

27 April 2020

To the Honourable {name of Minister}
Minister for {Health/Sport and Recreation etc}

The Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association was established in the 1970's and is the professional association for swimming coaches and teachers and the Industry association for swim schools. We have 7000 financial members and regularly communicate with the 30,000+ coaches, teachers and swim school operators on our database. We provide a leadership role for the industry and have been providing members with information, resources and advice to manage the COVID-19 crisis in line with official Government sources.

On behalf of swimming coaches, teachers and learn to swim schools, we are writing to you to share information about the industry and how COVID-19 is affecting swimming and learn to swim in Australia.

There are over 3,000 swimming pools and swim schools in Australia that we are aware of, and we estimate this relates to well over 100,000 industry professionals. Three quarters of all swimming pools are run by the private sector.

All swimming pools closed their doors on 23 March (or before) due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a nation surrounded by water, drowning prevention has been an essential part of our children's education for generations. While there are a number of important drowning prevention initiatives, learning-to-swim is by far the primary driver that affects our national drowning statistics, particularly for our children. Prolonged closure due to COVID-19 could indeed put lives at risk in the future.

Swimming is also Australia's number one Olympic sport with more medals won than any other sport. Our International success is due to the access to excellent swimming pool facilities and the provision of highly professional coaching and teaching of athletes.

Our industry is in crisis with many Swim Schools and aquatic providers contemplating shutting their doors forever unless business can resume sooner rather than later. We provide essential life and survival skills that last forever and training and competition environments which are a fundamental part of Australian society and way of life.

Swim Schools are recognised as an educational facility and should be treated the same way as pre-school and other educational institutions. In addition, swimming is a community sport which should be re-established as soon as possible in line with recent government announcements regarding the physical and mental health of our swimmers and communities.

We are in an environment that can practise social distancing, classes and squads can be taught with a low ratio of students to teachers/coaches and can be staggered to allow distancing within changeroom and pool areas. Separate entrance and exit points can be introduced to create a one-way flow of traffic. Chlorine and other pool chemicals disinfect the water and surrounding areas and all registered swim schools are tested multiple times throughout the day for exacting chlorine and chemical levels. It has been stated by health authorities that COVID-19 cannot survive in correctly managed swimming pools.

Swimming pools are more than capable of putting in place the same social distancing precautions that grocery stores, medical centres and essential services have. For instance, separating seating and change areas, placing plastic barriers around customer service areas and reducing the number of patrons in each area at a time.

Opening swimming pools will allow children and parents to have some normality and routine along with exercise and teaching vital skills for co-ordination, survival, and following instruction.

As you would be aware, the swimming pool industry has been decimated in the past few months. Highly trained staff have been stood down, operations have ceased, and bills still need to be paid for keeping facilities and assets maintained. Swimming pools cannot simply close their doors and be left unattended. Swimming pools need to keep running and hygiene practises must be continued, so expenses continue to compound on a daily basis.

We implore the State Government to consider our crisis and act with the following:

1. Phase one, allow learn-to-swim programs to re-open under reasonable guidelines for social distancing and hygiene;
2. Implement a staged approach for re-opening swimming pools under reasonable guidelines for social distancing and hygiene. This staged approach to be achieved in a controlled and coordinated manner with three proposed stages as follows:
 - a. re-commence high performance squad training. We support the work that Swimming Australia has been doing to enable this to occur at a State and Federal level;
 - b. allow swimming squads for those athletes who have qualified for National Age and Open Championships (in various aquatic sports) to resume;
 - c. Enable general swimming squads to resume.
3. Introduce a specific swimming pool and learn to swim stimulus to support and assist swimming pool and swim school business owners to re-open and maintain facilities/assets until their operations can re-commence.

The above actions will provide a lifeline and allow thousands of coaches, teachers and businesses to survive, resume employment opportunities for staff, inject much needed spirit into the community and provide economic stimulus at a local level.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this most urgent matter. We look forward to providing any additional information or meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss our requests in more detail.

Yours sincerely



Tony Shaw
President



Brendon Ward
Chief Executive Officer

CC: State Premier