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SA Aquatics Industry Workforce Development Survey Report

September 2011



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Introduction

The SA Aquatics Industry Workforce Development Survey Report provides a unique snapshot into the workforce practices, employee characteristics and business drivers of public swimming pools in the South Australian Aquatics Industry.

This survey report is an outcome of the SA Aquatics Attraction Project. As an Industry Partnership Project it has been funded through the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST), South Australia Works Program which is an initiative of the Government of South Australia.

This report facilitated by Service Skills SA (SSSA) aims to assist aquatics enterprises develop and adopt better long term workforce development & business planning practices, in particular more effective strategies to manage staffing issues during peak season.

Background

The SA Aquatics Attraction Project commenced in 2009 and was designed to combat the increasing difficulties experienced by aquatic enterprises in attracting and retaining skilled professionals by providing training to job seekers in Certificate III in Community Recreation with an aquatics specialisation.

The workforce development survey component of the project commenced in late 2010. Whilst collecting survey data from the pools involved in the project SSSA identified that the opening of the SA Aquatics and Leisure Centre and other industry expansion would create a skills hump in the 2011 season. In light of this information DFEEST responded by extending the project timelines and providing further funding for up to 100 participants to undergo aquatics skill set training. The project extension is currently taking place.

Methodology

From late November 2010 to early January 2011 SSSA conducted a simple face-to-face survey lasting approximately 1 hour. Where possible a tour of the pools facilities was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the environment on which survey responses were based.

A total of 27 pools were surveyed, 22 of these being the initial enterprises engaged in the SA Aquatics Attraction Project. An additional 6 interviews were conducted with other key industry organisations such as, Associations, Registered Training Organisations and government departments who work with the aquatics industry. For a more detailed break down of the pool characteristic please turn to page 4.

For the purpose of the SA Aquatics Attraction Project SSSA compiled several aquatics industry association databases to form a list of metropolitan and regional pools. The list of metropolitan pools included were located within one and a half hours travel from the Adelaide CBD and provided aquatics services to the general public as a core part of their business. Based on this database the survey report represents 50% of the SA metropolitan aquatics industry. Within this survey segment there are three large swimming centres and a group of aquatic franchises.

It should also be noted that the statistical data reported in this survey only reflects the responses from the 27 pools while the industry issues addressed incorporates responses from the other key industry stakeholders.

SSSA has compiled and presented the survey data in a direct and simplified manner for easy interpretation by industry stakeholders. This survey was not intended to be a scientifically valid research project.

1.1 Segment Snapshot

Out of the 27 pools surveyed 18 (66%) were council owned with 10 (37%) of these being council managed and the other 8 (29%) managed by private contractors. Out of the 8 council owned and privately run pools 6 of these were in regional locations.

Pools surveyed varied from large aquatic centres with multiple pools to smaller single pool centres. Approximately half of the businesses had indoor pools and just over 50% of the pools surveyed had a 50m pool. 25% provided gym & fitness services and on average each business had 2 pools.

56% of pools surveyed were open for 12 months of the year with the seasonal pools open on average of 5.8 months per year. The surveyed pools on average were open 70 hours during the week and 18 hours on the weekend taking the weekly total to 88 hours per week. This indicates that during the week pools were generally open 14 per day.

The total annual attendance of these 27 pools was 3.19 million. This represents an average attendance of 118,000 per pool. The two busiest pools represent 36% of the annual attendance figure. If these pools are removed from the figures, the average attendance for the remaining 25 pools is 82,000 per pool. This figure also includes the six regional pools whose average attendance was 28,000. It should be noted that these figures are prior to the opening of the SA Aquatics and Leisure Centre and the temporary closure of the Adelaide Aquatics Centre.

If the surveys average annual attendance figure (118,000) was extrapolated across Service Skills SA's current metropolitan pool database of 48 pools (not including school, hotel or tidal pools) then average annual attendance in the SA metropolitan area would be approximately 5.68 million (five visits per person).

On a similar basis the extrapolated total annual attendance figure for regional pools in South Australia based on the current SSSA database of 78 regional pools (inclusive of school pools) would be approximately 2.19 million.

Total employment amongst the 27 pools surveyed was 1096 with the average number of staff equating to 42. Interestingly this means that on average staff are covering 2,912 attendances annually. Pools indicated that total labour cost was on average 43% of turnover.



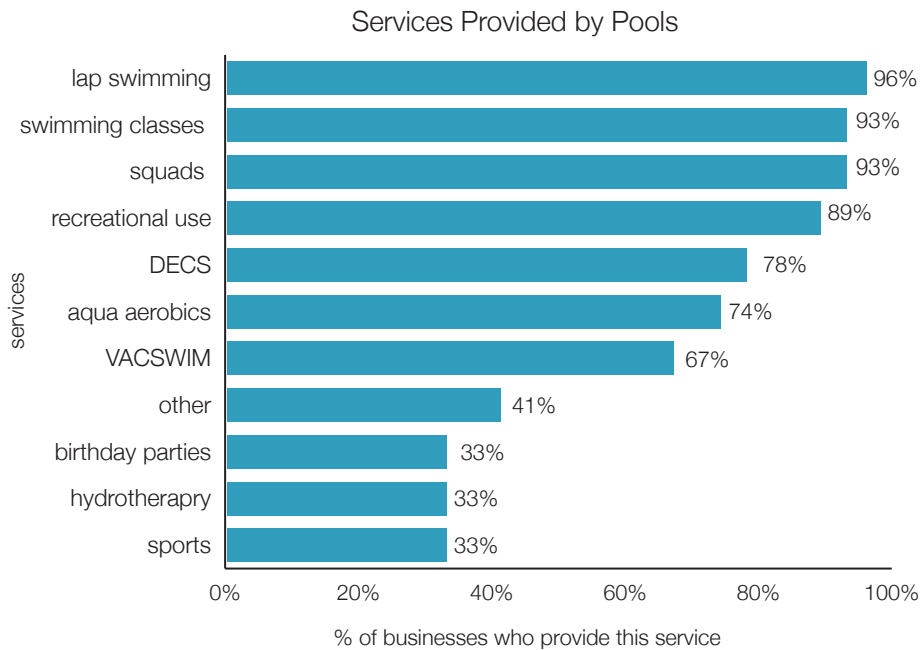
Burnside Swimming Centre



Unley Swimming Centre

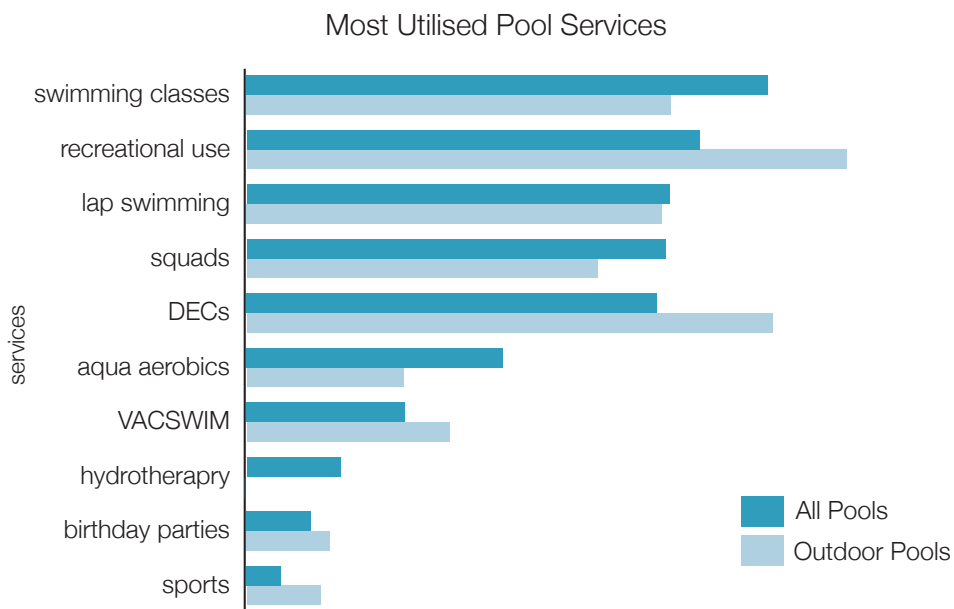
Topic 1: Pool Characteristics

1.2 Services Provided By Pools



Comments: Surveyed pools offered a very similar range of services and maximised their service menu where possible. This data indicates that most pools provided lap swimming, swimming classes, squads and recreational use where as 1/3 provided hydrotherapy, birthday parties and other sporting activities.

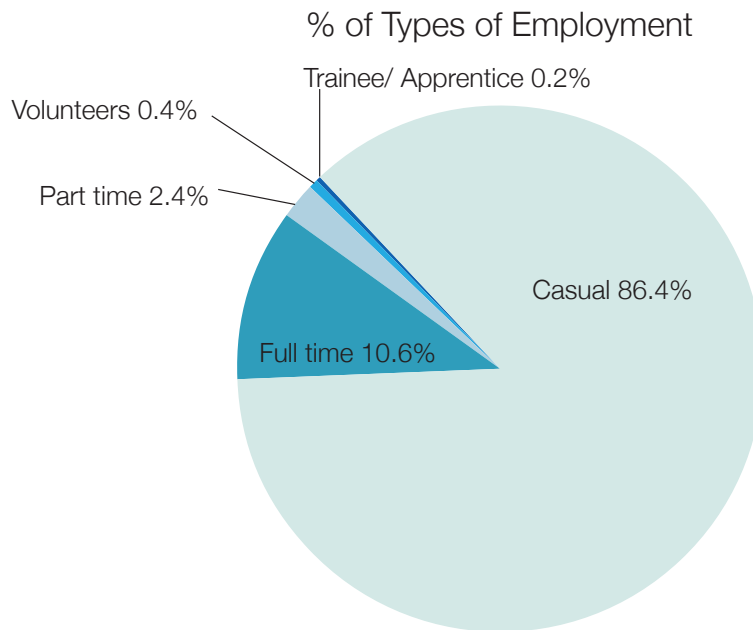
1.3 Most Utilised Pool Services



Comments: The top two utilised services for 'All Pools' were swimming classes & recreational use whilst "Outdoor Pools' identified recreational use & DECS swimming classes.

Topic 2: Employment Characteristics

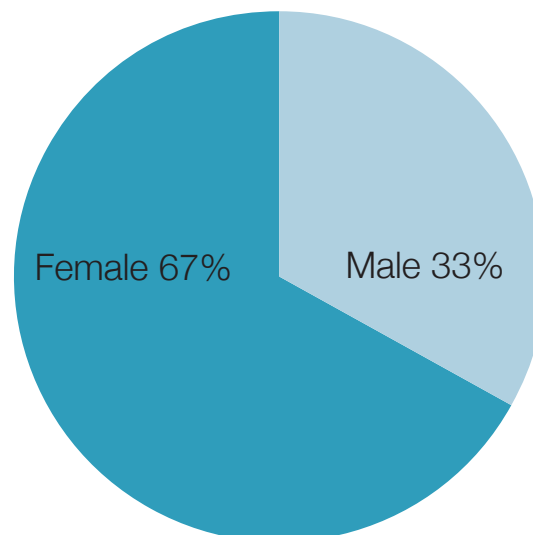
2.1 Types of Employment



Comments: This graph reflects the industry trend for casual employment. The graph indicates the traineeship system does not fit the current aquatics employment model. Metropolitan legislative and insurance obligations makes it difficult to engage volunteers, however in contrast to this the regional aquatics community relies heavily on volunteers to run community public pools.

2.2 Gender Ratios

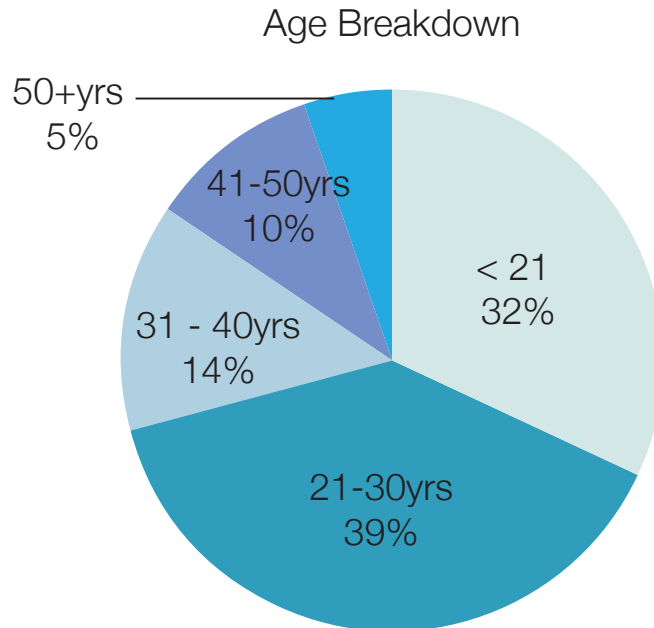
% of Gender Ratios Across All Pools



Comments: The higher percentage of women may be attributed to the high level of contact with children and the flexible casual nature of employment being compatible with those who have family commitments. Some pool owners indicated that their current gender balance was being perpetuated by the use of staff networks to recruit new employees.

Topic 2: Employment Characteristics

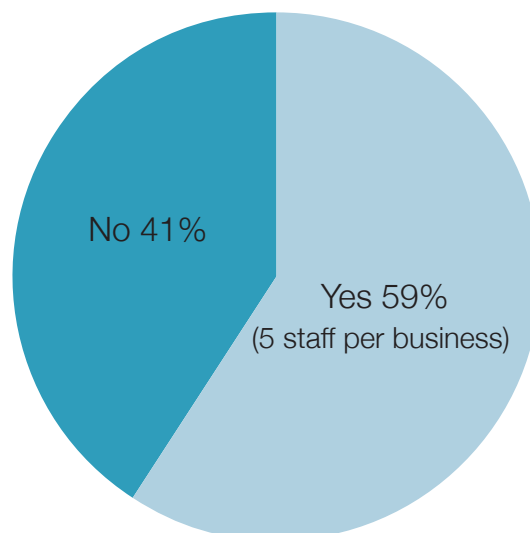
2.3 Age Breakdown



Comments: Over 70% of the industry is under 30 years of age. It would be interesting to compare this to the demographics of pool attendance as some sports facilities are endeavouring to employ more mature workers to match their customers age profile.

2.4 Staff Retention - will any of your staff leave over the next 12 months?

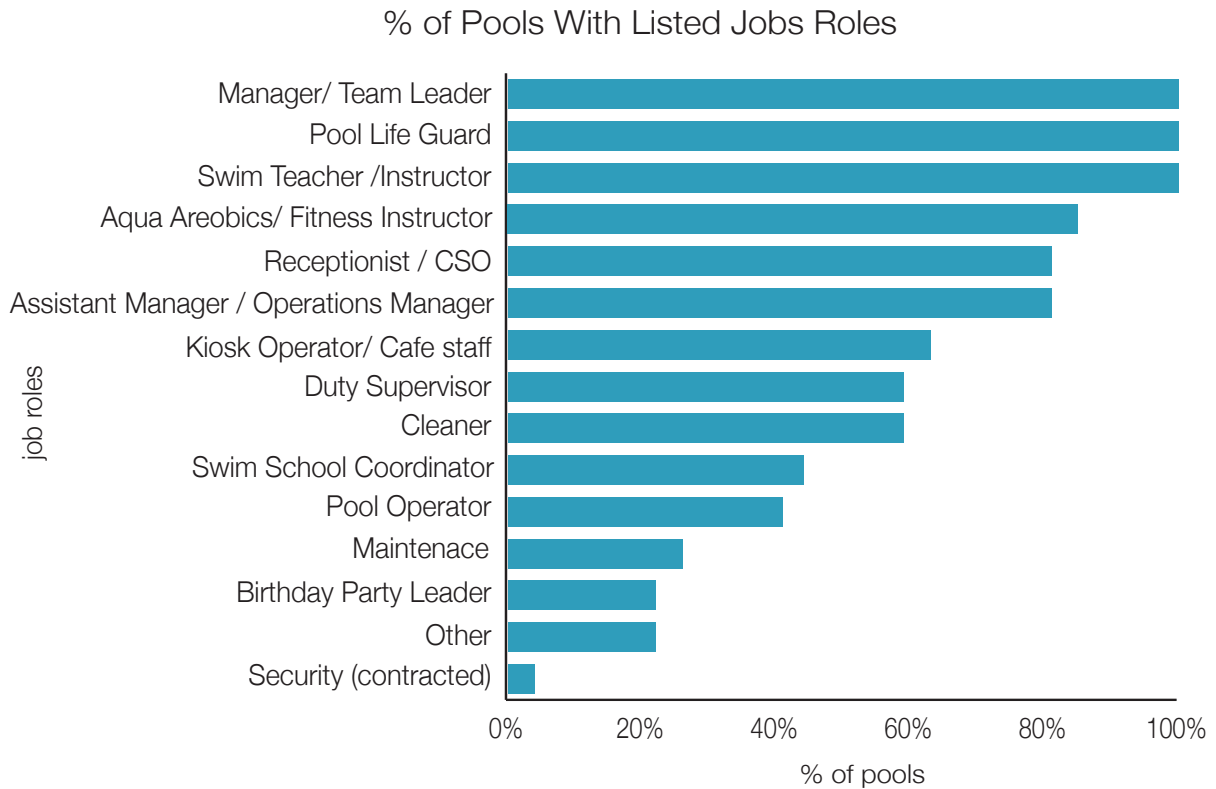
% of Pools Who Predicted Staff to Leave Over the Next 12 Months



Comments: 50% commented that the student nature of their workforce played a large part in the annual staff turnover. These predicted staff losses (77) appear very optimistic when compared to the previous twelve months staff losses (147) especially when the next twelve months includes the opening of the SA Aquatics and Leisure Centre, the renovation of the Adelaide Aquatics Centre and the expansion of several other pools.

Topic 2: Employment Characteristics

2.5 Job Roles

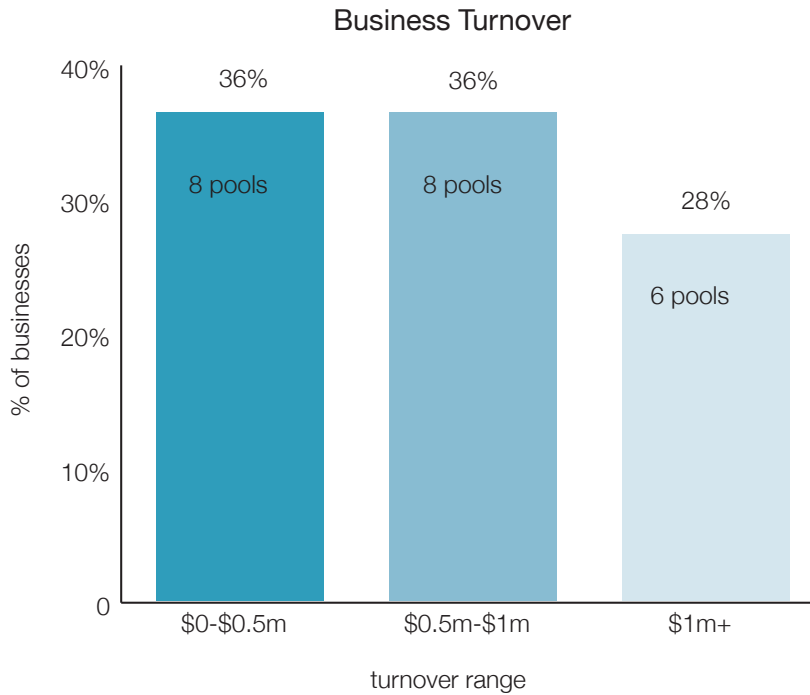


Comments: Managers, Pool Life Guards and Swim Teachers were identified as the essential occupational roles.



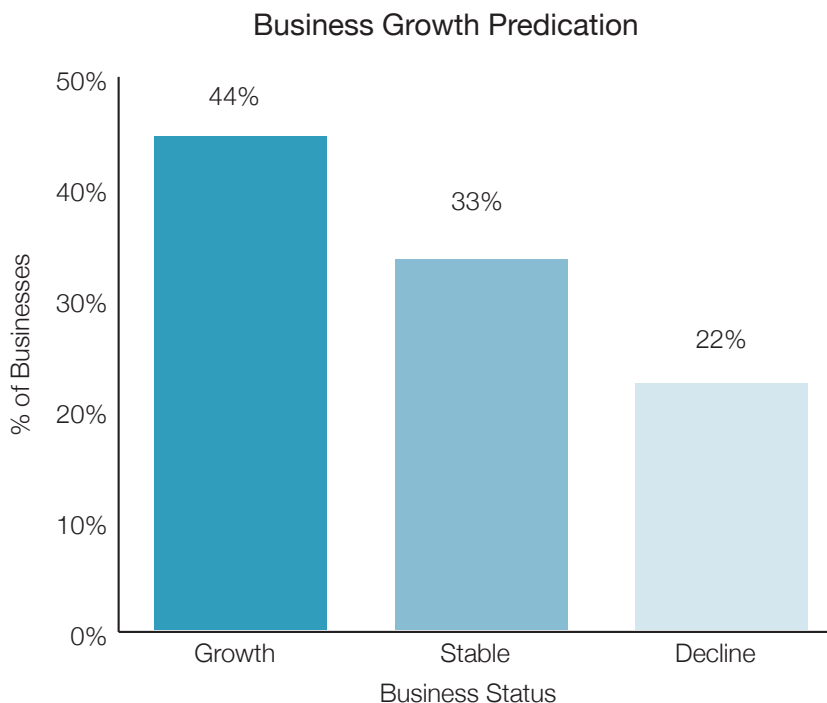
Burnside Swimming Centre

3.1 Business Turnover



Comments: Turnover from six of the businesses surveyed included other revenue sources aside from aquatics. (Three of these were in the \$1m+ dollar turnover bracket.) It should be noted that 5 pools did not respond.

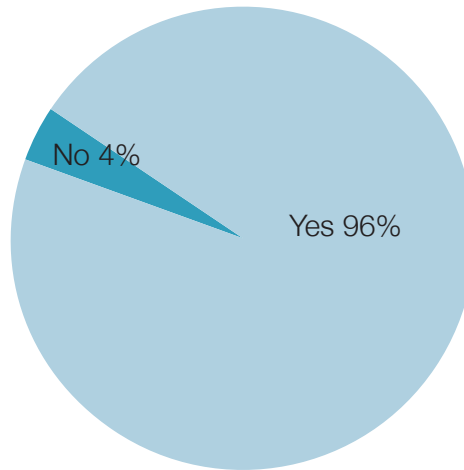
3.2 Business Growth Predictions



Comments: The average growth change for businesses was 7.5%, this value excluded a growth percentage of a centre that was currently undergoing an expansion that would triple their size. Of the businesses predicting a decline the average percentage change was 12.3%.

3.3 Pools With Ongoing Business Plans

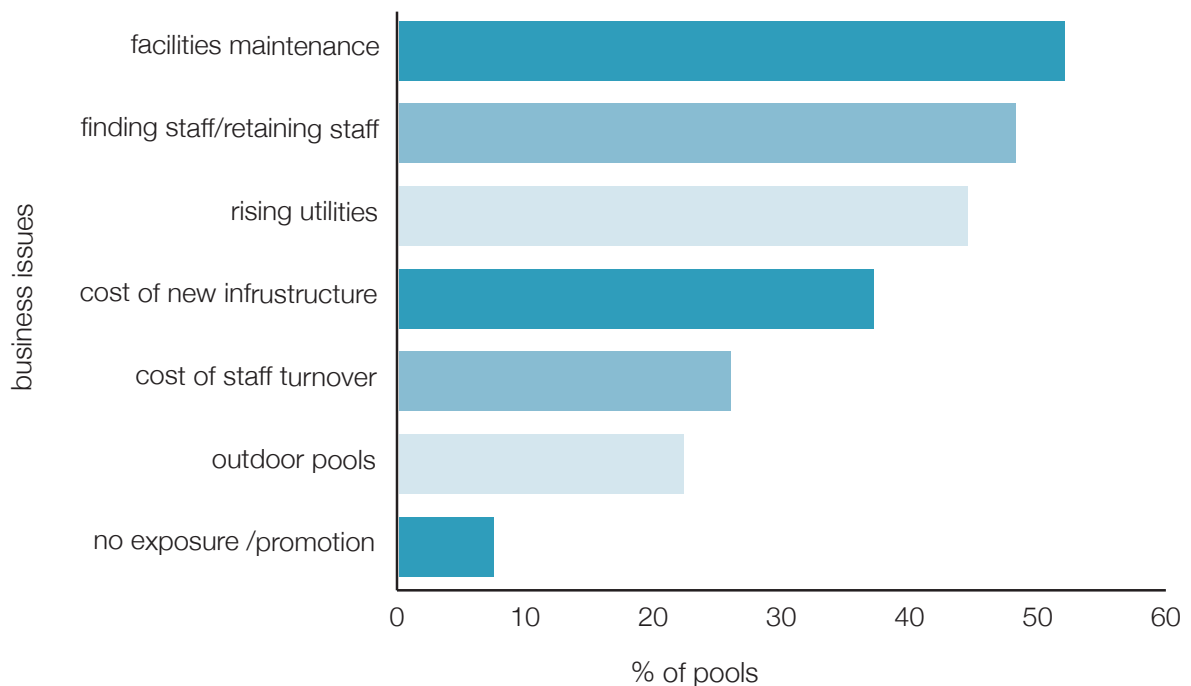
Pools Who Have an Ongoing Business Plan



Comments: Almost 100% of the pools had an on going business plan which is a great start to ensure healthy workforce development practices.

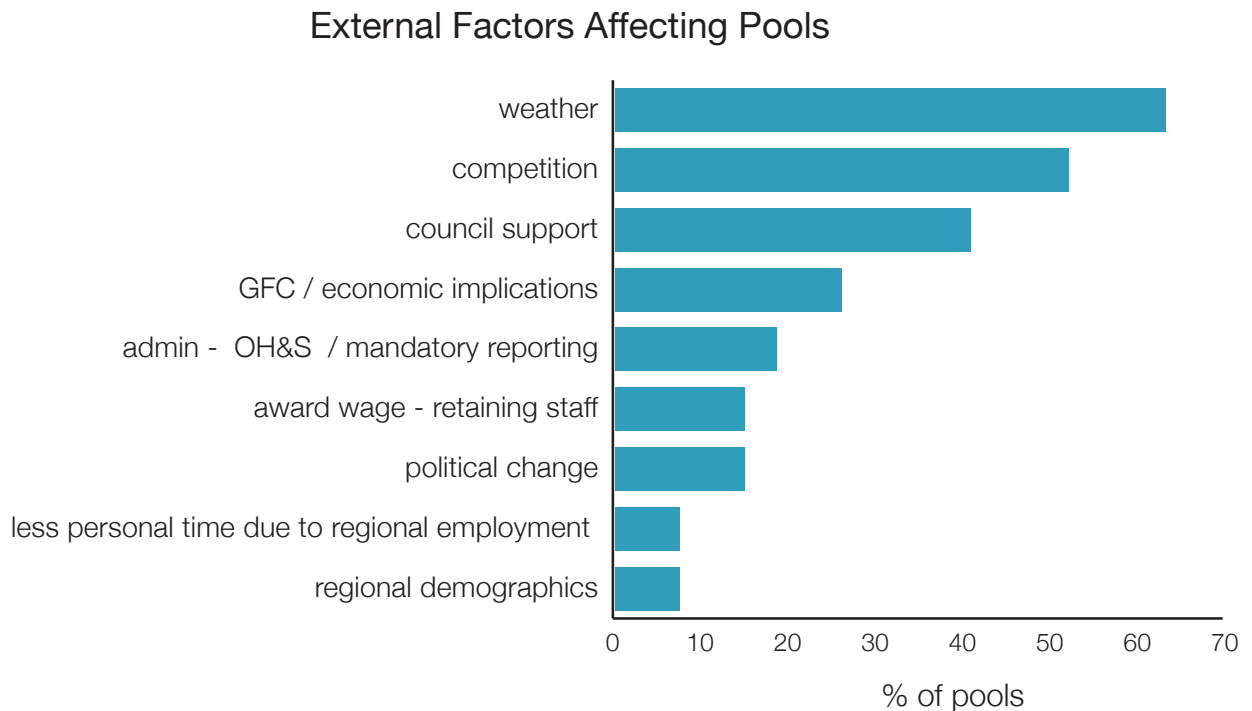
3.4 Major Business Issues

Major Business Issues



Comments: The constant need to maintain facilities and maintain a well-staffed casual workforce were identified as the two highest issues. The additional cost of staff turnover as the fourth-highest issue also highlights the need for industry to create more effective attraction and retention strategies.

3.5 External Factors Affecting Pools



Comments: All pools are affected by the weather, indoor and outdoor pools alike. With such an unpredictable and uncontrollable factor affecting business outcomes it makes it all the more imperative for pools to strategically risk manage the components of their business they can control.

Pools owned by councils, in particular those managed by the council, commented that they were often influenced by political support and change at local and state government level.

Some pools commented that the Global Financial Crisis had affected them. In particular this was reflected by the number of parents who withdrew or reduced the number of children attending swimming lessons or other extracurricular aquatic activities.

Topic 4: Workforce Development Strategies

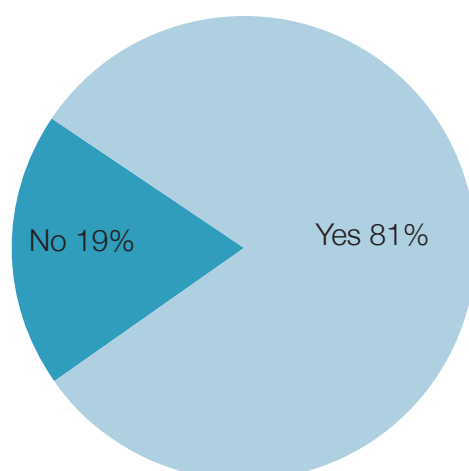
4.1 Workforce Development Strategies



Comments: 96% of pools indicated they considered and incorporated workforce development strategies into their business practices. The graph indicates there is significant room for improvement in some pools in the lower cost strategy areas of job flexibility, communication, respect and humour/fun.

4.2 Staff Lost in the last 12 months

% of Pools That Had Staff Leave in the Last 12 Months

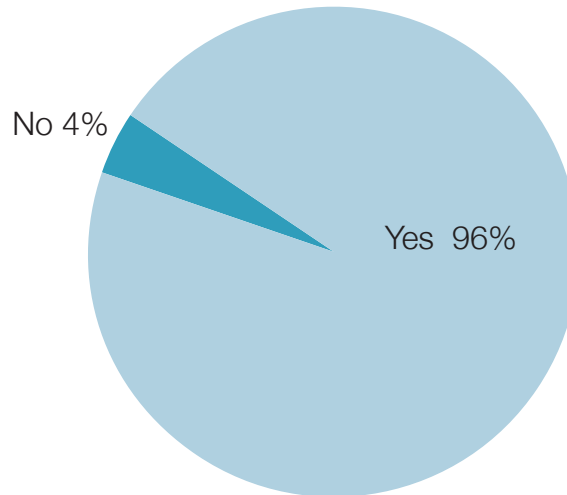


Comments: 81% of the pools had staff leave in the last 12 months. On average each business lost 7 employees. This represents an average labour turnover for the pools surveyed of 13.4%. This is surprisingly low given the seasonality and casual nature of the employment.

Topic 4: Workforce Development Strategies

4.3 Staff Employment Needs

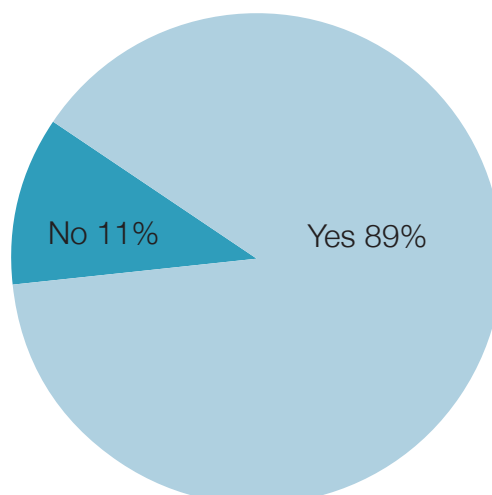
% of Pools That Will Employ New Staff in the Next 12 Months



Comments: Over 95% of the pools identified that they will employ new staff over the next 12 months. Across the 27 pools the total new or replacement employment is predicted to be 254, which is an increase of 23%. On average this equated to 9 staff per pool. The figure is distorted by one expansion that includes 45 new staff. These figures do not include the opening of the SA Aquatics and Leisure Centre which may come close to doubling these figures.

4.4 Employment Based on Industry Recognised and Accredited Skills

% of Pools That Employ Staff Based on Industry Recognised and Accredited Skills

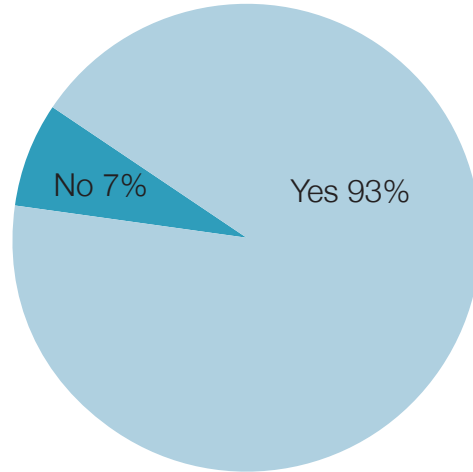


Comments: Pools employed based on industry recognised and accredited skills Pool Life Guard, AUSTSWIM Swimming teacher of Water Safety, Pool Operators, Senior First Aid and Bronze Medallion. For many pools it was necessary to have police checks prior to employment. Mandatory notification training was in the process of being implemented into over 50% of the pools. Several pools did comment that some staff were engaged whilst still in the process of completing their industry recognised and accredited skills training.

Topic 4: Workforce Development Strategies

4.5 Professional Development Training for Staff

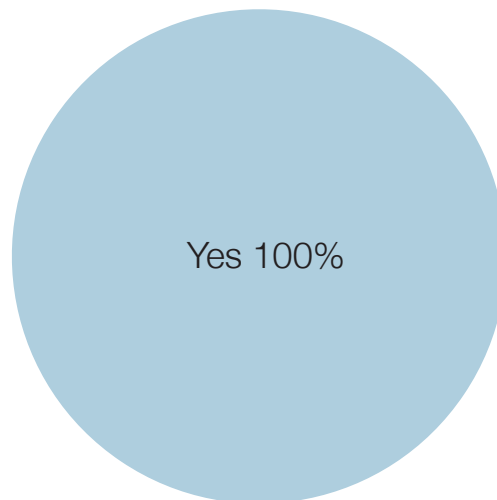
% of Pools That Provide Professional Development Training To Their Staff



Comments: Pools indicated that the focus on professional development training was on aquatics skills sets. Some pools provided full time employees with professional development in other skills areas. Most pools did identify that the nature of the workforce being predominantly casual made it difficult to coordinate or offer professional development opportunities to their workforce.

4.6 Rigorous Recruitment & Induction Processes

% of Pools That Implement a Thorough Recruitment & Induction Process

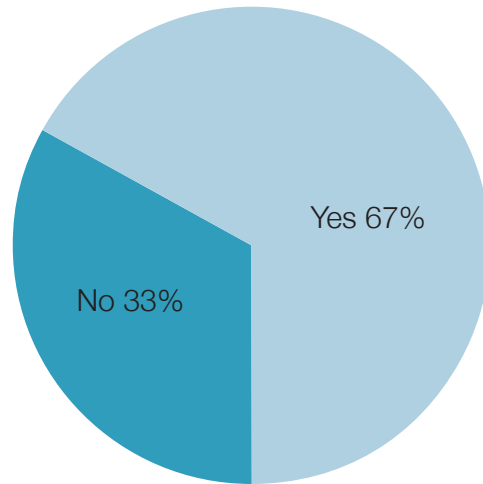


Comments: This graph indicates that the pools surveyed understand the importance of a thorough recruitment and induction process.

Topic 4: Workforce Development Strategies

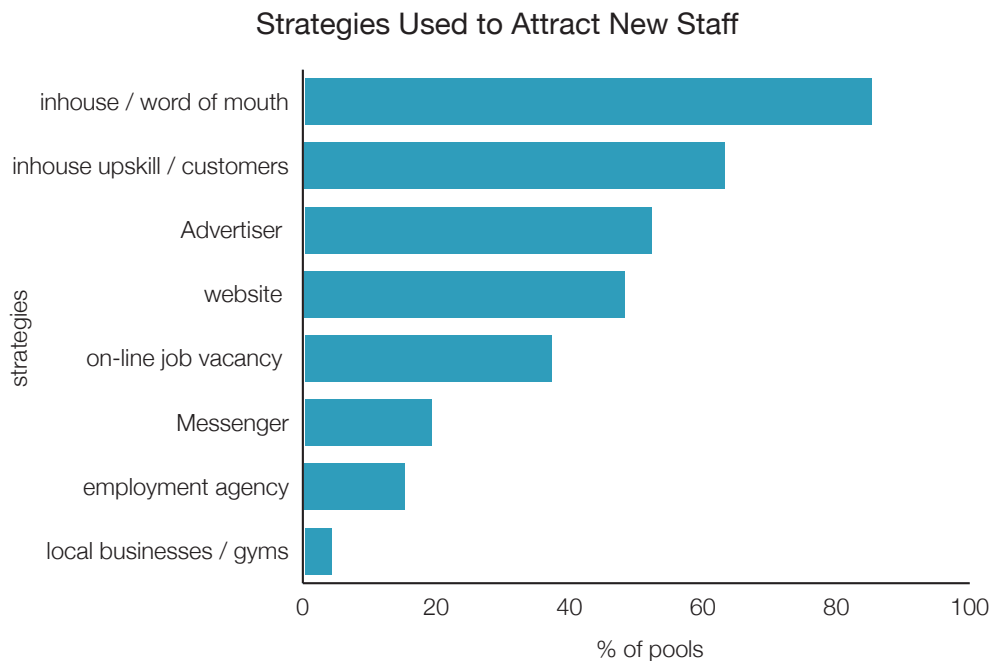
4.7 Difficulties Recruiting and Developing Skilled Staff

% of Pool Experiencing Difficulties Recruiting & Developing Skilled Staff



Comments: Two thirds of pools have identified this as an issue. It should be noted that pools found it harder to recruit staff that were already skilled as often training was required.

4.8 Strategies to Attract New Staff

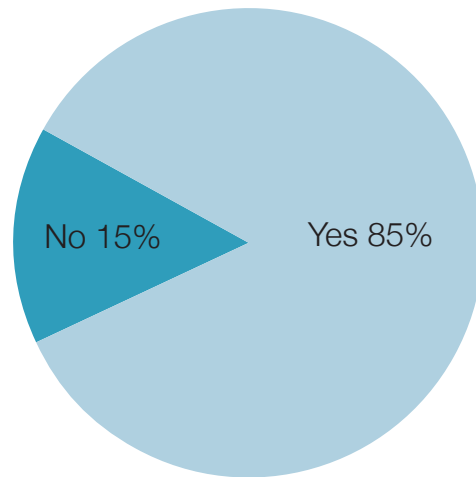


Comments: The pool community network was an essential tool in sourcing suitable employment candidates. Other external marketing sources were used but the lack of public understanding about the role, tasks and required training for those working in the aquatics space made it difficult to source the right candidates. This lack of public understanding was reinforced in the first stage of the Aquatics Attraction Project process when a significant number of non-swimmers (sinkers) believed they could undertake the bronze medallion.

Topic 4: Workforce Development Strategies

4.9 Are you aware of the likely impacts of the ageing population in SA?

% of Pools Aware of the Implications of the Ageing Population in SA



Comments: Pools were aware of the impacts of ageing population but many had not considered how it would impact their workforce. The predicted South Australian skills shortage will result from a large proportion of the workforce retiring. In regards to the aquatics industry this provides an opportunity to tap into a new workforce of mature adults who are looking for a career change likely to be based on casual employment. With more time for recreation retirees are more likely to frequent pool facilities in coming years flagging potential growth in this target demographic for pools.

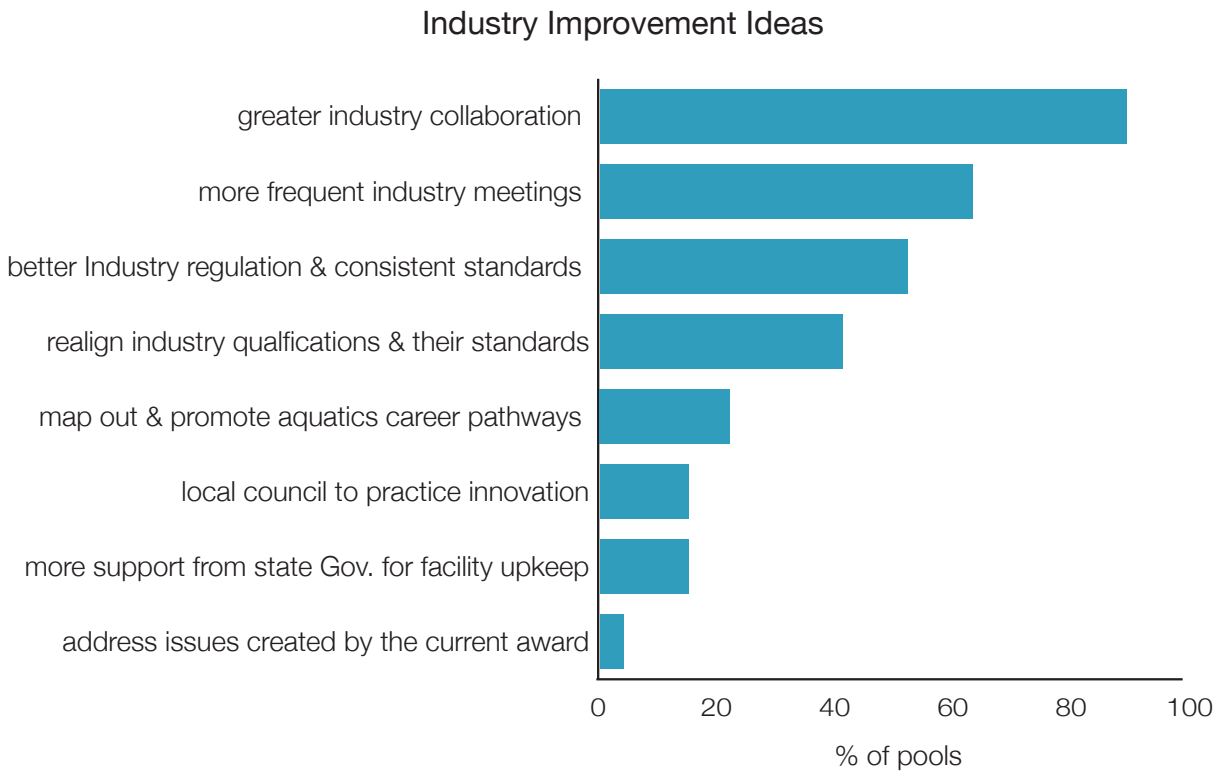
4.10 Identified Training Areas to Up-skill Staff



Comments: Pools strongly identified a need for greater customer service. Following this was need for communication and marketing and promotions.

5.1 Industry Issues

This graph is a compilation of the responses to the simple lead question “What do think the industry should do to improve?”.



Comments: The two highest rating responses strongly indicates that the industry wants greater collaboration and communication. This desire extends beyond workforce development issues into regulation, standards, innovation, facility upkeep and the award.

5.2 Critical Industry Comments

Collaboration & Communication

- There is not enough communication & collaborative discussion between pool managers.
- Pool managers find it hard to attend industry meetings as they are time poor and often have to travel long distances to meetings.
- Pool managers need a central point to find out about all SA Aquatic Industry activity.
- Councils do not encourage their pools to collaboratively work together to solve similar issues.
- Industry needs to clearly understand the role and objectives of all key industry stakeholders eg. industry associations, registered training organisations and government departments.

Workforce Development

- The continuous cost of training updates places additional pressure on the volatile casual workforce.
- It is expensive to train new staff during work experience (shadow shifts).

Topic 5: Industry Advice

- Qualified Surf Life savers are not qualified to work as pool lifeguards. Currently there is no clear training pathway that encourages a transition from surf to pools. This is a large untapped pool of potential employees with the relevant aquatics skills and necessary personal attributes.
- There is a lack of duty supervisors - the middle rung of the industry.

Career Pathway

- The general public have little knowledge of the job roles and the required training need to work in the aquatics environment.
- Industry needs a clear career pathway mapping out accredited training and occupation outcomes.

Industry Development

- As the overheads for running pools increases more councils are considering outsourcing management of their pools. There is a concern that the commercial objectives of these businesses may compromise service and facility operations.
- Industry associations & bodies need to be more dynamic and increase the number of industry initiatives.
- The Aquatics Industry needs a more consistent front marketed to the general public.
- There is a lack of water safety promotion regarding the risk of swimming to the general public, people have become too complacent.
- There are no industry conference and events suitable for aquatics employees.
- There are new cultural groups living in South Australia that lack experience with water placing them at great risk.
- South Australia's Aquatics industry is 15yrs behind other states.
- There are many ageing pool facilities that require upgrading.

Industry standards – Safety

- Industry needs a unified approach to water safety and implementing water safety standards.
- Not all pools are operating within the Royal Life saving guidelines.
- Not all pools were clear of the timing and requirements surrounding mandatory notification
- There is no monitoring of pools at apartments & caravan parks.

Industry standards – Training

- The standards of recently trained aquatics industry professionals is inconsistent. Some pools felt that RTOs needed a more uniform and consistent approach to training.
- Industry needs to create a set of educational standards clarifying what the recognised industry accreditation is.

Regional

- Regional pools are experiencing skills shortages in qualified lifeguards and swimming instructors.
- There needs to be a more effective coordinated and strategic approach from RTO's who deliver training in regional areas.
- Regional pool managers need a way to communicate to assist each other with staffing & industry issues.

Topic 6: Recommendations

6.1 Service Skills SA Comments and Recommendations

From the information collected it is evident a fair portion of the workforce development challenges sit at an industry level. Industry has clearly identified the need for greater collaboration and a collective workforce development plan that addresses the challenges of the large casual workforce, the need for consistent training standards and a clear career pathway.

It was pleasing to see that most pools surveyed indicated they were at least aware or currently implementing good workforce development strategies with some pools going above and beyond. Many of the aquatics professionals interviewed had worked in the industry for a long time and advised they had no intention of leaving the sector as they loved their work.

Service Skills SA believes that the most effective way to address and tackle the industry challenges identified in this report is to power up the peak body Recreation SA through increased industry membership. Recreation SA has an aquatics specific body, Aquatic Recreation SA, which is already gathering momentum as it works to facilitate development opportunities, foster industry networks, manage the SA Watch Around Water accreditation and input codes and standards for the industry.

To assist in this process Service Skills SA has put forward two sets of recommendations, one specifically designed for pools to improve their internal workforce development practices and the other designed for the industry as a whole.

Individual Pools

- Collaborate to seek out best practice and utilise support available through the industry peak bodies.
- Improve customer service capability across all staff
- Derive a simple annual workforce plan from your business plan
- Adopt the lower cost workforce development strategies of job flexibility, communication, respect and humour/fun. (These are currently in place in one third of pools.)
- Document staff losses and the reasons annually to feed into the annual workforce plan.
- Review employment age mix to align employment diversity to changes in the regional customer base.

Industry

Strengthen coordinated industry peak body action by:

- Encouraging all key support bodies to have representation (*The Office For Recreation and Sport, Sport SA, RTO's, industry organisations, other Government initiatives*) with Aquatic Recreation SA (Rec. SA).
- Promoting Pool membership of Rec. SA.
- Developing an SA key industry stakeholders map which identifies organisations role, objectives and contacts. (Particularly important for organisations that play dual roles in industry e.g. RTO / industry association)
- Seeking national best practice
- Creating a regional sub-committee to deal with regional specific concerns
- Fostering greater collaboration between council owned pools who share similar issues (peer mentoring)
- Ensuring there is the support & drive for the SA Pools Code of Conduct to be completed (Rec. SA is working on this).

Topic 6: Recommendations

Industry (continued)

Stronger collaborative engagement in the training and workforce development space to achieve:

- An industry based workforce development strategy.
- An annual aquatics skills set project via Skills for All.
- A clear training pathway between Surf Life and Pool Lifeguards to utilise this resource of skilled workers.
- An aquatics career pathway and training resource.
- The creation of a recruitment leaflet (specifying qualifications & job requirements) which predominately is designed to attract people into the industry.
- Industry professional development events for pool employees