry interests, skills and working environment, including aquatic educational career pathways are accessible via the FutureNow website.

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We would like to hear from you

FutureNow continually seeks feedback from the aquatic sector to facilitate workforce development, and the development and delivery of responsive training and skills sets to meet emerging sector needs. If you can contribute to this in any way or require further information, please contact

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