

Background

On the 27th and 28th of November 2024, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA) facilitated the National Aquatic Industry Committee (NAIC) meeting at the South Australia Aquatic and Leisure Centre (SAALC) in Adelaide. Senior leaders from across the aquatic industry ecosystem and local governments came together to progress several key initiatives aimed at enhancing safety, accessibility, and sustainability in Australia’s aquatic facilities.

The NAIC is dedicated to strengthening the health, safety, and viability of aquatic facility ownership and operations across the country. Its core objectives include:

- Developing and maintaining the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPO)
- Advocating for the future direction of the aquatic industry
- Strengthening the aquatic workforce
- Maintaining a cohesive National Aquatic Industry Development Strategy

Around the Grounds

NAIC members were invited to provide reflections on industry challenges and opportunities while the committee updated its conflict of interest register. Themes included:

- Challenges around aquatic infrastructure
- Workforce retention, particularly early leaders
- Inconsistency in state / territory approaches to safety programs, systems (water quality, child safety, child supervision, etc)
- Cost of living pressures leading to cancellation of memberships & swim lessons
- Occupational violence and aggression towards aquatic facility staff
- Industry’s appetite to participate and support conferences and events (due to inflationary pressures)
- Increased incidents around the industry
- Supporting regional and remote aquatic facilities, particularly sole operator pools who have a lot to manage
- The need for reforms to the Fitness Industry Award
- The opportunity of Brisbane 2032 and influencing the legacy to encourage greater aquatic participation & infrastructure
- The importance of bringing the NAIC together to work on coordination and a cohesive strategy

Updates on RLSSA Research and Projects

RLSSA provided several briefs to the NAIC on a number of research and other projects that had been undertaken or were about to commence. These included:

- Enhancing DEI in Aquatics and Leisure research with Swinburne University
- Strengthening standards around AI drowning detection systems – microcredential and research
- Pool infrastructure gaps
- The National Aquatic Workforce Profile & associated research

The NAIC workshopped and discussed each presentation and provided feedback and input into each project. RLSSA thanks NAIC members for their advice and counsel as well as the contribution of member organisations to the data and research processes.

Meeting Highlights

The meeting focused on advancing critical projects and providing strategic direction for the committee's work towards 2030. Key outcomes included:

1. Launch of New Industry Guidance

- The committee authorised the publication of updated guidelines on **diving safety**, for a three-month industry consultation period
- Additional guidance into **breath holding** is being finalised
- A minor update on **lightning risk management** will be communicated to the industry

2. Support for Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium

- Planning is underway for the National Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium, to be held in March 2025, focusing on aging pools, equitable access, and sustainable facility models

3. National Aquatic Workforce Profile

- Agreement to launch a comprehensive national survey in early 2025 to update the aquatic workforce profile and address key challenges in recruitment, retention, and diversity
- The committee requested this profile be extended to dry roles on the recreation side of the facilities to develop a more comprehensive profile of the sector

4. Research Initiatives

- Support for research into enhancing DEI in aquatic facilities and supporting AI-enhanced drowning detection systems and other projects to advance safety, accessibility, and sustainability in aquatic facilities

5. Review of the Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS)

- A mid-point review of the Aquatic Facilities section of the AWSS 2030 led to recommendations for 2025–2030 action items, aligning with industry goals for safety, sustainability and inclusion.

Industry Challenges Addressed

The NAIC tackled several pressing challenges, including:

- Workforce retention challenges and the need for improved pathways and accreditation systems
- Increasing operational costs and aging infrastructure
- Contemporary safety concerns, such as occupational violence, and psychosocial risks
- Barriers to access industry activities and events, particularly for regional and underrepresented communities

Next Steps

The committee agreed to progress the following actions:

- Publish the updated guidelines on diving, breath holding, and lightning management over summer
- Initiate the National Aquatic Workforce Research (2025) Project, with survey promotion to be shared by NAIC members
- Work with RLSSA on research and planning for the 2025 Aquatic Infrastructure Symposium
- Support the mid-point review recommendations for the AWSS

Acknowledgements

RLSSA extends its gratitude to the SAALC team for hosting this productive meeting and to all NAIC members for their ongoing contributions. Together, we are building a stronger and safer aquatic industry for all Australians.

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