

# Swimming in Australia: A Cultural Study

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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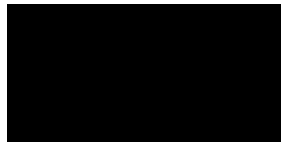
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## Declaration of originality

I, Shane Gould, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ‘Swimming in Australia: A cultural study’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

**Signature**



Shane Elizabeth Gould

**Date** 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019

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## Abstract

To all appearances swimming in Australia is a popular and serious activity. In fact, one organisation goes so far to claim that ‘Australia swims, it is who we are. Swimming is in our cultural DNA’. Governments and other Australian agencies provide generous funding for public pools, water safety, and swimming education, as well as high performance sport. Swimming and water safety organizations make up a vibrant commercial service industry. Swimming has become central to Australian national identity, reaching an apotheosis every four years at the Olympic Games. Despite this level of financial investment and apparent cultural value, less than half of all Australian children can swim 50 metres by the time they leave primary school and an average of 282 people drown each year.

This interpretive cultural study uses a variety of qualitative methods to interrogate swimming as a prominent movement culture. It explores aspects of swimming culture in Australia such as beach swimming, pool and river play, lessons, and racing, and asks whether swimming is an Australian ‘thing’ or is the narrative hyperbolic? As an Australian champion swimmer I realise I have contributed to this narrative, which adds a unique dimension to this study, but is only part of the story. Positioning myself as subject, insider, questioner, and commentator, I examine slogans used to sustain national identity narratives, and peruse roles of industry organizations, asking “who says what about swimming, and why?” I undertook 12 weeks of field research driving across Australia, stopping in country towns and regional cities, asking “where do you like to swim? And, what do you do when you go swimming?” When I saw ‘swimmers’ standing in water at the beach, I asked myself, “how do people define “*swim*” when they go swimming?” For those people who say they swim, what does ‘swim’ mean to them? I also immersed myself with adult ocean swimmers, who create a sense of place through their aquatic wanderings in the ocean in Tasmania. To analyse this fieldwork data, I utilised insights from educational, social, and environmental geography perspectives, and paid particular attention to the values of movement in nature, which is the essence of swimming in water.

This thesis reveals the complex meanings that constitute the culture of swimming in Australia. There is a tension between the reality of Australians in the water and the hyperbolic feel-good narratives, such as ‘a nation of swimmers’ and there are differences in cultural-linguistic meanings, and organisations who blur private and public service, as they vie for public funds and compete for the same customers. Revealing these polysemic meanings and tensions contributes to broader academic debates about the culture(s) of sport and physical activity, and the place and meaning of swimming in Australian national identity. Findings from this cultural study are also potentially significant to swimming and water safety education. For example, findings from this study suggest that swimming education could be more effective if the significance of humans’ reciprocal and interactive relationship with water, which differs perceptually and somatically to experiences on land, was embedded into swimming instruction models.

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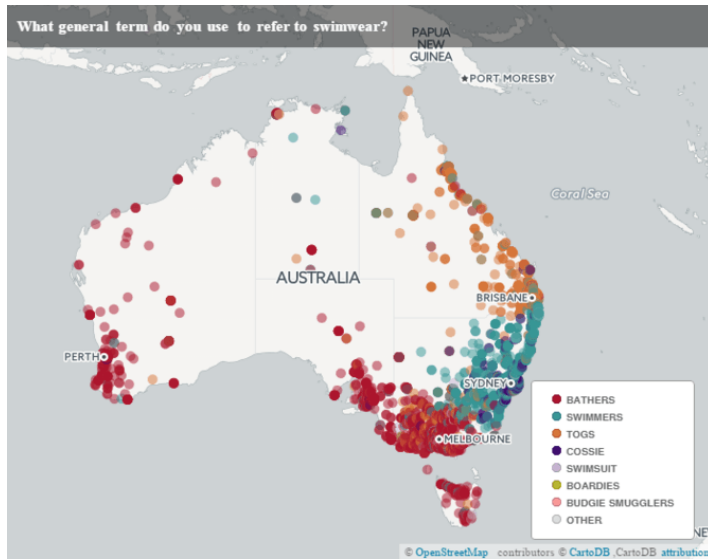
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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### **Swimming as ‘culture’**

Swimming in Australia is ostensibly a popular activity. Swimming is a means to cool off, a form of exercise, a recreational activity and a competitive sport. In Australia, public pools cater for people who want to do laps for fitness, meet casually and cool off, while thousands of backyard pools are sites of significant recreational swimming culture for families and friendships. Swimming lessons are a rite of passage and squads and swim clubs exist in most public swimming pools around Australia. Swimming at ocean beaches is also popular— from wading, wave jumping and body surfing to swimming long distances parallel to the shore. Australian rivers are sought after places for swimming activities that are associated with picnics under cool shady trees recreating on the water in boats or water skis. Swimming education is considered as a life-skill enabling safer aquatic sports and recreation in on and around water. Swimming and water safety skills are heavily promoted and funded for drowning prevention, or to transition into sport swimming. This is reflected in financial support by municipal, state and federal governments for swimming facilities and swimming services. Swimming is also a high profile competitive sport largely funded by tax payers through Sport Australia (formerly the Australian Sports Commission) and Australian swimmers have often excelled on the world stage. Olympic swimming champions are identifiable national heroes.

Accordingly, to be able to swim and to swim well, is valued in Australia, socially and financially. The number of swimming organisations, public pools and learn to swim businesses, attest to the esteem and value for swimming. It could also be argued that swimming is part of Australian culture, and it is a cultural practice. Swimming narratives in Australia use language and concepts that are part of the way Australians organise everyday life. For example, 'swimming lessons' are a ritual childhood activity, understood to be a paid for series of lessons for a child conducted systematically at an aquatic venue by certified teachers. The terms kick, streamline, duck dive, blow bubbles, and float, have agreed upon meanings for actions learned in 'swimming lessons' that potentially aid the child in becoming safer and competent in and around water. Freestyle and backstroke are known as types of swimming strokes, and most school children know what a school swimming carnival is and what happens at one. Lap swimming, bombies, marco polo game, dolphining, are well known types of actions done while swimming that are part of the Australian vernacular. For people who use inland rivers for recreation, a donut is not only food but also a large inflatable toy for sitting in while towed by a motorised boat. Even the names for swimwear have localised vernacular terms. Togs, swimmers, bathers, swimsuit, sluggos, budgy smugglers are various names for swimwear which create territorial prideful arguments, arousing jovial childhood memories. The locally preferred name for swimwear was mapped by state differences in a Linguistics project see Figure 1. Cossies, bathers, swimsuits, togs, swimmers, boardies, budgie smugglers, speedos, jammers are the most common names for swimwear.



**Figure 1** Map of Australian names used to refer to swimwear. © The Linguistics Roadshow 2015  
 Creative Commons <https://lingroadshow.com/all-about-language/engishes-in-australia/vocabulary/mapping-words-around-australia/> (Billington et al. 2015).

Furthermore, swimming and Australian culture are entwined in a relationship that is reflected in the often quoted sentiment: “Australia is a nation of swimmers” - see for example, “Australia is a nation of swimmers and Olympic medals attest to our performance in the pool” (Australian Government 2013). The national organising body for competitive swimming, Swimming Australia Limited, takes this notion of the swimming nation a step further by claiming in one of its promotional catch phrases that: “Swimming is in Australia’s cultural DNA”. Interestingly, despite all of this discussion about swimming popularity, the number of Australians who can’t swim 50 metres is apparently increasing. RLSSA provide the following warning:

As many as one in five children – [50,000] - will leave primary school this year not even having the skills to swim the length of an Olympic swimming pool ... We are losing our

basic values of swimming and water safety. We have to do more. (AUSTSWIM/RLSSA 2013).

Of interest here is how this trend is framed. A decline in swimming proficiency (defined as swimming 50 meters of freestyle) is it is not just portrayed as a safety concern, but it is seen as a loss of (Australian) values.

The “Australia is a nation of swimmers” and the “cultural DNA” logic implies that swimming is a necessary, inherently good, and inclusive practice for all Australians. But if Australia is a nation of swimmers, then what does this say for those Australians, who do not swim? Take for example journalist Neha Kale who stated in a newspaper article that she felt socially excluded ‘in a series of tiny humiliations’ because she and other migrants couldn’t swim and didn’t understand the Australian swimming culture (Kale 2018).

Dominant narratives and rhetorical statements about swimming neglect the full story. It is presumed that spare time in water is sought after, to take part in the fun of swimming, bolstered by perceptions of relaxation and social inclusion it affords but these assumptions have not really been explored empirically. Proximity to water and its access, does not induce everyone to swim. In the fishing and tourist town of Bicheno, where I live on the east coast of Tasmania, only an estimated 10 -20% of residents, population 900, get in the water to swim. According to casual conversations I have had with 97 locals, one out 5 I listened to are frightened, some can’t swim, while others are not interested compared with a small group of the 30 regular swimmers that I enjoy swimming with in the ocean. I not only enjoy the company but the pleasures of swimming, which has varied throughout my life depending on motivations, contexts and age. For 18 years in my 20’s and 30’s I rarely swam any distance longer than 200 metres, but I was surfing up to 20 hours a week. In my teenaged years I swam 20 hours a week training for the olympic games. In my 40’s and



50's I enjoyed adult masters competitions in the pool and ocean, swimming 4 times a week for fitness. In my 60's now I enjoy the social aspects more than I ever have and swim as a daily routine for wellbeing. Once I get out of my warm bed, I just feel great after a 30 minutes cold water swim, it sets me up physically and mentally for the day.

There are popular stories and representations of swimming in the public domain, like mine, but what about swimming literature? There exists much information about swimming in Australia and texts and artefacts proliferate, for example the historical origins of swimming have been explored in academic literature, as has feats of muscular sport performances, and artistic representations in novels, art and film (Tsiolkas 2013) (Winton 2008) (Silvey 2009) (Autio and Parke 2000). In other words, the content of this ordinary, yet pervasive, activity is rarely questioned, but I do have questions. Two of my questions are; do people swim when they go swimming? and why is swimming so closely associated with cultural and national identity?

Swimming is popular in other countries too, yet there are very few critical studies of contemporary swimming culture. An outspoken journalist, Craig Lord, formerly in the FINA press corps, writes critical articles for the UK Times and his own blog *The State of Swimming* [www.stateofswimming.com](http://www.stateofswimming.com) (an offshoot of his previous websites Swim News and Swim Vortex). A study of USA swimmers, examines surveillance and conformity in youth swimming (Lang 2010). Also in USA, Jeff Wiltse wrote a comprehensive book about racism in the contested spaces of public swimming pools in eastern USA (Wiltse 2007). Another study included swimming athletes, examining female athletes in USA used in marketing to 'sell sex' (Kane, LaVoi, and Fink 2013). Pippa Grange conducted a systematic review of leadership of the 2012 Swimming Australian Olympic Swimming team with a concurrent review called Bluestone Review, of culture and leadership in

Australian Olympic Swimming, finding the existence of a ‘toxic’ culture (Grange 2013; Smith and Panel 2013). The Australian sex abuse commission examined swimming sport in Case study 15 in 2015 (McLellan 2015).

Apart from those studies and reviews, Gary Osmond and Murray Phillips’ historiographies have revised historical swimming myths (Osmond and Phillips 2004; Osmond 2011a) (Phillips 1998). Ian McShane has created insightful perspectives of regenerating old swimming pools (McShane 2009). Beyond these works, two doctoral studies stand out from commissioned histories of sports swimmers and organisational reviews. Jennifer McMahon’s 2010 PhD thesis is an autoethnography and narrative ethnography of her experiences as an elite swimmer in Queensland in the 1990s. It exposed hers and two other swimmers’ ‘damaged swimmer identity, technocentric ideologies, slim to win ideologies, disciplinary power’ (McMahon 2010). She is critical of body pedagogies in competition swimming recommending that discourses of performance and perfection be questioned. A second doctoral thesis, by Chris Zehntner (2016) examines coach education in Australian swimming culture. He is scathing of the culture that privileges bullying hierarchical authority and an inability of trainee coaches to question practises and approaches of the mentoring coaches or the coaching curriculum (Zehntner 2016).

In this thesis, I further open up the culture of swimming in Australia to critical scrutiny and provide the first extended cultural study of swimming in Australia. Following David Inglis (2005) who states that ‘everyday life contains within it more significance than we might think’, I endeavour to make swimming knowledge and practices less strange and unfamiliar (Inglis 2005: 3). The aim of this thesis is to deepen the understanding of Australian swimming culture and to potentially open space for other ways of knowing and doing swimming in Australia. Specifically I address the following research questions:

How is swimming represented, practiced and experienced in Australia?

What factors shape and constrain these representations and practices?

Could, or should, swimming in Australia be represented and practiced differently?

Before discussing the research framework and methodologies that I have adopted to answer these questions, I will explain how and why this project came about by reflecting on my own swimming experiences and identity.

#### Positionality: questioning experiences and expertise

Every research project starts with some sort of question arising from curiosity about how things work or do not work, or about why people behave in certain ways. Questions may arise from noticing or experiencing power differentials in human relationships. The idea for this study came about through personal observations over 45 years of involvement with swimming organisations from grass roots to international federations and with swimmers of varied abilities, and as a champion swimmer.

I swam competitively when I was a teenager and was very successful. I achieved the highest sporting success possible in swimming – three Olympic gold medals and multiple world records. For 30 years afterwards while I was raising my four children in the country, I was involved with my children's land sports and their interest in surfing, which I also did. The Sydney Olympics in 2000 provided me with commercial opportunities that I took advantage of after raising a family. I became involved with swimming sport again in the role of observer and commentator. Of course swimming had changed by 2000 since my 1972 participation as an athlete. I found 'swimming' was a professional world of

competition swimming, sophisticated drowning prevention remedies had been developed and emerging swimming pedagogies were standardised.<sup>1</sup> I found myself in a unique position, having been an insider, then an outsider with mature perspectives, and an insider again as a business person in varied swimming enterprises. Observing other swimmers while participating myself in swimming activities especially as an adult, opened many questions that gnawed on my curiosity. Some questions were about how people swam and why they used kickboards or noticing many older people swimming year-round without wetsuits in ocean pools. Other questions were more about the role of swimming in Australian society – its access, reach and effectiveness. For example: Who is missing out, on knowing how to swim? Do schools still provide swimming and lifesaving instruction? What barriers are there to access water? How come there are so many organisations involved with swimming and water safety, yet 280 people still drown each year? Reflecting on my own experiences as the subject of sports histories, and an instrument in the celebration of and use of swimming champions in international diplomacy as well as the marketisation of athletes in sports-media-tourism triangle of sports mega events prompted further questions about the place and value of ‘fast’ swimmers in Australia. Why are Australian champion swimmers revered? What about the people who do daily swims without any fanfare? Where else besides movies and novels are the aesthetics of swimming extolled?

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<sup>1</sup> Amateur swimming turned professional in 1984 when the Olympic movement allowed athletes to be paid for being an athlete. Up until then, if an athlete received even \$1 they were deemed a ‘professional’ and so disqualifying them from participation in amateur club competitions affiliated with the international swimming federation FINA.

In essence, upon re-entering the swimming world again I became a student of swimming, with an elite athlete ethic of seeking better ways to do things, with single-minded determination. Comparative visual observation was honed in my role as swimming educator, and critical thinking was exercised in making sense of swimming information distributed through books and online media. By making observations of (non)swimmers, and comparing those with reports, slogans and rhetoric in media and aquatic industry statements, demonstrated to me an obvious ‘disconnect’ with how this thing ‘swimming’ was frequently represented<sup>2</sup>.

My knowledge and perspectives initially found outlets in editorial comments, documentaries and my 1998 autobiography in the decade around the Sydney Olympics. Over time I recognised that the unique knowledge I amassed over a lifetime of engagement with aquatic sports and recreation was not enough to provide satisfactory answers to my whys and hows. I felt that my questions needed to endure the fire of rigorous systematic inquiry and academic scrutiny in order for me to enhance my own (and others’) practice. – I was determined to make swimming, an activity that is so much a part of my identity and livelihood, better for more Australians. It was this practical outcome that was the impetus for undertaking doctoral study.

I have taken my research project in many different directions since enrolling in this PhD and there have been several iterations leading to this final thesis. Despite reconfiguring questions and methodologies, I have not swayed from my initial intent which was to

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<sup>2</sup> I use the word ‘thing’ because the word swimming is used so broadly that it needs a qualifier to understand what is specifically meant. Thing also includes swimming as an industry, an image, personalities, an activity in varied contexts.

carefully and rigorously consider the cultural practice which I am immersed in and have been for most of my life. To this end I developed a research framework that would allow me to make the most of my prior knowledge and experiences yet simultaneously ensure that I could critically examine the culture of swimming in Australia. In the section below I outline the key tenets of my approach and justify the framework I adopted.

### Research framework: swimming as a cultural study

I framed this project as a cultural study. I decided on a cultural framework because it allowed me to explore different layers and perspectives of swimming in Australia and to understand the power relationships that shape dominant practices and render other practices absent or silent (Frow and Morris, 1993). There are a whole series of elements that make up the cultural practice of swimming. As layers or aspects, some elements are deemed of higher importance than others, depending on vested interest or value. The element of competition swimming in the overall layers of swimming culture, commands the more important position of a top layer, as does water safety, reflected in financial support, and entrenched discourses. Based on my personal experiences and initial research, I was interested in critically examining textual representations, organisational structures, swimming spaces and places and their varied practices and meanings, and in-depth, embodied experiences of water. In framing the study, I aimed to ensure that I captured the complexity of swimming knowledge, practices and experiences and to contextualise these findings within broader Australian history and culture. I also sought to reveal inconsistencies, contradictions and incongruities in my findings. Another influence on the ways I approached the questions that I sought answers for, is my interest in environmental

sustainability and systemic understanding of social-biological processes (Gould 1998; Capra and Luisi 2014; Walker et al. 2004; Holling 2001). A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organised in a way that it achieves something (Meadows 2008). For the purposes of this study then I saw a swimming club as a system, the human body as a system, an aquatic centre as a system. Moreover, swimming is a human activity that incorporates biophysical and social elements. Swimming is not seen as a discrete activity of the body-as-a-machine.

My cultural study of swimming involved a range of different methods and approaches to account for the diversity and complexity of swimming representations and practices. Rather than going shopping in a supermarket of theoretical frameworks and containing my study in a pure knowledge framework such as phenomenology or ethnography and therefore being constrained by the rules of that school of inquiry, I sought out the best instruments to obtain answers to my research questions. The methods and research instruments I chose are qualitative in nature which can address contexts, meanings, values, interpretation and affective aspects of the movement culture of swimming (Ravitch and Carl 2016). I used Ravitch and Carl's (2016) text as a workbook and the latest Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research by Denzin and Lincoln (2018) to discipline my thinking and improve my understanding of qualitative research. I will outline the specific methods that were used when I outline the thesis structure and provide an overview of the thesis chapters. First, I will briefly explain two key concepts that guided me throughout this cultural study: criticality and immersion.

### Criticality

As I have already mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to open the culture of swimming up to critical questions. I developed critical thinking processes in earlier academic studies and from a natural inclination to question norms (Cottrell 2005). Throughout this study I use the ‘inquiry-engine’ of ‘criticality’ in qualitative inquiry, as detailed by Ravitch and Carl (2016). A feature of criticality is examining power imbalances. In ‘swimming’ there are dominant ideas and values appearing to be normal and neutral, validated in public discourse and represented in public processes and institutions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Criticality refers to a broader conceptualization of what it means to critically approach qualitative research other than solely examining its relationship to critical social theory. Considering issues such as power and inequity and impositions of social hierarchy and structural integrity (Ravitch and Carl 2016: 14).

Throughout this thesis my intention is to deconstruct notions such as ‘Australians like to swim’ and ‘Australia is a nation of swimmers’. I examine taken for granted assumptions and commonly accepted symbolic meanings, which appear to create a conceptual veneer, obscuring empirical phenomena of ‘swimming’. One of these assumptions is that people swim when they go swimming. I asked questions about phenomena that were of interest and concern to me and noticed incongruences with what and how media and organisations represented phenomena.

### Immersion

As I mentioned above, I am inextricably bound to my subject matter. There is no escaping my past and current involvement in Australian swimming culture. Therefore I decided to embrace this fact rather than hide from it. Throughout this project I have maintained my



involvement in many different facets of swimming practises and the industry and I have fully immersed myself in swimming literature and knowledge. By being immersed in the practise of swimming provided proximity to subjects to interview both formally and informally. I particularly sought out recreational rather than competition swimmers, as it was their silent voices in literature, discourse and representation that I wished to report upon. The dominance of competition swimming in cultural discourse overshadows and suppresses the sort of swimming that the majority engages in.

In the field for my recreation, paid work and study, I had innumerable casual conversations with adult swimmers who share significant and moving private experiences they had/have while swimming. I felt privileged to hear their uplifting anecdotes that nourishes their well-being. I discussed insights with friends who had enthusiasm for the practise of swimming while often asking acquaintances ‘do you have a swimming story? Everyone I asked provided a story without hesitation. I paid particular attention to news reports and website photographs, thoroughly read organisational reviews, and looked for ways people used swimming environments in and out of the water in my everyday life as a recreational swimmer. I have continued to swim with my friends in Bicheno. I spent considerable time cogitating questions while swimming around in the ocean and passed ideas by respected colleagues with historical perspectives.

Because swimming occurs in the natural substance of water, it fosters deep seated human satisfaction for the need to engage with the natural world (Foley 2017). Movement in water also consummates human imperatives to move and perceive the natural world through the body (Smith 2007; Sheets-Johnstone 2011; Ingold 2011). Empirical immersion in water generates metaphorical immersions into the mystical, the sentimental, the relational, all of which I embraced in the period of this research. Sarah Pinks (2009, 2011)

work in sensory ethnography and visual anthropology informed my choice of research methodologies and selection of relatable narratives and images (Pink 2009, 2011).

Artists respond to water with varieties of creative impulses (Pink 2013; Couper 2017).

Swimming is represented in contemporary art as a means of release from worldly cares or distilling dark secrets, a symbol of renewal and an outlet for the body athletic.<sup>3</sup> The pleasures and terrors of swimming are creatively represented in popular literature and movies in very sophisticated literary ways. Therefore, I turned up my awareness radar for swimming scenes in Australian movies, books, short stories and newspaper reports. I re-read sport histories, swimmer biographies, re-watched Australian movies and re-read some popular novels that referenced swimmer characters such as Tim Winton's books *Dirt Music* (2001) and *Breath* (2008). A recently completed master's degree at UTAS 2012 in contemporary art examining swimming images in contemporary art informed theoretical and technical interpretations of images and other forms of visual texts.

### **Thesis structure**

In this thesis I use criticality and immersion to examine four different 'layers' or aspects of swimming culture. As a structural device, these four layers can be categorised as follows: representations; organisational structure; breadth of practices and deep practice.

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<sup>3</sup> I am a photo artist member of an organization of Olympian artists called Art of the Olympians (AOTO).

One of the ideals of the Olympic movement is culture, a broad sense of art, history, values. AOTO is embedded with the Culture and Heritage Commission of the International Olympic Committee and exhibits in the Olympic museum in Lausanne.

Examining each of these layers required a different method of data collection, review of literature and form of analysis. Therefore, rather than provide a dedicated chapter of research methodology and literature review I have woven them throughout the four chapters 2-5. I provide a brief overview of each of the chapters below.

**Chapter 2** examines dominant narratives about swimming as a popular activity and ‘the swimmer’ in Australia. Three such slogans that headline dominant narratives are ‘Australia is a nation of swimmers’; ‘Swimming is in Australia’s cultural DNA’ and ‘We are good swimmers because we are an island surrounded by water’. The role and use of swimming symbols in tourism representations and national identity narratives is explored paying some attention to the heroic champion swimmer and bio-geographical rationalisations for the popularity of swimming, as determined by statistical data and social or collective memory identifying as a swimmer. Participation and drowning statistics are reviewed, and representations are used as evidence of the popularity of swimming.

**Chapter 3** investigates how swimming is organised as in industry in Australia, for sport, for recreation and for survival. This chapter describes how swimming is funded, delivered, taught, and systemised. I ask by whom? for whom? And for what purpose? My analysis reveals how swimming services, organisations and facilities are highly structured systems embedded in National sporting policy, and funding. The organisational structure of these partially profit driven partially not for profit associations, are corporatized, using neo-managerial principles of management and corporate culture. Organisations are vying for market share of influence, and customers. This creates tensions between accountability for government and sponsor funding and for-profit accountability and services to members.

Tensions are also evident in provision of funding to councils, for swimming pools for competition, pools for recreation and learning and the recurring discussion of conducting compulsory school swimming lessons.

**Chapter 4** offers a broad view of swimming practices in Australia. It reports on observations and interviews from strategically designed field research on two ‘around-Australia’ road journeys. I compare observed phenomena of people swimming or not swimming at pools, in rivers and at ocean beaches with previously discussed representations and rhetoric describing swimming, with observed realities of how Australians swim and use the water to recreate in geographically and population diverse regions of Australia. I argue that Australians do swim but in ways that are at variance with dominant narratives discussed in Chapter Two.

**Chapter 5** narrates an experiential view of a specific group of swimmers, by describing dimensions of swimming experiences that are personal and deeply meaningful. The swimming group consist of adults, who swim informally in the ocean in Bicheno Tasmania. I storify first hand sensory experiences, the formation of community and creating a sense of place through the experiences of regular swimming in cold water in the open ocean. This chapter is partially autobiographical as the swimming group is the ‘pod’ of swimmers I belong to, for seven years. I am immersed with my fellow swimmers, taking both leadership and follower roles. I demarcated a research phase by when I gained permission to ‘research’ the group and began diarising conversations, quotes, quips, weather conditions, and group dynamics for over a year. I documented visceral responses to seaweed, marine animals, cold water and scary sea conditions, intuiting others

experiences, and actively listening to their recollections while reflecting on my own. What emerged was a picture of enthusiastic adventurous Australians enjoying swimming together in an unusual location having multi-dimensional experiences ‘wandering’ around a bay making ephemeral tracks like bushwalkers. I reviewed academic and popular literature about land wanderers, the flaneurs and walkers experiencing the world through their feet, to make comparisons with and then made maps with a GPS enabled waterproof body-tracking device as the swimmers experienced the world through their immersed bodies (Nold 2009; Coates 2017; Ingold 2004).

In **Chapter 6**, I draw together some of the key threads from studying these four layers and offer a critical overview of swimming culture, noting where power relations are masked by the missions of swimming organisations and the limits of ‘evidence based research’<sup>4</sup> for how swimming is and can be ‘known’ and practiced in Australia. I argue instead for the importance of experiential narratives, local contexts and more-than-representational qualitative research.

In **Chapter 7**, I make conclusions and recommendations from the thesis. I discuss how insights from this study might enhance swimming organization and instruction in Australia - recognising diverse users and their experiences to ensure inclusive opportunity, and creative development of swimming practices.

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<sup>4</sup> I argue against the dominance of ‘evidence based research’ as a paradigm,.I do not refute the need for research evidence.



## Chapter 2 ‘Swimming is in our DNA’: Australia as a nation of swimmers

Swimming is an important part of our national identity. We consider it as part of Australia’s DNA (CEO Mark Anderson on SAL website [www.swimming.org.au](http://www.swimming.org.au) in 2016 Accessed 11/2/2016).

An island nation - and rich in aquatic opportunity and ability - Australia is globally recognised as the swimming nation, of water babies and world champions alike (Australian Swim Schools Association, [https://australianswimschools.org.au/about\\_us/](https://australianswimschools.org.au/about_us/) accessed 3rd September 2017) .

In this chapter I explore the connection between swimming and Australian identity. I ask whether the trope about Australia as ‘the swimming nation’ reflects reality, or is it merely rhetoric? To this end I discuss a selection of narratives and examine swimming participation data and drowning statistics and juxtapose these against one another as a form of analysis (McLachlan 2010). In this process I reveal contradictory statements about swimming in Australia which problematise the assumption that Australia is indeed a nation of swimmers. To make sense of these contradictions I explore a further trope – the Island nation explanation – which offers some insight into the perception of Australia as a swimming nation and the persistence of this myth.

### **Australians as swimmers: a selection of narratives**

### Australia as a swimming place

Walking along the arrival hall of the domestic terminal in Sydney, travellers are welcomed by life-sized photographs of smiling people in swimsuits, in outdoor aquatic locations. Depictions are of romantic trysts and families playing: a mood of happiness, cocooned by beautiful, uncrowded, calm beaches or rivers. The photographs in the Sydney airport arrival hall are associated with a broader Australian tourism campaign targeting international visitors to “come over to our place and have a swim with us” suggesting that Australia is a place where getting into water to swim is possible and the locals like to do it too (Tourism 2016).



**Figure 2 Images adorning domestic airport hallway in Sydney advertising potential aquatic experiences 2016 Personal files**

Similarly, in Coolangatta airport at the Gold Coast region of Queensland, competition pool-swimming was invoked in a whimsical way, before and during the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Swimming pool lanes and lane ropes were painted onto the floor



of the airport arrival hall stimulating greater anticipation for the swimming races. The floor could have been painted with a running track, but it was not, it was a depiction of a swimming pool, possibly a more representative Australian icon than a running track.



**Figure 3 Arrival hall at Coolangatta airport greeting guests attending the Commonwealth Games at sites on the Gold Coast 2018 Personal files.**

As these two examples illustrate, tourism agencies promote Australia as a swimming ‘place’. Australia is, by reliable international reputation, a country where swimming is possible. It is a place to swim for visitors and for local residents alike. The popularity of swimming in Australia is assumed to be influenced by a mild to hot climate, accessible swimming pools, clean coastal beach/seas, unpolluted inland waterways and enduring socio-historical traditions. In this way, swimming in Australian waters can be viewed as a cultural identifier. The amphibious swimmer and their idealised identity are intertwined with national identity characterizations. Immersion in water and swimming is encouraged, excluding tropical areas where dangerous animals such as jelly fish and crocodiles inhabit. Thousands of swimming pools are publicly accessible for reasonable prices although often just in warmer 4-6 months of the year. The electronic application, *Beachsafe* list the swimming characteristics of every coastal beach. For the convenience of fishermen, surfers and swimmers, the daily data from the Australian bureau of meteorology (BOM) includes

wind direction, swell size and power, tides and sea surface water temperatures. Aquatic locations attract families and friends for social picnics, often for the coolness and beautiful outlook. But are they actually ‘swimming’?



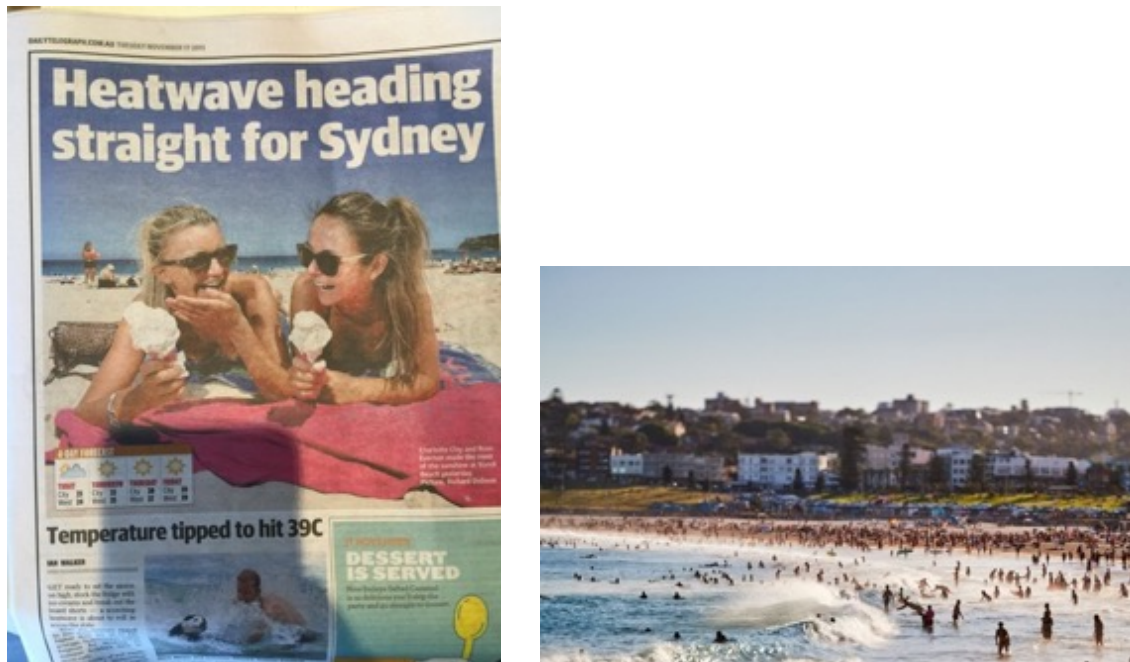
**Figure 4 Woolgoolga, coastal NSW 25metre outdoor heated seasonal council pool. Horizontal swimmers doing laps, vertical swimmers wading and playing. Personal files 2016.**

### Australians as ‘swimmers’

The air is warm, the sun is hot and the water is cool. Bodies carpet the golden sand, dotted with cheerfully coloured beach towels and umbrellas. Lines of white water roll in, parallel with the beach as chest high waves. Off-white bodies of all ages, shapes and genders jump over and through the waves with a few brown skinned bodies amongst them. Squeals of delight pierce the air, or is it fear?

The scene is Bondi Beach at 11 am in January. A photograph of this scene will be on the front page of tomorrow’s paper if the air temperature continues to rise toward 40C. The

image will be accompanied by a caption like “swimmers cooling off at the beach yesterday getting relief from the scorching heat”. The image will invariably be of the archetypical Australian beach, Bondi. See right hand image in Figure 5.



**Figure 5 Archetypical Australian beach Bondi, in summer, culturally a typical place to cool off and swim.**

**Left Newspaper headline alerting readers of pending hot weather, suggesting ‘get to the beach’ Daily Telegraph November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015 personal files.**

**Right Bondi beach swimmers April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Photo Aquabumps.com.au used with permission**

Bondi is often featured more than other proximal representative beaches. Bondi beach must presumably have some prototypical features of city beaches, representing outdoors, free time, robust healthy beautiful people, physically confident bronzed Aussies. ‘Othered’ curious and clumsy international visitors to Bondi create stark difference against competent, confident local surfers and that difference aids identity formation reinforcing the notion that Australians are beach lovers and by association, swimmers. Looking at the

water scene with a critical observer's eye, of all the hundreds of people in the water, only ten or so are actually horizontal, doing something like swimming, amongst the white water or just beyond the wave zone. I am one of those people for a brief 15 minutes. Why are the people standing in the water and jumping waves called swimmers? What does this conflation with dipping or wading with swimming 'do' in terms of the inward and outward perception of Australia as a swimming nation?

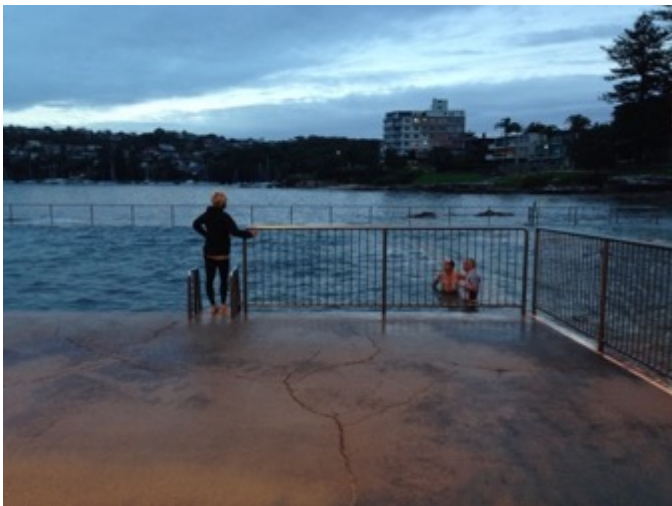


**Figure 6 Manly beach 'swimmers' 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018 Photo titled 'Manly Ants' by Eugene Tan  
©Aquabumps used by permission**

There are historical precedents for the popularity of swimming documented in biographies and historical writings (Lomas 1960; Osmond 2015; McDermott 2012; Huntsman 2001; Winterton and Parker 2009). As researchers of Australian culture and characters of swimming suggest, the warm climate and water in Australia, relative to northern European climate, facilitated bathing in Australia from an early time of European settlement as

Rachel Winterton and Claire Parker describe swimming as a utilitarian pursuit in 19<sup>th</sup> century England and Australia. The popularity of bathing was brought from England and Europe with white settlement at the same time as bathing - in order to get morally and physically clean - seeped into the mindset and edifying habits of westerners through beliefs in hygienic Christianity (Wilkie 2003; Love 2007).

Architecture had an influence too, as the sun was embraced in outdoor pools and other buildings, especially the Australian verandah that became symbolic of optimism looking out onto the literal and metaphorical world beyond the land, over the beach a metaphorical verandah, to the sea and countries beyond (Drew 1992). Fashion was influenced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the sun and swimming, when bulky clothing was shunned and physical exercise was embraced (Worpole 2000; Schmidt 2008). The unique geography of east coast NSW beaches and headlands made it possible to construct ocean pools in the sandstone and have ocean waves flush them at each high tide (McDermott 2012).



**Figure 7 A Sydney harbour sea pool, Fairlight, early morning winter swimmers stop for a chat.**

Many of these pools still exist and used routinely by local residents as a crucial part of their daily life. Men with bronzed bellies in speedos embrace cold morning air and salute the morning sunrise. I talked with and observed women in cossies<sup>5</sup> who also have a morning swim, saying they swim to reset their mind and body from home and work responsibilities. In my experience a post swim ritual of going for a coffee and a chat at a conveniently located cafe at beach swimming locations around Australia is also a rudimentary ingredient to a morning swim.

The habit of swimming began early in colonial years with races a natural sequel. Swimming was embraced heartily often through contests with laws against ‘indecenty’(Huntsman 2001; Watermarks 2010)



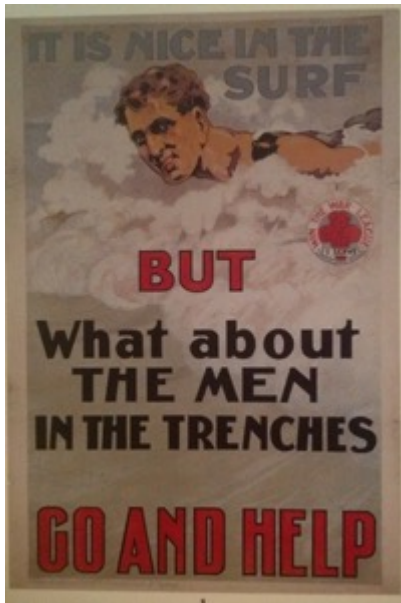
**Figure 8 Popularity of swimming shown in the history of Sydney, Coogee Beach, Sydney January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1900 Mitchell Library Sydney PX\*D 582 negative 2563. Watermarks exhibit, Museum of Sydney 2017.**

After world war one, the surf shooter (body surf) and the surf lifeguard overtook the previously dominant image of the soldier as the protective male, one representation

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<sup>5</sup> Cossies is a colloquial term for a swimsuit.

affirming the identity of Australians as separate from their English forefathers. An interesting enlistment poster of a young man in 1915 indicates the popularity of swimming and body surfing. The poster goads young men to enlist and shame them for frivolously body surfing while other men are in the trenches. See Figure 9.



**Figure 9** A poster from 1915 urging young men to stop playing in the surf and go and enlist to fight in the war in Europe. Source personal photograph taken at Watermarks exhibit Sydney (ANMM 2017)

Even though the English also loved to bathe and swim in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as did Europeans (with variations in Turkish baths, Swiss and Scandinavian spas and saunas and ice swimming options), Australia's climate enabled lengthy swimming seasons. Longer summers than Europe, warmer air and water, promotes swimming, surfing and body surfing (Gordon and Inglis 2009; Love 2007). Consequently, swimming, bathing, wading, was dynamic in Australia, not as passive as in Europe where sauna culture and spa life was and is still used for health and cleanliness (Ashenburg 2007). Saunas do not suit the climate in Australia, even though saunas do exist in hotels and some pools such as Bondi icebergs. The Moree baths and hot springs in western NSW tend to attract Australians with European migrant backgrounds with spa culture habits. In the winter time, an influx of

patrons from colder southern cities flood the town for a holiday and to use the hot natural mineral springs to relieve arthritis and other aches (conversation with Moree baths manager 2015).

From Northern hemisphere perspectives, Australia was and is considered an exotic place (Connell 2007). Initially, somewhat looked down upon as uncultured colonials, yet the English were fascinated by this hybrid human, sons and daughters of the British empire (Horwood 2000; Driscoll 2014a). Robust Australian born colonial girls and boys, were distinct from those born in England, establishing an alternate identity, sealed with the establishment of the Australian parliament and self-government in 1901. Accepted morality and social sensibilities in dress and behaviour in England and Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> C were challenged and dismantled by women and men in Australia, but highly criticized and disparaged by English propriety. Australian swimming exports included 16-year-old Annette Kellerman one of these colonial girls, who was a novelty in Europe and USA, coming from the antipodes. Kellerman demonstrated her swimming and diving skills for money in the Thames River in London in a skin-bearing swimming costume, for which she was arrested. She was an icon of Australia, establishing a national identity with swimmers and physically active, sun tanned women from the exotic nation far away (Gibson and Firth 2005). Before Annette Kellerman, the Cavill brothers conducted swimming demonstrations and lessons in USA, embedding the Australian ‘type’ of person as having association with water and beaches (Huntsman 2001; Booth 2001; Osmond 2012).

Australians as ‘good’ swimmers



Australians have a reputation as swimmers, especially as good swimmers. There is a long record of good swimmers in the sporting sphere as well as depictions in television shows such as Bondi Rescue. Long before Australia became a nation and 70 years before Australian women made a name for themselves as competitive swimmers at the modern Olympic Games, Aboriginal women were very adept swimmers, as reported by George Augustus Robinson in his diaries, written as he traveled Tasmania in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The females are in general very adept swimmers and are enabled to procure a surprising quantity of shellfish upon the single immersion in the water. .... The women are trained from children to swim and dive so that when grown up the water becomes their element.

GA Robinson Bruny Island 28th September 1829

Friendly Mission: the Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1834 was first published in 1966, republished 2009 Edited by NJB Plomley Pub Quintus

The function and contexts of swimming has diversified dramatically since 1829, transforming the meaning of swimming, also overlain with diverse contemporary interpretations. The sort of swimming required for catching seal and the breath holding capacities to submerge and prise abalone shellfish off rocks, has comparable typology to pleasure snorkelers, and free diver fishermen. Pleasure swimming and food gathering functions still go hand in hand for many people who enter and use the rivers and sea.

Swimming clubs and races amongst white settlers began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century while edicts had to be declared in 1810 against nude bathing at all hours of the day (Phillips 2008: 7-10). Flaunting the bathing rules aligned the larrikin trait to the activity of swimming and to the swimmers themselves (Osmond and Phillips 2004; Bellanta 2010).

Swimming clubs, recurrent tragic drownings and changed social norms tamed participation

in bathing and swimming, making it more socially acceptable according to a study by Jean Allan (2004) of the ‘Natatorial Art’ in Sydney up to the second world war and Rachel Winterton’s (2010) study of historical swimming in Melbourne (Phillips 1998; Allan 2004; Winterton and Parker 2009). Historian and war correspondent C.E.W. Bean noted that Australian soldiers at Gallipoli, the Anzacs, enjoyed bathing in World War I;

the salvation of the troops [was] sea bathing...From the day when first a section of the troops was withdrawn from the line to rest, bathing became the one officially approved recreation (Bean 1934: 382-83) as quoted in a study of the beach in Australian history (Huntsman 2001: 193-99).

The tradition of bathing at the beach continues, along with organised surf lifesaving club activities. On weekends at city beaches, thousands of pink clad nippers (ages 6-12) and youths in the water at beaches where there are surf clubs, such as Manly beach also look at home in the water, ducking under waves, getting tossed off boards by the swells, coming up laughing with the thrill of it. Perhaps through some sort of cultural mimesis, a physical confidence in water is integrated and claimed as some imagined uniqueness to Australians similar to ‘backyard cricket’ and surf life-saving club competitions.



**Figure 10** A surf lifesaving club carnival at Manly beach, 2018. Club members wear pink high visibility vests for safety. Skull caps identify a club. Surf sports are one pathway for surf club membership, lifeguarding is another. Surf sports involve events with skills that may be required to

**rescue someone. Board paddling, swimming with a rescue tube, soft sand running and surf boat crewing are some. Many surf club members become ‘good’ swimmers or can identify one. Photo Debbie Brunner with permission 2018**

In Australia a ‘good swimmer’ exhibits several characteristics such as physical confidence and efficient technique. Australians who are interested in sport swimming can identify names of champion swimmers, race times and recognise ‘good technique’. At another level of understanding, a good swimmer is someone who can manage difficult conditions such as surf, deep, or cold water and maybe for a long amount of time. A third category is someone who displays physical confidence and little fear of the water, plunging upside down, breath hold, swim various strokes for short distances, jump dive and turn with athleticism. This type of good swimmer may not have competition ready stroke technique but do look ‘at home in the water’. Many a proud parent relate how their 5 or 8 or 10-year-old exhibits physical confidence in the water, summarising them as ‘a good swimmer’.

There is another type of swimmer, both real and symbolic, who embody the mythology that Australians are swimmers. This swimmer-type is the champions, the world-beaters, the so-called ‘super fish’, the heroines of water (Hargreaves 2000; McLachlan 2009; Gordon 2014). They are highly valued, feted and valorised. Competition swimmers in Australia are well known as heroes and preoccupy the attention of sports fans and identity creation when sport is used in international commerce and political diplomacy. Each national representative swimmer, both able and para swimmers, is allocated an ‘Australian swimmer number’ by Swimming Australia and joins the distinguished heritage of Australian champion swimmers, some of whom are ‘golden fishes’. The Australian swimmer number is a rare sporting mark of honourable pride. Between 1896-2017 there have only been 759 swimmers who have represented Australia. Ian Thorpe is 494 Shane

Gould is 214. There are also 283 Para swimmers since 1957 with their unique numbers with a P prefix. Matthew Cowdrey is P224 (SAL 2016a). Indeed, the idea of the swimmer number and ceremonially receiving the symbolic golden yellow team cap, is made more significant when prefaced by a short talk about the past champions, they are succeeding (SAL press release July or August 2016).

Australia ‘produces’ many fast world champion swimmers, reinforcing the mantra that ‘swimming is in Australia’s cultural DNA’ (SAL 2016b). Australian swimmers have won 62 gold medals 70 silver medals and 68 bronze medals at Olympic Games held every 4 years from 1896 <http://olympics.com.au/sports/swimming/medals> accessed 25 January 2019. Only the USA has won more Olympic swimming medals. The Olympic Games is the pinnacle international sporting event for swimmers, so extra status is attributed to an Olympic champion, rather than a world championships winner or even a world record breaker. There is a long ‘genealogy’ of Australian Olympic champions, since the first modern Olympics in 1896 particularly the 1956 Golden Girls, so named since when the Olympic games were held in Melbourne (Gordon 2014). The Golden Girls were both swimmers and track athletes – they won 7 of the 13 gold medals won by Australia in 1956, notably more than the men. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the term golden girls referred to a woman who was rich, successful, beautiful. This term mutated to reference winning gold medals, while still maintaining some associative meanings with success, wealth and beauty. During the swimming competition phases of the Commonwealth Games in 2018, as often happens in international swimming events, fast Australian swimmers feature in the Australian sports news and during prime time TV hours. A new freestyle champion, Ariarne Titmus fully asserted her expanded champion status in the gaze of Australian swimming fans. She became the newest addition to the ‘golden girls’, a

long line of female Australian swimming champions, when she won the women's 800 metre freestyle event.

Successful elite swimmers are socially elevated and publicly revered in Australia and the Australians-are-swimmers slogan is perpetuated and on the basis of their reputation.

Producing a swimming champion is a way to be socially elevated as well, by perpetuating myths and realities of Australian swimming prowess. Australian swimming champions are further maintained by historical writers (Osmond and Phillips 2004; Phillips 1998). A TV sports documentary *Sporting Nation* locates swimming in sporting history and contemporary culture (Clarke 2012). Swimmer biographies preserve social memory (Shea 2005; Thorpe 2013; Gould 1998; Gibson and Firth 2005). Social memories are often not historically accurate, but what is remembered or recalled when recounting events. In the case of swimming history and popular swimming narratives, impressions, memory, recollections with a touch of reminiscent nostalgia appear to perpetuate cultural framing, slogans and identity narratives. The two part 2019 documentary by Mint Pictures broadcast by the ABC Australia titled *The Pool* is an example of invoked nostalgia for childhood at the swimming pool and memorable cultural meanings attributed to the pool (MintPictures 2019).

Swimming as a sport and swimming as recreation is not always distinguished in Australian sport policy and sport funding, yet there are reports from a government perspective that help to locate where swimming fits with other sports (Hume and May 2019; Jolly 2013). As to other documents about where swimming fits in Australian society and culture, Rowe (2014) and Phillips (2000) provide an academic perspective of Australia as a nation of good sports, and the cult of sport in Australia (Phillips 2000; Rowe 2014).

National identity has been identified as significant to Australians (Elder 2008; Turner 1994; Drew 1994; White 1981). It is understandable that swimming is utilized for identity projects such as a sense of unity. An international identity is initiated by saying ‘we’ are swimmers. In this case the ‘we-identity’ develops by nostrification<sup>6</sup>, ‘this is us’, which is endorsed by ‘foreigners’ (Eichberg 2004: 67). For some commentators, national sporting identity, as a unifying force, is an uncritically reproduced mythology (Houlihan 1997). For example, Swimming Australia, the self-declared custodians of swimming, suggest that knowing how to swim is a way to be, or become, ‘Australian’ [www.swimming.org.au](http://www.swimming.org.au) and [www.australiaswims.com.au](http://www.australiaswims.com.au)

A more nuanced representation of swimming is taken up by the creative community, such as writers who have tried to describe existential meanings of swimming writing about dread and fear, joy and pleasure. Heroes and heroines in Australian film and literature swim well or swim badly, some to the point of drowning. The genre of the tragic hero appears in other literary cultural identities, in the form of the bushman/woman and the larrikin in Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson stories and poetry. The swimmers’ habit and idyllic swimming locations are depicted as an Australian identity, encapsulated in Henry Lawson’s poem *The Days When we went Swimming*. The larrikin formula story goes: three boys play truant from school and swim naked in a farmer’s dam, who caught the boys swimming in his water supply. Here are the last two verses:

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<sup>6</sup> Nostrification definition: The process or act of granting recognition to a degree from a foreign university (Dictionary.com) In this context, Australian national swimming identity is recognised and endorsed by foreigners.

And do you mind when down the creek  
 His angry way he wended,  
 A green-hide cartwhip in his hand  
 For our young backs intended?  
 Three naked boys upon the sand -  
 Half buried and half sunning -  
 Three startled boys without their clothes  
 Across the paddocks running.

We've had some scares, but we looked blank  
 When, resting there and chumming,  
 One glanced by chance upon the bank  
 And saw the farmer coming!  
 And home impressions linger yet  
 Of cups of sorrow brimming;  
 I hardly think that we'll forget  
 The last day we went swimming (Lawson 1900).

Another swimming narrative of an Australian anti-hero relates to the bushranger Ned Kelly. When Ned was 11 he rescued a boy from drowning in a creek. The boys' parents gifted Ned with a silk and wool sash in appreciation. Ned Kelly was wearing the sash when he and his outlawed gang were under siege at Glenrowan in Victoria. The sash was stained with Ned's blood and can be seen in the Benalla Historical Society museum.

A humorous contradiction to the declaration of inferred universal national swimming participation and swimming competence, is the irony of the drowned swagman in the national folksong *Waltzing Matilda*, attributed to Banjo Patterson. The lyrics relate a swimming mishap, after the protagonist in the story steals a sheep. The 'jolly swagman' (an itinerant worker who carries his swag to sleep in) jumps into a billabong (a

pond/waterhole) to escape the wrath of the law and the farmer who owned the jumbuck (sheep). The mishap became a drowning by suicide ('you'll never catch me alive said he as he jumped into the billabong'). A favourite folk song engendering prideful nationalistic identity memorialises a suicidal non-conforming antihero and his inability to swim!



**Figure 11** An Australian stamp picturing the story in the bush ballad *Waltzing Matilda*, issued May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, one of a set of four stamps commemorating Banjo Patterson's poetry. The swagman in the ballad stole a sheep belonging to a 'squatter'. The squatter and a policeman chased him, but the swagman jumped into the water and deliberately drowned himself rather than be prosecuted for theft. <http://auspost.com.au/education/stamps/students/stamp-issues-archive.html>

Christos Tsiolkas' (2013) novel *Barracuda* and adapted to a 4-part television series, uses competition swimming as the story's backdrop to explore class, politics, atonement, migration (Tsiolkas 2013). Human characters positioned alongside water as character is used in some Australian novels such as Favel Parret (2011) *Past the Shallows* (Parret 2011). Younger brother Harry is afraid of the Wild windswept edges of life – deep, cold, dark malevolent water, but his older brother, the good swimmer, surfs joyously in it. The human characters confront their deepest fears and express their greatest loyalties but the water 'takes' Harry 'into itself'.



Tim Winton's novels nearly always include a good swimmer. Non-fatal drowning is a theme in *Cloudstreet* 1991 (Winton 1991). The acclaimed novel chronicles the lives of two working class families in Perth, Western Australia, while examining the human heart's capacity for sorrow, and joy. It is set around a family's recovery from the disaster of their sons non-fatal drowning. Tension in the story builds when family members try to stop the brain-damaged sibling from 'finishing the job' of drowning himself, which is juxtaposed with the metaphor of the two families nearly drowning in relationship complexities of their suburban lives. Water and what is in it, has potential for insidious agency. Richard Flanagan's protagonist in *Death of a River Guide* (1994) narrates most of the book while drowning underneath turbulent water in a cold western Tasmanian river (Flanagan 1994). Winton's *Dirt Music* 2001, and Craig Silvey's novels *Rhubarb* 2009 and *Jasper Jones* 2004 use water as contradictory forces; water immersion as an invisible danger or a potential transformational redeemer/sustainer (Winton 2001; Silvey 2004, 2009).

Australian lifeguards have conducted many actual water rescues; consequently, they are revered as genuine heroes, represented in real and imagined ways. The lifeguard and surf competent character type is embellished further by popular drama and reality television shows, such as *Bondi Rescue* and *Home and Away*, co-constructing a national identity characterisation, while further aggrandising 'the swimmer'.

The good swimmer is revered, the scared swimmer is pitied while the ignorant swimmer is judged by Australian audiences as explained by the producer of the movie *Japanese Story* (Maslin 2003). Maslin shares an insight via personal email communication;

The narrative of *Japanese Story* pivots around a dramatic scene in which Hiromitsu (Gotaro Tsunashima), a Japanese visitor, unwittingly dives into a beautiful and remote waterhole located in the Pilbara desert of Western Australia. Realising the danger, Sandy

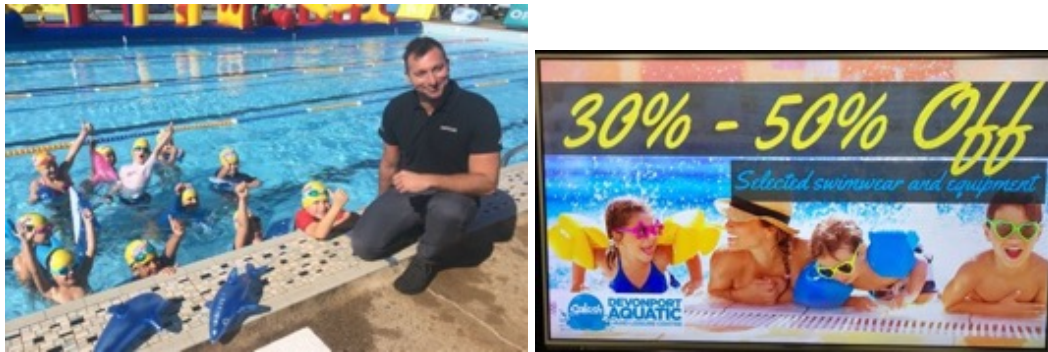
(Toni Collette) screams too late to stop him. He does not surface. Sandy is then faced with the enormity of recovering his body on her own - a seemingly impossible task.

Australian audiences immediately recoil in horror as soon as Hiromitsu dives, so ingrained is the shared understanding of the dangers that can lie beneath the surface. This reflex reaction is not universal as I discovered at the advance screening of the film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2003. In a theatre comprising mostly French and European press, I was alarmed to witness the audience laugh audibly when Hiromitsu dived and did not surface and continue to laugh louder as Sandy became more and more distressed. I honestly thought that the screening was going to be a disaster at that moment as we had lost our audience who thought the scene to be ridiculous. But then the laughter slowly died down, stopping altogether and you could have heard a pin drop in the cinema by the time the scene ended.

What had happened is that they likewise did not recognise the danger and thought that Hiromitsu was playing a joke on Sandy by not surfacing! They read the scene as comic and there was a delayed reaction when they realised their misreading of the situation. In fact, the scene turned out to be even more emotionally powerful as a result. The exact same thing happened in an audience of more than 2,000 people at the red-carpet premiere at the Palais Cinema that night. It cemented for me the profound difference that Australians have in relation to recognising the dangers of waterholes and rivers - a language that is both cultural and visceral- but one that is not universally shared (Maslin 2018).

Cultural scholar Stuart Hall (1996) notes an explosion of interest in the idea of identity, personal and communal identity and the polity of the nation state and he provides an explanation for the interest in identity - as a reaction to uncertainties derived from hypermobility and globalisation (Hall 1996). The national swimming identity narrative is

also found in slogans such as Swimming is in Australia's cultural DNA and is seen in ubiquitous pictorial representations of people swimming. Smiling white skinned children in clear blue pools, and bathers jumping through waves while 'swimming between the flags' at the beach come to mind.

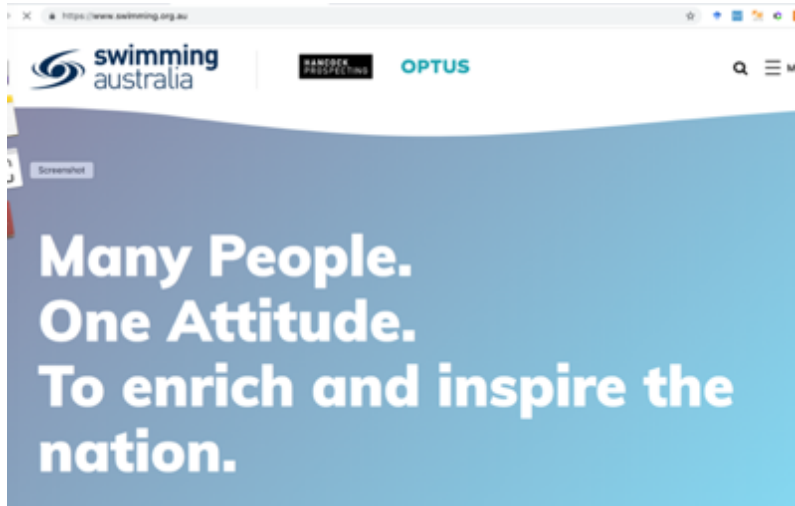


**Figure 12 Representations of swimming – happy, white people in blue water expressing enjoyment. Left Smiling club swimmers in a blue pool Port Macquarie NSW, visited by a 'golden fish' Olympic champion Ian Thorpe 2018 Right Swim shop signage Devonport Aquatic Centre Tasmania 2018 personal files.**

The Australian swimmer, not just the champion, is a 'character figure' which is projected internationally; in art shows, tourism campaigns, TV shows, movies and conveyed by swimming champions at sports mega events. An example of using the mythology and realities of swimming activity as a way to strengthen social connections is seen on Swimming Australia's website, demonstrating an explicit strategy to use swimming as a national symbol of inspiration and unification.

President of swimming Australia, John Bertrand, devised the concept of using swimming to unify Australians, with the mantra "Many people. One Attitude. To enrich and inspire the nation" see Figure 13. Earlier in John Bertrand's life he was skipper of the Australian yacht that won the Americas cup, defeating the Americans in 1983. In his experience, the race series and the win brought Australians together and as outlined in a 2013 update of his

biography (Interview November 2017) (Bertrand 2013). He believes that everyone swimming could establish or revive a similar sense of the unity he noted occurred as a side effect of the Americas cup win.



**Figure 13 Front page of Swimming Australia website, screenshot 22 February 2019**

There's something unique and fabulous about swimming that separates it from all other sports. There are no age barriers, no gender barriers, no ability barriers – anyone can be a swimmer. At Swimming Australia, we want to inspire all Australians to be the swimmer they want to be, because we believe life's better if you swim.

<http://www.swimming.org.au/home.aspx> accessed 25 August 2017

While the above examples certainly illustrate a connection (albeit contradictory one) between swimming and national identity, is there further evidence for this reputation as a nation of swimmers? Does the participation data to support the notion that swimming is a popular and a cultural activity in Australia? The following conversation is an example of contradictions to the popular notion that Australians are swimmers.

I'm having a conversation at a café with a woman about 90 who I barely know, when she proudly reveals that her daughter runs a swim school and lectures at swimming conferences. 'Oh' I say, 'were you involved with swimming yourself, and encourage your daughter's interest in swimming education?' No, she says, 'I'm ashamed to say that I'm scared of water. I nearly drowned when I was 6 and I haven't swum since'. 'Well' I continue the conversation provocatively, 'I thought Australians were a nation of swimmers!' 'Obviously not' she retorts picking up my sarcasm 'I know many other people who can't swim or don't like to, but I also know people who are really good swimmers and love it. But not me'.

In this next section I draw on statistics and reports to further challenge the assumption that Australia is a nation of swimmers.

### **Australians as swimmers: a selection of statistics**

There are a number of sources of numerical information about swimming participation in Australia. Detailed data about participation, swimming ability and drowning rates is collected each year by varied agencies, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA), Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA) and AusPlay using a population tracking survey funded by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). Previously, before AusPlay, in 2015, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collated sport participation data. Other data surveys question generic participation in varied sports including swimming. They are conducted by the independent commercial data collection market research agencies, Roy

Morgan and Gemba<sup>7</sup>. Even though I have some contention with the trustworthiness and confirmability of available data, I select SLSA and RLSSA data to report on swimming participation, because they are more specific to swimming and water safety than other three sources listed above (Shenton 2004; Quinn-Patton 2015). Additionally, those two peak organisations are trusted agents for the water safety industry. Specific swimming skills are featured in SLSA (2018) and RLSSA (2016) reports, even though some of RLSSA's data, such as Fact sheet 33 originates from AusPlay and Roy Morgan (RLSSA 2016b). SLSA data originates from another independent commercial source Newspoll/Omnipoll online Omnibus<sup>8</sup> (SLSA 2018: 67).

AusPlay replaced the role of Australian Bureau of Statistics who until 2014 collected data on trends and participation in sports and activity, data required to approve funding and plan for health improvement initiatives for children 0-14 and adults 15 and over.

The Ausplay survey data, are represented in tables. The tables include numbers of people participating in sport and physical activity, frequency, duration, motivations to be active, whether they are involved with a sports club, how much money is spent, types of technology used and the most popular activities. It is a comprehensive survey with figures extrapolated from over 20,000 interview participants. In the segment *The most popular*

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<sup>7</sup> Self-described as “World-class insights, strategy & marketing communications to the global sport & entertainment industry” [www.thegembagroup.com](http://www.thegembagroup.com) accessed 17<sup>th</sup> September 2018

<sup>8</sup> OmniPoll online Omnibus is a monthly survey of 1200 Australians aged 18+ <http://omnipoll.com.au/omnibus>

*physical activity*, swimming is the fourth most popular activity for adults - 14.5%.<sup>9</sup> For children, swimming is the most popular activity, with 30% of children preferring to swim, ahead of football gymnastics and netball. While popularity data is relevant, participation data is fuzzy, due to the nonspecific nature of ‘swimming’. Are children’s data derived from participating in swimming lessons, a school swimming carnival, backyard pool play, a summer season of membership in a surf lifesaving nippers club? In addition, the numbers are unreliable because they are calculated on participation in swimming activity at least once per year<sup>10</sup> (AUSPLAY 2016: 14). Swimming only once a year cannot count as ‘participation’ in swimming, in order to reap the physical and social benefits from consistent, regular, meaningful participation. Including and using once-a-year participation is also misleading for those creating policy and obtaining funding. It is also ethically questionable when a human beings life is at risk due to poor or unpractised swimming skills. As a result, funding for student education and upskilling teachers may not be going to the most needed situations for example for every school child participating in an annual school swimming carnival.

Youth sport swimming does not have the same numbers participating as swimming lessons, but there are about 10,000 school swimming carnivals in the ‘carnival season’ where student races occur, and games are played. Other selected swimming participation services include ‘Baby swimming’ which is conducted by well-trained teachers, winter

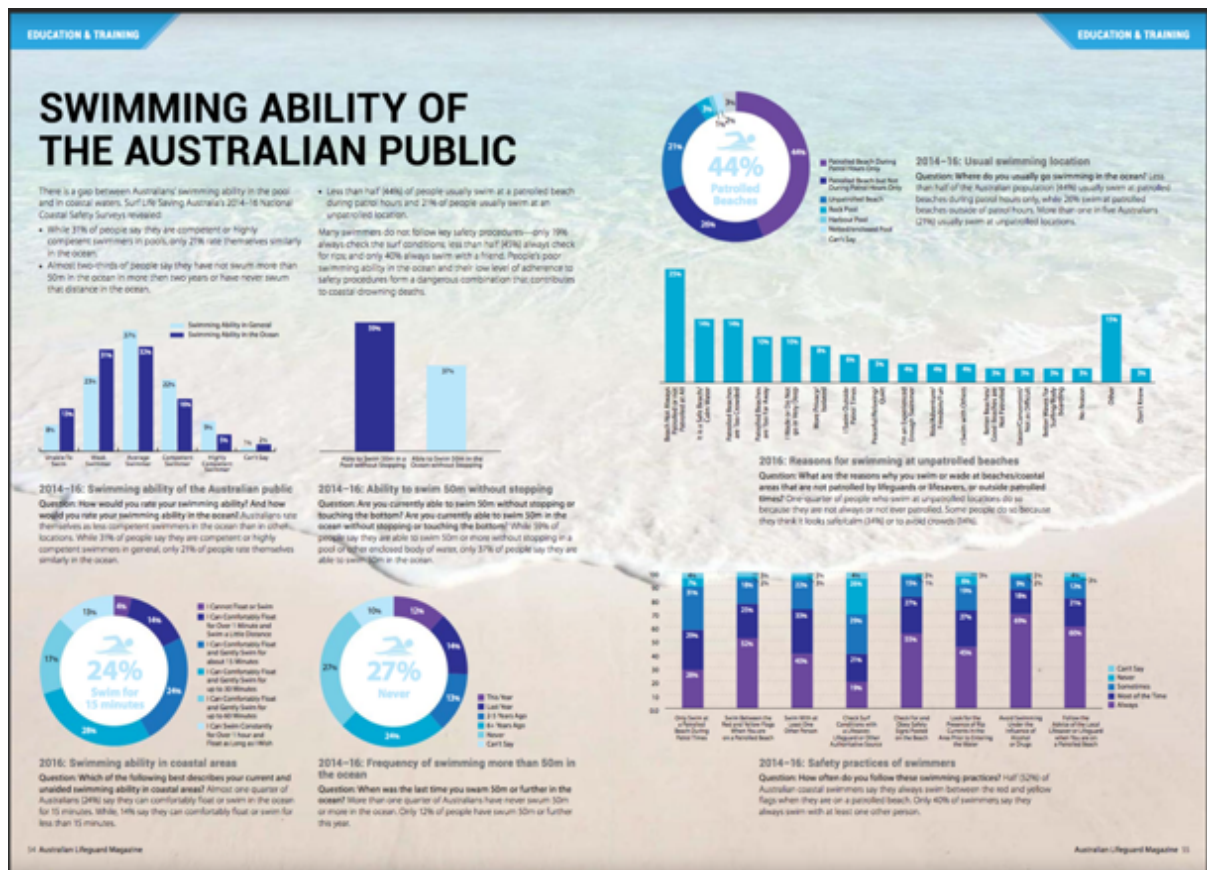
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<sup>9</sup> AusPlay participation report 2015-2016 was based on data collected by ORC International from 20,021 interviews 15 years and over and interviews with 3849 parents/guardians of children 0-14 years (AUSPLAY 2016: 3).

<sup>10</sup> Popular activities for adults are walking 42.6%, fitness/gym 32.1%, athletics/track and field 15.8% then swimming 14.5% then cycling 11.7%.

swimming and nippers. Surf Life Saving clubs<sup>11</sup> conduct ‘nippers’ days during summer, for about 60,000 children 5-13 years, giving context to swimming skills and enhancing water skill development in natural water environments.

Better, more specific survey questions are needed to obtain more reliable data, especially about the regularity of swimming and explaining the meaning of participation to the respondents. SLSA obtained better data of swimming skills and participation data, graphically displayed in the 2017 Summer Lifeguard magazine. This segment is titled ‘Swimming Ability of the Australian Public’ (SLSA 2017b) see Figure 14.



<sup>11</sup> Total SLSA membership numbers 2016-2017 was 168,823 in 313 clubs. <https://sls.com.au/slsa-ar-2017/6-statistical-summaries/membership/> accessed 21 November 2017



**Figure 14 Swimming ability of the Australian public is the best survey of self-described abilities for swimming in the ocean. This survey identifies swimming and wading but doesn't differentiate between them in drowning statistics Australian Lifeguard Magazine 2016 p35**

[https://issuu.com/surflifesavingaustralia/docs/australianlifeguard\\_2016\\_low-res\\_\\_1](https://issuu.com/surflifesavingaustralia/docs/australianlifeguard_2016_low-res__1)

SLSA data is better because it asks interviewees a practical question, self-assessed confidence and ability to swim 50 metres in a pool or in the ocean and rating themselves in a range of competencies from non-swimmer, to average then to highly competent.

Swimmers at the beach who are actually swimming beyond the waves, may have a better sense of their ability due to having to manage the natural and changeable ocean environment, compared to the predictability of a pool environment which has clear water, marked depths and edge proximity. The problem with Ausplay data about participation is the definition of swimming, which needs a qualifier. As stated already – is swimming about swimming lessons, swimming squad, swimming for nippers? Even the data for the type of activity preferences is indeterminate because of the generic nature of the idea/term swimming as play or as an organised activity.

There are five thousand, adult winter swimming (WinterSwimming 2018) club swimmers and 60,000 children 5-13 years old, participating in surf lifesaving summer 'nippers' programs at surf clubs and beaches around Australia<sup>12</sup>. Nippers clubs give context to known swimming skills and the children develop advanced water skills and rescue techniques when they participate in weekly summer sessions and seasonal competitions.

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<sup>12</sup> Total SLSA membership numbers 2016-2017 was 168,823 in 313 clubs. <https://sls.com.au/slsa-ar-2017/6-statistical-summaries/membership/> accessed 21 November 2017

There are more children involved with nippers than swimming clubs, even though nippers are a shorter summer seasonal involvement.

There are more children enrolled in the Nippers program than competition swimming clubs. There are more children involved in swimming lessons than nippers. Each swimming activity has a different purpose, so numbers cannot be compared 1 for 1.

### **Swimming Australia Memberships Table 2011-2018**

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Swimming members	52899	51136	55434	52092	54749	57373	60178	59490
Non-swimming members	26262	25284	21095	21353	24302	26127	27953	28338

**Figure 15 Swimming Australia Memberships 2011-2017 Source: Swimming Australia Membership services manager Lisa Newman-Morris by email February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

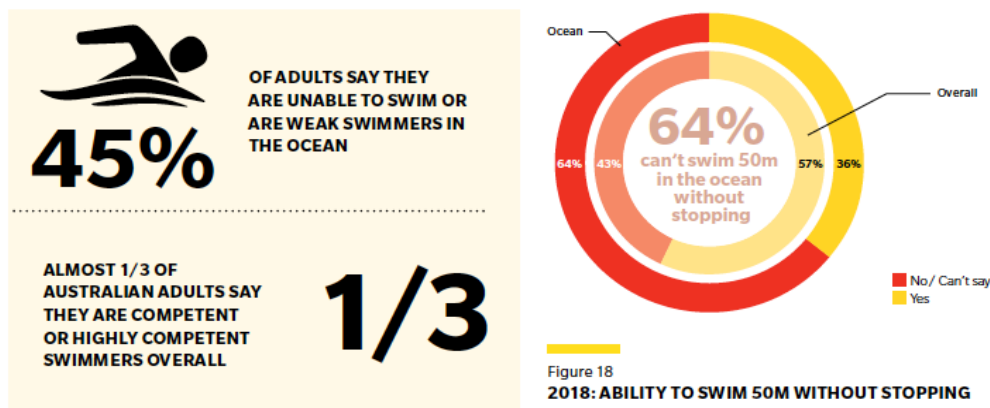
Swimmer numbers not included are the recreational swimmers doing swimming socially and for fitness in pools and the ocean. Numbers of people swimming and how often they swim are estimations derived from polls and survey data. Recreational ocean swimmer groups exist in populated coastal suburbs and towns, operating informally yet with tribe-like characteristics. Numbers fluctuate wildly according to interest, weather and sea temperatures. Swimming tribes or 'pods' have names such as the Sea Slugs, one of four groups in Gnarabup/Margaret River Western Australia, Byron Bay Stingrays north coast NSW, Toowoona Buttercups central coast NSW and Tomatoes swim club in Hobart, Tasmania.

Participating in a swimming club is a popular youth sport even though memberships are only slowly increasing. There were small annual increases in swimming members of Swimming Australia, from 2011 -2018, to a number of 59,490 swimming members in the 2018 season. See chart in figure 15. Not included in swimming membership figures are other formalised memberships in winter swimming clubs, nor swimmers who only compete in school competitions but are not a member of a club.

If swimming skills are not foregrounded in some aquatic recreations, yet swimming lessons widely available, and swimming skills admired, what then are the swimming skills of Australians that reflect the popularity of swimming?

## SWIMMING ABILITY

CONFIDENCE IN COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS



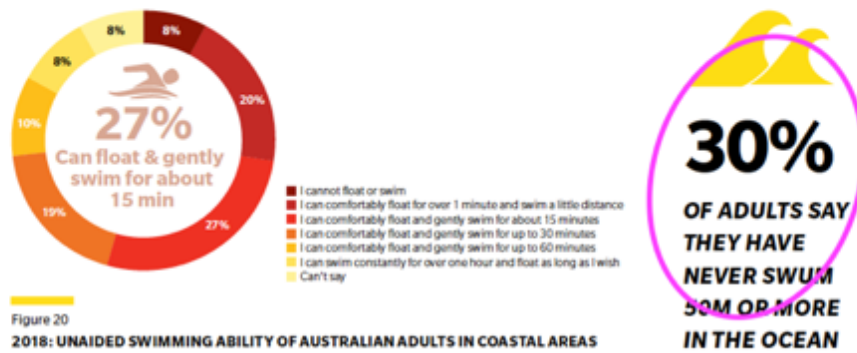


Figure 20  
2018: UNAIDED SWIMMING ABILITY OF AUSTRALIAN ADULTS IN COASTAL AREAS

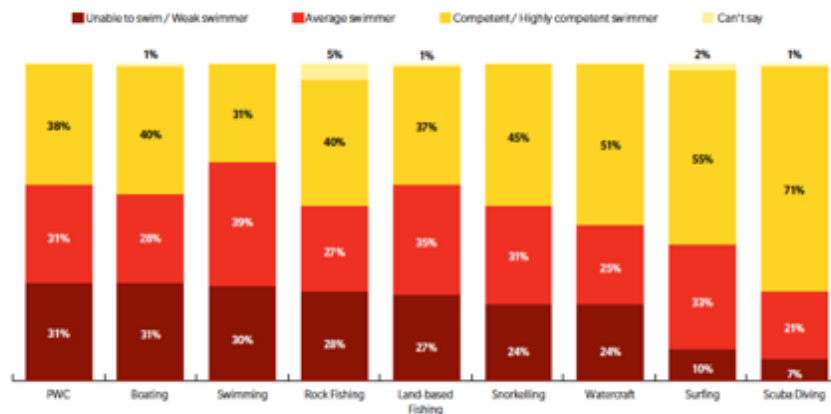


Figure 21  
2018: OCEAN SWIMMING ABILITY OF PARTICIPANTS IN COASTAL ACTIVITIES

Figure 16 Two graphic pages from Surf Life Saving Australia National Coastal Report (2018). Swimming ability of people in the ocean 2014-2016 compiled by Surf Life Saving Australia 21% rate themselves as good swimmers in the ocean and 37% of people say they are able to swim 50 metres in the ocean. 30% said they have never swum more than 50meters in the ocean (SLSA 2018: 14-15).

There are 40,371 people trained by Surf Life Saving with their surf bronze medallion, and 8000 with a surf rescue certificate. This pool of 48,000 lifeguards can patrol swimming beaches to take care of beach and coastal water users;

Surf Life Saving Australia Coastal Safety Report 2018 reports that annually, there are 10 million swims out of 300 million beach visitations, and 14.9 million coastal activity participants. Activities registered include boating, scuba, fishing, surfing, snorkelling, personal watercraft, swimming/wading (SLSA 2018: 14). The Australian Water Safety Council relies on reports from surf lifesaving and Royal Lifesaving Society to measure the progress toward reducing drowning by 50% by 2020 from 2016<sup>13</sup>. Ausplay data is more about all physical activity and sport participation, not just swimming, which is used for policy and funding distribution among other reasons for health metrics, identifying personal habits and trends in relation to recommended activity guidelines.

Further drilling down into the beach swimmer numbers and summarising them;

- 3.5 million frequent swimmers at least once a month
- 75 swimming hours per frequent swimmer per year
- 4 swimming hours per occasional swimmer per year
- 45% of adults say they are unable to or are weak swimmers in the ocean
- 64% of adults cannot swim 50 metres in the ocean without stopping
- 27% say they can float and gently swim for about 15 minutes
- almost 1/3 of Australian adults say they are competent or highly competent swimmers

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<sup>13</sup> Formed in 1998, the Australian Water Safety Council has a strategic plan 2016-2020 and aspirational goal to reduce fatal drowning by 50% by 2020. In order to accurately measure the effectiveness of policies, programs, education, funding for water safety applied towards the goal, data is averaged over 10-15 years and related to events per 100,000 people.

<http://www.watersafety.com.au/AustralianWaterSafetyStrategy/2016-2020Strategy.aspx>

- of the 248 fatal drowning deaths in 2017/2018, 110 occurred at the coast or in the ocean
- an additional 63 coastal fatalities occurred but not from drowning
- of the 110 drowning deaths, 35 occurred while swimming, 28 while boating, 10 while rock fishing, 10 while snorkelling
- half of the people who fatally drowned at the coast were born in Australia
- 76% were male and 24% female (SLSA 2018)

In 2014 RLSSA announced alarming figures that 1 in 5 Australian children will leave primary school 'without the skills to swim the length of an Olympic swimming pool'. This means that 50,000 children aged 11 years, demonstrate that these children who are in primary school, are not learning basic water safety skills. This data is based on swimming certificate levels pass rates accomplished in lessons. Furthermore, RLSSA warned of a 'ticking time bomb' for future water accidents and fatalities, because parents falsely assume that secondary schools will fill the gap. Many high schools do not teach swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills (RLSSA 2014a). Another study between Deakin University and Peninsula leisure centre (Victoria) noted that parents trusted intensive school programs - 5 by 45 minute lessons in Victoria - to fulfil learn to swim skill requirements (Moncrieff and Peters 2019). The study showed that those skills would plateau or decline if extra weekly lessons were not undertaken, concluding that school swimming programs are not enough to keep children safe. Reports such as this affirm my perspective that swimming is a skill that requires regular lifetime practise to maintain.

The National Drowning Report 2018 contains additional talking points about participation and ability for 2017/2018. The diverse dimensions of water user data in the report also

indicates the high value placed on safe swimming and recreating in aquatic environments in Australia shown in the statistics of people who drowned while recreating around water

- there were 800 drowning incidents of which 249 were fatal
- 72% of drowning deaths were male, 8 times more likely to drown in rivers
- drowning is a global health issue with approximately 360,000 people drowning each year
- 33 swimming pool drowning deaths accounted for 13% of the total
- of 2860 13-15 year olds attending swimming lessons only 30% could swim over 50 metres
- 86% of the overseas born people who drowned were long term residents not tourists
- 21% - 52 people drowned over 65 years old, 16 related to swimming/bathing
- 19% of drowning deaths involved a pre-existing medical condition contributing factor
- 31 drowning deaths involved alcohol

The following summary points about swimming ability in Australia are derived from RLSSA Fact sheet 33 compiled with data from various government and commercial sources (RLSSA 2016b).

- swimming is the third favourite for of physical activity after walking and fitness/gym
- there may be a declining interest in participating in swimming
- up to 40% of children cannot swim 50 metres when they are 11 years old
- 5% of adults cannot swim at all
- there are 1077 public swimming pools, 106 million visits per year

- the average Australian goes to a pool 4.4 times per year

There is a disparity between 2014 figures – 20% of 11 year olds can't swim 50 metres, and the 2016 figures stating up to 40% cannot swim 50 metres. It appears that in two years the numbers who cannot swim 50 metres has doubled! The source of the data is questionable, but not the indicative information presented. What is clear is that many Australian children – up to 40% - cannot swim very well or cannot save themselves if they are in deep water for longer than a minute.

Up to 2012, inquiries about the effectiveness of swimming lessons and swimming competence had been made of children in New Zealand Australia. Results were presented at the 2011 World Drowning Prevention Conference in Da Nang Vietnam. No such study of young adults had been conducted to review whether swimming lessons and swimming competence actually prevented drowning.

Little is known about the relationship between real and perceived water competence among youth in the context of drowning prevention or of their perceptions of their risk of drowning...Young adults are one of the most at-risk groups of drowning in most developed countries (Moran, Keig Stallman, and al 2012: 122).

In Australia, 249 people drowned in 2018, of these, 29 were young people 15-24years old. The 10 year average is 33(RLSSA 2018b: 28). It's not just young adults who are at risk of



drowning. More people over 65years old drowned than young adults. Over a 10year average, 57 over 65's drowned (RLSSA 2018b: 32).

Real and perceived competence of what makes a 'good' swimmer and how they manage the water is worthy of further exploration. Charities such as RLSSA, AUSTSWIM and SLSA are under pressure to be transparent with donations given in relation to results achieved and so rely on metrics of inputs and outputs, in order to be accountable (able to be measured) equating low overheads with higher productivity, but additionally having demands imposed by funders for reports (in which RLSSA is prolific), which distracts from fundraising and ongoing activities (Muller 2018: 154). I may sound apologetic, in trying to explain the dearth of good data about swimming participation and ability, because I have been stymied by contradictory statistics created by reputable organisations, there must be some reason. Examining available swimming statistics has left me confused but perhaps the problem is in the questions asked which relates to the ambiguity of the idea of swimming. I am impressed by the number of surveys and statistics about the popularity of swimming. On closer inspection, the numbers are 'soft', because the data is ill-defined. Numbers are indistinct because recreational swimmers are not a coherent group, unlike swimming and surf club members that can be counted. What is needed is more complex information about a club member. For example whether a swimming club member participates in a squad and races for a whole 4 month season or drops out after a month or swims all year round. Therefore, other knowledge frame works and methods of inquiry about swimming participation and culture need to be applied to obtain richer understanding of how swimming is done or not done.

In the search for understanding why swimming is used for personal and national cultural identity, I will now discuss self-fulfilling logic and the topographical explanatory argument ‘surrounded by sea’ as a rationale for ‘what we do, we swim’

‘It’s what we do. We swim’: questioning the self-fulfilling logic

In the process of developing a sense of self, people create narratives to make sense of random experiences and create meaning. Narratives are a structured story and a meaning-making device that can validate differences and similarities. A narrative that storifies a process of identity formation can be called an identity narrative (Riessman 2008).

Identity narratives serve a purpose for making sense or meaning out of random events, but the narrative does not explain the label. Why are Australians so successful in swimming competitions relative to countries with a bigger population? Why is swimming identified with Australia? What could possibly be reasons why Australians are identified with swimming? And why is it important to be a swimmer? I have already posed some possibilities; Is it the climate? coastal dwelling? lifeguarded beaches? clean natural warm water? swimming pool provision? outdoor lifestyle? surf swimming? values? drowning prevention? sport and recreation opportunities? systematic organisation? historical tradition? a genealogy of fast swimmers, the golden fishes? Other countries have many of these values and attributes for example, USA, UK, Germany, Sweden, Japan<sup>14</sup>, Spain, but

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<sup>14</sup> Imperatives to swim are also invoked in Japan using the ‘surrounded by sea’ adage, in relation to samurai soldiers’ skills for war – Suiejutsu swimming art (Durbin 2011)

they are not identified as nations of swimmers. Answers given in interviews, conversations and textual reviews to explain the phenomena, continually refer to Australia visualised as an island ‘surrounded by water’ justifying why ‘we’ need to swim and why ‘we’ are good at swimming. I offer further discussion of the storyline by exploring ‘Australia is surrounded by water’, another cultural identity narrative that impacts the swimmer narrative.

The imperative to swim in Australia is emphatic. You must swim! It is inevitable if you live in Australia that you will swim, because *Australia is an island nation*. Islands are surrounded by water...Australia is an island nation, Australians are coastal dwellers, 80% live within 50 kilometres of the coast, Australia is girt by sea.

The conclusion, one could deduce is the sea is lapping at our feet waiting to ‘get us’. Therefore, you’d better know how to swim! This is the causal illogic of the imperative to swim in Australia - that Australia is surrounded by water. By inference, it is not only sharks that are out to get ‘us’, but it’s also the water that is a deceptive character wanting to consume us.... Be ready, in case you are seduced by the coolness of water, or its pleasure! Whether water is a pleasure or a menace, the cultural perception is that it is inevitable that an Australian swim, determined by living in proximity to the coast.

Some Australians are coastal dwellers, and regularly commingle water and land life, across the beach. Phillip Drew (1994) characterises the beach as a homely retreat from the world on a metaphorical veranda (Drew 1994). John Fiske interprets the cultural spaces of the beach as a liminal space through a binary lens, as between city and nature (Fiske 1989).

Environmental events such as threats of apocalyptic tsunamis, sea level rise and land-eroding waves, assign water with malevolent human characteristics. The ability to swim is a front foot defence, in preparation for inundation. Of course, this is sarcastic, because the logic of ‘surrounded by water’ as an imperative to swim loses credibility under scrutiny.

Still, water as menace was realised in the winter of 2016 during a powerful storm and enormous swells. The images of waves (see an example in figure 17) devouring the beach at Collaroy, Sydney on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016 sent ontological shockwaves through Australians – the ocean not only has sharks stopping ‘us’ from getting in the water, the water is ‘out to get us’ peacefully living on the land, reclining on our beach/verandas. In the aftermath of the storm, media vision repeatedly showed veranda decks hanging perilously over a void of sand and a private in-ground pool, collapsing and dragged 5 metres into the sea by massive waves.



**Figure 17** The veranda of a private house and backyard swimming pool fall into the ocean at Collaroy beach Sydney, after a storm and wave surge erodes the sand in June 2016 Photo sbs.com.au 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016

In this case, the littoral coastal zone at Collaroy and other beaches along the east coast of Australia was washed away and the literal veranda of the particular house in Collaroy was undermined. The storm threatened the Australian way of life – the rights to have a backyard pool, safe engagement with the natural world, and outward looking self-reflexivity conducted while sitting on the veranda/beach. Phillip Drew’s thesis of the beach as the veranda of Australia may need revision, because of fluctuating environmental vulnerabilities.

Not only the beach has a metaphorical personality, water does too. When wading, gliding, swimming, splashing and frolicking, the water can ‘pull you under’. The notion of the water personified as a deceitful trickster ‘pulling you down’, ‘taken by the sea’, ‘disappeared’, are concepts used repeatedly in drowning news reportage (Textual observations from Google news alerts for drowning 2014-2017). A rip current is a specific threat at beaches not just in Australia. Just as Australian animals are oddly peculiar, an Australian beach rip has a unique ‘genus’, with a reputation matching the fearsome wildlife lurking in Australian waters. Framed in this way; water is “out to get you” while having fun.

For some, swimming is a pleasure while for others it is avoided. Swimming can be both horrible and wonderful. Swimming is a contradiction in this sense. But to be an Australian ‘you must know how to swim because we are an island nation’ activates psychosocial and topographical notions of islands. Australians swim because we are surrounded by water is a circular argument, as is the logic of Australians swim. The argument commits the logical fallacy of assuming what it is attempting to prove. Instead of offering proof, it simply asserts the conclusion in another form, thereby inviting the listener to accept it as settled when, in fact, it has not been settled. Island nation surrounded by sea is an identity narrative that meshes with the Australians-are-swimmers narrative, reinforcing the latter.

The significance of Australia surrounded by sea is even in the Australian national anthem. It includes a line emphasising an island nation - ‘our land is girt by sea’. Girt is an old-fashioned word, not used everyday conversation, but it means to secure a garment or surround/encircle and is a shortened version of girth. Australia’s topography is also mentioned in the anthem, golden soils, rare nature, boundless plains, all surrounded by sea. It is important. So much so that the picture of land surrounded by sea is given as

justification as to why all Australians should swim and why Australians are good swimmers, as I have repeatedly stated. The rationalising statements surrounded by sea and proximity to coast are entrenched discourses, limiting researchers' questions for accurate cultural understanding.

Contrasting representations of 'island surrounded by sea' create tensions in Australian swimming culture and in the organisation of swimming. The culture is structured to provide opportunities to swim and partake in the pleasures of it yet acknowledging the danger of water and the need to keep people safe from harm, an ever shocking reminder every time someone drowns.



**Figure 18** Graphic website notice of drowning deaths <https://sls.com.au/drowning-deaths-raise-alarm/> Screenshot 8<sup>th</sup> January 2018 (SLSA 2017a).

Campaigns to encourage learning to swim or swimming improvement and swimming engagement, are organised from time to time throughout the year at a local or national scale. One novel campaign conceived and delivered by Swimming Australia and its commercial partners in January 2018 was aimed at getting people swimming again, but not necessarily just competition pool swimming. Australia Swims campaign consisted of 9

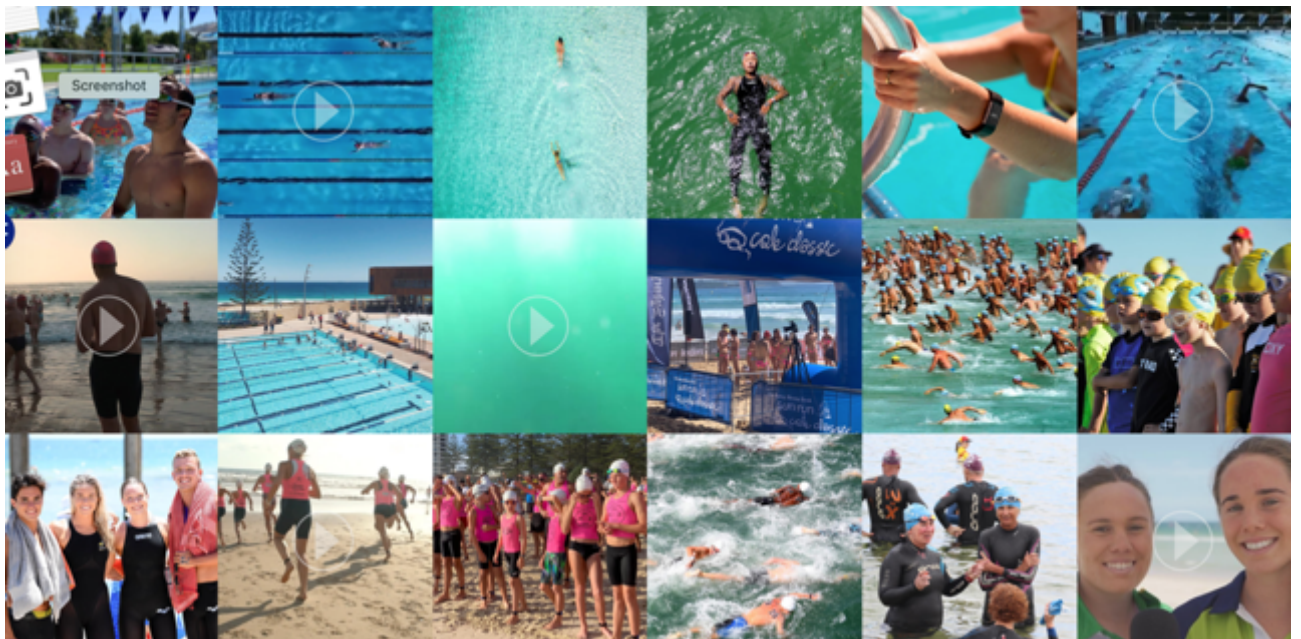
days of events during summer school holidays celebrating swimming in Australia's DNA. Optus was the major sponsor with Channel 7 advertising and broadcasting it.

The Australia Swims event hosts a dedicated website Australia Swims. The promotion casts a very broad net over anyone and any swimming activity. The website preamble provides an inspiring invitation to swim during 'a 9 day celebration of water' 20<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> January 2018 (note that includes Australia Day 26<sup>th</sup> January).

At an event, in a pool, at the beach or somewhere else, we're looking for swim experiences that appeal to every Australian. Young or old. Fast or slow. Lane lapper or ocean splasher. Experiences are opportunities for people to get involved with swimming. An experience can be anything: an ocean race, a pool party, swimming with dolphins. It's up to you! And they can take place anywhere. In a pool, at the beach or somewhere else

<https://australiaswims.com.au/>

Website images include jetty jumping, floating in an inflatable, racing, doing lessons, swinging off a rope into the river - to 'reconnect with your enjoyment of swimming'.



**Figure 19 Screenshot of AustraliaSwims website, a swimming participation campaign conducted in late January since 2018, ‘celebrating Australian’s love of water’ [www.australiaswims.com.au](http://www.australiaswims.com.au) accessed February 11th 2019**

From ocean swims and pool parties, to beach barbies and snorkel safaris, places all over Australia will be creating experiences that make it easy for Australians to get involved. Because it’s what we do. We swim. Australia Swims

[www.australiaswims.com.au](http://www.australiaswims.com.au) accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017

The topographical justification for Australians’ reputation as swimmers, is borrowed from the identity narrative of Australia as an island nation, giving mutual credence to both accounts. The shore and pulsing wave swash are where land and sea intermingle, permitting multifarious uses and symbolic interpretations that writers capitalise on when studying beach culture. In reviewing literature for this project, I note that studies examining aquatic beach culture get stuck on the beach or on waves in the surf (Lencek and Bosker 1998; Huntsman 2001; Hosking et al. 2009; Fiske 1989; Booth 2001). Just like beach scholars, some island scholars get stuck on the ‘*hard emphatic edge of island boundary*’ rather than its elastic liminality (Hay 2006: 22). Not to be forgotten, the sea and metaphors emanating from it go hand in hand with mention of an island. On the surface, vastness, void, unending, and in its depths, denizens of the deep, more void, mysteries and mythologies.

It is no wonder that swimming cultures are lived out, formed and reformed on islands and shores (Denning 1980). The ideal worlds of island and shore are held in the tension as a place for dwelling comfortably, feeling ‘*at home in the water*’, punctuated, often dramatically, with the contradiction of tragedy and terror. Fear of becoming suffocated by metaphorical ‘small isolated sameness’ of an island or drowning in the surrounding water,



interrupts the idyll of the island with dystopic perspective. Contrasting representations of 'island surrounded by sea' create tensions in Australian swimming culture and in the organisation of swimming. The culture is structured to provide opportunities to swim and partake in the pleasures of it yet acknowledging the danger of water and the need to keep people safe from harm, an ever shocking reminder every time someone drowns, the contradiction to 'Australia swims'.

## **Conclusion**

Swimming in Australia is used as a symbolic characterisation of national identity because the sport of swimming and doing swimming, are both closely identified with 'Australianness'. Swimming in Australia is perceived as a common shared experience, which creates a sense of solidarity and allegiance to a cultural identity for those who embrace that impression (Houlihan 1997; Hall 1996; Giardina 2005). In addition to the sport champions, other representative swimming practises perpetuate the cultural identity; swimming at the beach, picnics at the river, swimming lessons, backyard pools and school swimming carnivals are some.

I am curious about the pervasive use of the swimmer characters' in association with Australian identity. I ask like Hall (1996) - who needs identity and why? and how does one manage a crisis of belonging, the quandary of self-knowledge in a changing world? (Hall 1996). I suggest that the Australian swimmer identity narrative functions as an 'anchor' to the real physical and social world, provide existential meaning and agency – by associating with other people doing the same thing-: comingle with water in natural environments, to

pay attention to breath needed for survival, move for pleasure, and share the unusual experience an 'alternate reality' of unstable buoyancy by comparison with hard gravity.

The Australian swimmer as an identity character is embedded in the statistical data presented above, while the archetype is further developed in photographic representations and other popular media, attesting to the popularity of swimming. Swimming is used in the bigger picture in Australia to consolidate narratives about Australianness. The swimmer is one of a number of symbolic representations of an elusive Australian identity. Like other identities such as the lifeguard, the digger, the fire fighter the good swimmer is held in esteem. The swimmer is bestowed with supra normal ability to transcend boundaries between land, beach and water. They can be heroic.

Contrarily, 40% of children cannot swim 50 metres when they leave primary school when they are 11 years old (RLSSA 2014a; SLSA 2018). Most in this group will always remain poor swimmers, or 'dryheads'. Many of the other 60% will not practise or improve their swimming beyond their last swimming lesson at 11 years old and also become a 'dry head'. Dry heads may have a wet head but prefer to 'swim' vertically, retaining foothold in shallow water. Most 'swimmers' at the sea and river beaches are in the class of dry heads. They can be seen standing on the sand bars, jumping waves, or briefly plunging and surfacing to cool off. Dry heads are a contradiction to swimming is in Australia's cultural DNA, but they pass the genetic cultural test because they are in the water doing something like swimming.

The statement Australians are a nation of swimmers brings events, experiences, relationships, memories and perspectives together into a story that seems to have coherence, logic and unity. What of migrants new to Australia who don't have a social history of swimming to 'buy in' to the function of swimming as a national identity

narrative? Indeed, Australia is a country of many migrants whose identities are challenged while becoming accustomed to their new country, so not be able to swim or not understanding rituals around going swimming can become an activity fostering exclusion. Swimming does have the potential to aid assimilation and also the alleviation of suffering through the pleasures of swimming (Atkinson and Gibson 2017: loc1615). Certainly, my work with migrant women escaping oppression from Bhutan affirms that learning to swim, feeling safe, laughing and playing in the water, provided the women with joy, confidence and agency that they applied to their newly enfranchised life in Launceston, Tasmania (Personal communications with Women's Migrant Centre manager after I conducted a 5 week swimming program in 2011).

The slogan "swimming is in Australia's cultural DNA" perpetuates an imagined uniform capability and affinity. The phrase, Australians are swimmers is a generalisation, just one of the myths of national identity characterising what it is to be Australian. Australians are not necessarily swimmers, determined by nice sandy beaches, warm weather and clean water. These geographical features make it possible for swimming to occur, (but not everywhere - in some places in Australia water is cold, polluted, too warm, infested with crocodiles or killer jelly-fish, or physically and financially inaccessible). While environments conducive to swimming afford opportunity to swim, the environment does not determine a national identity or ubiquitous swimming competencies. Other mechanisms are in play; social values, cultural meanings, organisational structures, all influence whether individual Australians swim or not. Contrary to social cohesion, not swimming, or being a poor swimmer or unable to swim, can lay the foundation for social exclusion and lack of belonging, because of a persuasive identity narrative that 'Australians are swimmers'. More people could swim more often and swim with greater

competence for their own benefit – perceived and actual competence is distorted by self-perception that being an Australian must mean ‘I am a swimmer’.

In the next Chapter I investigate how swimming is organised as in industry in Australia, for sport, for recreation and for survival. This chapter describes how swimming is funded, delivered, taught, and systemised. I ask by whom? for whom? And for what purpose?

## Chapter 3. The organisation of swimming: sport, recreation and survival

Swimming is organised in Australia for sport, for recreation and water safety. Swimming is structured and regulated in a systematic way, from government policy through to public and private operators providing facilities and then to organisations delivering standardised water safety, coaching and teaching methodologies. The aim of this chapter is to examine the complex organisation of swimming. In particular, outlining the overlapping and at times competing needs, interests, and beneficiaries of the different types of swimming organisations and businesses. I argue that the swimming industry demonstrates high esteem for swimming opportunity and for safety while swimming. While swimming is respected, it is also contested. Swimming is a crowded, systemised industry consisting of co-operative organisations each trying to hold a niche audience/market barely successfully, yet competing for the same pot of government, sponsor and donor money while replicating similar services.

The material for chapter was drawn from a critical study of organisational policy documents, annual reports and websites. Additionally I examined systematic reviews of swimming campaigns and intervention programs conducted by RLSSA which are presented as evidence based research (Clegg 2005: 4; AUSTSWIM/RLSSA 2013). I also conducted formal interviews and had informal conversations with people involved in various aspects of the swimming industry.

## Structure and functions of Australian swimming organisations

‘Swimming’ is a generic term that incorporates a variety of practical applications categorised within a broader conception of ‘aquatics’. It is this broader conception of aquatics that I investigate and describe how swimming is organised. The term aquatics (and my inquiry about generalised swimming), casts a wide net over other sports and activities where the ability to swim is implied, or considered a prerequisite. The many aquatic activities other than swimming, such as fishing, boating, surfing, kayaking, water polo and diving, are not within the scope of this project but are not forgotten. For example, drowning statistics include those who drowned while boating and those who drowned while fishing from ocean rocks – two aquatic recreational activities under the statistical jurisdiction of the water safety council. Furthermore, knowing how to swim and obviously a ‘good’ swimmer, opens doors to broader contexts of water recreation where swimming has practical application such as in examples above. Learning to swim can be an end in itself once a parent decides their child has enough competency. Another facet to a learn to swim business that may not be transparent to the customer is, swim schools have associations with swim clubs who encourage a student toward club membership and the competition pathway in a ‘squad’. A member of a squad may choose to not be a member of a swimming club. I spoke with children and parents involved with swim clubs and squads who bemoaned the time and race commitment demands of a competitive squad, wanting to limit their involvement to a season or fewer than 6 times a week. They felt the squad and club culture didn’t leave them with any choice than to become more involved than they wanted. In many cases, state and national qualifying times were put forward as the standard to aim for. Whereas parents only wanted their kids to improve, have a social experience and have local interclub competitions as the limit of the child’s aspirations.

Squads can consist of children only, adults only, or a mix. Swimming organisations take care of people entering the swimming culture, help to maintain their safety and structure potential achievement goals - whether a school swimming race, go surfing or canoeing without an adult, or to have hydrotherapy rehabilitation after a medical procedure. Competition swimming membership demands a minimal commitment set by narrow choice of cultural precedents.

The scope of organisations and services within the swimming industry is vast. And, as I have illustrated above, there are many different ways that people may use swimming services. I wanted to acknowledge this but at the same time keep the focus of this chapter on those aspects of aquatics that I see are directly related to what I call swimming. In the remainder of this section I outline some of the ‘key players’ in the swimming landscape and their relationships to one another, to help provide some context and order. While this is not a review of swimming organisations in the sense of gathering comprehensive statistical data, the below synopsis is useful for understanding the scope of the swimming industry by having an overview of the ‘players’ who influence cultural manifestations.

It is from the evidence of the many swimming organisations that the conclusion can be made that swimming is a valued activity.

#### ‘Peak bodies’ and swimming providers

‘Peak body’ is an Australian vernacular concept used in the health and community sector – not for profit, non-government organisations - who are a representative body of organisations with allied interests in the same sector (Ogle and Bowling 2011). Peak

bodies usually have knowledge-authority, funding eminence, and lobbying power. They are an apparatus reflecting the unique way governance is administered in three structures, federal, state and local governments. Each of these governments outsource public services to non-governmental organisations and business, swimming education and water safety is an example. While the interrelationships function, the bureaucracy and regulatory environment inhibit change. For swimming services to improve, the basic administrative scaffolding that enables the current culturally accepted structures, need to be revised toward a less top down model of operation, to a nuanced bottom-up, locally driven model.

Standards and regulation can also be conservative, constricting transformation of organisational conventions and cultural traditions. A review of swimming curriculum for example could be conducted by a panel from other educational activities, rather than perpetuating the status quo in a closed system by swimming industry stakeholders.

Swimming clubs could exist without affiliating with the international and national swimming organisations, using a child appropriate model of participation rather than the current model based on adult and international participation. Standardising the national swimming curriculum created order by necessity when Austswim was formed in 1978.

When peak bodies were established in the division of industry responsibilities, unscrutinised authority became possible. A study of the social and cultural authority of not for profit swimming organisations would inform the field of recreation and safety services.

Two examples of peak bodies are; The Australian Water Safety Council (AWSC) and AUSTSWIM. AWSC was formed in 1998 as a consultative forum and 'collective voice', for water safety agencies. AUSTSWIM is the Australian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety and formed in 1979 and is the peak body for the training and teaching of swimming and water safety. Some of their member organisations include Surf



Life Saving Australia (SLSA), Australian Leisure Facilities Association (ALFA), Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Swimming Australia Ltd (SAL) and YMCA. AUSTSWIM not only provides education standards and teaching systems<sup>15</sup> but also offer specific curriculum that is slightly different to other learn-to-swim brands. The distinction between systems and curriculum are not made clear in the Swimming Teaching Manual or other public documents. Though I am familiar with varied curriculums, the roles and functions of each organisation was a puzzle I had to unravel in the research processes, especially when each organisation appeared to be doing the same thing, with each claiming authority and competing for the same funding.

A third example of a peak body is Swimming Australia Ltd. (SAL). SAL is also a member of the Australian Water Safety Council and AUSTSWIM while also functioning as a ‘peak body’. The organisational concern of SAL is primarily competitive swimming, developing pathways for competition swimming participation, with the ultimate goal for a young swimmer to become a national representative “Australian Dolphin”. Membership of SAL as a peak body includes other industry related organisations sometimes called ‘stakeholders’, such as Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) and ASCTA’s Learn to Swim and Water safety division called Swim Australia.<sup>16</sup>

SAL is the peak body for swimming with nearly 1,000 clubs and 90,000 registered members nationally. Swimming Australia’s vision is to create a nation of swimmers

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<sup>15</sup> Aligned with the Australian vocational training system, so that a professional swimming teacher will have Certificate II or III in Aquatics. A teacher of teachers such as an AUSTWIM presenter will have Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment.

<sup>16</sup> Swim Australia is in competition with AUSTSWIM, RLSSA’s Swim and Survive program and the YMCA curriculum., creating an interesting dynamic.

admired by the world, striving towards this vision every day through inspiring Australians to be the best swimmer they want to be – from grass roots community participation through to elite level swimmers representing our country and themselves on the global stage.

<http://www.swimming.org.au/Corporate-Information/About-us.aspx> accessed 7th October 2017

The 2015 CEO Mark Anderson explains the role of SAL as a peak swimming organisation, aiming to bring industry members/partners together for the good of the sport, and to increase competition swimming membership.

We want to grow the base and the stream of swimmers into the elite pipeline, but not just for elite also for the beauty and participation in the sport. SAL needs to ally with everyone, all of the aquatic industry. The Junior dolphin program for example is a way to grow the sport for the good of the sport. At SAL, we want access to the learn to swim customer details – get inside your organisations swim tent – but Swimming Australia doesn't want to own the customers we just want a relationship with swim school customers, to direct them to further develop swimming skills and possibly join a club (Interview with Mark Anderson CEO SAL, 2015, Melbourne 2/12/15).

Swimming sports appear to drive safety and participation through peak organisations such as Swimming Australia who act as a custodian of the activity of swimming. Swimming Australia since 2018 is now using the mantra ‘Many people, one attitude, to enrich and inspire the nation’ using swimming as the vehicle to inspire and unite Australians (www.swimming.org.au accessed 11th February 2019).

In a similar category as ‘peak’ is another descriptor indicating authoritative importance - ‘leading’ – as in organisations such as the Royal Life Saving Society Australia. Their membership is state Royal Life Saving Society organisations, not other industry

organisations. RLSSA is a ‘leading’ organisation not a ‘peak’, yet both types are significant, respected aquatic industry authorities.

‘RLSSA is the leading water safety, swimming and lifesaving education organisation in Australia. The RLSSA is a nationwide organisation that has been educating millions of Australians for over 100 years’

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/about/who-we-are/background> accessed 7th October 2017

Exacerbating the smorgasboard of choice of providers, are three learn to swim curriculums delivered by AUSTSWIM, RLSSA and SWIM AUSTRALIA. Each organisation supplies similar swimming education, with slightly different emphases on water safety and competition skills. As long as the learning outcomes are realised for a swimming skill as outlined in a skills training package, the way a skill is taught can be customised, just as in-flight safety briefings are customised by different airlines. For example ‘safe entry into the water’ or ‘glide through the surface of the water and recover to standing’ two outcomes in the Swimming teacher training package code number SISAQU308A “Instruct water familiarisation, buoyancy and mobility” [www.training.gov.au/Training/Details/SIS30110](http://www.training.gov.au/Training/Details/SIS30110) accessed January 9th 2019.

AUSTSWIM ratifies a swimming teachers’ training (AUSTSWIM 2014a), and curriculum is recognised by industry norms – set by popular beliefs of ‘best practise’ and by the Australian Qualifications Framework. AQF is a work and skills training regulator. AQF certifies a set of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge, a curriculum and benchmarked learning outcomes confirmed by a committee of industry representatives. The aquatics industry regulates itself within the broader skills training and legal

frameworks of occupational health and safety and fair work guidelines. New insights to teaching and training can be incorporated to existing systems in several ways - via visiting overseas speakers at conferences, via commissioned research, and a 5 yearly curriculum review by independent panels outside of the industry. Additionally, creatively examining fundamental beliefs such as the use of kickboards, training durations, and the pathways model of youth sport could be reviewed by atypical consultants. An example of how the industry interacts with the AQF is how a swimming teacher is trained. The context of training and the process of becoming a licensed swimming teacher, maintaining certification and renewing a license is explained on page 116 when I explain the regulation of qualifications and wages.

#### Para-statal relationship between AUSTSWIM, RLSSA and Federal Government

The relationship between RLSSA and AUSTSWIM is that teachers of the RLSSA Swim and Survive curriculum are validated by AUSTSWIM standards. At the governmental level, RLSSA acts as a para-statal entity, having some political authority while serving the state indirectly. The nature of multi-levels of government in Australia, how they cooperate with each other and distribute responsibilities, is a unique way of engaging with quasi autonomous non-government organisations such as RLSSA. Multi-level government is a governmental technology functioning across jurisdictions, which makes an interesting, distinctive way of managing and enabling government funding and regulation of water safety, swimming education and drowning prevention projects. This is a key feature of how swimming is organised in Australia, and why exact duplication of Australian systems in other countries that have tried to, such as UK, cannot occur (Dugdale 2017: 1).

Play by the Rules<sup>17</sup> is an example in one genre of an across-jurisdiction authority that swimming organisations adhere to through association with the Australian Sports Commission. Move It Australia is another Sport Australia initiative that Swimming Australia is a conduit, encouraging and guiding Australians to be active for at least 30 minutes per day <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/findyour30> accessed 16th January 2019. The Australia Swims Campaign in January 2019 promotes ‘Move It find your 30’, on behalf of Sport Australia, effectively becoming jointly responsible for swimming as an optional health-giving activity <https://australiaswims.com.au/>.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has a name change in July 2018, to Sport Australia. Sport Australia is the operating brand name of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), a Commonwealth entity within the Australian Government’s Department of Health Portfolio <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/sportaus/about> accessed 8th December 2018.

The name change coincides with the launch of the Australian Governments’ Sport 2030 plan and the Move It, get active campaign.

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<sup>17</sup> Play by the Rules is now a unique collaboration between the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, all state and territory departments of sport and recreation, all state and territory anti-discrimination and human rights agencies, the Office of the Children's Guardian (NSW), the Australian New Zealand Sports Law Association (ANZSLA) and the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW. These partners promote Play by the Rules through their networks, along with their own child safety, anti-discrimination and inclusion programs. <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/about-pbtr>

‘a fresh marketing and community creative platform, ‘Move It’ part of an ambitious plan to make Australia the most active sporting nation in the world’ encouraging 30 minutes of daily physical activity <https://www.cmo.com.au/article/644638/how-sport-australia-plans-build-new-national-sporting-agenda/> accessed 7 December 2018.

Australian swimming organisations are therefore involved in global, social and economic processes through proprietary swimming teaching and drowning prevention know-how – for health and education functions, both as social good and market products and act as government proxy. SAL, RLSSA and AUSTSWIM are public benevolent institutions with business subdivisions. For example, RLSSA :

‘Royal Life Saving Society - Australia is a public benevolent institution (PBI) and is a Public Company Limited by Guarantee. ABN: 71 008 594 616’

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/about/who-we-are> accessed 21 January 2019

In this context, ‘Swimming’ is not just an experience but as an industry, is located in the education, sport and health sectors, while some swimming organisations conduct governmental duties outsourced to them, functioning as surrogate government agents. For example Swimming Australia acts an aid agency, receiving monies from Federal government aid budgets to conduct drowning prevention work in the Pacific. Managed as a policy of Sport through Development in the Pacific, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Pacific Sports Partnership and delivered through cooperation with local agencies such as Fiji Swimming and Vanuatu. <https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/sport/sport-for-development/pacific/Pages/sport-for-development-pacific.aspx> accessed 21 January 2019.

The overarching concept is *diplomacy through sport*. Following a specific strategy, DFAT, together with Austrade, the Office for Sport, Tourism Australia and the Australian Sports Commission, have jointly developed the **Australian Sports Diplomacy Strategy 2015-18** ‘to inform, engage and influence through sport, in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond’ <https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/sport/Pages/sports-diplomacy-strategy-2015-18.aspx> An updated strategy, **Sports Diplomacy 2030** was launched in February 2019, ‘to leverage the nation's sporting excellence in ways that enhance Australia's influence and reputation and advance our national interests’ <https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/sport/Pages/sports-diplomacy-2030.aspx>

Sport is increasingly used by states as part of their foreign policy objectives as soft power (intangible power resources as opposed to traditional military hard power) - whether hosting international sports events, shared international health goals, socio-economic development, nation branding through sports tourism or public meet and greet opportunities between politicians and visiting sports champions (Nauright 2004; Grix 2016; Horne 2006; Maguire 2011b). Sport and diplomacy is a novel subject as in the Journal of Sport for Development and Sport for Peace actions advocated by the International Olympic Committee <https://www.olympic.org/peace-through-sport>. Emerging studies of the role of sport in soft power is examined in Grix, Brannagan and Lee (2019) against the backdrop of concerns about the break-up or radical change in the global world order (Grix, Brannagan, and Lee 2019).

In summary, to emphasise the arrangement, Swimming Australia Limited has a role as an aid agency, acting on behalf of the Australian government as a para-statal organisation, enacting diplomacy through swimming education and swimming sport. Athletes, officials and coaches are diplomatic influencers. Three examples are: swimming coaches Forbes and Ursula Carlile being ‘honorary national coaches’ of the Peoples republic of China from 1973-1982 <https://www.carlile.com.au/about-us/our-history/> just as China was opening up to the west. Secondly, champion swimmer Ian Thorpe sitting with US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice at her request, during the world swimming championships in Melbourne in 2007 and thirdly, US marathon swimmer Lyn Cox helped to warm relations between USA and Russia when she swam some of the Bering Strait in 1987. See more in footnote 37. An additional example of what could have been, I was invited to travel to China with Forbes and Ursula Carlile in 1973 when I was 16, but my father prevented me from going, not wanting me to be used as a political instrument, as well as being frightened of ‘the communists’.

Forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the programs that SAL conduct in Fiji and Vanuatu - teaching swimming teachers and conducting swimming coaching education - has more of the appearance of *sports development* than *sport for development* (Kidd 2009: 532). The programs function as diplomatic aid. *Sport for development* matches with United Nations Millenium Development Goals (MDG) – strengthening basic education, public health community safety, and social cohesion and helping girls and women, youth at risk and persons with HIV/AIDS and persons with disabilities - whereas *sport development* is largely a project of sporting organisations assisting those engaged in organised sport, directing people to organised sport and strengthen the infrastructure of facilities and institutions (Kidd 2009: 530). Swimming (and other sports) athletes and officials are therefore untrained diplomats and unskilled aid workers. The role model capacities of



athletes take on the character of a product influencer common on social media platforms, the intangible product being foreign policy. As diplomatic influencers, they are the ‘transacting actors’ for ‘augmenting a foreign policy objective’ (Murray and Pigman 2013: 1100; Rofe 2016: 212). National representatives must be trained for diplomatic service as it is a significant role and position for foreign policy influence.

### Swimming Campaigns

I have already sketched out the function of swimming campaigns in Chapter 2 which describes some characteristics of Australian swimming culture and the perceived popularity of swimming. Swimming campaigns function as public service announcements and as a marketing service to commercial business supplying swimming education. Recurring campaigns are therefore significant to the way swimming is organised and funded. Federal Government agencies, the Water Safety Council, Australian Sports Commission and business sponsors, direct funds through to service providers, the peak swimming organisations, who then coordinate localised and national campaigns and programs.

Recurrent learn to swim and water safety campaigns further indicate the value of swimming ability and potential safe swimming opportunities. Drowning prevention via knowing how to swim is the primary message, targeting parents of school aged children. Secondary messages are to supervise children and to never swim alone. The audience of other campaigns vary from beach users in specific beach swimming safety awareness such as swim between the flags and learn to identify a rip current, to fisher people, and men recreating and drinking around water. Advice is offered to river users to be realistic about

one's swimming ability. See some of these programs listed online at <https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/programs>. The campaign 'Australia Swims' is a summer program delivered in January (in its second year in 2019) encouraging people to get back in the water 'to reconnect with their love of swimming' and enjoy any and all sorts of ways of doing swimming <https://australiaswims.com.au/about> accessed 9th January 2019.

Learn2swimweek Oct 2-9, 2018 [www.learn2swimweek.com](http://www.learn2swimweek.com) target under 5's in NZ and Australia, "Free swim lessons to curb drownings Victor Harbor times.com.au September 3, 2018" and "Harrison Schulz Flerieu aquatic centre supporting learn2swim week for under 5's launched by Kids Alive and Poolwerx."

Come the first week of December, also the first week of the Southern Hemisphere summer, National Water Safety Week occurs. Swimming centres and swimming organisations organise public service announcements in the media reminding people about water safety and offering reduced price swimming lesson events. Learn2swimweek.com in October is another parallel initiative, a commercial, quasi social-entrepreneurship initiative of Poolwerx, a pool cleaning franchise business. In other state campaigns aiming to induce school students to swim more, the Queensland education department announced a \$3.68 million budget to fund free water safety lessons for all Queensland primary school students 6 to 12 years old in 2019, by expanding in-school swimming programs for children particularly in remote areas. The schools funding is additional to a 3 year federal government funded sports/activity program of annual \$100 to \$150 vouchers for eligible children. The vouchered swimming lessons offered in Queensland are for children between 1 and 4 years old, providing about 8 to 10 swimming lessons conducted by an accredited club. It is unclear whether a club that is also privately owned and run as a business can

register as an accredited provider to receive the vouchers. Parents can access these vouchers for other sports too, but only once per year per child. The vouchers can only be used with an accredited provider. The aim is to encourage parents to help their children engage in more physical activity and to reduce cost barriers to participation. The average cost for participating in swimming in NSW is \$1559 for a season, second in expense to golf. The cost does not include travel costs (Cull and Parry 2018). Lessons for 1- 4 year olds is a different subsidised program to the school aged sport program to encourage physical activity.

Another water safety campaign in the form of a water safety resource is associated with municipal councils in the south east of Sydney. Called The South East Sydney Water Safety Directory it is aimed at preventing drowning within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and newly arrived communities (SutherlandShire 2018). RLSSA statistics identified that one third of drowning deaths in waterways and aquatic activities are people who have been born overseas, hence aiming the resource to CALD communities. The resource features available training courses, education workshops and aquatic services convenient to residents.

Water safety awareness is revived by the occurrence of hot days, invariably reported in Sydney based newspapers with a photograph of bathers at Bondi beach, the prototype swimming beach in Australia as discussed in the previous chapter. Beach-bathing images and hot weather trigger further public safety messages promptly delivered by water safety institutions and government agencies. Two primary messages for beach swimming are 'swim between the flags' and what to do in a rip current. Secondary messages are; learn to swim and never swim alone. Public service announcements reinforce safety lessons

learned initially in school. ‘Swim between the flags’ water safety education sits alongside road safety, fire safety and personal hygiene.

High incidences of drowning and water accidents reported in the annual national drowning report and children missing benchmarks, not only trigger political election promises, but also prompt the design and delivery of public water safety and swimming campaigns, co-ordinated by peak bodies. Smaller organisations and private swim schools also engage in public swimming safety campaigns by their own volition or as a constituent service provider during a broader, national campaign.

### **Organisational categories**

I have identified five categories of the many aquatic organisations in Australian swimming organisations and their functions.

- Water safety
- Teaching/learning and swimming skill development
- Policy, laws and regulations, tourism representations, public service announcements
- Swimming as sport
- Facility provision (including tidal rock pools, river and water hole access, aquatic centres, backyard pools, beach access and organisation for public use.)

Within the swimming ‘industry’ as a whole, organisations have specific or generalised concerns, which I have categorised in the table below in Figure 17. The listed categories

are not discrete though. Some belong as sub sections or over other listed groupings. What the categories demonstrate is that swimming is held in high estimation in Australia and is co-ordinated methodically, with oversight by the Australian Water Safety Council and the Australian Sports Commission.

The table below outlines most (but not all) of the organisations involved with the swimming industry.

Area of concern	Agencies	Beneficiaries
Water safety	RLSSA, AUSTSWIM, Swim Australia, SLSA, YMCA, Divers Alert Network, Private Swim schools, School curriculum, Aquatics and Recreation Victoria, VicSwim, VacSwim (WA and Victoria), Municipal Councils	Everyone who is around or in water for sport, pleasure, semi organised activity, recreation, boating, diving, fishing.
Teaching/learning	RLSSA, AUSTSWIM, ASCTA, Swim Australia, swim schools, swimming clubs, YMCA, Australian Sports Commission, Australian Qualifications Framework, state education departments, Registered Training Organisations.	Children are the main beneficiaries of learning to swim organisations. Teachers and coaches benefit from knowing how to teach national standardised curriculum. Adult non-swimmers are also catered for.
Policy, laws and regulations, tourism	Australian Water Safety Council, Swimming	All people who live or visit Australia and use

<p>representations, public service announcements, data collection</p>	<p>Australia Limited, AUSTSWIM, RLSSA, ALFA, SLSA, Municipal Councils, Tourism Australia, AUSPLAY, Vocational Education and Training, SAL, University Research departments, private data collection agencies engaged by public organisations, insurance companies, corporate partners, SPASSA Swimming pool and spa association, State Sport and Recreation Departments, National School Curriculum, State and National Aquatic Sports Organisations, Water parks association</p>	<p>aquatic locations for recreation, tourism and sport, benefit from a regulated industry and broadcast safety reminders. Standardised curriculum and teaching methods can be conservative but consistent. Corporate partners/sponsors dictate terms of relationships, and athlete agreements may be onerous. Data collected from surveys can be unreliable despite asserting the scientific method of 'evidence based research'. Backyard pool safety fence and water regulations, swimming hole access and council lifeguards at popular sites enable safe swimming. Surveillance can be an issue and under reliance on common sense</p>
<p>Skill development</p>	<p>Education departments, certified club coaches, advanced swimming instructors, ASCTA, RLSSA, Australian Sports Commission, private adult</p>	<p>People taking advantage of opportunities to develop advancing swimming and water safety skills beyond benchmark basic skills. Includes increased</p>

	swimming improvement businesses, AIS and state sports institutes, SLISA, AUSTSWIM,	competencies for riskier scenarios, employment, competition, fitness goals, water sports, medical rehabilitation
Facility provision	Municipal Councils, Australian Leisure Facilities Association, Corporations e.g. Belgravia Leisure, Surf Clubs, Private commercial pools, School pools, backyard pools, fitness clubs, access managed by Parks and Wildlife, and again beach access and public management	Anyone wanting to swim in a safe, pleasant location, knowing water is hygienic, patrolled, accessible by foot or car. Costs of entry and distance to venues and punitive rules such as 'no school no pool' may restrict access. Scarcity of lane space and price of lane hire may inhibit equitable group access. Councils subsidising for profit companies.

**Figure 20 Table showing how swimming industry organisations can be categorised and how many there are. The listed categories are not discrete, some belong as sub sections or cross over into other headings. What the categories demonstrate is that swimming is held in high estimation in Australia and is co-ordinated methodically.**

### Water safety

A prerequisite for having competence to swim in the many types of places a person may encounter in one's lifetime, is having some ability to swim for a duration of time and

manage deep water. Water safety skills are also essential particularly how to read the environmental conditions and have a realistic sense of one's swimming fitness at that moment for making a choice to get in the water or not. The fundamental aim is to have a good time but also get out again, alive - which is sadly not the case for over 250 people who drown each year in Australia (RLSSA 2018b). Knowing how to swim is not a guarantee against drowning, but it does go a long way to prevent accidents and toward making good decisions about when not to swim such as when the conditions are unsafe, especially in backyard pools (supervision and fencing) rock fishing in big swells and natural waterways without lifeguarding services.

The release of the annual national drowning report in September is a reminder of water safety protocols with graphic prompts to prepare for the upcoming summer season. The National drowning report is collated by the Royal Life Saving Society Australia, from data collected by state coroners departments. Detailed statistics tell of tragedies in the past 12 months compared with 15 years of data - of people who died by drowning, locations where people drowned, their ages, and the activities undertaken when a drowning occurred. It is from these statistics that new or renewed drowning prevention campaigns, water safety education and research is fostered. It is September as I write this and the 2017/2018 National Drowning Report has just been released. Good news is that the number of people who died from drowning in Australian waterways is the lowest ever, 249 people, a drop from 291 in 2016/2017 an overall 11% reduction on the 10 year average (RLSSA 2018b: 6). As the report asserts, the numbers are people, not 'data' or 'cases', as the CEO of RLSSA Justin Scarr writes:

“We must always be mindful that this is a report filled with the stories of real people impacted in a most tragic way by drowning. It includes people who lost their lives to



drowning, the families they left behind, the rescuers who made valiant efforts to save their life, and the communities that are reminded as they pass the causeway, swimming pool, rock platform, beach or river swimming holes” (RLSSA 2018b: 4)

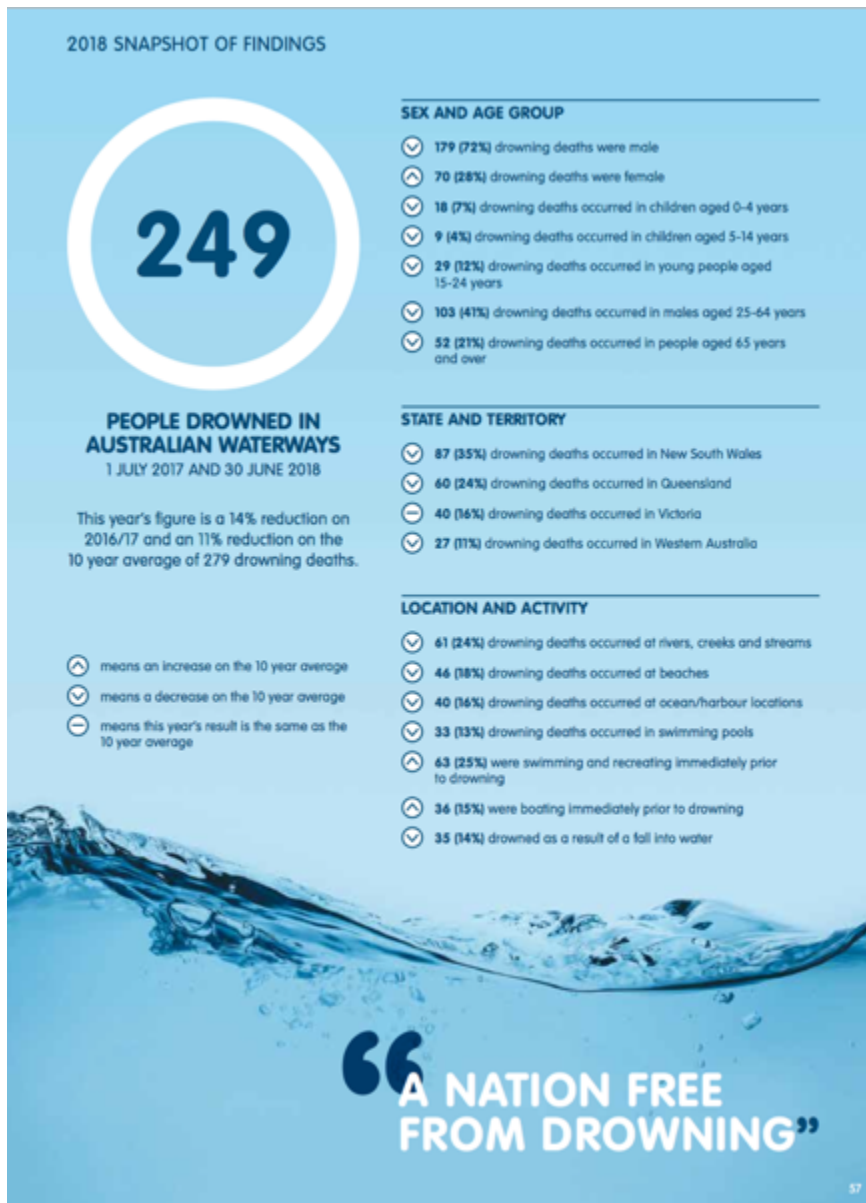


Figure 21 Sample Page 57 from the 2018 National Drowning Report compiled by RLSSA is a snapshot summary of findings obtained from data analysis of drowning and non-fatal drowning in Australia in the season 2017- 2018. The Australian Water Safety Council and members agencies aim to reduce drowning by half from 2016 to 2020, hence references to 11% reduction on the 10 year average (AWSC 2016)



Towards a nation free from drowning

**Figure 22 Australian Water Safety Council logo and by-line ‘towards a nation free from drowning’**  
[www.watersafety.com.au](http://www.watersafety.com.au) 2018

A new data set has been added to the national drowning report, that is, non-fatal drowning. Non-fatal drownings are also people, not cases. People whose lives, families and communities are also traumatised by a drowning experience. This fact impacts policy and strategies for lifeguarding, and other drowning prevention actions and services. Policies and procedures are regularly updated by research and agreement of definitions through international consultation. For example: CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation) techniques in first aid for a person suspected of drowning has changed to a pattern of 30 compressions and two rescue breaths from a more complicated pattern including checking pulse. The registered training organisation Surf Life Saving Victoria, delivers training in Victoria and Tasmania, have indicated that the two breaths in resuscitation may soon be eliminated due to shared understanding (personal experience in a first aid course for Bronze medallion qualification November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Bicheno).

Swimming safely and drowning prevention is a high priority in Australia, Royal Life Saving Society is at the forefront of research projects and trials. The federal Australian government is a major funder of RLSSA. Drowning prevention and management and recording of incidents, provide extensive data from which to identify correlations and patterns from which education and campaigns are developed. For example, a fact sheet

published by Royal Life Saving Society Australia explains what non-fatal drowning means. I provide the following extensive quote to explain non-fatal drowning, because water safety actions are increasingly based on more sophisticated understanding of the effects of accidents in and around water;

Non-fatal drowning is often reported incorrectly as ‘near-drowning’. World Health Organization have replaced this term to one of three outcomes of a drowning: death, morbidity (injury), and no morbidity.

If the person does not die from the drowning, then it is a non-fatal drowning with or without morbidity (injury). A person who does not die from a drowning incident and survives may experience either: no complications or, brain or other organ damage ranging from mild to severe. This is also known as hypoxic brain injury (brain damage due to lack of oxygen).

Between 2002/03 and 2014/15, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows there were an average of 474 people per year admitted to hospital following a non-fatal drowning, compared to an average of 285 fatal drownings recorded for the same period.

Children aged 0-4 years are at highest risk for both fatal and non-fatal drownings and make up the largest proportion of hospitalisations compared to all other age groups. Swimming pools (including backyard and public pools) record the largest number of non-fatal drownings, especially among young children. Teenagers and adults are more likely to get into difficulty in natural bodies of water such as in rivers, lakes and at beaches (RLSSA 2018a).

Enabling safe recreational swimming opportunity in Australia highlights the value for a culture of swimming. On-going campaigns initiated by the Royal Life Saving Society include [Keep Watch](#), a campaign aimed at parents of children. Keep watch actions encourage adults to pay attention to children while around water, to avoid getting distracted by adult conversation or phone screens. Caregiver distraction is a major cause of

child water accidents. The Keep watch program does not just apply to pool and beach water, it also educates about pool toys, farm dams and bath time.



Figure 23 Water safety campaigns are either mitigation strategies or intervention strategies primarily to reduce drowning. In this page from the 2017 National Drowning Report, the number of people who have drowned in rivers and streams over a 10 year period is highlighted – 735. Of which 80% are males and 20% females (RLSSA 2017b). From this type of data, water safety campaigns are designed.

As part of their “Total Service Plan” process, the basis of the National Safety Agenda, Surf lifesaving Australia conduct campaigns and actions that mitigate drowning or diminish

risks to safety. Some of their programs strategically intervene in an identified safety issue such as watercraft, over 55's and intoxication while around waterways (SLSA 2018: 5).

Another campaign conducted by RLSAA is explained in the online program [Don't let your mates drink and drown](#), and discourages men from drinking alcohol while doing water activities like fishing. Online education is backed up with television announcements in ad breaks, in humorous ways as in [#BeLikeDave](#) and #NoManLeftBehind. Another safety warning and educational campaign specific to river use is [Respect the River](#), a project designed to reduce drowning in rivers creeks and streams because that is where more drowning occur than anywhere else in Australia. In the last 10 years 2002-2012, 735 people have drowned in rivers or a stream or a creek.

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/facts-and-figures/research-and-reports/research-reports/drowning-data-reports> accessed 31st August 2018

Parents are more likely to give permission to their child to go to the weir or the beach without an adult, if they can pass their stage 4 swimming test according to local swimming teachers who are also parents or school teachers (Interviews in 2015 with Bev Annesley, Vanessa, and Bronwyn). A swimming certificate assures a parent of their child's ability to go swimming without adult supervision, such as Junior Swim and Survive awarded by the Royal Life Saving Society. This standard involves swimming in deep water and in clothes, and for a distance of 50 metres. Junior Swim and Survive is the swimming benchmark for year 4 (9-10 year olds), advocated by the swimming and water safety industry and aspired to by swim schools, and those state education departments providing lessons. Swimming skills standards for year 1 school (6years old) to year 7 school (12 years old) are

documented in the RLSSA National Swimming and Water Safety Framework (RLSSA 2014b).

The vast array of swimming and water safety organisations and the benchmark standards also attest to the popularity of swimming and aquatic recreation. Industry bodies such as AUSTSWIM, Australian swimming coaches and teachers association, Australian swim schools association agree on industry standards and learning outcomes but emphasise their own procedures to achieve those recommended outcomes.

For example in Margaret River there are a number of places to learn to swim, typical of populated suburbs and larger country towns. Some classes provided for babies and up to adults, occur in the heated indoor 25 metre pool, while there are other opportunities for school aged children in the pool as well as in calm beach bays on the coast, such as Gnarabup and Cowaramup Bay. Vacswim, a Western Australian education department initiative through Royal Life Saving Society WA, accredits swimming teachers with extra know-how, to teach in natural water like the ocean or a river during school holidays. Vacswim enrolment is managed through schools. Swimming teachers are recruited locally. Vicswim is a similar program in Victoria supplying 'educational aquatic holiday programs' [www.vicswim.com.au](http://www.vicswim.com.au) supported and funded by the Victorian government and Aquatics and Recreation Victoria (ARV). Swimming locations require access, funding support, health regulations, emergency plans and equipment at the ready, and trained people to staff facilities and programs. Australian government policies, public funding and corporate sponsorships are embedded through the network of aquatic industry entities, further substantiating the popularity of aquatic sport and recreation, of which swimming is deemed a fundamental skill to participation.

Once children leave school and disperse into general society, it is much more difficult to distribute safety messages and education. Other means besides school classes need to be resorted to. Targeting specific user groups is one way. While purchasing some camping equipment at a store selling fishing camping and boating supplies in Hobart in 2017, I noted that the store was providing water safety booklets for recreational fishing and water craft. I flicked through the booklet and found there was no reference at all to swimming skills in the booklets supplied by Marine and Safety Tasmania (M.A.S.T). Further investigation of the role of M.A.S.T. in water safety education revealed short videos posted on [www.mast.tas.gov.au](http://www.mast.tas.gov.au) linked to a Youtube channel. Canoe and kayak safety educational videos posted are explicit about the importance of knowing with how a life jacket works and to use a tether between the paddler and the lightweight craft when more than 200metres offshore. The videos don't mention swimming and water skills that may be required to fulfil the suggestions. <https://youtu.be/gpdN1RPWRXc> accessed 9th September 2018. The advice that is given for those paddlers using light weight canoes and kayaks (10000 sold in Tasmania in 2013-2014) in order to have a safe enjoyable time on the water, is to understand weather forecasts, tidal and wind changes and make an honest assessment of personal fitness to paddle (by loose inference fitness to swim).

In activities such as surfing, kayaking, snorkelling, water skiing, boat fishing, swimming in those situations is unintended, even incidental to the focus of recreating ON the water with a craft.



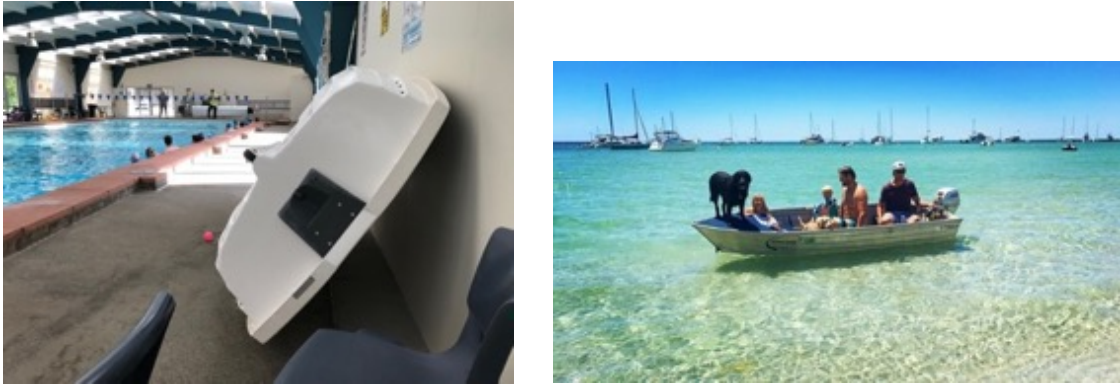
**Figure 24 Stand-up paddlers next to yachts ON the water without life jackets presumably know how to swim, Pittwater Clareville-Avalon NSW. Water safety for recreation ON water is taught by some organisations and swim schools. Personal files December 2018**

Surfers rely on their leash connected to their board, snorkelers rely on flippers for safety, boaties rely on the reliability of their boat and PFD for safety. These water users are in between two different aquatic activities – water craft and water immersion. Water craft users don't need to be able to swim very well at all to use them – creating a false sense of safety, ripe for dangerous accidental immersion. The Australian Water Safety Council and Royal Life Saving Society identify a high number of water accidents in boating activities, particularly in inland waterways (RLSSA 2016a). Alcohol is sometimes involved, which impairs judgement and despite laws about wearing personal flotation devices (life jackets), some water craft users neglect to use them.

In Tasmania, there is a plan under discussion to combine water safety providers in an attempt to reduce drowning, share knowledge, training and human resources. (SLST 2017). Boat safety is taught in some schools in Tasmania, by instructors from MAST (Marine Aquatic Safety Tasmania) or by a qualified AUSTSWIM teacher. The Friends School in Hobart and St Mary's High School each have a polyurethane boat that fits 4 people, to teach school children how to self-rescue if the boat is swamped or if propulsion



fails. The boats are stored on the pool deck and brought out to use in swimming lesson periods.



**Figure 25 Training boat at a high school in Tasmania and family ON the water boating**

**Left Dinghy boat stored, used for learning boat water safety at St Mary's High School pool Tasmania 2017 Personal files.**

**Right A family boating outing Dunsborough WA, where water safety skills are required. Personal files 2018**

The children at these two schools also learn how to swim, aiming for the Australian benchmark competencies. Combining swimming lessons and water craft safety skills appears to be obvious synchronous use of time.

### The business of learning to swim

An ongoing discussion of who is responsible for children learning to swim sheds light on the learn to swim business aspect of the organisation of swimming in Australia (AUSTSWIM/RLSSA 2013; Lynch 2012; Peden and Scarr 2012; RLSSA 2012, 2017d; StaffWriter 2012). McShane (2009) notes that learning to swim became a 'civic duty' after incidences of mass drownings on sinking ships and waterways in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

when swimming and bathing became fashionable (McShane 2009: 197) (Huntsman 2001). Historically, swimming education since the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been a commercial service, sometimes a short term free education through schools, and occasionally a charitable service in seasonal emotive campaigns (Osmond 2012; Winterton 2010). Parents are responsible to their children to know how to swim, by accessing a commercial service, unlike school teachers who are responsible for a child knowing how to read and write. Supporting the imperative to learn to swim are strong opinions expressed in prevailing public literature, that swimming know-how is a social good for public benefit, similar to rights to school education and medical care (SLSA 2017a; Peden and Scarr 2012). Falling swimming standard achievement levels noted in 2010 triggered a call for action and a review of why children were slipping through the net of an industry well supplied with opportunities to learn (Larsen and Savage 2010).

“Royal Life Saving believes it is the right of every child to access a quality swimming and water safety education that includes skills such as general swimming techniques and treading water, survival techniques and strategies, floating and rescue skills. In order to prevent drowning, every Australian child must have basic swimming and water safety skills and knowledge of how to be safe when they are in, on, or around water. Swimming and water safety education differs from basic learn to swim in that it includes a holistic mix of swimming, survival and rescue skills, and water safety knowledge suitable for use in a range of aquatic environments”

“Lack of skills and knowledge levels of Australian children were cited as a concern, as was perceived decrease in the number of children accessing swimming lesson classes particularly while at school and falling achievement levels and consistently high drowning statistics among Australian children” (Peden 2012: 3).

Without ongoing lessons, and guided practise, the standard of swimming skills will be poor for the person's lifetime. A survey of parents and carers of children and their swimming education conducted by RLSSA, illuminate other reasons why parents stop taking their children to lessons after some initial classes. Besides cost to the family, seasonal accessibility to pools, unsuitable weather, parental perception of adequate competence were considered barriers to children participating in swimming lessons (RLSSA 2017d: 6).

Participants reported the most common reason their child had ceased or would one day cease swimming lessons was that they could swim competently enough (68.7%). This level of competence would likely be different for every parent. Whichever measure is used by parents, it is not an objective measure, nor is it likely to be based on any published guideline (RLSSA 2017d: 7). This study noted several requirements for future research in this field, including the need to gain a greater understanding of why children cease lessons, or do not participate at all (RLSSA 2017d: 9).

Another earlier survey already referred to above, this time of swimming teachers conducted jointly by RLSSA and AUSTSWIM in 2012 revealed that the teachers thought parents valued competitive swimming strokes more than water safety knowledge that teachers valued more (Peden 2012).

When comparing teacher's opinions on the relative importance of various swimming and water safety skills with teacher's perceptions of parent's opinions, there were similar views expressed in most skill areas. Both teachers and parents were thought to view water safety

knowledge and the most important skill for children to acquire, however teachers believed parents valued competitive swimming strokes more than teachers did (Peden 2012: 13).

Freestyle, one of the four competitive swimming strokes is taught first in Australia, unlike UK and Sweden where 'life saving' breaststroke is the most valued learners' stroke. The caveat here is that due to the worldwide influence of Australian teaching methods and respect for fast Australian competition swimmers, freestyle is in the process of becoming the preferred learners' stroke in UK and Europe. Freestyle is sometimes called crawl, and in historical writings has an Australian version and an American iteration (Osmond and Phillips 2004). Vigorous discussions about the tradition and efficacy of breaststroke or freestyle occur amongst swimming teachers in Europe at conferences such as the World Aquatic Development Conference in Lund, Sweden in 2014, 2016, 2018 and during teacher training sessions I co-conducted in Sweden through the enjoy water/fearful swimmer program Gilla Vatten 2014-2018.

Another aspect of the regulatory controls in the swimming industry is; without an AUSTSWIM recognised license, and a working with children police check, a teacher cannot be employed. There are equally stringent regulations to operate a swim school business on top of certified affiliations with one of the four 'peak' swimming organisations. A swim school owner cannot operate unless they have an AUSTSWIM or ASCTA recognised teaching or coaching qualification, which permits them to secure 'swim school insurance'. Without swim school insurance, a lesson operator cannot hire lane space or operate a private facility.

A well-run swim school business is lucrative especially if it is associated with a known 'named' swimmer or successful coach in a populated district. With over 200,000 children

born each year in Australia, there is a ready supply of new customers. Some parents take their babies to baby and infant classes. In these lessons the caregiver is in the water with their child as a teacher guides and instructs what the parent can do with their own child.

Infant and baby lessons were pioneered by Forbes and Ursula Carlile in Ryde, Sydney, in the 1960s, in warm water in indoor pools. Forbes Carlile was my swimming coach in the 1970s. He capitalised on his reputation as my coach and on his effective programs, by extending his learn to swim business to 5 venues in Sydney by the 2000s, making his managers and himself millionaires. Forbes and Ursula established a foundation which supports the Carlile Swimming Clubs' competitive programs. When swimming coaching evolved to a profession throughout the 1950s – 1970s, a coach had to supplement their meagre coaches income by providing swimming lessons (Gallagher 1998; Carlile 1963; Phillips 2008). This commercial approach continues, in which a learn to swim business subsidises the competitive club program.

As indicated already, Swimming Australia assumes the role of custodian of swimming practises in Australia and is the peak body for competition swimming. Swimming Australia also has a commercial arm managing learn to swim teacher qualifications branded with the Swim Australia curriculum. <http://www.swimaustralia.org.au/> SwimAustralia also has a close association with ASCTA as a contact email address on the SwimAustralia website [swimaustralia@ascta.org](mailto:swimaustralia@ascta.org) suggests. Swim Australia services over 600 member-swim schools. Theoretical differences between swimming curriculum providers are based on safety or competition, while the content is very similar. The Swim Australia curriculum gives greater attention and lesson time to competitive strokes and racing skills than the RLSSA curriculum, which focuses more skills and time to water safety. The two agencies do consult with AUSTSWIM as a mediator, for example,

AUSTSWIM provides master classes in competitive strokes taught by experienced competition coaches and teachers such as Leigh Nugent head coach of the 2004 Australian Olympic swimming team. A private swim school can opt in with the RLSSA curriculum or the Swim Australia curriculum. RLSSA Swim and Survive programs are prevalent in Western Australia, Swim Australia more prevalent in Queensland and NSW while AUSTSWIM curriculum is more prevalent in Victoria. Despite the confusion of multiple suppliers in the industry, the content of what children learn is similar enough for children to transfer from one provider to another, taking with them similar language and routines, including enrolling into school swimming lessons.

The focus of learning to swim is on school-aged children 5-12 years, providing beginner experiences, fundamental aquatic skills and water safety knowledge. Most lessons are paid for by parents, there are occasionally free lessons sponsored by a local community or swim school with a secondary commercial motive. I noted that some of the lessons provided by a swim school that are so-called 'free' are subsidised by a government program. Older children in high school and younger children are also served by skilled teachers, as are adult non-swimmers. Subsequent lessons beyond primary school age are available for a cost, to hone and develop skills and begin to stream children toward swimming and surf sports. From this step onward, and as skill development increases, fewer parents buy lessons to improve their child's competencies (RLSSA 2017d). Swim schools and swimming organisations such as SAL work hard to keep children on development pathways and so engaged with the activity of swimming and potentially, participate in the sport of youth swimming. As far as doing fundamental lessons, it is easy for a child to lag behind their peers if a child misses scheduled school lessons, or parents do not take their children to private lessons at recommended ages or are withdrawn from sequential, life-stage lessons.

Neither learning to swim nor developing swimming skills are compulsory in school education (Lynch 2015). Aside from private schools with own pools, Tasmania has the most consistent supply for years 3, 4 and 5 and for vulnerable year 6's (RLSSA 2014b, 2017e; TASED 2016). School swimming lessons is a May 2019 election policy promise offered up by the federal Labour party, the opposition leader Bill Shorten offering \$46 million over 4 years from 2020 to ensure all Australian kids receive school-based swimming lessons.

“swimming lessons aren't just something parents should have to organise on weekends or during holidays. It's a critical part of growing up safe in Australia, so it should be part of the school term” he said [www.9news.com.au/2019/01/20/08/44/labour-splashes-out-on-swimming-lessons](http://www.9news.com.au/2019/01/20/08/44/labour-splashes-out-on-swimming-lessons) accessed 23 January 2019

The value of this promise works out to be \$5.18 per child per year, based on 2017 census figures of 2,216,779 primary school aged children (ABS 2017). It is unclear how this investment would be managed or who would be receiving the funding – families? swimming teachers? swimming pool entry fees? schools?

In the Health and Physical Education curriculum guidelines of the new (2015) National school curriculum, only broad swimming skills are recommended. Conceived as ‘learning outcomes’, selected swimming skills are categorised and evaluated as fundamental movement skills<sup>18</sup>. Examples of some fundamental movement skills defined in the glossary of the Australian Curriculum Health and Physical Education are; throwing,

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<sup>18</sup> FMS - fundamental movement skills, provide the foundation for confident and competent participation in a range of physical activities.

catching, striking, balancing, jogging, leaping, floating and moving the body through water to safety (ACARA 2014: 31). Timothy Lynch (2012) reviewed places that children could learn to swim in Australia and recommended

“That by implementing swimming and water safety with conviction into the school curriculum, all students will become more aware of drowning risk behaviors, thus successfully decreasing drowning fatalities in both the short and long terms” (Lynch 2012: 267).

Without comprehensive year-by-year school swimming and water safety instruction, the onus is on parents to organise their child’s swimming lessons during out of school hours and then take their children to water to apply what they learned in formal lessons.

Despite the thorough and candid recommendations of the ‘No Child to miss out’ report conducted by RLSSA and Timothy Lynch’s recommendations (2012), the new (2015) Australian National Health and Physical Education curriculum leaves swimming and water safety education up to each school as an optional, not compulsory course<sup>19</sup> (Peden and Scarr 2012) (ACARA 2018). There are partnered opportunities for children to learn swimming – arrangements made between schools, and local swimming clubs. After-school sports programs are coordinated by schools but delivered by local existing sports clubs such as a registered swimming club. The programs have been implemented since 2014 with ‘partner organisations’ who are able to apply for funding from a pool of 100 million

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<sup>19</sup> This is despite the Crawford Report recommendations to increase physical activity in schools and consider mandatory inclusion of basic physical education training for teachers (Crawford 2009: 27-30).



dollars, between \$1300 and \$3100 per term and considerable amount of ‘paperwork’ to apply for and acquit the grants. <https://www.sportingschools.gov.au/> accessed March 2017

Schools outsource in-term school swimming classes to Austswim qualified swimming teachers. It is rare that a school has enough school teachers who are also qualified to teach swimming (Lynch 2012). Not all state education departments make provision in school time for children to attend ‘in-term’ swimming classes. Those that do, vary widely. There is minimal homogeneity of number of lessons, frequency of lessons throughout the year, across schools, and between states. There is a common thread through lessons that are conducted though, and that is the benchmarked standards set and administered by AUSTSWIM with the RLSSA’s prototype ‘Swim and Survive’ skill levels in figure 23. A child can relocate from one state to another with a certified skill set that is recognised in all states. In-term lessons and VacSwim – vacation lessons – are organised through schools. It is the education department though, who engage and pay qualified swimming teachers, who may also teach in a private swim school. Children pay a low fee for up to ten x 30 to 45-minute lessons, which may include bus fare and pool entry.

10/02/2017

Active Award 4

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### Water Safety Tips

Go together. Never swim alone. If you get into trouble, there will be someone to help.

Lochie the Lifeguard ROYAL LIFE SAVING Mascot

## Active Award 4

### Water Wise

To achieve this award you must be able to:

1. Safely perform a compact jump and exit from deep water.
2. Demonstrate feet first sculling on the back.
3. Demonstrate rotation of the tucked body, keeping the face above the surface of the water.
4. Swim 50 metres freestyle with correct technique.
5. Swim 50 metres backstroke with correct technique.
6. Swim 25 metres survival backstroke with correct technique.
7. Swim 15 metres breaststroke with correct technique.
8. Demonstrate 10 metres sidestroke with scissor kick.
9. Dressed in swimwear, shorts and t-shirt, demonstrate the following sequence:
  - a) Sculling, floating or treading water for 2 minutes
  - b) Swim slowly for 3 minutes, changing survival strokes after each minute.
10. Float for 1 minute using an open-ended flotation aid.
11. Surface dive, swim underwater and recover an object from water depth equivalent to the candidate's height.
12. Demonstrate a crouch dive.
13. Throw a rescue flotation aid to a partner at 5 metres distance and instruct the partner to kick to the edge.
14. Answer questions about dangers in the aquatic environment.

**Extension:**  
Demonstrate introductory butterfly arm action for a distance of 5 metres.

**WATER SAFETY TIPS**

#13 Get Wet & Wise: Learn the Aquacode - Go Together, Stay Afloat and Wave, Reach to Rescue.

#14 Water Safety Rules: Building survival and lifesaving skills are just as important as being a strong swimmer.

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**Figure 26** RLSSA Swim and Survive Active award 4 is the benchmark standard for children to achieve by the time they are 11 years old (RLSSA 2017a) © 2011 Swim and Survive, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> February 2017

Aquatic centres and public pools make space available for lessons, often closing most of the pool during swimming lesson season. Lane hire and pool entry costs vary from place to place as shown in Figure 24, prices for adults in 8 different venues.



Balmain baths Sydney \$5 adults



Lake Talbot Narranderra \$3.50



Glenorchy Tasmania \$3.80



Wentworth NSW \$4



Hay NSW Free



Wilcannia NSW Gold Coin \$1 or \$2

Ganmain NSW \$2	Cohuna VIC/NSW \$4.50

**Figure 27 Photographs of pool entry prices for an adult at pools in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.**

**Personal files**

Children effectively do 8 lessons, not 10, because the first one is usually an assessment day, organising children in to their correct ability group, finding lost swimsuits and goggles and dealing with frightened and hesitant children. The 10<sup>th</sup> lesson is the testing day and ‘fun’ and games time. Swimming lessons are optional, chosen by the school principal or parent teacher council. Some head teachers wish to avoid the chaos and time required for getting young children to and from the pool as it is too much angst. Lost socks, wet shirts, youngsters unable to dress themselves, distracted children wandering off, torn plastic bags holding a wet towel, make swimming lesson excursions very demanding for the supervising school teachers.

When lessons are conducted in high-school they are usually for PE classes, or as a specialist aquatics class. Different issues arise when dealing with teenagers attending swimming classes than with primary aged children. According to a PE teacher on the Gold Coast, some girls won’t participate unless the class is at the end of the day when they can go straight home to reapply makeup and dry their hair, unless time is allocated at the pool

or in the school change rooms for post swim grooming. Teenage body consciousness sensitivities feature for high school swimmers, reflected in swimsuit styles – board shorts and or t-shirts and shorts for the children less familiar with pool swimming experiences, rather than sleek body hugging drag reducing swimwear. Private schools such as Knox and PLC in Sydney and Scotch Oakburn in Launceston insist on proper purpose designed swimwear (Personal discussion with Chris Fydler, NSW swimming president and with Scotch Oakburn teachers).

According to teachers and parents of high school students I had informal discussions with in 2015-2018, some school students avoid participating in the classes with elaborate excuses. Avoidance and therefore lack of improvement from year to year is a frustration to authorities attempting to reduce drowning accidents and minimising rescues at patrolled beaches (RLSSA 2017b). School swimming lessons take time out of the academic curriculum. While most school boards and principals attribute value to high school aged children having swimming lessons, others do not. (Interview 2017 with Michael Wenden, father, 30 years a pool manager and Gold Coast swimming pools co-ordinator.) School swimming lessons are therefore dependent on the advocacy of the principal, guided by recommended but not compulsory, national curriculum educational outcomes.

The provision of swimming lessons through schools is complicated by the number of providers and as stated, the high or low values a principal has for swimming.

Administering lessons require organisational flair to manage complex relationships between aquatic centres allocating pool space, state education departments, co-operative parents, and the availability of qualified swimming teachers certified with AUSTSWIM qualifications. While lessons are available and accessible, not all Australian children follow through to learn and achieve benchmarked abilities, hence the report in 2014 of one

in 5 children who cannot swim 50 metres a distance considered optimal for competence (RLSSA 2014a).

Fewer teenaged school students participate in school lessons than primary aged students. The minimum benchmark embodied in the swim and survive level 4 program is supposed to be achieved by the time a child leaves primary school when they are 11 years old. The exception is children at high schools and private schools with a pool on campus as they have swimming activity classes all year round, due to the accessibility of the pool in school grounds.

#### Competition sport swimming and its funding

Because of the success of swimmers at international events, sport swimming receives the highest amount of dollar funding of all Olympic sports in Australia (Gordon 2014). High performance sport funding is distributed to national sporting organisations (NSO) on the basis of world ranked performances of athletes competing at Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games and World Championships. Swimming Australia Limited is the national sporting organisation for swimming. The national sporting organisation for the sport of swimming, Swimming Australia, receives \$10,325,000 of which \$8,415,000 is for high performance able sport swimming and \$1,910,000 for high performance para swimming. Swimmers do not directly receive monies from this 'pot', only indirectly in such benefits as attending coaching camps, competition events, travel subsidies and media training. The Australian Sports commission applies strict conditions on the funding which is framed as an 'investment' in both participation and in high performance. Funding conditions imposed on NSO's apply the business technology tools of key performance

indicators, in order to achieve the goals of mass sport participation (Harris and Houlihan 2016). Goals are set out in the ‘vision’ and policies of Sport Australia:

Sport Australia is determined to have more Australians participating and excelling in sport, from grass-roots right up to the pinnacle of elite competition. <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2019

In the participation category, funding terms include fulfilling compliance expectations and ensuring the impact of programs by demonstrating measurable positive change in levels of physical activity, workforce capability and business capability. High Performance investment conditions are dependent on Sport Australia’s ‘high performance targets and strategic objectives’ and sport categorisation - based on the projected likelihood of athletes in the sport with potential to win medals at benchmark events.

[https://www.sportaus.gov.au/grants\\_and\\_funding/investment\\_announcements](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/grants_and_funding/investment_announcements) accessed 24 January. Swimming Australia has developed an app called iSwim as an aid to collect data required to measure funding impacts on both recreational and competition participation numbers. The function of the app is outlined by Swimming Australia Chief Executive Officer Leigh Russell 14<sup>th</sup> January 2019. The press release shares in a declarative way, the number of people, estimated, who swim at least once a week – 2.9 million – to explain the relevance of the application, along with its aim to serve the recreational swimming community, and SAL’s role in aligning with the Sport Australia *Find Your 30* health campaign.

We know there are an estimated 2.9 million Australians who swim at least once a week and more than seven million that swim throughout the year.

“This app is aimed at engaging those people in a meaningful way to motivate and encourage them to swim more often and build life-long connections through digital communities.

“With the ability to tailor programs to suit different levels, we believe iSwim can benefit all swimmers, whether they are young, old, recreational or elite.

“It also aligns with the Sport AUS ‘Find your 30’ campaign which promotes all Australians to get active through 30 minutes of daily exercise,” added Russell.

<https://www.swimming.org.au/news-articles/iswim-connect-recreational-swimmers>  
[accessed 24th January 2019](#)

The value of swimming-participation-funding from Sport Australia is \$650,000 and the high performance funding is \$10,325,000

[https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/677194/35249\\_Investment\\_Summary\\_18-19\\_fact\\_sheet\\_v4.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/677194/35249_Investment_Summary_18-19_fact_sheet_v4.pdf) accessed 24th January 2019

An elite swimmer both able and para can receive a stipend of funding according to world ranking and means testing. An eligible swimmer also has considerable compliances to fulfil, legal documentation to sign and online reports to maintain. A grant recipient has to sign a Swimmers Agreement with SAL, use the online Athlete Management System to store and share data with coaches and support staff and have an individual performance plan. Daily entries are recommended. In addition, compliance with ‘clean’ sport regulations is required. The Australian anti-doping agency in conjunction with the world anti-doping agency requires athletes to fill out a whereabouts diary, to help drug testers to find them for an out of competition random drug test (WADA 2018).

Some of an elite swimmers’ living allowance stipend comes from the Georgina Hope Foundation swimmers support scheme (GHFSSS) and another tranche is available from Sport Australia as direct athlete support (dAS). GHFSSS works with the Australian Swimmers Association and Swimming Australia to distribute \$1.9 million dollars in



incentive programs and base level funding to eligible athletes

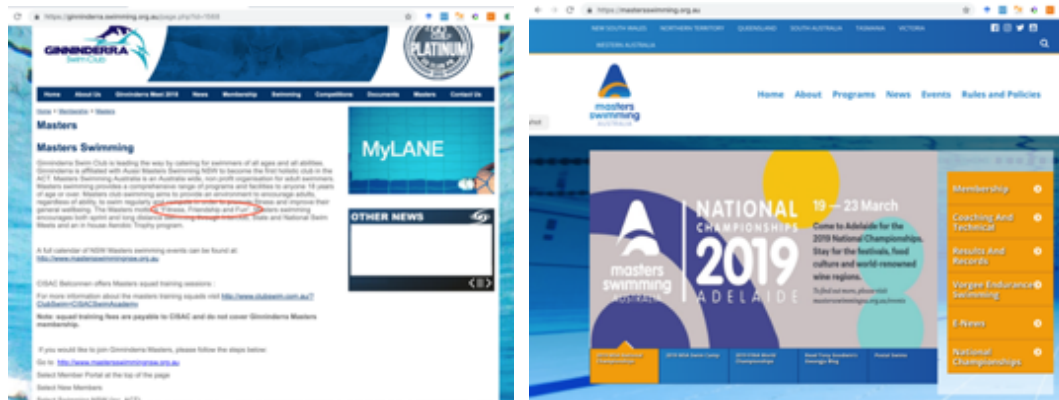
<http://www.australianswimmers.com.au/page.php?id=164> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January. As one example; swimmer Ariarne Titmus who won Commonwealth games medals in 2018 and broke a world record in the 400m women's freestyle at the world short course championships in China, December 2018, received \$31000 from dAS in 2016/2017 and \$35000 in 2017/2018. She is eligible to received \$40000 from Georgiana Hope foundation as well, because of her world rankings and 'benchmark event' performances (ASA 2017). A university student can access a scholarship as well, to continue study and train through Unisport. Any other income required to live has to be earned through winning at swimming events that offer prize money such as FINA World Cup series, or through part-time flexible employment, or by way of a commercial sponsorship.

Outside of elite open competition, adults have opportunities to train and compete in masters events, triathlon and open water races, and improve their skills with a coach in adult squads. Adult squads exist in various degrees of structure in most pools.

Swim Smooth is one private company providing video coaching and training squad coaches for adult groups. Swim equipment companies such as Speedo and Zoggs ('a full-service swim brand' [zoggs.com.au](http://zoggs.com.au)) also provide online swimming instruction. Clients sign up to accelerate their improvement, motivated by their participation in masters swimming competitions or 'open water' races. Open water races are mostly conducted in the ocean, sometimes in dams or lakes. The sport of triathlon and ironman events motivates swimming improvement lessons and squad memberships too. Triathlon involves swim run and cycle. Corporate teams are common entrants. Ironman are long distance marathon triathlons or can be surf based events including paddling a surf ski and a rescue board as well as swimming and beach sand running. Open water races in the ocean are used by surf

clubs to raise money for rescue equipment and operational expenses. Some punters enter open water races with the express purpose of raising money for their charity of choice. The website [www.oceanswims.com](http://www.oceanswims.com) is one place swimmers can register for an event, pledge fundraising goals and receive news of results and information about other events. Along the eastern seaboard there are events every weekend from November through to April. Pink Canto caps can be seen worn by people swimming to fundraise for the charity.

Out of the ocean and in the pool, Masters swimming is age group swimming all over again beginning from 18 years old. There are 6600 registered masters swimmers in Australia. They are counted in the 90,000 member numbers of Swimming Australia. Masters swimming is an international sport affiliated with the international swimming federation FINA. Masters Swimming Australia (MSA) abide by the rules of FINA which are the same ones that apply to open international swimming events. One modification to open rules is an allowance to begin a race from the water, rather than having to dive off the blocks to start. Age groups in masters swimming are in increments of 5 years, so contestants are always competing against people their own age or against the clock when after 5 years personal times are reset. PB's - personal best times are followed carefully and are a great measure for identifying improvements made from training and improved technique. Masters swimming is equally as well organised as youth swimming in Australia, and many competitors I have associated with are perhaps more serious than younger age group swimmers, despite the motto for masters swimming Australia "Fun Friendship and Fitness".



**Figure 28 Masters swimming websites highlighting the motto ‘Fun friendship fitness’ and advertising the National championships in Adelaide SA in March 2019 Screenshots 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019**

Officials are trained to officiate for races and electronic timing ensures accurate times. The sport is taken seriously, for example attending regular squad trainings, strategically learning refinements, demonstrating that even as an older person, they can still learn proficient ways of moving and how to maintain fitness. There are masters divisions in surf lifesaving clubs as well, for adults 30 to over 70 years old and masters divisions in ‘The Aussies’ an annual National Championships. Surf lifesaving sports are an opportunity to showcase skills and fitness used for lifeguarding beaches. There are 314 clubs participating in more than 400 beach and ocean events, 6000 competitors, the largest event of its kind comparing the likes of the Commonwealth Games <http://sls.com/aussies/> accessed 11 February. The Aussies as a major sports event fit into the category of sports-media marketing events and are supported and sponsored by state tourism departments, state companies and national surf lifesaving ‘partners’, DHL, Holden and Westpac bank. Swimming and surf skills are essential for participation. Those skills can be first learned through ‘nippers’ the age group of 6-12 year olds’ surf club membership and following on from 13 in cadets and then adult memberships and training for surf sports and volunteer

lifeguarding. RLSSA conduct pool lifesaving competitions in which SLS members can also participate.

The pool competition is a common standard brought in by the ILS formation in 1990. RLSSA and SLSA competitors have to compete in a common team at an international standard. (I was heavily involved in the formation of the ILS common standard and trained most of the early European competitors in Surf Life Saving techniques and was trained by the Europeans in the pool events). The combination of the surf and pool events makes up the competition that is the ILS World Titles in Life Saving (Craig Fisher by email May 2019)

The sport of pool lifesaving tests a lifesavers skills in rescue, accident prevention and emergency care [www.royallifesaving.com.au/sport/pool-lifesaving-sport-and-participation/get-involved-in-pool-lifesaving/](http://www.royallifesaving.com.au/sport/pool-lifesaving-sport-and-participation/get-involved-in-pool-lifesaving/) accessed 11th February 2019.

Unisport is another organisation in which swimming athletes can participate. There are 41 Australian universities who are part of the Elite Athlete Friendly University network EAFU, of which 31 provide swimming opportunities (UNISPORT 2018). Additionally there is a program for student athletes 'elite student athlete pathways' (ESAP) a partnership between the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and Unisport Australia in support of Australia's Winning Edge (AWE) strategy [www.unisport.com.au/elite-student-athlete-pathways/](http://www.unisport.com.au/elite-student-athlete-pathways/) accessed 11<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Financial scholarships, flexible study regimes and personal skills support are part of the program. Australian University sports do not have the same cache as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in USA university competitions, but Unisport is a way that athletes can study and continue to compete. Unisport competitors can also attend international competitions such as the

World University Games, providing valuable competition experience for world championships and highly valued Olympic games teams. Unirooms is the team identity for all Unisport high performance teams representing Australia.



**Figure 29 Unisport logo depicting a kangaroo from which Unirooms national team identity derives for University sports. Screenshot [www.unisport.com.au/uniroos](http://www.unisport.com.au/uniroos)**

Some adult swimmers are not motivated to compete in pool or surf swimming or want to commit to a club. They can be classified as recreational lap swimmers. Laps can be done in sanitised pools, ocean pools or by doing ‘laps’ of a bay. Swimming centres allocate lane space for lap swimmers, a lane for each varying speeds slow, medium and fast in a form of non-verbal social order and performative regulation (Nixon 1986; Scott 2010). Other individuals are motivated to do one or two local ocean swims each season such as those in the Margaret River ‘Swimming Women’ group and ‘Bondi Fit’ customers. Some of those join together to create informal swimming groups that has a focus on the social gathering and daily outdoor activity rather than paying for coaching.

Open competition swimming is primarily a youth sport, with the higher levels of elite swimmers are older teenagers and adults in their early 20’s. Swimmers competing at world class standards beyond 30 years old are the rare exception, except as explained earlier in masters swimming events where world, national and state records are collated.

### Facility provision

Gaining access to water to recreate in is demanded by residents and facilitated by governments. Accessibility includes construction and maintenance of roads and tracks, rubbish collection, car parking spaces and signage. Sometimes management of swimmable places is out-sourced to contractors, but the three layers of government agencies oversee the supply and maintenance of swimmable locations.

Indicative of the high value placed on doing and accessing swimming is noted in the provision by government entities of over 1500 public pools around Australia (AWSC 2007). The state of NSW alone has approximately 370 public pools and 720 beaches ‘for individuals and families to relax and enjoy the water and water sports particularly over summer’ (OLG 2017: 5). Safety while swimming is a high priority, underpinned by regulations and financed by government and business sponsors. Westpac for example supply water rescue helicopters, DHL sponsor Surf Lifesaving, while Hancock Prospecting fund the development of young swimmers. The NSW government is directly involved in swimming safety, by maintaining an informational website for water safety initiatives and promotes standardised water safety symbols

<http://www.watersafety.nsw.gov.au/Pages/Resources/water-safety-symbols.aspx>.



**Figure 30 Samples of standardised water safety symbols (StandardsAustralia 2002)**

The provision of pools determined not just for fitness and safety, but social benefits are also recognised. Improved social cohesion is another benefit of swimming pools in remote areas, primarily consisting of aboriginal residents, as stated in a 2016 report of the effectiveness of the Remote Aboriginal Swimming Pool (RASP)<sup>20</sup>. The project is conducted in 6 locations in Western Australia.

‘Respondents also reported that the swimming pools enhanced social cohesion in the community. It was commonly identified as a social hub and gathering place where positive community interactions took place. This was particularly strong for children who viewed the pool as a fun and relaxing place where they could be happy and have a break from unpleasant situations at home. This is an important finding as Aboriginal communities suffer much higher rates of poor social and emotional health and wellbeing which contributes to overall poorer health outcomes’ (Juniper, Nimmo, and Enkel 2016: 47).

As for the number of other swimming pools Australians can use; there are an unknown/uncollated number of private pools at fitness gyms, private swim schools and school pools. The provision of the many public and private pools is yet another indication of the value for swimming opportunity and know-how.

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<sup>20</sup> ‘This program aims to increase Aboriginal participation in aquatic activities while achieving improvements in the realms of health, education and employment, benefits frequently associated with having swimming pools in remote communities. While previously conducted research has identified a number of positive outcomes provided by remote pools, to date, no formal evaluation of the key enablers and barriers to swimming participation in these RASP communities has been undertaken. Executive summary page 2 of the report (Juniper, Nimmo, and Enkel 2016).

All pools are tightly regulated for fencing, water quality and supervision. Tragically, while backyard swimming pools add value to property and private lifestyles, they are also sites of avoidable toddler drownings. Of the 461 children under 4 who drowned in a 15 year period 2002-2017, 50% occurred in home swimming pools.

<https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/families/at-home/toddler-drowning-prevention>

accessed 23rd October 2018

In order to make backyard pools safer and to reduce child drowning, backyard pools are subject to laws administered by local authorities, who recommend registering a private pool for compliance <http://www.swimmingpoolregister.nsw.gov.au/>.

Each state has their own specific laws for private and public pools. In NSW, the Office for Local Government makes fencing compliance recommendations guided by the Swimming Pools Act 1992 and Swimming Pools Regulation 2008. Councils have a regulatory role to ensure private swimming pools are surrounded by a child-resistant barrier that complies with Australian Standard AS1926.1 as amended from time to time (OLG 2017: 37).

Besides social and physical values cited, the value of swimming can be calculated in financial benefits of health maintenance and disease prevention. The health benefits of swimming pools have been calculated as an economic benefit to the community. The economic value of public aquatic facilities is linked to health benefits, estimating through simulations, that an average of \$26.39 of health benefits per pool visit, \$2.8 billion nationally, in addition to the leisure value gained by users (RLSSA 2018b: 34; Barnsley, Peden, and Scarr 2017). Economic benefits also provide quantitative values to social reasons for maintaining or reviving community pools (McShane 2009; Tower, McDonald, and Stewart 2014).



Since many pools in Australia were built in the 1960s and 1970s and are in need of upgrade or replacement, a number of communities conduct ‘save the pool campaigns’ on the basis of their social value to residents. Councils are under financial pressure to balance their budgets. Accountants charged with reducing municipal council costs, see a swimming pool as a drain on finances, so pools are slated for demolition and defunding on the basis of their financial cost, not on their health cost benefits or difficult to quantify social values (McShane 2005; Lewi 2008). Public campaigns to keep communal pools, reflect passionate social attachment to the infrastructure and public social space of the ‘local pool’. Footscray pool in Melbourne and Olinda pool in the adjacent district north east of Melbourne are two typical ‘save the pool’ campaigns.

### **Swimming as an industry and commodity**

It seems strange to call swimming services for people an industry, as the concept of industry infers factories, production, commerce, marketing, and financial language such as investment, value, account, customers, labour, worker agreements.

Unfortunately, industrial language, even if they are metaphors has regrettable outcomes - regarding people as objects, tradeable market commodities (Nauright 2004; Horne 2006) (FrontierEconomics 2010). Competition swimming is unavoidably entwined with global processes as sports-industrial complex, a ‘machine’ of media, marketing, nation building and soft diplomacy (Maguire 2011a). The sport-industrial-complex, raises questions of the ethics of children’s participation in elite sport when they are both product and worker (Donnelly 1997). Swimmers are subject to a swimmer agreement when the child becomes part of the Australian junior and senior team (Swimming Australia and Legal 2013a).

Sociologist and political economist Max Weber notes that as capitalism became corporatized, management became a professional task, whose work was to ensure the efficient output of goods and services, maximum output for minimum cost (cited in Lynch 2014 pp. 4-5). Sadly, swimming education is supplied and conceived in a model 'where value is not imputed to the activity itself but what the activity produces an extreme form of instrumental reasoning' (Lynch 2014b: 3). I believe this includes goals of gold medals at Olympic Games in the High Performance "Winning Edge" strategy 5, through to passing swimming tests. Learning and doing swimming is treated and organized more as a commodity delivered through agencies where market values are a higher priority than human values. This makes the commodity of swimming when packaged as specific swimming products, eminently suitable to be traded on the international market, which it is. For example: as an export to Hong Kong (teacher and coach training), Bangladesh & Vietnam (drowning prevention), Lebanon (franchised learn to swim), India (swim teacher training), China (competition coaching), Japan (beach lifeguarding) or import (head competition coach from Netherlands).

Swimming is an industry in Australia with some products exported such as the identities of champion swimmers and the intellectual property of swimming education and water safety protocols. Learn to swim and water safety for drowning prevention is a tradable commodity as indicated in examples above. The trade is involved in global social and economic processes, and of particular concern to the World Health Organisation who regards drowning as a non-communicable disease. Non-communicable diseases (NCD) are managed in particular ways that drowning prevention research and implementation is now subjected to. Coming under the auspices or frameworks of the World Health Organisation as 'Public Health Prevention Programs'

<sup>21</sup>[https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/surveillance/en/](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/surveillance/en/) accessed 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

The Bloomberg foundation funds drowning prevention research, along with the USA Centre for Disease Control, partnering with Royal Life Saving Society Australia, and the Australian Government to conduct randomised control research in Bangladesh, Malaysia and Vietnam and varied trial programs in Australia, as reported at the World Conference Against Drowning 2017 and the 2014 World Health Organisation drowning report (WHO 2014; WCDP 2017). WHO also champions orthodox health research methodologies, which RLSSA has embraced wholeheartedly, as the organisation aligns more and more with drowning as a health issue.

### Regulation of qualifications and wages

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21 Drowning is a leading killer. The latest WHO Global Health Estimates indicate that almost 360 000 people lost their lives to drowning in 2015. Nearly 60% of these deaths occur among those aged under 30 years, and drowning is the third leading cause of death worldwide for children aged 5-14 years. Over 90% of drowning deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Drowning prevention interventions range from community-based solutions, such as day care for children and barriers controlling access to water, to effective national policies and legislation around water safety, including setting and enforcing boating, shipping and ferry regulations. Much more needs to be done to prevent drowning, and achieving commitments made under the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible without addressing drowning prevention. [https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/drowning/en/](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/drowning/en/) accessed 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019

The complex network of swimming and water safety organisations is also testament to the operational skills many Australians have or need to have, in order to be able to work and participate in swimming services. Work skills for the Aquatic industry are regulated as vocational education under the Australian national training authority, established in 1992<sup>22</sup>. The corollary to certification is that both providers and customers have a mutually agreed understanding for the value of swimming and an understanding of swimming cultural 'know-how', especially safety.

Tightly structured and precisely scheduled school children's lessons contrast with more loosely organised adult recreational pool and ocean swimmers who have learned to swim and make swimming a recreational hobby in their adult years. Adult swimming improvement lessons are widely available at most pools in Australia and eagerly sought after through online coaching or face to face lessons with expert coaches. Adult teaching qualifications are an extension to the Austswim basic Teacher of Swimming and Water Safety. All of the occupations in the swimming industry are under the educational authority of the Vocational and Education Training (VET) system <https://www.asqa.gov.au/about/australias-vet-sector> guided by the AQF <https://www.aqf.edu.au/> Standards of education to work in the swimming industry are regulated. Occupations such as pool maintenance, front office service, swimming teachers, swimming coaches, lifeguards, require a level of training recognised in 10 educational levels. For example, Level 10 is a doctoral degree, level 5 is a diploma requiring 1 to 2

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<sup>22</sup> Certificate III in Aquatics and Community recreation has the code SIS31015, costs an average of \$1500 to complete the course over a year and qualifies the student to be lifeguards, pool operators, swimming teachers and recreation leaders [www.myskills.gov.au](http://www.myskills.gov.au) Accessed December 2018.

years of education, level 3 requires 6 months of training <https://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-levels> accessed 21st March 2018

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) seeks to make sure that the sector's quality is maintained through the effective regulation of providers and accredited courses (ASQA 2018).

Most VET training for work skills in the swimming industry is level 2, 3 or 4. The introduction and application of a national Australian training authority was designed<sup>23</sup> to make Australia a 'clever country' rather than a 'Lucky country'.<sup>24</sup> The system's learning outcomes cover literacy, numeracy, use of technology (e.g. phone, printer, tools, internet), working in groups, oral presentation, problem solving, and applying knowledge to real world scenarios. One aim is to improve education of people who did not complete high school and to up-skill people without knowledge of digital technologies, creating a culture of lifelong learning. An unfortunate consequence of Australia's highly regulated qualification framework is a swathe of bureaucratic reporting tasks, expense to requalify, and normalising conservative standards (balancing difference with the common good <https://theconversation.com/a-common-curriculum-means-all-students-share-common-values-32377>) that are slow to change (Bowman and Mckenna 2016; Smith 2002).

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<sup>23</sup> Anecdote related by VET trainer in 2005 at Central TAFE Perth, Western Australia while I studied a Certificate IV Workplace training and assessment.

<sup>24</sup> Based on reference to Donald Horne's 1964 book *The Lucky Country* <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/hindsight/the-lucky-country%C2%A050-years-on/5710724> and in reference to a Bob Hawke election speech 1990 <https://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1990-bob-hawke> accessed 21/3/2018

The training required to become accredited as a teacher of swimming and water safety Certificate III in Aquatics involves; Working with children police check, preliminary online learning tasks, familiarity with the teaching manual, understanding of the history and function of AUSTSWIM, a weekend course of 16 hours of theory and practical learning, including writing lesson plans (AustralianGovernment 2018). The cost is between \$360 and \$400 which includes public, product, and professional liability insurance for 3 years. On passing the requirements an 'Austswim Teacher License' is issued, lasting for 3 years if employed by a swim school. During the 3 years, 10 hours of professional development is required which can be obtained through short courses or attending a swimming industry conference. The teachers' license can then be renewed after 3 years with a record of hours of work experience and a fee of \$255. A teacher also has to pass a Continuous Aquatic Sequence test<sup>25</sup> demonstrate rescues and have a CPR certificate (AUSTSWIM 2014b, 2014a).

Wages as an accredited swimming teacher are regulated by Fair Work Australia, the actual hourly rate is variable between swim school operators, age of instructor, experience, full or part time, junior or adult. The industry average is \$23 per hour (FairWork 2017).

Swimming teaching is usually a part-time job, weekend work for university students, casual work for women with children. Work conditions are hazardous, in chlorinated water, often cold and wet for hours, make swimming teaching a physically uncomfortable job. 10 to 20 hours a week of teaching is fairly common @ \$23 hour which is a subsistence income that would need to be supplemented with other sources. Consequently, there is a

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<sup>25</sup> A continuous no rest sequence of: Enter water feet first, float or tread water without touching the bottom for 2 minutes, submerge and swim underwater for 2-5 metres and re surface, swim 50 metres freestyle, roll onto back, swim 50 metres on back, exit water appropriately.

high turnover of teachers. Swim Schools find it difficult to keep teachers, unless they pay higher wages and create better work conditions such as alternating out of water deck jobs with in water work – meaning tighter profit margins for the business. One proprietor of a swim school in Western Australia paid her teachers \$30 - \$35 per hour with flexible shifts and was able to retain experienced teachers longer than a rival swim school who paid below average rates and suffered from constantly training new teachers once she found new willing applicants.

Safe aquatic experience is a high priority, indicated by the sophistication of the systems and mechanisms incorporated in skills training and governed regulations in place to enable diverse water experiences and prevent accidents. Water quality testing and warning signage are two examples. Thoroughly trained personnel, often as volunteer lifeguards, can conduct rescues if water accidents do occur. Resuscitation courses are widely conducted by accredited private trainers for a fee under \$100 or through member organisations such as Surf Life Saving and St John Ambulance Australia. It is the contextual combinations of swimming ‘know-how’ and easy access which makes the Australian swimming culture unique, articulated in popular media, and the language and habits of everyday life.

#### Status of Australian water safety and swimming systems in the global context

Australia has an international reputation as a country that possesses swimming ‘capital’ a form of wealth with potential to yield income. Australian coach education, learn to swim curriculums and water safety systems, are international articles of trade such as (AUSTSWIM 2018) and (WASwimming 2017). The provision of packaged water safety products through RLSSA, AUSTSWIM and Surf Life Saving is of particular interest to the

World Health Organisation who regards drowning as a non-communicable disease (WHO 2014).

Two of the functions of The World Health Organisation as it takes more responsibility for drowning prevention, is that it defines terms and directs research. Australian systems and knowledge delivered through RLSSA is the go-to major source of information and methodologies. As RLSSA aligns with the millennium goals and policies of the United Nations and World Health Organisation, drowning is now framed as a health issue, not an education issue (Personal conversation with Justine Scarr at Fiji Water Safety Council Symposium in Lami, Suva June 2016 where he was co-convening a symposium to establish a National Fiji Water Safety policy).

RLSSA and the Australian Government Aid program contribute to drowning prevention research in Bangladesh using RLSSA Swim and Survive program adapted for the SwimSafe program for CIPRB Centre for Injury Prevention Health Development and Research <http://www.ciprb.org/who-we-are/field-laboratory/community-services/swimsafe/>.

UNICEF is also involved, partnering through The Global Drowning Fund, the operational name of Royal Life Saving Australia's Global Drowning Overseas Aid Relief Fund.

Taking 'leadership', the RLSSA invokes the reputation of the culture of swimming and lifesaving in Australia as a rationale for authority<sup>26</sup> and global social responsibility toward drowning prevention;

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<sup>26</sup> One could question the authority of Australia's drowning prevention capability in the light of Australia's rates of death by drowning. The problem has not yet been solved despite the number of organisations, reports, reviews, funding and production of swimmers.



With an aquatic lifestyle central to its culture, and with a rich and iconic history of lifesaving both as a service and as a sport, Australia is the obvious choice to lead a role in drowning prevention and education around the globe(GlobalDrowningFund 2018)

Swimming teaching systems are a physical capital element of general swimming capital. The swimming teaching certification systems of Austswim are confirmed as an international standard of safety, reliability and quality (AUSTSWIM 2015). The particular standard, ISO 17024 assigned to AUSTSWIM was granted in 2015 in the category of ‘Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons’(ISO 2012). In a world where business and product standards are admired, having an ISO standard for certifying teachers is an astute business manoeuvre, providing market difference and organisational status. As a result, WHO and the International Life Saving Federation look to the Australian supply of systems backed by Australian Government aid funding, to address world-wide drowning prevention as evidenced in the number of Australian speakers and conference abstracts (over 25) at the World Drowning Prevention Conference October 2017 in Vancouver Canada (WCDP 2017).

### Swimming sport as capital

Sport swimming is just one sport in Australia that has a place in the features of consumer capitalism; globalisation, commodification and inequality (Horne 2006: 160).

Sport is a form of cultural capital, an integration of culture and business (Ross 2009). It is logical that one of the peak organisations in the swimming industry, Swimming Australia,

promote the activity of swimming in the same way an industry does - both for marketing their products and to manage their companies (national and state bodies). Expertise in selling swimming is managed by experienced administrators with business training and experience. SAL president John Bertrand has a long association with business as do many of the board members of Swimming Australia, and the patron Gina Reinhart is one of the most successful business women in Australia. Ross (2009) uses the example of hockey sport, but suggests his notions also apply to other sports. He notes that hockey sport organisations, entrepreneurs, and labourers (athletes) function as an industry. The business model absorbs the meanings, identities and institutions of hockey as a capital input (Ross 2009: 20).

Sports organisations operated as-if they were corporations, require experienced managers. To this end a number of research/writers have identified the widespread use of neo-managerialism in sport organisations (Andrews and Silk 2012; Coakley 2011; Grix and Carmichael 2011; Klikauer 2013; Nauright 2004). Managerialism is a prominent ideology in society, appearing also in the structures of sporting clubs and federations (Klikauer 2015). New managerialism is an iteration of managerialism, an ideology which breeds negative consequential effects such as performance audits. In swimming, I observed key performance indicator - KPI audits - for increasing memberships and quotas for student passing tests, dehumanising people to numbers of industry productivity. Swimming education and swimming health design, are embedded in the 'coercive' audit culture<sup>27</sup>, just

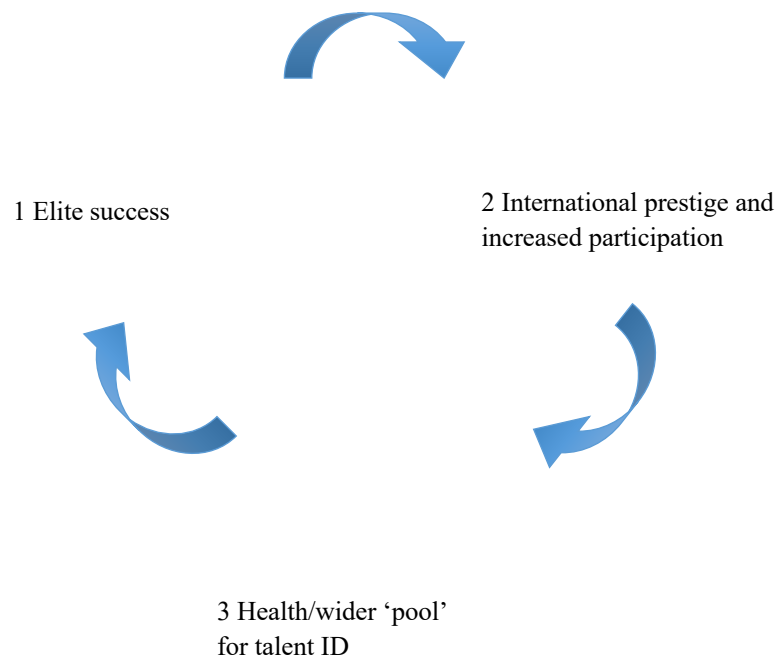
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<sup>27</sup> In the case of new managerialism and British higher education in the 1980s, 'audit' was divorced from its strictly financial meaning and became associated with a new cluster of terms: 'performance', 'quality assurance', 'quality control', 'discipline', 'accreditation', 'accountability', 'transparency', 'efficiency',

as health and education is now acknowledged to be dominated by neo-managerialism (Shore and Wright 2000). Other negative consequential effects are: individual workers reframed as human resources, and people becoming consumers or customers and ‘coerced’ to consume, to satisfy ‘false needs’ rather than vital human needs that progressively alleviates toil and poverty (Klikauer 2013: 31) paraphrased.

In the commerce of swimming, it is not just the children of the parents buying swimming education, who are customers not people, but the champion swimmers, the golden fishes, are a commodity too, attracting sponsorships as an adjunct to advertising.

An extension of the commodified athlete are the fast swimmers used as role models in the ‘top-down’ virtuous cycle of sport.



**Figure 31 The virtuous cycle of sport (Dennis and Grix 2012: 31).**

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‘effectiveness’, ‘value for money’, ‘responsibility’, ‘benchmarking’, ‘good practice’, ‘peer-review’, ‘external verification’, ‘stakeholder’ and ‘empowerment’ (Audit Commission 1984: 3). In Shore and Wright (2000)

The model of causal effects between elite sport success and increased participation has been described as the virtuous cycle of sport (Dennis and Grix 2012). It builds on the 'double pyramid theory' logic of mass participation at the base of the pyramid leads to Olympic champions, while the existence of Olympic champions role models encourages thousands of people to take up some sort of sport by 'trickle-down effect' see van Bottenberg (2002) in (Grix and Carmichael 2011: 4).

The virtuous cycle of sport 'holds that investment in elite sport promotes mass participation, which in turn apart from the obvious health benefits, provides a greater pool from which elite champions of the future are likely to be drawn' (Grix and Carmichael 2011: 2).

Dennis and Grix (2012) in their treatise on the East German sports system (that many countries have emulated, for example the establishment of the Australian institute of sport in 1980s) assert that the virtuous cycle of sport is an unquestionable 'given'. Elite sport is a policy discourse justifying investment in sport for reasons such as gaining international prestige, and participating in the global 'sporting arms race' (Dennis and Grix 2012: 30). Australia participates in the sporting arms race which is a driving rationale for government funding of swimming and the production and search for potential champions who will represent Australia AND its international aspirations. (de Bosscher et al. 2008; Oakley and Green 2001).

The pathway model of swimming nestles neatly into the virtuous cycle of sport. Along the development pathway - of swimming lessons, to club and squad participation in youth sport, then elite sport, a gradual process of transformation occurs for the swimming athlete, to become unwittingly an instrument of foreign policy in an ongoing process of global

flows of the production and consumption of media – sport – tourism, technology and trade; the media - sport production complex (Maguire 2011b). Role model is the overarching description of the transformed ‘special’ athlete.

The rhetoric of athletes-as-role-models as a result of their sporting success, reason that elite athletes will inspire inactive or moderately active people, to become involved in physical activity and sport as described as a causal effect in the ‘virtuous cycle of sport’. Research suggest otherwise. It is a parents’ influence that is a more likely catalyst to see children involved with sport and physical activity, not athlete role models. Belgian research shows that only 10% of elite athletes have been inspired by other elite athletes in order to start with their current sport. Mostly they were encouraged by their parents (59%) and friends (28%) to practice their current sport. This is different during the talent development stage, well after the participation phase, where 62 % indicated that elite athletes had inspired them to train more (De Croock, De Boscher, and van Bottenburg 2012).

There is a presumption that because successful athletes who have followed the rules of their sport, having engaged in striving to achieve ‘ultimate (superhuman) performances’ also have a unique character that elevates them as a type of person to be admired in other areas of life (Green and Oakley 2010: 253). Swimming athletes are not trained for diplomacy, they are immature or underprepared for the tasks imposed on them to act as international envoys. Responsibilities are explained in athlete swimmers agreement, the Olympic team member agreement and agreement to Ethical Behaviour By-Laws (Swimming Australia and Legal 2013b) (AOC 2016b) (AOC 2016a). The agreements are

more as a way to impose controls on behaviour, than train athletes for complex diplomatic assignments.<sup>28</sup>

Professional athletes cannot be expected to be able to respond to the demand that they act as role models within and beyond the sporting arena, unless the tensions implicit within that demand are articulated (Adair, Lynch, and Johnson 2014).

Paradoxically, an athlete cannot compete unless they follow the rules. There is nothing remarkable about complying with the conventions of sport. Indeed there is no causality between athleticism and exemplary behaviour or character – although many athletes do exhibit unusually dedicated work ethics, gracious attitudes to success and defeat, and give generous time and attention to fans and charities.

In the process of examining symbolic roles and practical activities that champion swimmers perform outside of the athletic arena, I identify three intertwined categories of functions under the banner of ‘role model’;

- good/moral ‘off-field’ behaviour
- commercial or sporting ambassador/representative and
- political ‘envoy’

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<sup>28</sup> Team members attended a 2 hour lecture called Ignite to learn more about Rio, the ASPIRE values and understand Australian olympic history and team objectives. They also attended an ASPIRE lecture where they were ceremoniously given their team uniform, and further explained the Team value statement *“Together we aspire to achieve our highest level of performance and conduct this providing the finest expression of Olympism”*

John Daly's 1991 history of the establishment and first 10 years of the Australian Institute of Sport<sup>29</sup>, recognised (in the 1970s) that other nations realised the value of sporting success: in developing national pride, in encouraging healthy emulative lifestyle and perhaps even as an extension of foreign policy (Magdalinski 2000: 329). The National Sporting Organisation enters athletes who qualify, to participate in a global sport festival such as the Olympic Games. Representation is national in character but transnational in consequence (Maguire 2011b: 987).

The sporting role model, to repeat, is a commodity in the culture of swimming that serves the consumption of transnational sport and the sale of the products of sponsors. All at the same time, the fast swimmers are; 1. the products of swimming, 2. the labourers and 3. the consumers. Once on the Australian team, they have worker contracts called a Swimmer Agreement and extensive rules of engagement in order to race in events. Like many athlete agreements the Australian swimmer agreement is one sided, more in favour to management, in this case to SAL (AthletesCAN 2015). The athlete agreement is also an instrument of the neo-managerial audit culture, having targets, directives and sanctions imposed through the contract as part of governance and governmentality of the athlete (Grix 2016: 129). The swimmers agreement is a legal document which has a relationship to government sport policy, attendant financial support with accompanying acquittal requirements. Parents of swimmers have to get legal advice to understand onerous compliance with the agreement. The example of the swimmer agreement and the swimmer as a product and customer, puts swimming in perspective with Australian society,

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<sup>29</sup> Quest for excellence: The Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra by John A Daly, Australian Government Publications 1991

international relations and the enmeshed politics of sport in the world. The main international swimming organisation, FINA with whom Australian Swimming is affiliated, restrict FINA registered swimmers from racing in non-FINA-sanctioned events. In a form of restriction of trade, FINA threatened exclusion from Olympic Games if any swimmer competed in the International Swimming League (ISL) instigated in 2018-2019 by European and American stakeholders, with some Australian swimmers included <https://swimswam.com/isl-statement-fina-move-is-implicit-admission-of-guilt/> . Two antitrust law suits in December 2018 by ISL and its supporters, caused FINA to back down from the threats. In an interesting twist, FINA developed another event to compete with ISL, the Champion Swim Series with \$5.5 million prize monies.

<https://www.smh.com.au/sport/swimming/isl-s-record-prizemoney-offer-set-to-escalate-rivalry-with-fina-20181219-p50n8g.html> The first event is in April 2019. Swimming appears to be moving into the areas of commercial development that professional tennis evolved from in the 1970-1980s and professional rugby football in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of competition swimming goals pervades the whole of the industry as suggested in the first and second chapters of my thesis; that the swimming industry in Australia is structured to find and develop golden fishes<sup>30</sup>. Swimming Australia Limited assumes custodianship for the sport of swimming and more recently from 2017, the

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<sup>30</sup> *Golden fishes* is a metaphorical term describing elite champion swimmers.



responsibility to engage and support the goals and aspirations of recreational swimmers, through the overarching 'vision to enrich and inspire the nation' through getting in the water and swimming <https://www.swimming.org.au/news-articles/iswim-connect-recreational-swimmers> accessed 16th January 2019

Swimming Australia mobilises the device of 'identity characterisations' to sell products and services to its market - coaches parents and swimmers. In the process, the social good of swimming education is blurred with the commerce of swimming business. The sport of swimming tends to drive the generic culture of swimming, within the framework of a corporate business which is then copied by mimesis by swim schools and swim clubs. The business style of swimming organisations is evident at the annual Australian swimming coaches and teachers association (ASCTA) conferences that always have motivational and business speakers highlighting the speaker line-up <https://asctaconvention.ascta.com/presenters> accessed 2nd April 2019.

Sport is used by 'all sorts' of governments to assert national identity and enact government policy (Grix 2016: 38; Rofe 2016). Australia especially highlights swimming sport to assert a national identity. The key driver of Australia's reputation as a swimming country is the national swimming federation Swimming Australia and the Australian swimming champions whom the organisation serves.

The function of all of the swimming organisations, therefore, is to work together to provide education, preventative and promotional health and facilitate the potential opportunity to participate in a variety of aquatic activities, sport included. It is in this complex crowded industry of suppliers, regulators, educators and managers and promoters, that swimming is situated and practised in all its various ways, enacting the Australian culture of swimming. The aquatics industry stakeholders agree upon duplicated services

and standardised processes within the global governance paradigm of neo-managerialism and act as proxy government agencies in roles fulfilling international diplomacy policies, through sport.

Australia appears to be a nation of swimming organisations, not necessarily a nation of swimmers. I now ask the question, is Australia a nation of swimmers too? Do people swim and if so where and how? I will now provide a broad view of how and where people do swim, by means of a selection of swimming practices in Australia observed on two road trips in 2015 and generally throughout the project into 2018.



## Chapter 4 Where and how do Australians swim?

Stephen Langendorfer, an American swimming researcher, spoke at an international Austswim conference in Melbourne in 2014 that I attended. He asked the audience of swimming instructors ‘how many ways of swimming are there?’ Great question I mused, thinking of my Sudanese neighbour whom I took swimming at the Cataract Gorge Launceston in the summer of 2008. My neighbour James had been an Australian for a year and we voted together at a recent election. We shared evening meals and gardening chores. My tree pruning was different to his though. I wanted neatness, out of lifelong habit, he wanted clear vision of the ground so he ‘could see if any lions were approaching’ in suburban Launceston. James’ swimming also reflected his African upbringing. As we stood on the side of the deep natural water hole called The Basin, he warned me to step back away from the edge, because our shadows were cast over the water, a dangerous and ignorant place to stand when there are crocodiles in the water. We explained that while Australia, indeed, had crocodiles, his new home in Tasmania did not. I asked if he could swim in deep water. He assured me he could, as he had swum across the Blue Nile River to Kenya as a refugee and regularly swam with his cattle in smaller rivers in southern Sudan. Before I knew it, he had plunged into the water with hardly a splash or sound and started gliding across the surface out towards a log floating about 40 metres away. He swam a kind of sidestroke, breaststroke, smooth as silk, graceful and calm - nothing that would attract a crocodile’s attention, by looking and moving like a crocodile.

I was ashamed of myself for realising that I had patronisingly asked James to come for a swim so I could teach him how to be Australian - by showing him how to swim, and how to swim ‘proper’ freestyle, so he could ‘at least’ blend in by looking like an Australian in

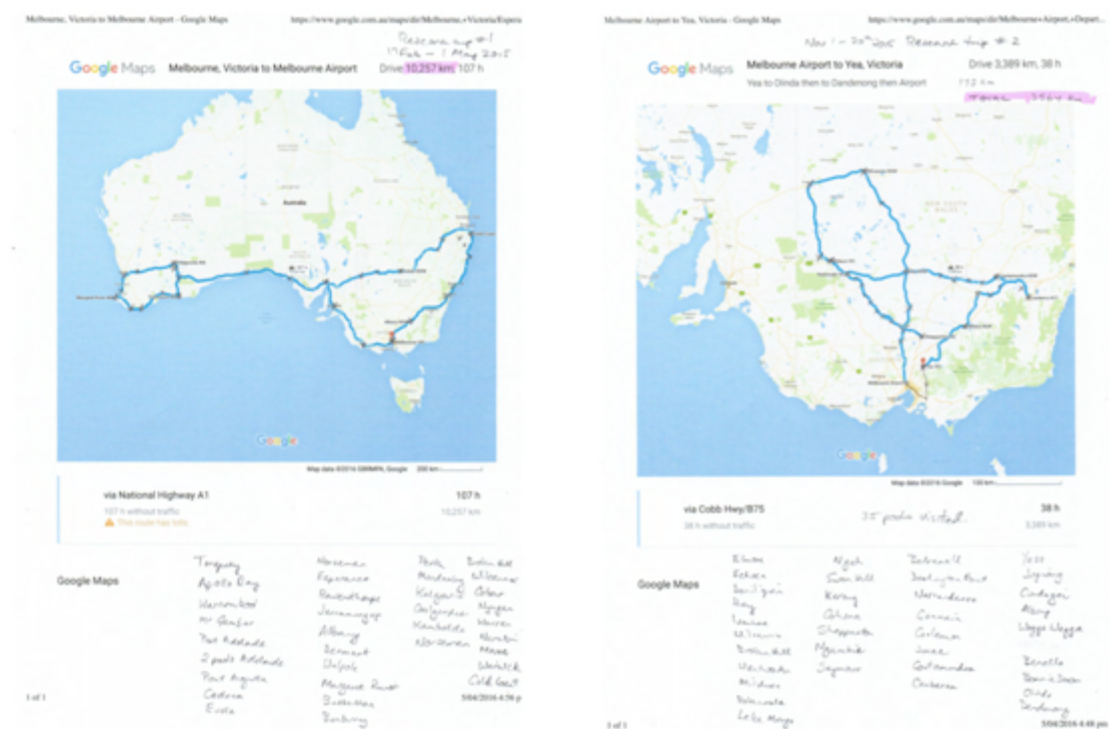
the water – with his black skin, a tell-tale otherness in Tasmania. Later we drove out of Launceston to show James the forest and the Nile river near Evandale. James laughed and laughed when we stopped on a bridge and pointed out the 15 metres wide creek named the Nile River.

Those Australians who go to water and get in and move about in it, do so for a wide range of motivations. As the above story reflects, the locations themselves often shape the ways in which swimming is practiced or immersion experienced. A 50metre lap pool invites fitness and squad training, but in a series of 50 meter swims punctuated by the reset of the nervous system back to land when the feet pause on solid concrete, much different than the continuous suspension that can occur in the ocean or a river . A hotel or backyard pool ‘tells’ the user how it can be used. A steep surf beach ‘tells’ another story, different again from a protected sea lagoon. The aim of this chapter is to explore the questions: Where do people swim and what do they do in the water? How do these practices contribute to Australian swimming culture? And with what effects for how swimming in Australia is perceived, funded, organised and experienced and by whom?

In this chapter I provide evidence of the array of different styles and practices of swimming in Australia. The chapter begins with a description of my methods, I then describe the types of water movement that was occurring in several different watery places or locations (in pools, in rivers, watering holes and creeks, and at beaches); I then provide a discussion and summary of the typology of Australian swimming based on my observations and conversations; I then critique the dominance of certain types of swimming and discuss some of the issues with ‘colonial swimming practices’.

### **Data collection**

The empirical material that forms the basis of this chapter is gleaned from observations and interviews conducted on two road trips totalling 12 weeks. The first trip I undertook in February – May 2015 from eastern Australia to Western Australia and back to the east coast via Perth, Kalgoorlie and the Gold Coast region. I set out on a second road trip in November 2015, early summer, through river country, across 9 rivers, from Melbourne and north to Wilcannia and back through Broken Hill down to Mildura and along the Murray River to Canberra and back to Melbourne. See Maps in Figure 29



**Figure 32 Maps of two research road trips 2015 with handwritten list of pools visited.**

**Left Trip #1 Melbourne to Margaret River and return via Kalgoorlie Broken Hill, Gold Coast 17<sup>th</sup> February to 1st May 2015. Visiting more than 43 pools and 12 natural swimming places.**

**Right Trip #2 Across 9 rivers from Melbourne to Hay NSW to Wilcannia and back through Broken Hill, Mildura, along the Murray River to Canberra and back to Melbourne. 1<sup>st</sup> November to 20<sup>th</sup> November 2015 viewing 38 pools and 10 river swimming places.**

The focus of these road trips was to document the varied practices of ‘swimming’ in Australia, and to talk to people I met about their experiences in, on, and around water to try and get a sense of the ‘culture’ of swimming in Australia.

### Observations and photos

In designing the field research methodology, I had the challenge of how to travel to a wide variety and number of places where I might find different and distinctive ways and places that people might swim, constrained by Australia’s extensive land mass. I set upon travelling by road, through as many varied places as possible, within time and budget constraints. I had a problem that I needed to shape a methodology to, not have a research method shape the way the problem could be investigated. Dilemmas between problem/questions and method, recurred throughout the project.

I approached the principal of Jayco, who without hesitation, generously provided me with a motorhome for 10 weeks in order to conduct my research. I shared the driving, safety and companionship with my husband, travelling through towns and cities in southern parts of the country. Using the motorhome rather than staying in hotels, reduced costs and increased comfort. Travelling and camping with the vehicle enabled flexibility in travel schedules and spontaneity to stop where I observed an interesting location to investigate and photograph. The journey began and ended in Melbourne during late summer 2015. In summary, the route I decided upon was across southern Victoria toward South Western

Australia, north to Perth and west to Kalgoorlie, then back across the Nullabor highway. Turning northward, we drove up through Broken Hill, across western NSW to the Gold Coast and back down through coastal NSW and into Victoria again. I felt I needed more time to investigate swimming cultures around inland rivers, so I secured another sponsorship with Jayco and drove a similar vehicle on a second field trip in November 2015, this time for two weeks. We travelled through river country, known as the Murray-Darling Basin, in NSW and Victoria, crossing nine major rivers. See maps in figure 29.

When the term 'the local watering hole' is used, it is colloquially known as 'the pub' a place to have some beer. In Australian vernacular, the *local water hole* also refers to a place to swim. Most towns I visited on the road trips appeared to have at least one place to get in for a swim, natural, or man-made. Some of these places are secrets carefully guarded by the locals, who were reluctant to provide me with a precise location. In late 2017 I advised some researchers documenting beautiful and interesting places to swim in Australia. They shared with me in conversation about the same guardedness of locals that I also noted. In the resulting book published in 2018 as *Places we Swim*, [www.placesweswim.com](http://www.placesweswim.com) the authors advise readers to respect local secrets (Clements and Seitchik-Reardon 2018).

Some issues I faced on the road trip included: water holes were toxic, pools were closed or the weather was inclement. Additionally, on the return journey, seasonal pools were closed for the season in April or only intermittently open, rivers were suffering from a blue-green algal bloom in hot weather and low-river flows. Despite warm to hot weather in southern Australia, swimming appears to be enabled just for 3 to 6 of the hottest months. Furthermore, coolness and warmth appear to be relative - 26 degrees Celsius in Port Headland is cool compared with Lorne, Victoria where it is considered warm to hot.



Swimming and swimming locations are evocative, therefore still and video images are integral to the storytelling by the dominant swimming institutions in Australia and to my field research. Water and swimming are mostly depicted by happy people in sunshiny blue water scenes, creating a strong association with pleasure, freedom, joy, free time, friendship in beautiful and benevolent nature. What I looked for in a photograph is something that I perceive while observing but cannot quite articulate, perhaps because the scene is too ephemeral to recognise what is going on. Certainly, the photo is of something, such as a child jumping into the water, but other embedded connotative meanings have to be extracted by me and my meaning-making or by another viewer and their filters. The photograph as a snapshot of time is still moving in my memory from before and after the specific moment captured. Phone cameras can capture time before and after a moment of the snapshot such as Apple's iPhone's optional camera function 'LIVE' mode, helping to create the memory. A short video up to 3 seconds is created as a result, in models from iPhone 6 onwards. Only fleeting moments are captured, but more than enough visual information too, from which to tell a story and record situational features, such as signage. Many of the photographs I took were of general scenes of the architecture, entry ways and topographical contexts. Most often, the photographs I took, were without people framed in them, according to privacy restrictions at swimming places and ethical responsibility of photographing people in public spaces (ALRC 2008) (Jordan 2013).

I already had some skills and experience in using photographic images for research and evaluation so in the beginning, using visual images gave me confidence as a novice researcher. Featuring images as data is logical too due nature of the subject; because swimming is a multisensory activity that pictures can evoke, swimming environments have

varied aesthetics, and images of scenes of people swimming are common but not critiqued. Images I took were equivalent to field notes but also texts of bodies in physical culture. I obtained sociological insights of bodies-in-motion, using photos as a research tool, all the while reflecting contemporary life that is saturated with images (Azzarito 2010).

I photographed many pools and river swimming places when my driver and me travelled through small towns and regional cities. I included some major aquatic centres and crowded beaches in metropolitan areas too. I went back into my archives discovering photographs with which I had a prior affinity, then created new series of images when in and around swimming sites. I used photos as a memory trigger, note taker and empirical evidence. Combining photo analysis with interviews or casual conversations with pool staff, coaches, teachers and swimmers, some compelling cultural meanings emerged. The whole research process and project design involved metaphorical and literal immersion in my subject. Figure 30 is an example of using a photograph to tell a story of place as well as a memory trigger. The photograph of Cobar swimming pool is one of many front entrances I took to use as data and empirical evidence.



**Figure 33 Cobar memorial swimming pool front entrance Personal files 2015**

The front entry of public swimming pools such as Cobar in figure 30, are covered with wordy information that takes time to decipher and to determine the most important information. Signage printed with admission prices and opening times dominate.

Additional signage indicates protocols for the shared space, such as no bicycles in the entrance area where they can block the passage or be a trip hazard. There can also be signs to manage behaviour, such as no smoking, guides for minimum parent to child supervision or water safety cautions.

Cobar is a country town in western NSW. The council owns and manages the outdoor 50 metre public pool. There is a diving board, heated multipurpose pool, children's water feature play area, a water slide and large grassy area with shady umbrellas.

Cobar memorial pool is a seasonal pool – open from the beginning of October to the end of March. Pools such as in Cobar, were often built in Australia as memorials to war veterans - a practical facility where peaceful community life could be practised, rather than a static commemorative monument.

Another research method I intended to use but minimally executed, was my aim and intention, to swim in as many pools, swimming beaches and water holes as possible. I believed I would be able to gather more robust stories and information by engaging experientially in a swimming place like I anticipated how the locals swim. My strategy was not fulfilled to my satisfaction, because many places were closed or no one else, no locals, were in the water. I did apply myself to talk to 'locals' when I needed local knowledge to find out 'where do people swim?' I was brazen in asking a supermarket worker where do you swim in .....name of town ? If there was a swimming pool I was

directed to that. If I could engage in conversation longer with my local informant, I would be given what appeared to be restricted information about a natural water hole. Some conversations evolved to interviews, for which I could provide ready-made ethics permission forms.

### Interviews and conversations

Some of my interviews were structured but others were casual conversations conducted in the process of going about my habitual routines of swimming in different places. I spoke with or interviewed adults working at pools or beaches, coaches, teachers and lifeguards. Each person willingly gave me anecdotes and their observations to one of my main questions 'do you think Australia is a nation of swimmers?'

A personal swimming story or an historical narrative often followed. On occasions a story was related with pride about a talented fast swimmer and their coach. I noted that a good swimmer is highly admired. The 'good swimmer' was a recurring phrase in conversation and interviews... 'I'm not a good swimmer, but I could get back to shore if I fell out of a boat' ... 'my children are good swimmers, I made them do lessons, because I can't swim since I never overcame a fright I had as a kid when I nearly drowned' ...

Sometimes in the telling of a swimming story, place was significant but immersion in water was not the subject. I found it difficult to follow a story when I first started listening with purpose, until I understood that the idea of swimming was not just about immersion in the water, but also about the environment, the space, the place. The meaning and

memory of going swimming was much more encompassing than just moments in the water.

In some situations I observed, camping or picnicking was the primary activity, with water as the backdrop. In other situations I observed, water was the foreground of the activity, such as; surfing or water skiing or for a fitness goal by doing laps. Swimming stories reflected both of those scenarios.

The interview/conversational data I gathered resulted in wide ranging examples of types of swimming done, and where they swam. The locations described to me, variously involved deep water and moving water, sanitised and natural waters. Examples were reliably comprehensive to extract conclusions from. A notable observation emerged when I listened to people talking to about their immersive water experience. What they did when they were having a swimming experience, was broadly interpreted. The meaning of the term swimming appears to be widely understood and equally widely practised but it was up to individuals to interpret swimming from personal experiences.

In order to understand the stories told me, I found that without a qualifier of where their swimming story occurred and what sort of swimming they performed, made the story difficult to imagine. Interviewees rarely defined what they meant by swimming. The term is used generically for wading, bathing, playing, wave jumping as well as moving about horizontally in a specific style. The beach the pool the river the backyard pool, the farm dam were locations that were included in interviewees stories. In some situations, water is a backdrop. For example; a cool place to have a picnic on a hot day or a place for adults to socialise while the kids play in the water. For the purposes of this chapter, I make a distinction between going to a body of water to look at it, or just dipping in it, or fully immersing and moving around from place to place.

### **‘Swimming’ across different locations**

There are abundant safe locations for people to swim in Australia, as depicted in advertising, popular media and swimming education. In this section I describe where and how people do swim, in pools, ocean and rivers. The following four images in figure 31 are examples of people ‘swimming’ or a photograph of places that people can swim in Australia. Water play in backyard swimming pools is a common childhood experience, whether with a hose and a bucket, a cheap inflatable wading pool, or an inground pool with pumps and landscaping. Water play is the beginning of learning about water, how it flows, its sensory characteristics, its varying temperatures, that it can get in the holes in your head to sting your eyes and fill your ears. Water play with toys stimulate children’s imagination and their curiosity about how the world works. How does a boat float when a stone sinks? These are questions my grandchildren 8 and 6 asked when they were playing in the inflatable pool pictured below in figure 31.

Water environments are places to socialise, meet and mingle with family and friends, relax and unwind. Shared food and drink, conversation and playful activities may also be part of moments by water. In the image top right in figure 31, two teenage girls sit and chat in the water at a suburban beach to cool off and hang out in the ease and safety of a natural tidal pool. In the background, fisher people, a family in this case, cast lines out to sea off rocks when the swell was low and safe for rock fishing. I do not know if any of these people know how to swim in deep water, have the fitness and skill to ambulate themselves from deep water to shallow water. They are in situations where it would be useful to understand pulses of the water, uneven depths, currents and how to manage their emotions if they

ended up in the water, not on the rocks. These are contexts for the usefulness of knowing how to swim, knowing how to self-rescue and how to make good decisions about whether to go in the water at all at that time – crucial elements underpinning a safe swimming culture. The photograph at the bottom right is a 5 month old baby, another grandchild, with her father, my son, bonding and playing in calm shallow water in Geographe Bay near Busselton WA. This sort of exposure and subsequent experiences in water build capacity for later years of independent swimming. The many moored boats in the background are typical of sheltered bays and harbours in Australia. Boaters can rely on inflatable vests to stay afloat, and do not need to have a swimming license to get a boating license – I think they should.



**Figure 34** Some places and ways people swim in Australia

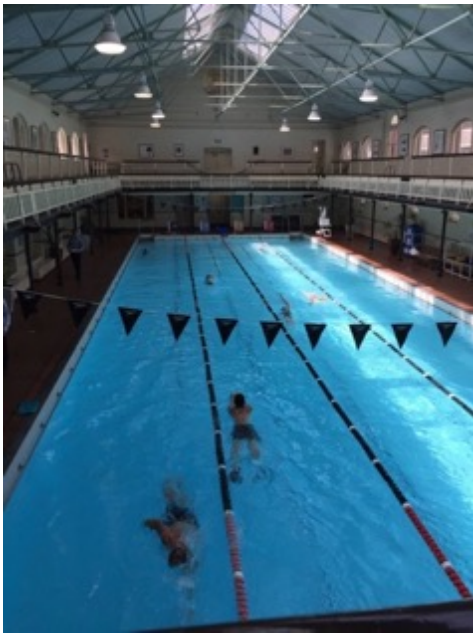
**Top left Childs wading pool on a farm, Margaret River WA personal files**

**Top right Natural sea pool and fishermen on rocks Forresters Beach NSW**

**Bottom left Backyard pool Forresters beach private home personal files**

**Bottom right Father and daughter Dunsborough main beach, Geographe Bay WA personal files**

The swimming pools in figures 32, 33 and 34 display the variations of swimming pools I observed on my research-road trip. Each have multifunction, social and physical, with the primary purpose to get in the water and swim.



**Figure 35 Lap swim time at Melbourne City Baths 2015. Melbourne City Baths is one of Melbourne's most significance heritage buildings, built in 1860 as an alternative to swimming in the polluted Yarra River. A gym and café are now included and the building is used in TV and theatre productions and fashion magazine shoots.**





**Figure 36 Cohuna, north west Victoria a country town pool adjacent to a weir, with an historic culture of swimming matches in the weir from 1911 to 1962 when the pool was built.**



**Figure 37 Lake Talbot swimming pool Narranderra south east NSW, also has a long history of competitions and also a site for fashion parades. It consists of three pools, two water slides - ‘the rampage’, grassy shaded areas, terraced picnic lawns, BBQ’s and kiosk. It is open October to March.**

I will now go into more detail about specific places people can and do swim, affirming a high value for opportunities to swim. The provision of swimming places does not guarantee a high standard of swimming across all populations, but it does go a long way toward making it possible. I will begin with swimming pools, before discussing beaches, and then rivers.

## Pools

Public swimming pools are designed to provide multi usefulness, particularly opportunity for recreational lap swimming and training and racing for sport swimming. In fact, the design of public pools prescribes the way the pool can be used, primarily to do laps. Lap swimming in one of the 1500 public pools, is an indication of the importance placed on swimming skills, swimming for fitness which underpins cultural understandings of the function of a pool and how to use it.

The design of a typical Australian swimming pool includes lane lines painted on the bottom of a pool which help a swimmer to travel straight, while lane ropes divide areas off so swimmers in a race do not bump into each other.

Swimming lessons and water safety is provided all over Australia by qualified instructors as a means to an end to learn to swim and as a preventative measure for knowledge about safety in and around water. In each of the pools I stopped to observe on the research road trip, swimming and water safety lessons of some sort were available at some time during the year.

I immersed myself in Margaret River aquatic cultures, pausing for a month on my road trip. The town is typical of populated coastal towns with an aquatic focus on some or all of surfing, boating, swimming, fishing and sightseeing ocean vistas.

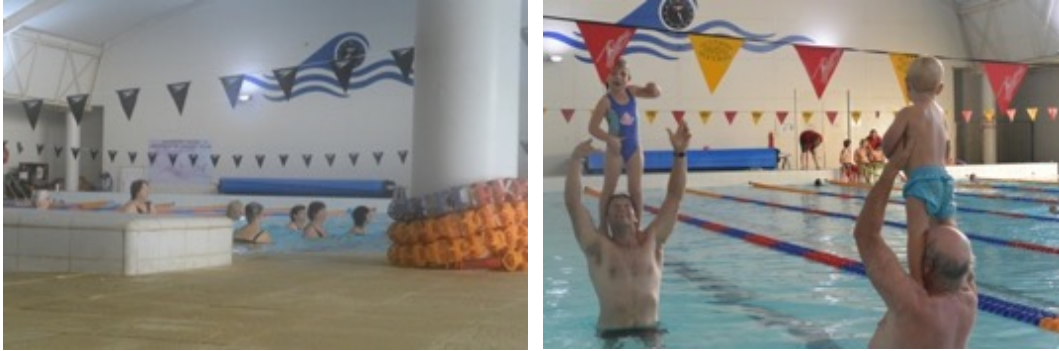
There is an indoor 25 metre swimming pool and recreation pool in the town as part of a recreation complex, built in 1997. There are two swim schools who use the facility. There are also two swimming squads for children, and two adult swim squads, one called

Margaret River Breakers who meet 3 times a week for an hour and the other, Swimming Women 'A collection of fabulous girls who love the water'. Sometimes they swim at masters pool events and more often informally as teams in the summer ocean swimming races such as the Rottnest Channel Swim, a 19.7 km distance for up to 3000 people in teams or soloists. Participants swim from Cottesloe beach to Rottnest island with a powered support boat for each team and a kayak support boat. The relay team members are transported in the boat and swap every 5 to 10 minutes doing a relay tag in the water, before climbing back onto the boat to wait for their next turn. The fastest swimmers and teams can swim the distance in about 4 -5 hours, while the slowest ones will take up to 10 hours. Swimmers become very fit when training for the annual event.

Other people who use the Margaret River pool enjoy swimming laps for fitness, and mental health. There is an active underwater hockey club who train and practise after work hours. Some of the Margaret River players have been in championship state events and been winners of national competitions. International competitor Clare Forward has competed all over the world in Australian Teams. Mark Wenman was the Australian Women's coach for many years

The two youth swim squads in Margaret River struggle for members to organise regular races and training. Most of the children just want to improve their swimming and fitness and be prepared for the school swimming carnival. One childrens group also swim in the morning before school. It is a RLSSA Swim and Survive squad aiming for higher level lifesaving awards. Breakfast is supplied at the pool for the children by a donation from a supermarket. The second children's group has a competition focus with a coach assisting children to improve their racing skills for interclub and school competitions. Squad session

ranged from 3-6 sessions per week, mostly afternoons. There is a shortage of qualified coaches. Those who do put up their hand to be the coach are fundamentally volunteers.



**Figure 38 Recreation in Margaret River 25metre indoor heated pool March 2015**

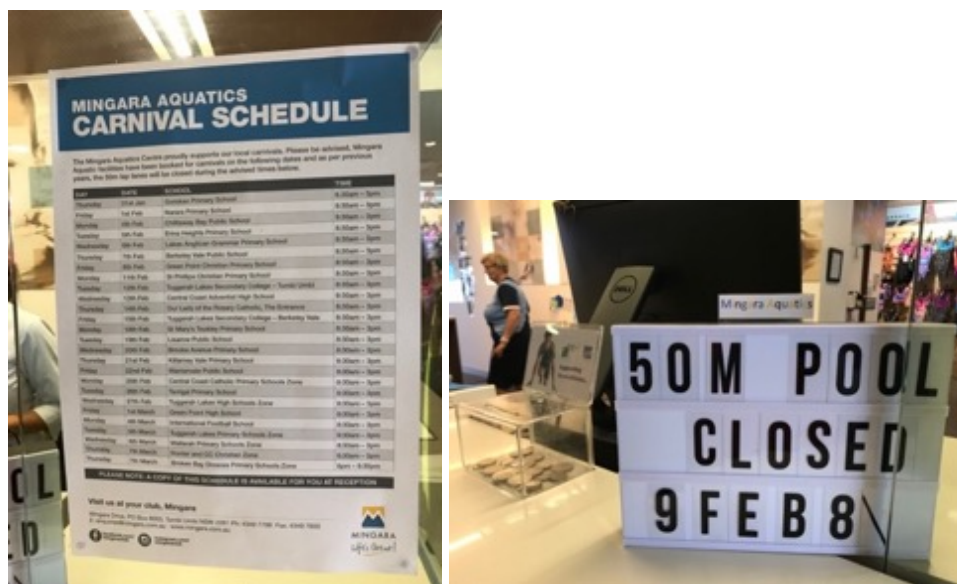
**Left Aqua aerobics class in, a popular form of in water exercise. Photo personal files.**

**Right A family playing with pre-school children and in the background a swimming lesson occurring, readying students for deep water. Personal files**

The later morning shift at swimming pools begins from about 8.30am after the school bus run. The 9 o'clock cohort often consists of younger women or men with pre-school or school-aged children. Pre-schoolers can be looked after in a crèche at the aquatic centre while parents swim. Older women also join the later swim session when there is less noise and chaotic splashes. They go to the pool sometimes as a social outing and while there, do laps or water exercises to aid mobility. Swimming movements look different between the intensive athletic approach of the first group of early morning lap swimmers' and the calmer more meditative attitude of the second shift. Contrary to a meditative mood, the serenity can be interrupted by a blast of loud bouncy music for the active aqua exercise classes. In an aqua class, participants, men and women, are in the water, led by athletic looking people who bounce around boisterously on the pool deck, while shouting instructions on their microphone. I participated in some aqua classes as part of my

research. On another day, I swam laps while the exercise class was conducted. The sound of the speakers is muffled in the ears of the swimmers who do their laps at the same time as the aqua class. The water sloshes and gurgles doing a head-inside-water stroke. If I swim a dry-head breaststroke, the sound can be distracting, a contradiction to relaxation, hence some patrons avoid lap swimming during the scheduled times of ‘aqua’.

The swimming pool as a public space is shared use, a democratic, social space. Aquatic centres maintain a calendar of scheduled classes and events such as school swimming carnivals so patrons are informed of seasonal pool uses and can therefore adjust their routines without feeling like their needs are less significant (Conversations with swimmers in the towns of Margaret River, Launceston, Claremont WA, Coffs Harbour and Goulburn).



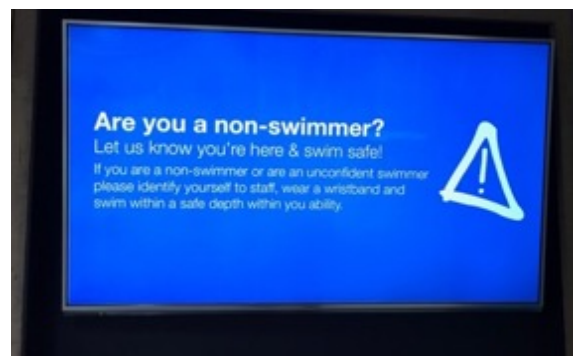
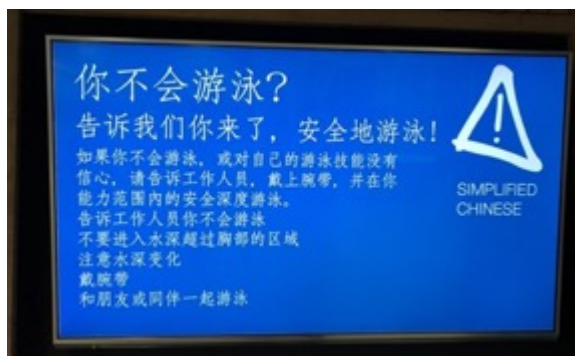
**Figure 39** Mingara Aquatics central coast NSW January 2019, open all year round but closed for special events.

Left Notice advertising the swimming carnival schedule February-March 2019

Right Sign at entry to pool alerting patrons that the 50metre pool will be closed on 9<sup>th</sup> February for one day. The recreation pool will still be open.

The above scenes can be seen in similar patterns in other parts of the world, but the rituals and body language described are more confident and casual in Australian settings compared with say Japan and Europe, that are more precisely ordered by performing hygiene protocols such as showering with soap before entering the pool. Smaller country pools are less formalised too, than larger mixed-use Aquatic centres with gyms and saunas attached to them. The personality of the pool manager also influences the tone of the swimming centre, whether one is a bossy, rule bound person or someone who is more like a concierge, friendly and personable (conversations in 2015-2017 with pool managers and patrons at Narranderra NSW, Wadeye NT, Cohuna Victoria, Yass NSW and Michael Wenden, who oversees all of the Gold Coast QLD council public swimming pools). The local swimming pool is not just a gymnasium facility, it is also a social meeting place, sought out by patrons and defended if closure is threatened (McShane 2009, 2005; Montgomery 2005; McLachlan 2012; Lewi 2008). I noted the signage at Devonport pool in northern Tasmania exuded a helpful, welcoming mood, see figure 37. It is one of the 50 swimming pools Australia wide, managed by Belgravia Leisure.

[www.belgravialeisure.com.au/sectors/aquatics/](http://www.belgravialeisure.com.au/sectors/aquatics/) accessed 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019



**Figure 40 Devonport aquatic centre Tasmania, managed by Belgravia leisure**

**Top Left Signage at entry to the pool inviting non-swimmers and offering assistance**

**Top right Hydrotherapy pool used for exercise warm comfort and baby lessons**

**Bottom left Chinese signage inviting non-swimming 'others' who do not read English very well.**

**Bottom right Sign of encouragement to provide for support to non-swimmers**

### **Early morning lap swimmers**

Swimming pools host groups or individuals who enjoy lap swimming, some of them swim early in the morning before work.

Early morning swimmers are a genre of swimmer. This group of swimmers help make up the fabric of the way in which swimming is organised and reinforce how swimming pools

are designed as rectangles with lane lines. This type of swimmer is unlike from their elite swimmer compatriots in approach to their experiences of swimming (even though some like to track their training and swim distances). Some like to do their regular 20 or 30 laps, unassumingly performing and counting, exercising old joints or young lungs, toning a baby tummy, or fulfilling a doctors' prescription after a heart health scare. The allure of swimming is the enjoyment of doing it. The number of this type of swimmer is unknown because the cohesion of this genre is not based on formalised 'joining' but informal practise of habitual routines as the following description indicates.

It is still dark, but from the outside of the pool fence, not yet opened, I can see steam rising off the outdoor pool silhouetted in the spotlights shining down on the 25 metre 8 lane pool that I'm about to plunge into. Fit, upright school-aged children begin to arrive, pouring out of cars driven by yawning parents who I notice later, sleep in the car park with the seat reclined. The kids carry their ironed school uniforms on a coat hanger, a backpack humped on their back that I notice after their workout, contains breakfast as well as their school lunch. Another twisting bulky bag hanging off long toned arms is the bulging mesh sack containing flippers, kickboard, pull buoy and hand paddles – standard training kit for a swimmer. A young blonde girl in a smart long sleeved council uniform with a stylish wave-like logo on the chest, finally opens the electronic doors. Kids and adults swipe their cards or pay cash with a ker-ching of the cash register and disappear into the bowels of the pool foyers and hallways. They reappear wrapped in a long warm pool coat kitted up in their swimsuit and mesh bag that gets dropped unceremoniously at the end of their lane. A coach appears with four stopwatches draped around his neck and starts barking orders organising pool deck stretching exercises.

The adult lap swimmers have lanes 1 2 and 3, the kids in squad, have lanes 4-8. Lane 4 is reserved for anyone to do dive practises, turns and single laps of butterfly. Some men have



already dived in the water by the time I get to the end of the pool with my swimming kit – me, my cap and goggles and a water drink bottle. I love using flippers, but I decided not to use them today. The water, now stirred up by the adult swimmers, emits a thicker fog that emphasises the cold damp air, and now yellow sun-glow on the horizon, angular with house roof silhouettes.

From Cairns to Geraldton, from Alice Springs to Mt Barker, from Mildura to Orange, a hotchpotch of Australians young and old, share a love for swimming early in the morning. A great start for the day, I hear over and over - doing laps and technique sets, emerging 1 to 2 hours later goggle imprinted eyes but with a spring in their step. Especially the cheeky grey-haired older men and women who act as if they own the place! The young kids are inspired by the older wrinkly people swimming slowly and gracefully with determined purpose. The older swimmers enjoy seeing the next generation of swimmers working hard and building a shared life-long love of being in the water, swimming. (field note...)

Swimming and swimming pools hold embedded meanings carried over from earlier historical eras of pool building. Swimming is a symbol of free time, a form of wealth for working class people. Swimming pools become memory places where childhood life is lived. A swimming pool can be a place for ‘body projects’, moral hygiene, social discipline - expected personal responsibility to know how to swim, remain fit and healthy, so as not to be a burden on society. Pools have been and are, active war memorials. Public pools are also gifts from the government, returning taxes to the collective via valued public facilities. Pools are arenas for sportive competitions, where a good swimmer at a school swimming carnival or a national championship is elevated to a special status.

As a contrast, I will now discuss another place where swimming occurs, the beach. The meaning of the beach and the unpredictability of the ocean frames the experience of the water, which in turn generates a specific type of swimming culture.

## Beaches

The beach is a popular place for Australians to go and while they are there, get in the water and 'have a swim'. Other writers have examined the role of the beach in Australian culture, but rarely discuss the swimming factor in the water at the beach. Some of these authors and their subjects include; The beach as paradise on earth (Lencek and Bosker 1998), tradition and meanings of ocean pools and liminal space, the beach and national identity and the beach as a social often contested space (McDermott 2012; Huntsman 2001; Fiske 1989; Drew 1994; Booth 2001). The generic meaning of swimming in a horizontal orientation using arms and legs is mostly presumed by these authors rather than noting and questioning the specific and contextual type of swimming people are doing.

Extraordinarily little horizontal swimming occurs when in the water 'between the flags' because crowds and waves inhibit travel. Most 'swimming' seen and done is wading, wave jumping, plunging under waves and occasionally body surfing a wave. Feet are usually close to the bottom or standing on the bottom. Wave jumping is exciting, risky, fun. It takes dexterity and knack to time the dive under or the jump through a wave without getting smashed by the wave and tumbled underwater in turbulence - and risk losing swimwear. If someone wants to swim horizontally when in the usually crowded patrolled area between the flags, they will have to go beyond the wave zone. There they can swim parallel to the beach back and forward within the flagged area. Horizontal swimming can be done but the stroke rhythms are interrupted every 5 or 10 seconds by waves and frothy swash as well as be hindered by other bodies swimming in the safe area between the flags.

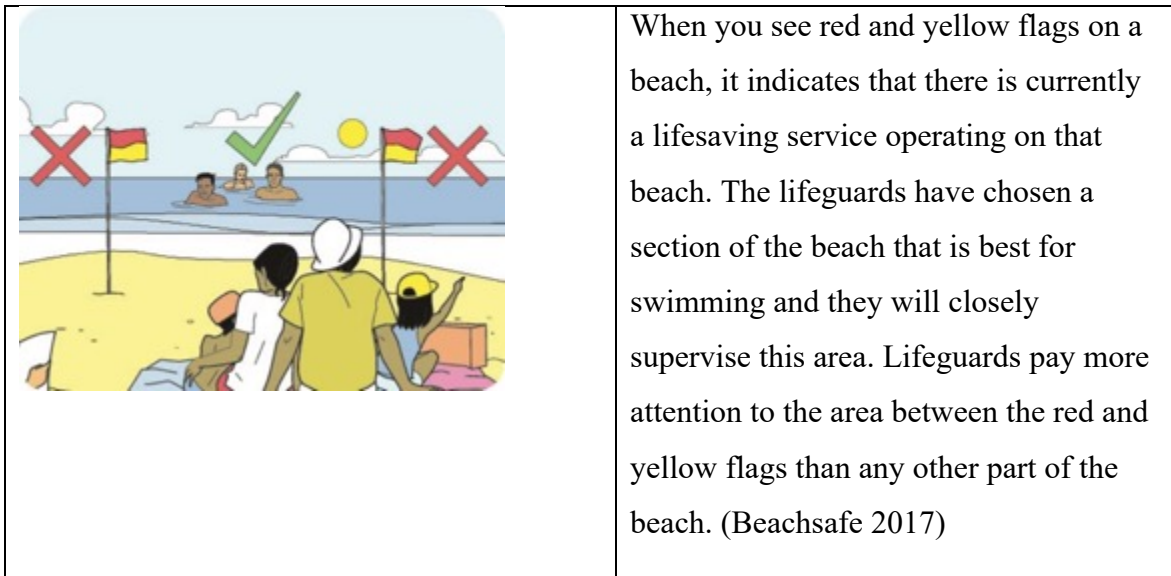


**Figure 41 Vertical swimmers like to be able to touch the bottom if they need to, or hover in an upright position. Gnarabup beach WA and top right Hamelin Bay WA. Personal files 2015**

### **‘Swimming between the flags’**

The much-touted water safety message swim between the flags is explained by Surf Life Saving and shown diagrammatically in Figure 39 Flags below.

“The central message of the campaign is ‘if we can’t see you, we can’t save you’ It is an imperative to educate all Australians and international tourists about the importance of swimming between the red and yellow flags....Research shows that although 90% of Australian people know they should swim between the flags, 40% of people still do not” (SLSA 2012-2013; White and Hyde 2010).



**Figure 42** An explanation of ‘swimming between the flags’ <https://beachsafe.org.au/surf-safety/lifeguards-top-tips> accessed 12 March 2017

The Swim between the flags directive can be confusing and can be misunderstood if taken literally. Lifeguarding flags are situated on the dry sand of the beach so of course you can’t swim in the sand. The meaning is implicit, not explicit. Two imaginary lines are drawn in parallel from each flag, perpendicular to the beach out into the water. This creates a virtual alley in the water, within which swimming and wading is the safest place. Looking at the image above of a family sitting on the beach looking out to sea through a corridor framed by the red and yellow flags, one can see swimmers standing in the water, they are not swimming horizontally so are they going to be scolded by the lifeguards for not ‘swimming’? A council lifeguard employed at Cronulla beach in 2006 explained to me another misunderstanding. He described an incident when a Japanese tourist misconstrued the safety message swim between the flags. The tourists swam outside the line of the flag because they could NOT swim. They thought that only swimmers could be in between the flags.

For those 40% knowledgeable people NOT swimming between flags, they may be doing so because of the intrusive surveillance - some people don't want to be watched - while others want to swim with fewer bodies. For safety sake, containing swimmers within a safe zone is necessary within the capacity of lifeguards to scan an area of water, but challenging, when the swimming zone is too small for the numbers of people in the water. Running into another swimmer is likely when everyone is crammed together and therefore potentially more dangerous than swimming outside the designated line of the flags.

In April 2017, Surf Life Saving Tasmania began a consultancy process with surf club members to review the lifeguarding services provided at patrolled beaches, with the view to providing lifeguarding 'Beyond the Flags' (SLST 2017). The consultancy process also includes governance issues and potential fee for service education to the public as a revenue stream. This review mostly relates to unpatrolled and remote beaches where people like to go at their own risk. Beach lifeguards employed by a municipal council are limited by their jurisdiction and Surf lifesaving volunteer lifeguards are restricted where they patrol by the nature of their volunteerism - to be on patrol at designated 'patrolled' beaches attached to a surf club. Public campaigns and ongoing education of water users target user groups. Ultimately a persons' personal safety is determined by the good or bad choices they make when they recreate around water.

### **Swimming for surfing**

Surf board riding is a prevailing aquatic activity in Margaret River, with tales of heroic waves ridden and peer pressure to adopt language, clothing and attitudes of the surfer

lifestyle. That surfing involves deep-water immersion evades the logic of some experienced surfers, tourists buying surf lessons and novice learners. Swim-ability is taken for granted even by experienced surfers, with trust for safety placed in a leg rope/leash attached to the surfboard and their buoyant wetsuits, rather than swimming fitness and swimming competence.

In Western Australia, the Margaret River High School conducts a surfing academy with a focus on sport performance. Curious about teaching and learning swimming for surf skills, I interviewed both the Phys-ed teacher in charge and one of the coaches Josh Palmanteer, during a school surfing competition in large surf at a rocky point break called Sewers. Their interest was surfing performance, not swimming survival skills in case of the teenagers becoming detached from their boards. As we chatted and watched the waves and the high school students, big powerful swells pushed in to the points and bays of the south west of Australia. Wave size and power accumulates during the long reach of water across the Indian and Southern Oceans. The kids looked like dots on the faces of the waves, the waves were big. I cringed every time they fell off and watched them do a few clumsy strokes back onto their surfboard attached to their ankle with a leg rope. 'How good can these kids swim? I asked physical education teacher Scott Cameron. 'They can swim 50 metres' but he said, 'it was up to parents to ensure their kids could swim, and up to the kids themselves to do their own fitness swimming training.' 'Do you insist on this and follow it through'? I asked. 'No' he said, 'but I guess I should, but we have limited time with the students, so we just coach them in surfing skills for competitions' (Conversational interview March 2015).



**Figure 43 Interschool surfing competition at Boodjidup Point/Gas Bay, near Margaret River WA 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

**Top Left Young high school students competing in large waves rely on their leg rope attached to their surfboard for safety, not their swimming skills if the leash breaks. Treacherous shore conditions have to be negotiated to avoid getting washed up on the rocks, requiring a high degree of environmental awareness, timing and paddling skills. Personal files 2015.**

**Bottom left and right Shows the shoreline along which surf waves wash up onto. High school children are waiting for their turn in the interschool surfing competition. Personal files 2015**

We then discussed the false sense of security the leg ropes provide to these young surfers if they are not systematically improving their swimming skills and swimming fitness as they mature.

Younger surfers like the kids in the Margaret River surf academy just want to surf and appear to acquire advanced watermanship by surfing a lot. Jumping off rocks to take a

short cut to the line-up, takes good judgement and practised timing, as does 'reading' swell size and power relative to one's ability. Three of my sons, now adults, grew up in the same community surf culture. They and their friends were fit and skilled at surfing, but I insisted on them having skills to swim 400 metres and tread water for another 10 minutes beyond the breaking waves, when they graduated from boogie boards to surfboards around 10-13 years old. Not all of them were able to swim 400 metres nonstop but they worked on it through their later teen years.

Trending in the culture of adult big wave surfers besides swimming fitness is an emphasis on breath holding training, and flexibility through yoga or pilates. Joe Knight of One Ocean International conducts courses in breath holding for surfers and free divers and 'all elements of ocean awareness and safety' [www.oneoceaninternational.org](http://www.oneoceaninternational.org) accessed 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019. I did one of his courses in Margaret River while on field research in 2015 and found it very helpful for my ocean swimming and body surfing.

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2014/12/10/4146038.htm> accessed 17 August 2017

When I lived in Margaret River up to 2006 and used the 25metre indoor heated pool, I would often see competitive surfers Jake Jakovich, Phillipa Tugwood and Dave Macaulay doing 45 minutes to an hour of pool swimming in preparation for the approaching big wave season. Perhaps the younger kids at the surf academy will take up the example of their older compatriots and find the value of practising swimming, even though they may be a-motivated to swim while attending the surf academy, that Scott Cameron reflected was for some, primarily a means getting time off class room school, to go surfing (conversation with Scott Cameron Academy director 2015). Problems with amotivation are a lack of knowledge to act, lacking a sense of competency to carry out an activity, and finding no value or interest in the activity. The surf coaches could intervene to help the



surfers to discover meaning and value in swimming endurance skills, by removing their leg ropes in a training session thus fostering intrinsic motivation.

On the other side of the country, in South East Queensland, in the Gold Coast area, surfing is also a dominant discourse. Additionally, beach walking/parading also prevails according to a high school physical education teacher Bronwyn. In both activities, surfing and beach parading, swimming is an incidental activity, and water safety knowledge presumed. Some of Bronwyn's teenage female students refused one summer to get in the water for swimming activities at the school pool for physical education classes, even though it was hot and humid. The teacher had the non-conforming students walk circles around the swimming pool for the duration of the class lesson, in the heat and full sun. Bronwyn realising the potential of the activity of walking, later created beach walking as an optional phys-ed activity choice, using that as a segue to water safety education 'reading' coastal environments and physical fitness (Interview April 2015 Mermaid Beach, Gold Coast).

### **Ocean swimming**

My discussion of ocean swimming is as a type of swimming at the beach, but with disparate reasons than going to the beach and using the water to cool off on a hot day. Ocean swimming is one form of openwater swimming. As more people participate in swimming in open water, over time, specific categories of open water swimming are gaining identity. Open water swimming is one generic term for deliberate swimming in the ocean, although I perceive that the term *open water swimming* is becoming culturally appropriated by elite competition swimming authorities as the type of swimming competition done in 'open water' of a lake, sea or river, not in the 'closed water' of a pool.

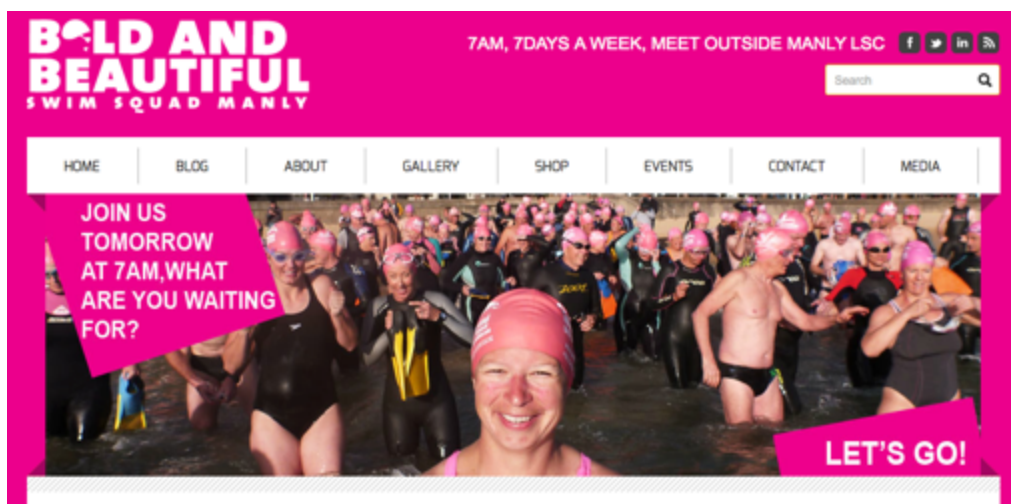
Before long-distance swimming (5km 10km 20km) became a swimming discipline embraced and controlled by FINA (the international swimming body), and an Olympic event, open water swimming was called marathon swimming. In practise, FINA still uses the term ‘marathon’ when it conducts 10km ‘marathon swimming world championship’ events under the banner of the open water discipline [www.fina.org/discipline/open-water](http://www.fina.org/discipline/open-water)

In some situations depending in the users and audience, marathon swimming means extreme long distance swimming such as swimming the English channel or a doing a personal challenge in privately organised charity swim down the Murray river or the Danube River - as done by marathon swimmers such as Shelly Taylor-Smith, Martin Strehl, Susie Moroney, Diana Nyad. I explained the definitions of swimming disciplines, in order to discern the place of ocean swimming in the pastiche of forms of doing swimming in water outside of a pool.

Interest and participation in swimming in the ocean is a significant and by all appearances, a growing phenomenon in the culture of swimming – how common it is and the number of adults who do it. All along swimmable coasts of Australia exist casual groups or individuals who enjoy a swim in the sea. The numbers are unknown, and motivations are varied. The reality of pods or tribe-like groups of competent swimmers ‘taking the plunge’ as a regular habit, upholds a perception that Australians are swimmers.

In Margaret River besides the fishing and surfing culture there are four active groups of ocean swimmers, with names such as the “the Sea Slugs”, and “Prevelly Penguins”. They consist mostly of adults who gather informally to swim in the mornings for about 30 minutes, starting at Gnarabup beach (the coast is 8km from the township of Margaret River) and finishing back at the start with a coffee or breakfast at the White Elephant Café. Coffee after a swim is a recurring theme in social adult swim groups.

In some country areas, swimming lessons are conducted for children in the calmer water of enclosed bays at the beach. Esperance WA is one place and Cowaramup Bay WA is another where VacSwim lessons in January school holidays are taught. Commercial adult open water swim groups provide instruction too. More school aged children 6-17 should have several guided swimming learning experiences in open water locations every year. Children familiar with the beach need time in and around rivers and those children familiar with rivers need experiences at surf beaches. There are other opportunities to learn to swim or improve swimming as an older person either commercial providers or by swimming more often. One significant opportunity already described, is the phenomena of open water swimming groups. The website banner in figure 9 is of a group at Manly called the Bold and Beautiful – and are typical of larger groups than the Bicheno swimmers, who gather at the shore at dawn to swim together before work.



**Figure 44** Website banner for the Bold and Beautiful swim squad, Manly, an open water adult swimming group, one of many, meeting at a beach to swim together before work. Screenshot February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Another group swimming at Manly attracting younger swimmers than typical 40 -60 year olds in adult groups, call themselves ‘Babewatch’ :

formed in 2011 as a bit of a lark but evolved toward two goals for people 18-35 – 1. increase youth participation in the sport of ocean swimming and 2. increase youth participation in community events , including fundraising’ (Oceanswims 2019) and see [www.babewatchcrew.com.au](http://www.babewatchcrew.com.au)

Having been involved in the adult open water swimming culture since 1997, I have seen an increase in the last 20 years, in the number of groups and the surging numbers participating. Open water swimming is a unique phenomenon of the culture of swimming. Open water swimmers are revising the identity of the ocean-goer who was the ‘surf shooter’ a person who body surfs and the surf-club lifesaver. Surf Life Saving, Surfing and Swimming have long histories and studies conducted about them, tracing their origins and culture, adult open water swim groups are deserving of similar socio/historical studies (Booth 2013; Osmond 2011b; Stranger 2010; Phillips 1998). One significant difference between swimming sports, and surf lifesaving clubs is that open water swimming groups are loosely organised, not rule bound or membership based in the sense of paying fees. Membership is determined by turning up and sharing in the activity, replete with rituals and affective experiences. Groups are like a fraternity, a clan, functioning as open tribes. Due to the similarities of swimming experiences and morning rituals, it is easy to visit or drop into a group outside of one’s own usual ‘tribal pod’ though water temperatures and specific rituals are distinct.

Ocean swimmers, wild swimming, open water swimmers perform similar swimming routines. Wild swimming has a cachet extolled by English swimmers and members of the

Outdoor Swimming Society. The group has a public facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/outdoorswimmingsociety/> and members have published a book of places to swim (Rew 2008). Heroic swims by novices are valorised, making the groups of wild swimming socially supportive and nurturing. Fresh water swimming is more common in Europe, less so in Australia where plentiful swimmable ocean locations are used more. Two books, *The Haunts of the black masseur - The Swimmer as Hero* and *Waterlog* by nature writer Roger Deakin are the ‘cult bibles’ of wild swimming (Sprawson 1992; Deakin 1999).

Since partaking in open water swimming from 1997, twenty years ago, I have a perspective on ocean swimming gained from swimming experiences with a number of groups in various locations around the world and within Australia. There is a spectrum of categories of swimming in natural water, lumped together as open water swimming as distinct from pool swimming. On the spectrum, there is extreme swimming, such as long distances of 10 km or more, and or in extreme cold below 10 degrees Celsius. Ocean swimming races such as the Rottneest Channel swim is another category of open water swimming enjoyed by many adult swimmers. Another genre is ‘wild’ swimming as already remarked upon. This is the type of swimming that has become a way of life for me with the Bicheno Coffee Club group.

Wild swimming has a loose definition, and can denote a remote location, bare skin/no wetsuits, stoicism, adventure. It includes engaging with the environment such as mud, sandflies, hot sun, cold wind and challenging water conditions - currents, cold, breaking waves, turbulence, deep dark water, harmful creatures. Wild/erness encapsulates many meanings, but in Christian thought, wilderness such as oceans, forests, and deserts, becomes the archetypal liminal space – a boundary between contingent everyday world

and the ‘other world’, thought in terms of infinity and eternity (Sheldrake 2011: 184). In the UK, there is The Outdoor Swimming Society (OSS) is ‘the world’s biggest collective of wild swimmers with 35,000 members’ Members debate the definition of wild to include the way swimming is performed, as something aesthetic rather than athletic swimming in wetsuits and fast splashy freestyle <https://www.facebook.com/OutdoorSwimmingSociety/> Some members associate splashy freestyle with brawny uncultured sport, just as English swimming authorities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century associated Australian crawl with unsophisticated colonials (Osmond 2005). Calm poetic, gliding, face-out-breaststroke is considered by some in Sweden and UK as more compatible with meditation and nature connection than the imposition of force and energy onto water, showing flailing arms and making splashes when doing freestyle (personal conversations with swimming teachers 2016).

The ‘early morning shift’ of beach users have quite different intentions for using the beach than the sun basking and water dipping of the ‘daytime shift’. Surfers on boards, bathers doing a tea bag dip, groups of paying fitness swimmers and groups of informal swimmers can be seen in the water beyond the sand bars and breaking waves, in overhead water. The people swimming in overhead water beyond breaking waves are ‘real’ swimmers. Pure pool swimmers have the skills but not the beach-sea know-how which can be learned through adult surf club membership or paying an expert to learn from. Many pool swimmers are frightened of ‘noahs’ (noahs ark / sharks) or rips until they have knowledge and experience to reduce fear and gain competence (Moles 2007). Pool swimmers have told me they prefer the consistency and predictability of the water in a pool. They prefer to swim for meditation, tranquillity, or to get accurate times from constant surrounds. Ocean swimmers enjoy the uncertainty. Swimming in the ocean requires attentiveness to

remaining safe in changeable conditions. It can elevate excitement, providing an adrenalin rush of pleasure, affective and emotional geographies (Foley 2017; Sherr 2012).

This and other informal swimming 'groups' have characteristics of a 'tribe' with ritual habits rather than a formalised club. They come together to enjoy the water and do some form of swimming. Nearly every popular beach has a loosely formed group of swimmers and body surfers. At Coolum beach on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, a group of swimmers meet at 8.30 am for an hour with flippers and a single hand paddle (for body surfing) and swim out about 250 metres, return to the wave break and body surf for the rest of the time. When it gets colder, they wear a vest. The open water swimming groups around Australia exist as a 'lifestyle culture', and may reflect other fragmented tribal groupings that are a reflection of a 'disintegration of mass culture' (Maffesoli 1996). In my experience, they are friendly, inclusive, resulting in social, gender and economic levelling. The daily or regular swims provide structure for the day and week and motivation to 'get out of bed' and 'get out of the house' whether for social, mental or physical reasons. The groups are place-based as well. There is a protectiveness toward the groups' swimming location, as every place-made-as-home evokes. Rubbish is scooped up, washed up sea animals mourned, water clarity appreciated. Ocean moods noted and beautiful scenery are admired. Solidarity is cemented by shared experiences of whatever surprises the ocean proffers.

**Rationale for open water swimming - Black line fever**

What is a possible reason for the observed surge in participation in recreational ocean swimming? Pool swimmers sometimes complain of the boredom and lack of variety, even drudgery following the 'black line'. 'Black line fever' is a metaphor for jaded fatigue from the repetitiveness of training and the disciplined life of a competitive swimmer. Black line fever can be a reason for choosing a different coach, or to stop swimming all together as Ian Thorpe and Leisel Jones mention in their biographies (Hunter 2004; Jones and McLean 2015). In a conversation in 2006 with Ian Thorpe about his swimming training regime before he changed coaches from Doug Frost to Tracey Menzies in 2001, he noted that it was Thursday. 'Doug would be setting 8x400's today. It was so predictable to the day and monotonous'. Thorpe's coach Tracey Menzies and other later coaches could not cure him completely of black – line fever even though he found new enjoyment and challenge for a few years, before retiring completely in 2012 (Thorpe 2013).

The key feature of swimming in natural water is its variety. The ocean particularly, affords stimulating interest. Variety is enjoyable because it is stimulating. It is stimulating because learning occurs. I cannot comment on more than a few elite pool swimmers in Australia, but I have vicarious experiences of associating with an American team - University California Berkeley womens swim team since 2003. They do ocean swimming training for extra fitness, challenge and interest. It has helped many, such as Natalie Coughlin and Dana Vollmer become even faster – they both affirm that the unique type of training they did in the waves, helped them learn more about the water around their body and how to 'get more energy out of the water' to convert to speed. Some Australian swimming champions such as Grant Hackett have a background in surf club swimming. His brother Craig Hackett was a legendary surf swimmer.



Grant Hackett's coach Dennis Cotterill surmised (when I asked him) that surf swimming probably helped Hackett's perception of water and matured his emotional responses to critical situations in the long-distance races he excelled at. Most of the successful long-distance swimmers are from surf backgrounds. The current 2019 representative is Simon Huitengua who is a second generation surf swimmer and Ky Hurst – another legendary surf ironman.

To be fair, not all coaches and their training programs are predictable to the exact same sets on a designated day. Many coaches are highly creative, using 'drills', games and random patterns of content to stimulate interest and discovery learning. I saw this at an Australian junior dolphins training camp in Brisbane in 2000. Entry-level career coaches in attendance learned new water drills at 'stations' set up around the pool. The hierarchical mentoring system of Australian swimming coaches such as at the training camp, maintains standards as well as exposing coaches to the skill-sharing coaching community. Whether the coaches used the novel drills and variegated sets of lap patterns back home, is up to them. Children I talked to in squads in Margaret River, Launceston, Hobart and Broken Hill all showed their excitement about training when they described the varied fun challenges set by the coach but groaned about the standard 'sets'.<sup>31</sup> I think that carefully designed ocean swimming training can help a swimming athlete improve and avoid getting the fever of straight, black line swimming, which is just a figurative expression for hours and hours of dedicated pool swimming training.

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<sup>31</sup> A swimming 'set' is a pattern of laps such as 8 x 400 metres freestyle with a specific rest interval between each one with goal times or speeds.

### Rivers, creeks and waterholes

Rivers creeks and waterholes are favoured places to swim in many of the towns I visited on field research, preferred over the local swimming pool which costs money to enter and has lifeguards watching and enacting strict rules to regulate behaviour. Some water users are averse to constant surveillance and rules, such as teenagers in Launceston who prefer to swim at the Basin pool than Windmill Hill Aquatic centre (Gould 2010). There has been some research conducted into the values and uses of waterholes.

‘Waterholes are, by virtue of necessity and preference, major foci of human activity in arid regions and underpin the social, cultural, and economic framework of inland Australia, while the penchant for waterhole based recreation hints at their mass appeal, especially landscape aesthetics ... associated with coolness, rejuvenation, escapism and cleansing ’ (Silcock 2010: 387-90).

In Margaret River township, ‘the weir’ is the favoured freshwater swimming hole for 14 year olds I spoke with, a place to escape from watching eyes of adults, and enjoy the bushy vistas. The Margaret River is dammed at Barrett Street as part of the string of weirs and the main reservoir on Ten mile Brook supplying town water. Winter rains and summer droughts cause fluctuations in flows and depths of rivers in the south west of western Australia, so that by January the river may be toxic for human swimming, due to low flows, stagnant water and blue-green algae outbreaks. Even when the water is safe for swimming, the river is a weak tea colour with some eucalyptus bark tannins dissolved in it too, making it opaque, a bit spooky as to what logs or branches may be ‘lurking’ under the surface. Marron, and gilgies, endemic freshwater edible crustaceans, also inhabit the

muddy detritus on the bottom of the dammed river. They can nip if a bare foot disturbs their home. Cormorants dive bomb fish and in the season, lamprey eels wiggle their way up the purpose built fish ramp at the waterfall overflow. There is a walkway over the weir dam wall as part of a 10km bushwalking loop, so there are often spectators watching the water antics of humans or animals. Not much swimming occurs in the water, except to dodge a thrown mud patty, or to find that warm patch of water in the middle of the pond. Plenty of ‘messaging about’ occurs in tyre tubes, rummaging around on the river edges, throwing stones or looking at cloud shapes while back floating through layers of warm and cold water. Local teenagers I interviewed have a sense of ownership of the place. They bemoaned the disrespect of casual users from out of town leaving their rubbish behind, defiling their beauty spot. Swimming is incidental to playing in the river environment, but knowing how to swim in the river, along its edges and in murky deep water is a prerequisite. No swimming lessons occur in that river, but they do in the ocean 10 km away. The weir is typical of country town swimming habitats in natural areas. While it is only one specific example, the Margaret River weir is indicative of the popularity of water recreation and the demand for swimming lessons and water safety policies.



Another scene consisting of water craft users and ‘swimmers’ on the water, is an inland river in far west NSW, in the town of Deniliquin. Maclean beach is the main town beach, a wide river-sand beach on a bend in the Edward River.

Tall old River Gum trees grow close to the river edges, providing cool shade for the beach goers and for the cars and boat trailers in the adjacent carpark. Boating looks like the main water activity, specifically water skiing and towing children in ‘donuts’ – inflated circles of plastic attached behind noisy powerboats.



**Figure 45 Water users and picnickers Macleans Beach, Edward River, Deniliquin NSW, September 12th, 2017 Personal files.**

**Top left Families recreating in and on the water and next to the river at Macleans Beach Deniliquin**

**Bottom left Scene of young children in the edge of the river, a donut tow toy, and water ski boats travelling less than 4knots speed in the shared swimming zone.**

**Bottom right Safety sign erected by Deniliquin council who takes responsibility for car parking, toilets and river beach access.**

Adults stand on the deck of the boat, women in bikinis adorning the scene, but the men in board shorts and singlets driving the boats. Children took turns either on skis or in the donut. The adults insisted on children wearing a PFD (life jacket/personal flotation device) in the water, but as soon as they climbed out of the water back on to the boat, they took it off, like their parents. Boats zoomed back and forth on the river slowing down to 4 knots in the swimming zone and speeding up around the corner and out of sight down river.

Every half hour or so, a boat would be driven onto the sand for the occupants to have a rest or take on board another group.

River uses first piqued my interest on research field trips when I saw an intriguing amateur sign pointing west off a main highway in northern Victoria ‘Aquatic capital of Australia’. Unfortunately, I did not stop to take a photograph as the sign was gone when I retraced my steps several days later. The sign pointed to Lake Mulwala and the towns of Yarrawonga and Mulwala. The lake is a large body of water, a reservoir, dammed up in the Murray River, and is advertised as your ‘Inland Aquatic Paradise’

<http://www.yarrawongamulwala.com.au/> accessed 11 August 2017 Water skiing, wakeboarding, water park and cod fishing are featured holiday activities, a veritable cornucopia of aquatic recreations in fresh water, inland from the archetypical aquatic recreations represented on the sea coasts.

Journalist and photographer CEW Bean wrote about another Australia, inland from the coast

the truth is there exists inside coastal Australia a second Australia - of which most of our people know very little...for out there you have reached the core of Australia, the real red Australia of the ages (Bean 1910).

There are not just red soils in the ‘outback’ but also grassy landscapes, agricultural production and rivers – many of them only flowing after flooding rains. I confess I knew very little of aquatic activity in inland Australia, before doing two research trips across 9 rivers in NSW and Victoria – rivers in the Murray Darling basin. My habitation of Australia is seduced by waves on the coast, not rivers inland. I do love the red soil in wide-open spaces, partitioned by creek and river beds, but the ocean is more alluring. The ocean beaches get much more attention in national narratives than river beaches and life on the river. Unfortunately, much of the attention about rivers in Australia is negative – high rates of drowning and contested water volumes for farmers and environmental flows. The visual

feast of inland Australia and surprising number of waterways traversing the landscape inspires artists and film makers. More positive depictions of rivers in Australia have been made such as the 1983 television series *All the Rivers Run* starring Sigrid Thornton and John Waters. It is an historical drama about a woman who owns a commercial riverboat and her relationship with the river. A sweeping saga of love and adventure, it dramatises tensions between the choice of coastal city society and aesthetic inland beauty of the Murray River.

Talking with research participants in Wilcannia on the Darling River in north-central NSW took me back to the memory of the TV drama when a recurring story emerged - about drifting in tyre tubes in the river current. Lazily floating along, warmed by the sun above the water and cooled by the water underneath. The subject and descriptions of the aesthetics and pleasures of swimming was constantly spoken. Delightful memories of holidays, friends, family outings and relaxation, accompanied answers to my question, what is your 'favourite place to swim?' Descriptions involved boating and floating ON water, very few in-water stories, besides rock-jumping into it. 'Hanging out' on the river invokes yet another polysemic meaning of swimming.

Back in Wilcannia on the Darling River, teenagers Katrina and Evelyn spoke about tyre tubes too. A tube for the river appeared to have powerful value as a prized possession and privileged use. Swimming in the river at 'the weir' often resulted in catching a fish, but in talking to me about how they used the river, invoked safety warnings told by her uncle through respecting the river serpent called the Nadjii in Barkindji languages. Katrina spoke respectfully of the nadjii, said she could feel its presence when she was swimming. She avoided going past a bend in the river where the nadjii might hurt her.

One teenage girl contradicts the dominant discourse of surfing and beaching in Margaret River Western Australia with her othering experience of swimming places

‘I hate the beach, I don’t like seaweed, I don't like sand and I don't like what might be in the ocean. I prefer the river at the weir. It is calm, and I like floating on my back looking at cloud shapes and watching black cockatoos flying over the forest and amongst the red gums. I saw some red-tailed ones one day.’ (In classroom interview at Margaret River High School 2016).



**Figure 46 Two swimming places favoured by 14year old students interviewed at Margaret River High school, WA March 2015**

**Top Left and right Barrett Street weir, in the fresh water of the Margaret River. This inflatable was wilfully damaged in 2014 and is no longer provided by the council. The river is preferred by some, especially teenagers who can walk there and don’t like sand salt and seaweed. The water is sometimes contaminated with e-coli in summer though January 30, 2018. Photo: Margaret River Mail**

**<https://www.margaretrivermail.com.au/story/5199717/ecoli-concerns-at-margaret-river-swimming-spots/> accessed April 26, 2015**

**Bottom Left and Right Joey's nose beach just north of the Margaret River mouth, popular with teenagers and local families for swimming, 4-wheel driving and fishing. Photo: Personal files 2016.**

### **Australian swimming practices**

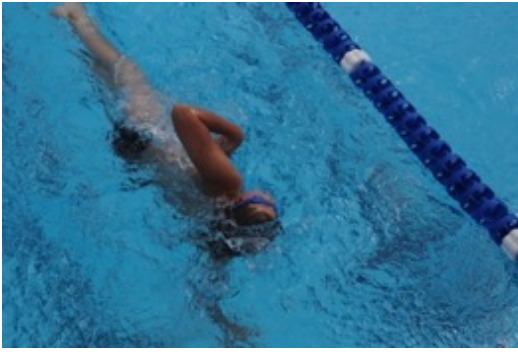
My road trip across southern Australia and around river country in NSW and Victoria revealed that ways of swimming are much more diverse than stereotyped depictions of children in swimming lessons, hot day wading after beach-parading, and the images of swimming heroes. The pleasures of swimming are also under played and swimming places presumed to be enjoyable are not the same to everyone.

#### Swimming styles: 'a look'

Of interest to me, on my cross-Australia road trip, I observed a typical style, an Australian style of swimming freestyle or 'crawl'. Most noticeable is a distinctive 'high elbow' recovery i.e. when arms are out of the water the arm is right-angular with the swimmers' elbow higher than their hand. This is the 'look' most obvious across a pool, when I observed lap swim sessions and swim squads.







**Figure 47 High elbow freestyle is a typical ‘look’ of Australian swimmers**

**Left Ocean swimmers Busselton jetty 4km swimming race WA 2014. A young girl I sat next to on the jetty while taking this image and watching the event commented ‘ooh they look like birds and spiders’.**

**Personal files**

**Right, Age group training squad exhibiting ‘high elbow’ freestyle, a technique reinforced by drills and instructions from coaches and teachers. Riverside club Launceston TAS 2015. Photo: Personal files**

**Bottom left A child doing ‘finger-tip-drag’ drill to learn ‘high elbow freestyle’ a central technique in Australian swimming coaching systems, producing the characteristic distinctive ‘look’ of swimmers from Australia. Riverside swim club Tasmania 2017. Personal files.**

‘Crawl’ is a shortening for the word ‘Australian crawl’ a swimming stroke style whose development is attributed to Australians in Sydney in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The current mechanics of Australian crawl, more commonly known as freestyle is not the same as the foundational stroke developed for competition by Alick Wickham and members of the Cavill family in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Distinguished Australian swimming coach Forbes Carlile (1921-2016) had an interest in historical facts and did some of his own original source research in the 1960s. He was working on a more comprehensive history of the development of swimming teaching and swimming strokes in Australia when he passed away in 2016 (personal conversations with Ursula Carlile). Forbes explains the appearance of ‘crawl’ in a 1963 article, updated in 1992;

In 1879 Fred Cavill voyaged to Australia from the UK and started a swimming baths at Lavender Bay in Sydney Harbour. "Professor" Cavill soon had a flourishing business. Of Fred Cavill's six sons, three played an important part in the development of the crawl as a competitive stroke. Syd Cavill wrote in the Sydney Referee (July 1914) his version of the birth of the crawl-stroke:

I claim that I am the man who discovered the crawl and that my brother Arthur ("Tums"), who died the other day in Seattle when he froze trying to swim the harbour there, was the first man to swim the stroke in Australia, and that my brother Dick was the man who perfected it. I introduced it into the United States. In 1898 I made up my mind to leave Sydney and try my luck in America. On the way, in Apia (Samoa) I swam against a woman and she gave me the hardest race of my life (Carlile 1963/1992).

Sports historian Gary Osmond has also written about the crawl stroke and its appearance in Australia citing Alick Wickham (the son of an English trader father and Solomon Islander mother) as a person who used the overarm stroke in a race at Bronte baths in 1897 or 1901 (Osmond and Phillips 2004). The typical stroke of the day was a type of arms-in-the-water side stroke. Gary Osmond found that in the Solomon Islands a freestyle like stroke is still swum and is called tuppa-ta-palla (Osmond 2015). Cecil Colwin (1927-2012) a swimming coach and published author, also narrates the evolution of the style that has become the fastest competitive racing stroke used by every competitor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Colwin 1999). To the trained eye there is still a distinctive version of the Australian crawl done by Australians, recognisable in age group and elite swimmers and recreational lap swimmers. Not all self-described 'swimmers' are horizontal in the water. There are 'dry heads', who swim without fully submersing, and what I call 'vertical swimmers', people who do

submerge but mostly hover vertically or stand in the water. ‘Vertical’ swimmers predominate surf beach bathing and recreating in other natural waterways. This is the main ‘look’ of swimmers I observed on my field trips.



**Figure 48 Vertical and horizontal swimmers by comparison**

**Top left Waubs Beach Bicheno January 2017 personal files**

**Top right Bondi beach ©Aquabumps 2017 by permission**


**Central left Mossman Gorge north of Cairns QLD 2014, personal files**

**Central right Town beach Port Macquarie NSW 2015 personal files**

**Bottom left ‘Vertical’ swimmers in the 25m outdoor swimming pool Launceston Aquatic, Tasmania 2014. Note diving board at right hand end of pool and deep water. Personal files**

**Bottom right ‘Horizontal’ swimming children’s swim squad training at Riverside pool Launceston 2017, personal files**

The look of a swimmer’s stroke or their ‘style’, is a common basis on which to assess skill and competency. I have identified four broad patterns of swimming movement commonly seen done by swimmers in Australia and around the world, conceiving them as ‘gestural postures’, rather than ‘technique’ which has specific cultural connotations. Some movements such as freestyle are emphasised in lesson programs in Australia, so that particular ‘posture’ is widely practised. Each of the four described patterns of moving in the water described and illustrated below in Figure 42 has a meaningful function. There are other strokes and ways of moving through water but the four I have chosen are archetypal. At a glance when people go in the water to ‘swim’, they will be doing something that looks like one of these four sketches, remembering that they are gestural, not technically precise representations.

Type/style of swimming	Description
 <p>#1 Sketch Copyright Milton Nelms 2019</p>	<p>Universal ‘vertical swimming’. This way of immersion in the water relies on shallow water to stand on the bottom, and keep the mouth out of the water, so the depth is critical. Other ‘vertical travel’ swimming is slow but doesn't require feet on the bottom. Hips are low and eyes and mouth remain out of the water. This can be done for a long time but it takes time to move from one place to another.</p>



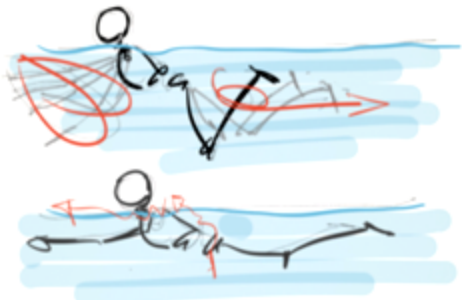
 <p>#2 Sketch Copyright Milton Nelms 2012</p>	<p>Horizontal Australian freestyle swimming, multi-purpose, short or long duration, modelled on the competition style. This style takes considerable practise time to learn to do it efficiently and do it with low energy output. It requires fitness and consistent practise to do it for long durations.</p>
 <p>#3 Sketch Copyright Milton Nelms 2012</p>	<p>Short duration swimming, very practical for play and dramatic physical showiness. High head, elevated chest, dropped hips, big down-kicks. Makes lots of splashes, uses a lot of energy. May indicate the inability to do rhythmic side breathing, a style that is energy efficient and can be fast. Sometimes called ‘water polo freestyle’ or ‘surf swimming’</p>
<p>‘Dry head’, ‘resting’ breaststroke</p>  <p>#4 Sketch copyright Milton Nelms 2017</p>	<p>‘Swedish’ or ‘British’ breaststroke, head out of the water eyes forward - a graceful energy conserving style for exercise that can be done for long duration, but slow in time. You can breathe whenever you want and see where you are going. Head can remain dry, goggles are not needed as no submersion need occur.</p>

Figure 49 Four typical types of swimming, represented as ‘gestural postures’.

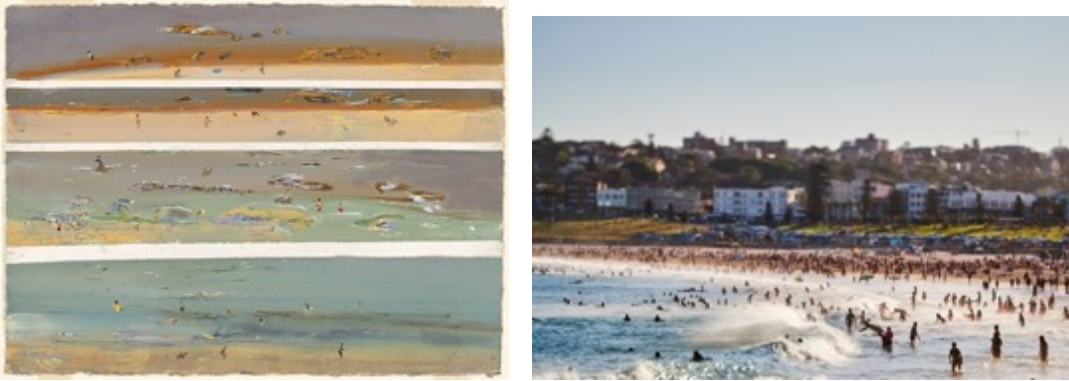
A popular practice and dominant image of people in the water is ‘vertical swimming’, standing in shallow water or hovering upright in deep water with face out of the water. See figure 42 image #1. The authoritative image of swimming in Australia is horizontal, face in the water freestyle with side breathing. See Figure 42 sketch #2. Having spent time in other countries doing swimming business, I note that the ‘look’ of swimming is different in Fiji and Sweden to Australia. A high-energy, showy way of swimming for short durations, is a splashy over-arm stroke, with face out of the water. A show of splash and fast movements gives the impression of skill and strength, perceived as ‘a good swimmer’ see figure 42 sketch #3 A common way of swimming is a slow, energy-conserving breaststroke or ‘resting breaststroke’ with the face out of the water see figure 42 sketch #4

### Vertical Swimming

Returning to the notion of vertical swimming, dictionary definitions and common understandings describe swimming as ‘a sport or activity of propelling oneself through the water using limbs’. This definition of swim in the Macquarie dictionary (2005) involves moving through water, by movements of limbs or in the case of fish, fins and tails. It entails gliding-travel, body movements, immersion and suspension. There is an anomaly to this definitional view of swimming. Observations show that many people spend a lot of time swimming in the water in a vertical orientation, not the dictionary description presuming a horizontal orientation, typical for effective ‘travel’ swimming from A to B. For example, beach ocean goers on hot days are mostly ‘swimming’ vertically when they ‘swim between the flags’.

Returning to the example of the prevalence of vertical swimming seen in pools and especially at beaches in the surf zone. One swim school owner describes children who refuse to submerge their face as dry-heads (Bev Annesley, Annesley Aquatics 2015). Adults doing dry head vertical swimming could be one of those children who never managed to comfortably, fully submerge. Vertical swimming has varied expressions which adds to the multifarious appearance of a swimming pool inhabited by water users. Uprightness may involve partial immersion, minimal suspension, some body movements, and hovering while slowly travelling in a vertical orientation. Is that swimming too? By definition, verticality is not swimming, according to a social norm that swimming is performed in a horizontal position. Interviewees self-report that they are swimming when they are upright in the water, wholly or partially suspended. I watched a group of grey-haired friends at Cottesloe beach plunge and wade in the shore break, rarely getting off their feet, frolicking like teenagers having a great time, laughing and moving about. I overheard their conversations as they dried off on the beach ‘what a great swim’ they concurred. The ubiquitousness of vertical swimmers is there to be seen by an attentive observer and is well represented visually in popular media and art for example Australian artist Fred Williams’ 1971 painting *Beachscape with bathers* figure 43 includes bathers standing in water.





**Figure 50 Images of ‘vertical swimmers’**

**Top Left Vertical swimmers Bondi 2017 © Eugene Tan Aquabumps by permission**

**Top Right Glenelg Jetty South Australia © Flickr badjoni/4306327196 creative commons**

**Bottom left Fred Williams Beachscape with bathers, Queenscliffe IV 1971 nga.gov.au © Estate of Fred Williams**

**Bottom right Bondi beach bathers © Eugene Tan Aquabumps 2017 by permission**

### Do swimmers swim?

News photos reporting hot weather include jetty jumpers and wave plungers as ‘swimming’ to cool off. The word swimming is overarching and is applied to wade-and-plunge child-swimmers in public pools and teenagers doing bombies off the edges.

Not all Australians are swimmers by the definition of swimming as a horizontal orientation, yet by some broad social norms and when the word is generic, a person standing immersed in the water is also ‘swimming’. This demonstrates an expanded understanding of what swimming is – the experience of immersing in water in a swimming-like way, is interactive, whether vertical, horizontal or suspended or not.

Feelings of; bouncy suspension, feeling light, complex interesting pressures and flows, feeling unstable yet safe, and more...sensations from which pleasurable appeal and scary anxiety of swimming derives.



The following table is one way of categorising swimming activity, a useful distribution for creating survey questions about types of swimming participation to collate statistics for policy and disbursement of funding. Within these expressions of swimming there is even more nuances and varied motivations.

<b>Recreational swimming types</b>	<b>Sport swimming types</b>
Backyard pool play	Club youth and elite competition in pools
Beach wave jumping and plunging	Masters clubs races in pools
Weekly ocean swim for fitness	Triathlon/multisport in ocean and lakes
Cool off at a river on floating toys	Ocean swim series in open-water
Jumping off rocks and diving boards	Lifeguard sports in pools
Lap swimming	Marathon swimming

**Figure 51** Categorising types of swimming into sport and recreation

### **Australian swimming practices: a critique**

I have created a broad picture of swimming and swimming places in Australia derived from field observations, immersive experiences and photographic interpretations, each one, tools of an ethnographer (Pink 2013; Denzin and Lincoln 2018).

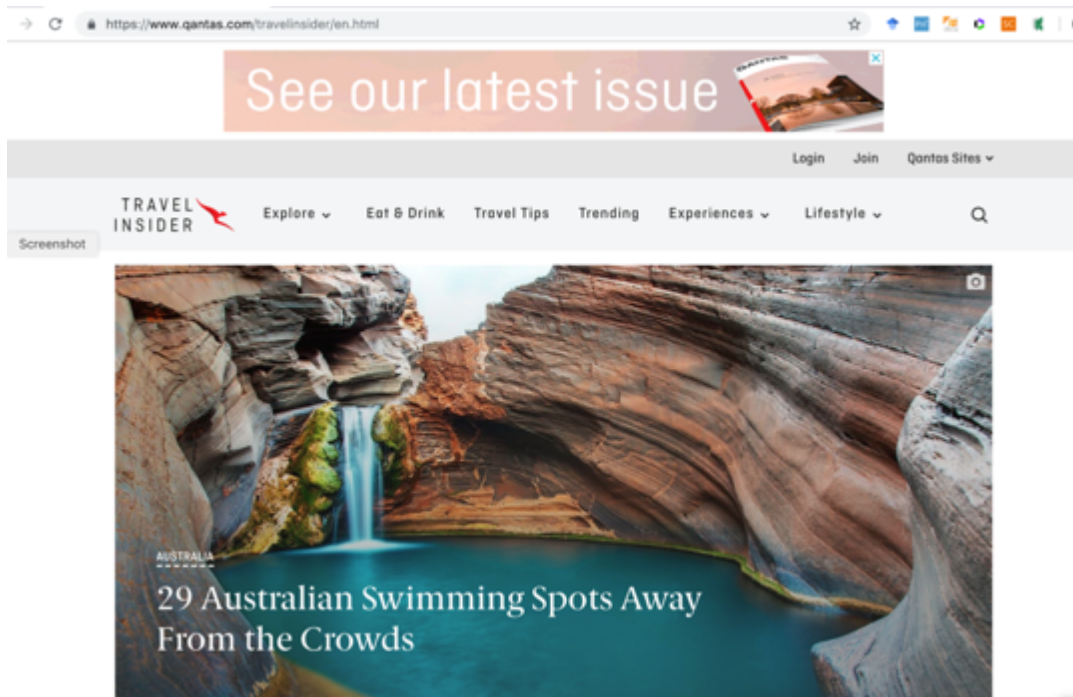
I will now assess evidence I sought out on my road trip in the attempt to answer the questions ‘Is swimming popular?’ and is ‘Australia a nation of swimmers?’ It was obvious

that having access to swim was a high desired. This value for swimming was backed up via the provision of places to swim. Australia is a nation of swimming pools and swimmable places, with limitations due to climate, weather and running costs .

The nation of swimmers identity is wishful thinking, a tourism marketing tool, and a disconnect from the empirical realities of poor swimming competencies. There are practical examples of highly competent swimmers, which, when placed alongside drowning statistics in the narrative, insert ambiguity to the discourse. Reports of competence or incompetence is broadcast according to who says what and for what reason. I develop that critique in more detail in chapter 5. For now I will discuss some of the limitations to the potential to go swimming.

#### Access to water to swim is sporadic

Intermittently the ocean and rivers are unsafe to swim in or it is too cold. Water does not always represent a friendly womb or carefree amphitheatre. In order to be able to swim, one needs water. It is a paradox of sorts that one of the driest land masses in the world – Australia - is populated by water loving peoples. Depictions of swimming in Australia indicate that swimmable water is always available, whether a swimming pool, a beach, a remote waterhole at the base of waterfall. The reality is a contradiction despite invitations to come and have swim in Australia by tourism agencies. In February 2019, Qantas is advertising remote and beautiful swimming locations in the glossy Travel insider magazine. (This type of advertisement contradicts Surf Life Saving Australia's adage to never swim alone and only in guarded places).



**Figure 52 Qantas airlines Travel Insider magazine website, advertising “29 Australian Swimming Spots Away from the crowds” Screenshot 21 February 2019**

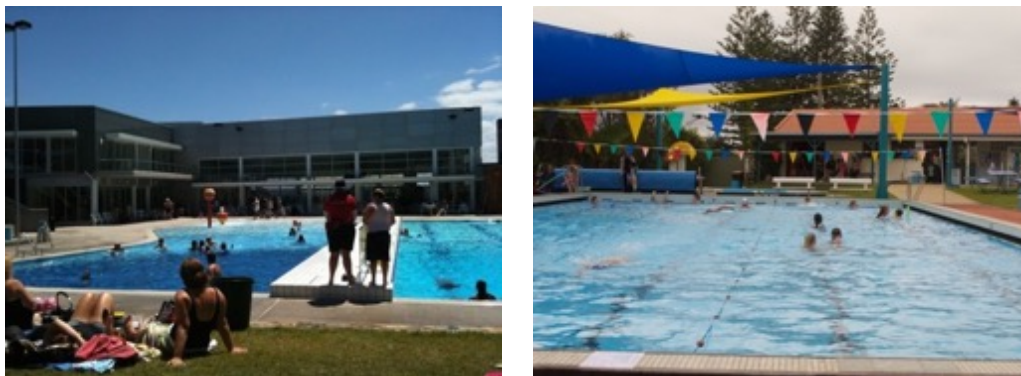
The travel story about beautiful secluded swimming spots boosts a mistaken belief that climate is always agreeable and water always accessible. The advertisement also presumes visitors are capable swimmers in deep water, and wise about assessing the safety of the site in relation to their ability. Contrary to depictions and advertisements of beautiful places to swim, access to swimming water is not always possible. Entrance to immersive water experiences can be blocked by human pollution, dangerous animals, cold water, seasonal pool closures or toxic outbreaks of blue-green algae in rivers starved of water and overheated by extreme air temperatures. Cold water can be managed by acclimatisation and by wearing a wetsuit, but other factors mentioned, prevent swimming. This fact was brought home to me on my research road trip across Australia in 2015, accentuated by swimming in cold winter water in Tasmania.

Experiences of swimming together in the ocean, year round for 7 years has challenged mine and other Bicheno swimmers' representations of swimming in Australia. For example, swimming in cold ocean water is unorthodox. Doing so has become like a badge of honour amongst ourselves. Regular swimming in the cold ocean water has reshaped our personal appreciation of swimming and given the participants a quirky but admired identity. Sometimes the water is unpleasant, it can be very cold, in Waubs Bay Tasmania, which is expected, as it is latitude 42 degrees south. Another example is unexpected - the perceived hot, dry outback in north-western New South Wales, where I visited Wilcannia, 31 degrees south, and other towns on a field excursion for this research project, the Darling river water gets as cold as east coast Tasmania in the winter. Access to water is not always favourable to pleasure swimming, as romancing the water at beaches and remote wilderness portrays.

### Pools closed

Access to swim in a pool is also stymied by limited daily opening times and seasonal closures. Thousands of useable pools have restricted opening hours because of the cost of staffing them. The Margaret River pool is open 9am – 3pm on weekends and closed on some public holidays – limiting the days and times when I would imagine pool use would be popular. Conversely at certain times of the day, lane space is in such demand by swim squads training and lesson programs, that water is unavailable for unscheduled lap swims. Lane space is highly contested in some pools causing conflict between individual patrons, user groups and management.

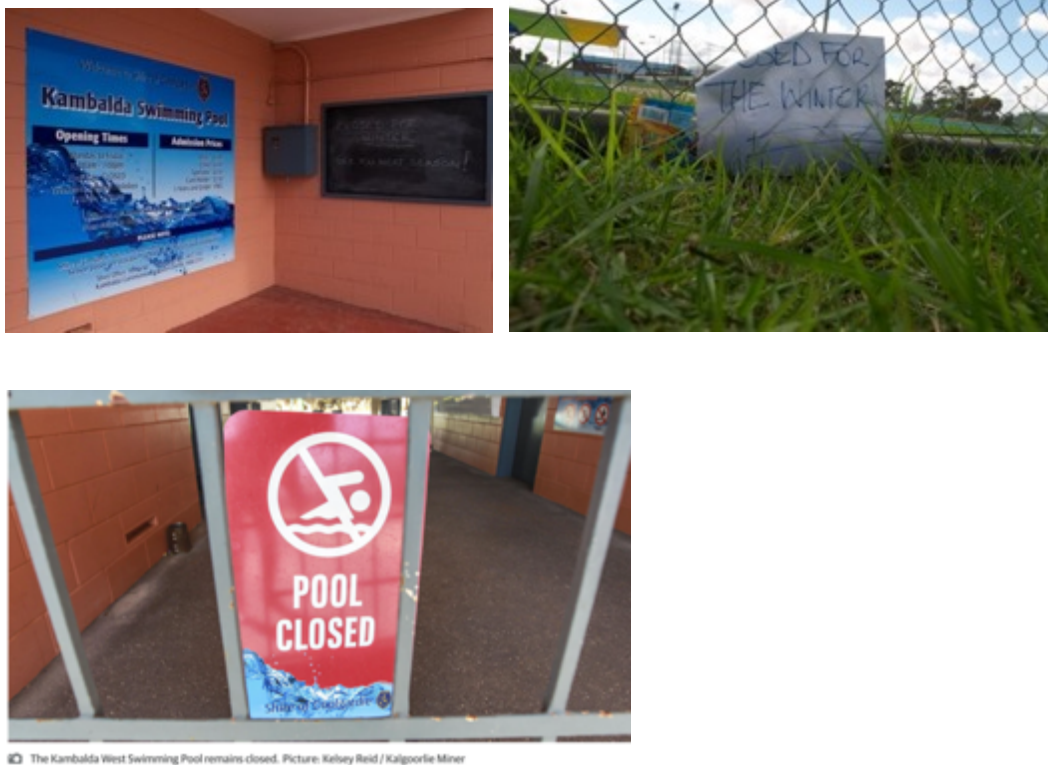
When I did find a town pool while on my road trip, what surprised me was how often I was greeted at the front entrance by **pool closed** signs and locked chained gates. On close inspection, signage stated closed for the season, or open only for a few hours each day. The season it turns out is the summer season lasting as little as 3 months or as much as 8 months of the year – the length of the pool season is determined according to combinations of warmth, local demand and what the council or school was willing to fund, to pay the wages of attendants and lifeguards. Indoor heated pools were more likely to be open for more months than uncovered pools, but nearly all outdoor pools were ‘seasonal’ even if they were heated. Port Headland and other North West pools close in winter when the water temperature gets down to 25 degrees. In summer the water temperature gets up to 35 degrees and they have cooling towers to cool the water down.



**Figure 53 Two seasonal public swimming pools.**

**Left Launceston Aquatic centre outdoor pools are open for 5 to 6 months, there is a 65 metre slide diving boards, a 25metre lap pool and recreation pool heated to 26 degrees. The indoor 50metre pool and recreation area is open all year round. Personal files.**

**Right Woolgoolga NSW 25metre outdoor seasonal pool and toddlers pool is open September to May with water heated to 28 degrees. Managed by Coffs Harbour council. Personal files.**



**Figure 54 Pool closed signs April 2015 and October 2018 Kambalda WA**

**Top Left Kambalda pool closed for winter season April 2015**

**Top right Southern Cross WA, open October to March, closed in early April Bottom left Kambalda Pool temporary closure, October 2018 due to the 50year old pool needing \$1.3 million renovations.**

**Photo The West Australian <https://thewest.com.au/news/kalgoorlie-miner/coolgardie-big-winner-in-temporary-pool-closure-ng-b88985370z> accessed January 20 2019**

One pool I stopped to use in February 2015 is the Ceduna Area School. It is only open by appointment. I made prior arrangements with the school principal to obtain a key to use the 15metre solar heated pool early in the morning, before a long day of driving west. Hire cost to the public is \$20 per half hour. The entry to the pool was colourfully decorated with children's artwork creating a pleasant reception.

Ceduna South Australia is a fishing port, with a sand mining industry nearby, and acts as a rural service town. The town is at the eastern end of the Nullabor plain, situated on the

ocean, on a tidal bay, 780 km north west of Adelaide. Travellers have to drive through it as they journey east and west. The bay can be swum in and off the jetty, but it is muddy, cold and the area is known to attract large predatory sharks. The caravan park I stayed in overlooked the bay. Many of the tenants in the caravan park had boats and fishing kit. Their enjoyment of the water appeared to be from looking at it from their camp, with a drink and food in hand after a cool day out ON the water, fishing for crays, crabs and fish.



**Figure 55 Ceduna South Australia Top left Ceduna School Community pool available for private hire at \$20 per hour**

**Top right Pool rules sign Ceduna school pool Bottom left Ceduna jetty at dusk, juts into a bay in the cold Southern Ocean full of fish - great for boating but not conducive to much swimming.**

**Bottom right Ceduna School children's artwork at the entry to the pool**

Planning ahead on the drive, I noted that the next possible pool to swim in was at the Nullabor roadhouse hotel. I knew there were rock pools in the limestone reefs to swim at the surf breaks at Cactus south of Penong, but there was only dirt road access to the beach.

I eventually bypassed the Nullabor roadhouse pool, thinking that I would get a swim at the beach at Eucla and later at the next public pool in the bigger town of Norseman.

There were other pools between Ceduna and Norseman, but in aboriginal communities, inaccessible though to non-community members. The one at Yalata, situated close to the Eyre highway along the Nullabor near to Ceduna, is under management of the school. It was built along with three other pools in three other APY (Anangu, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara) communities further inland, at a cost of \$9 million total for the four, in 2007. While on the research road trip, I randomly (sat next to her on the shady grass) encountered a woman, Adiele at Marion Park pool in Adelaide who had worked as a school principal in an APY lands school. She said she took the kids swimming 'they love it, but the no school no pool policy fell apart'. We then had a lively discussion about the misguided no pool no school policy. This is a disciplinary measure invoked to entice children to go to school. If they didn't attend school, they couldn't use the pool. It was called a policy by the Howard government who heard about it used in a school in Northern Territory. No such policy was formulated, just an idea that sounded good and had some very short-term effect of increasing school attendance. Children do not attend school for many complex reasons. Bribery and punitive actions did not address the underlying causes of non-attendance. Pools in remote communities were built primarily with health outcomes in mind - to be a social hub for residents, and in some cases, address ear and skin health. Using it as a bargaining tool with families in distress already undermined the foundational reasons for pool construction. I propose School at the Pool, my educational experiment trialled at Bicheno primary school.



Despite limited opening times of most pools and the cost of construction and staffing, swimming pools continue to be built and renovated due to their perceived and actual social and physical values. A government pool building scheme in aboriginal communities, occurred in the 2000s to provide recreational facilities for remote and impoverished communities. One rationale for pool construction was to give residents ‘something to do’ in a country area, an idea debunked by Catherine Driscoll (2014) critiquing a malaise in country towns perpetuated by the saying ‘nowhere to go, nothing to do (Driscoll 2014b) A swimming pool becomes a place to go to, for something to do, in an otherwise boring town where the assumption is that life is lived at a distance from active engagement with the contemporary world.

Some of the pools built in remote areas were equally paid for in thirds by federal, state and local fundraising under the Howard governments mutual responsibility agreements, an indigenous health strategy (Anderson 2006). Research by 2003 Australian of the Year<sup>32</sup>, Doctor Fiona Stanley (a keen regular lap swimmer in Perth) and the Telethon Institute for Child Health conducted a 6year study of the benefits of swimming pools to reduce Otis media a debilitating ear health issue in hot dusty regions. The study was released in 2006 and deemed positive benefits. A later study done in Victoria disagreed with the results<sup>33</sup>. Another report supported the 2006 study (Juniper, Nimmo, and Enkel 2016). Remote area

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<sup>32</sup> Two of Fiona Stanley's most significant discoveries are that a maternal diet rich in folic acid can prevent spina bifida in babies and that cerebral palsy is not only the result of birth trauma.

<sup>33</sup> In defence of the 2006 study, The Ballarat study was faulty in its method. Research data was selected on the basis of children attending school – presuming the children used the pool. It was not based on children using the pool once at school. Nor were observations made to check if the children who got into the water, submersed at all or for how often/long their ears were in the water.

pool supply has been problematic. Management issues such maintenance costs, lifeguarding, and low usage have caused closures. Parallel issues occur in municipal pools, especially when maintenance reconstruction has to be addressed for aging facilities.

In the summer of 2014 two of the APY lands pools, Pipalyatjara and Yalata were closed due to a lack of qualified staff to keep them open – qualifications required for insurance and legal liability. As reported in a news story, in the hot January of 2014, people of Yalata and Pipalyatjara were cutting open water tanks to swim in.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/outback-kids-lift-the-lid-to-stay-cool-out-of-school/news-story/79523a97c7f633451bdbb98745a4ddc2> accessed Nov 12 2018



**Figure 56 Swimming pools and tanks in APY lands South Australia**

**Left** Water tank used to cool off in Pipalyatjara in 2014 when the pool was closed due to lack of qualified staff to maintain and supervise the pool Photo [www.theaustralian.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.com.au) Nov 12, 2018

**Right** Pipalyatjara pool open for use. Photo attribution: <https://www.ggand.com.au/apy-community-pools?lightbox=image17x6> accessed Feb 1, 2019

Following my road trip journey through towns I hope to swim in, the next stop after Ceduna, was Norseman. A possible swim was also frustrated because the 50metre outdoor swimming pool was closed. I missed the opening hours 6-8am and 12-6pm. I continued on to Esperance on the coast, where I finally swam again in the evening at the indoor 25

metre heated pool. I swam alongside some young men doing some made up water activities, designed to recover from a game of football. In other adjacent lanes were some cheerful, enthusiastic women swimmers. Talking to them in the water, leaning over the lane ropes, they proudly bragged they'd just swum 3km.

They explained they were a social group inspired by a book, *The Swim Club* by Anne de Lisle (2008) which I looked up later –

five women are unhappy treading water in the shallow end of the local pool - and life after one woman's husband drowns. The book characters trade aquarobics for triathlon training, they cheer each other on to success, both in and out of the water. As their strokes improve, their friendship deepens and along the way they share tears, laughter and changing-room confidences....sometimes friendship is the only thing that keeps you afloat

<https://www.penguin.com.au/books/the-swim-club-9781863256506> accessed 4th December 2017

The next 'lap pool' I encountered was Greens Pool, William Bay National Park west of Denmark on the southern coast of Western Australia. Greens pool is accessible most of the year as it is protected from high seas by boulders, and immune from stagnation by the tidal flushing action with clean salty ocean water.

In the water below the high lookout several adult swimmers breaststroked serenely across the sea pool protected from waves by large granite rocks. In the smooth water they each created a wake, made visible by the shadows of the morning sunlight on the clear, green water. Only a few hundred metres away over the hill was Elephant rocks, a swim-able gap in the coastline punctuated with smooth elephant shaped boulders along the sandy cove. I only waded in the water there, as the water felt like a brisk 17 degrees Celsius and out of

respect, as it is rumoured that Elephant cove is a sacred place, an aboriginal birthing place over the centuries. [www.rainbowcoast.com.au](http://www.rainbowcoast.com.au) accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015

### Swimming, droughts and the Darling river, Wilcannia NSW

Later in November on the second road trip, I stopped in Wilcannia in western NSW hoping to immerse myself in any local water cultures and speak with locals and learn about swimming in the river and the 25metre outdoor public pool. The local aboriginal people are from the Barkindji tribal groups, river people. I set up interviews in advance with key people and planned sites to visit. Again I was confronted with both the swimming pool closed and the Darling river low in water, just a series of stagnant pools due to drought.

Inland air temperatures such as Wilcannia on the Darling River range from zero to over 40 degrees. Winter days can be 26 degrees Celsius, a nice air temperature for a swim but nights can be freezing cold. As a result the outdoor unheated swimming pool is only open from November to April because frosty night temperatures can make pooling water very cold such as August 2016 when the river was 11 degrees.

Coincidentally, while I was tracking the Darling River data through Murray Darling Basin Authority (MRDBA) records, I also tracked the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) sea surface temperatures in Tasmania. The water close to shore at Bicheno in August 2016 was also 11 degrees.

Not only are inland waterways cold, rivers are affected by droughts. The river had no water flowing in for months in 2015-2016. Consequently, when the shallow pools of water in the Darling River was 27 degrees warm, toxic blue-green algae bloomed, making

it hazardous to swim in it or fish from it. When I was in Wilcannia in a hot November in 2015, two young aboriginal girls from Wilcannia, Brenda and Evelyn, expressed frustration about the low river water levels and inability to swim in it in, because the swimming pool was also unavailable. The filtration system at the pool was damaged. It was going to take two weeks to be repaired, delaying the summer opening of the pool. Brenda and Evelyn preferred to play in the river but really enjoyed ‘the pool’ when it was open in the summer. Slow flows and low river water affect the mood of the people in Wilcannia.

Wilcannia is a place where aboriginal culture is still strong. An Aboriginal elder, Bill Riley, emphasised how important the river flows are to the spiritual and emotional welfare of the Barkindji aboriginal people – some who lived in Wilcannia.

Bill said in another interview; ‘The river is so important to my people, its everything. When there’s water in it, there’s something to do. When there’s no water there’s no life<sup>34</sup> (Moles 2007: 55).

Relating with and using the river for play and fishing and living life is integral to a cultured aboriginal life on and around the river. At the local hospital an iconic picture reflecting this knowledge hangs in the foyer – a photograph of townspeople standing on the dry sandy riverbed below the weir. See figure 54. The caption, borrowed from Moles (2007) says, “The local people say if the river is sick, the people are sick”

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<sup>34</sup> Low water and salty water can be caused by reduced rainfall due to climate changes, while there are contested opinions about cotton farms using too much water for irrigation and altered flows from rock blasting allowing boats to pass and a decline in duckweed along the banks that filtered the water, eaten by introduced feral carp fish (Moles 2007).



**Figure 57 Wilcannia weir April 2015 and Darling River art photograph 2006 by Ruby Banks.**  
**Left Darling River water in Wilcannia, is toxic in this photo. The river was even lower in November 2015. Children can play and swim when the river flows over the weir in the Darling River. Fish also are caught by hand. The river is part of the Murray Darling Basin and often as in this month, forms toxic blue-green algae due to lack of water flows and drought. Photo personal files 2015. The next photo right, was created just to the south (right) of this weir when the river was completely dry in 2006**  
**Right Staged photograph created by artist Ruby Banks 2007 when the Darling River had been dry for 12 months in 2006-2007 titled Water as Life: the town of Wilcannia and the Darling River Baaka. The image was a finalist in the inaugural National Photographic Portrait Prize 2007 and exhibited in the National Gallery Canberra until 2008. A copy hangs in the reception room of the Wilcannia hospital. Photo <https://nppp.portrait.gov.au/nppp-finalist/water-as-life-the-town-of-wilcannia-and-the-darlingbaaka/> accessed April 26 2015**

Access to water is not just about recreational swimming and fishing, for some, access to good water is fundamental to holistic personal and community wellbeing. Brenda from Wilcannia related a story her mother and grandmother told her about when they were young. It was a time when the river was deep and clear and they were healthy and happy, because the river was healthy. ‘Grandma used to live in a tin hut on the river, at the sandy part, and she could walk across the river and swim in the deep bits to get to school. They would swim back to have lunch at home, and then go back to school again. The river used to be clear as, no weed, flowing. They weren’t supposed to be swimmin’, but they got away with it.’ (Interview notes Wilcannia November 2015). The people I interviewed in Wilcannia all related time and place to the fluctuations of the river and its flow or non-

flow. 'Bob' came to Wilcannia in 1955 on an army truck, the year before the 1956 flood when he had to go out to 11-mile hill where the country was higher [to escape floodwaters]. Radio Maw told me of Oakie and JD who drowned in 2006 but her story voice faded by her overwhelming tears.

Indeed, additional river swimming sites affected by low flows, cold water or naturally occurring summer droughts, were evident on my two research travels across Australia in 2016. Cold air temperatures chill the water, even in tropical south east Queensland in summer, cause a reduce demand for swimming pool patronage (interview Michael Wenden, 2017). Concurrently swimming pools in other country towns that I drove through were also closed for 6-8 months of the year for varying reasons. Cost is a major one, cold unheated water another. Very few of the 90 or so pools I observed were open during these warm summer/autumn months. Only the indoor heated pools were open by April. Costs to councils for staffing the pools was a recurring rationale for closing them – entry fees aren't enough to pay the lifeguard or pool manager. Social benefits were presumed but not considered as important as financial accountability. Fran Scott, the pool coordinator for four swimming pools in the Central Darling Shire that includes Wilcannia, said Lifeguard training with RLSSA for a bronze medallion and first aid cost the council \$480 and \$135 for a yearly update, for each lifeguard they had trained for the job. They paid \$25 hour to the lifeguard to work but they often they 'burned out' because they were working alone. The responsibility to guard and discipline patrons was too difficult. Inevitably, Fran was repeatedly searching for new staff to train from scratch (Interview with Fran Scott Wilcannia November 2015).

The Wilcannia swimming pool was still closed in November 2015. It was late in opening for the season, due to pumps needing some last minute repairs. Parts need to be ordered

and transported from Broken Hill 200km away. The children I interviewed in Wilcannia were disappointed in the delayed opening. Summer temperatures are regularly over 40 degrees Celsius. The pool and river and shade shelters are welcome respite from the heat. Cold night time temperatures cause river and pool water to plunge to uncomfortable temperatures for swimming.



**Figure 58 Wilcannia pool is seasonal, open from November to March, one of 4 swimming pools Central Darling Shire operates. Personal files**

Instances of colonisation by the insistence of the Australian crawl



As an example of the intention of the Australia Water Safety council to reduce drowning, outlier groups are catered for. Some communities in Australia have particular social and physical needs for whom swimming organisations have respectfully developed modified swimming programs. Aboriginal communities are one of these for whom teacher and student guides have been developed. In the process of determining aboriginal swimming cultures and in the delivery of swimming curriculums, there are neo-colonial cultural clashes.

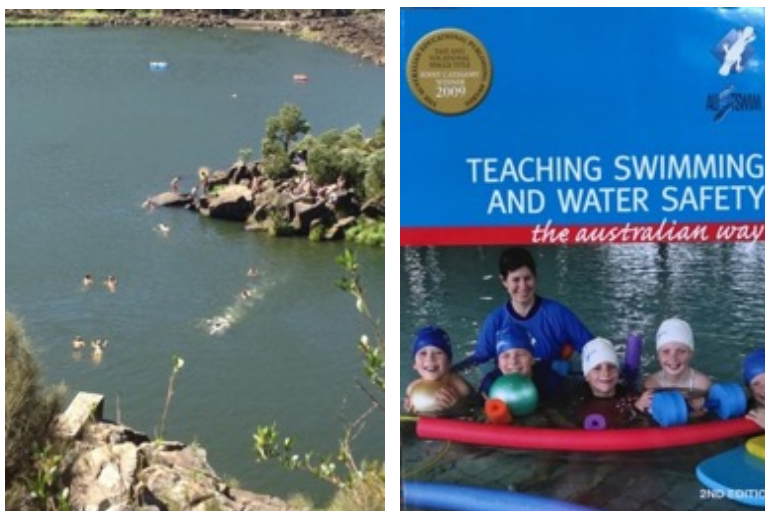
A swimming teachers guide for delivering swimming and water safety instruction to aboriginal groups has been prepared by RLSSWA, to assist swimming teachers manage sensitive cultural issues, to ensure swimming education is appropriate and available to all community groups (RLSSWA and Symons 2004). In addition to specific swimming guides, cross cultural awareness courses are recommended for working with aboriginal people, such as:

[http://www.workingwithindigenoustralians.info/content/Self\\_Study\\_00\\_Intro.html](http://www.workingwithindigenoustralians.info/content/Self_Study_00_Intro.html)

Austswim extension courses for swimming teachers are also conducted for culturally and linguistically diverse communities – CALD, embracing diversity.

In the academic sphere, Megan Stronach (2015) explores swimming and aquatic experiences of urban aboriginal people. She relates their urban pool experiences to old and new swimming cultures, missing the point that the people she interviewed were experiencing swimming for physical activity in white dominated swimming pool spaces (Stronach, Maxwell, and Taylor 2015; Stronach 2017). The swimming needs of remote aboriginal communities are becoming recognised and their unique issues addressed, with pool building projects and training for support staff to operate them (Silva et al. 2008; RLSSWA 2010; Juniper, Nimmo, and Enkel 2016). There is a gap in knowledge of the

unique needs of urban aboriginal people, who have not been given attention they need. Stronach's (2017) studies have revealed racist attitudes and shunning of aboriginal women just in the process of learning how to use the pool facilities and attempting to connect with and revive their understandings of old saltwater cultures. Swimming pools have a history in Australia as contested sites between whites and aboriginals (Perkins 2016) and in USA (Wiltse 2007). Perhaps an urban swimming pool is not the place to learn about saltwater heritage, while it is a good place to improve fundamental water skills, with a sympathetic instructor. Stronach (2015, 2017) neglected to take note of the two different endeavours – one to swim in an urban pool, the other to revive understandings of old saltwater cultures. In doing so she invoked colonial primitivism in her study of the aboriginal women.



**Figure 59 Australian ways and places to swim**

**Left** Cataract Gorge ‘The Basin’ natural water hole Launceston Tasmania, a site for swimming rock jumping and floating on logs washed down the Esk river.

**Right** Front cover of the Austswim swimming teaching manual. There is a pride on doing swimming “The Australian Way”

I opened this chapter by reflecting on a story about my neighbour James from Sudan and my ‘colonial’ assumptions about what swimming was and how one should practice it.

Another incident of the colonising effects of Australian swimming curriculum occurred in Fiji where my organisation Shane Gould Swimming Project was researching and delivering drowning prevention education. Jobe worked in the activities department of a resort, who we collaborated with to improve employees' swimming skills. Two of the guest activities he supervised were snorkelling and kayaking, for which he needed to have a bronze medallion qualification. Each year an Australian water safety teacher-assessor, trained in Australia, examined the aquatics staff before signing off on their certification. Jobe constantly failed the 400metre freestyle swimming part of the test because he used a breaststroke type kick instead of a freestyle flutter kick. He was terribly discouraged. He told us it didn't make sense. He was swimming the distance in the time required and could do rescues. He told us that he could swim, in fact he often swam out to a reef 2 to 3 km offshore from his village and spent a couple of hours spearfishing and line fishing while treading water, then swim back again with his catch. About 6 hours in the water without touching bottom. Jobe had extra ordinary capacities that did not fit the Australian swimming model - ridiculed for doing a breaststroke kick, when 'anyone in cultured Australia' knows that freestyle flutter kick is the civilised way to swim. Disparaged by a colonial authority in the process of trying to do his work, Jobe was more than capable of doing his job with his local knowledge and skills. From that moment I became acutely aware of the colonising actions by the imposition of insisting on a certain way of swimming. I wonder how many ways of swimming or even swimming cultures have vanished in a similar tendency as lost languages?

**Questioning where swimming lessons 'take place'**

While travelling and observing people swimming in pools and other swimming locations, a conviction about where swimming lessons should take place was affirmed.

### Learning in a pool does not transfer to natural water

In my opinion, due to high accident rates and drowning in open water a percentage of swimming lesson days should be conducted in natural waterways, providing context and exposure to the realities of the differences between the controlled spaces of a swimming pool and the random variety of open water locations. Despite the growing popularity of adults participating in a swimming group where they can and do improve their fitness, swimming skills and water safety knowledge, open water is where most adult drowning occurs. When children grow into adults they take their pool skills to natural water and in some cases their pool swimming expertise is inadequate for the challenges of the river or ocean environment.

There are unique types of swimming skills required for swimming in open water beyond breaking waves or wave riding or wave jumping in the shallows. Rivers also command respectful site specific knowledge of currents, snags and uneven depths. If a persons' last swimming lesson is when they are 11 or 12 when do they learn to safely manage the ocean if most swimming lessons occur in a pool? The bounds of a swimming pool are safest for learning as the water is clear and the edges are unambiguously delineated. The ocean and other open water sites are much more elastic in demarcating an edge, therefore inserting unpredictability and anxiety into the environment, which is already flooded with apprehension in a learning situation. Therefore pools and calm water bays are best

locations to teach children to swim. Australian children (and adults) are vulnerable to open water conditions if they do not have supervised experiences and other learning opportunities in the swimming places other than a pool, where they will later in life be recreating.

### Rethink pool design

If it is impractical for children to go to open water locations to learn the vagaries of a steep river bank or the power of a rip current, then I would suggest that swimming pool designs incorporate the characteristics of topographical features found in nature. Some swimming centres already include a kiddies wading pool with a ‘beach entry’, which is a gradually sloping pool from zero depth. Gunyama aquatic centre in the Green Square district of southern Sydney which began construction in 2018, is designed by Andrew Burges architects with Grimshaw and Taylor Cullity, incorporates beach features inspired by the rock pools of Sydney (CityofSydney 2019). Curved edges, uneven depths, sudden drop offs, intermittent changes in water flows, artificial submerged rocks are some features which a public swimming pool could retrofit. In the sphere of natural playground design rocks logs ditches mounds and bushes are shown by Fjortoft (2004) in Norway to inspire more active play, more inclusive play and more creative play, than colourful frames and swings; A system of measuring activity levels in playgrounds has been created called SOPLAY, designed in San Diego USA by McKensie (2006) at [activelivingresearch.org](http://activelivingresearch.org) (Fjortoft 2004; McKensie 2006) Building and using natural playgrounds on land has become an international movement with purposes to connect children to nature, and a strategy to encourage outdoor activity to reduce obesity in children (Dowdell, Gray, and

Malone 2011). The principles of design in natural playgrounds on land can be transferred to swimming pools and aquatic centres with the intention of preparing patrons for future visits to beaches rivers and other natural water sites. A barrier to this suggestion is perceived costs of the suggested features, aside from the standardised rectangular shapes. Another barrier is the dominant discourse that swimming pools are a place for swimming laps and doing races. There is an insistence by outspoken user groups such as swimming clubs and lap swimmers, that pools need to be constructed for that primary purpose.

### Don't trust your swimming certificate

Therefore I suggest that knowing how to swim in a pool does not transfer to natural water, so I say, with deliberate provocation, do not rely on the authoritativeness of a swimming certificate for yours or your child's ability to cope with water conditions beyond the confines of a swimming pool.

Theoretical instructions can be taught in pool swimming lessons but they need to be repeated during experiences at a beach on holidays with caregivers or structured school camps, to learn the differences between still, contained water and unbounded, open water. Surf Life Saving 'Nippers' (see <http://www.slst.asn.au/clubs-members/nippers/>) is one program children can learn to manage the ocean and 'Surf Groms' is another, but the instructors in those programs are not trained to teach swimming. Surf Groms are beginner surfing lessons for children 5-12 years and is run by commercial surf schools registered

with Surfing Australia, designating Surf Groms<sup>35</sup> as the ‘base’ of competition sport surfing [www.surfgroms.com](http://www.surfgroms.com) Children who want to get involved in both nippers and Surf Groms are required to have a standard of swimming ability before they can participate. Surf Lifesaving basic level is not swimming, it is running in and out of the water – wading – they are generally taught swimming skills elsewhere, but they are developing wading and ducking swimming skills. Pre swimming skills.



**Figure 60 Surf Groms beginner surf lessons logo, featuring company sponsor Nudie. SurfGroms is a paid for program, facilitated by Surfing Australia, where children 5-12 can also learn about managing waves and learn ocean water safety [www.surfgroms.com](http://www.surfgroms.com) accessed 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Aim of swimming lessons ‘be at home in the water for duration’

Getting into water is a popular Australian activity. What happens after that is rarely ambulatory horizontal swimming. That is; the generally accepted visual definition of

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Surf Groms forms the ‘base’ of Surfing Australia's sport development pathway, ensuring that more participants continue surfing throughout their lifetime’ [www.surfgroms.com](http://www.surfgroms.com) accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2019  
SurfGroms has a commercial arrangement with Nudie drinks, Rip Curl surf clothing, Woolworths, Mick Fanning soft boards and others.

swimming is not evidently practised. If more drowning occurs in natural water than pools and adults who can swim are drowning, then what sort of knowledge gaps are occurring when Australian children learn to swim? If only 30% of adults consider themselves a competent swimmer, then why is this so? Could lessons acknowledge and identify this gap? Or should an additional category of lessons, taught in substitution of, or in supplement to, pool lessons, but in natural water, be created and promoted?

Additionally, my impression in the road trip and other observation experiences, is that pools are more or less dormant, or at least have a feel of dormancy. There seems to be gaps in engagement of the communities, organisations, and public in creating energetic and vibrant action around learning to swim and in using the pools outside of doing lessons. I wonder if alternate pool design, improved teacher skills, modified curriculum to teach sensory awareness of water not just mechanical and judged actions<sup>36</sup>, would make lessons more effective and going to the swimming pool to swim/play/recreate, more satisfying?

Being 'at home in the water' is a common phrase used in swimming how-to books and swimmer autobiographies. 'At home in the water' is a desirable quality and virtuous aim. I was surprised how frequently the phrase was stated in interviews and casual conversations about swimming participation. It was a coded message I could not ignore in the research process. I interpret it as a qualitative judgement of competency, a desirable look and

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<sup>36</sup> Swimming curriculum is another subject too detailed to discuss in this project. Despite the extent of the topic I give some time to it as I pass judgement on current Australian swimming curriculum for the record in this document. I declare a research and commercial interest in alternate ways of teaching and learning swimming, such as Gilla Vatten, Brain Swim and Nelms Method – different programs with the same principled methodologies.



personal feeling/sensation. The phrase ‘at home in the water’ has various definitions depending on perspective - from an observer noting that a swimmer looks very comfortable, graceful, calm in the water, to a swimmers’ self-description, that they feel happy, confident, knowledgeable, at ease, while swimming. Pam, a septuagenarian Bicheno swimmer, says ‘I just love my swimming – I love my tennis too - but I just feel at home in the water, its where I feel I belong’ as she swims off with her waterproof camera to photograph a school of mullet she just saw. My use of the idea of and phrase ‘being at home in the water’ extends to include the idea of having a sense of place, besides a physical look of calm or personal sensation of control for duration of time, not just a set distance as is the current benchmark standard. For example a competence assessment could be - can a child maintain suspension and travel in the water for 10 minutes, while remaining emotionally calm and without touching the sides or bottom of the pool?

In a more general and overarching way, ‘at home in the water’ could be described as a displayed, or felt, affinity for the water. Whatever this “affinity” is, it should become understood, then taught, as it is a hallmark of competence, pleasure, and safety.

I will now move away from the broad view of swimming practises to a closer look by delving deeper into the lives of the Bicheno wild ocean swimmers and some of their unique swimming experiences.

## Chapter 5 Swimming in place - The Bicheno wild ocean swimmers wandering and dwelling

In the search for a way to frame ‘the doing’ of swimming I will now take a look at experiences of a segment of swimming praxis in Australia, the adult ocean swimmers as an example of people ‘growing along the multiple paths of its entanglement in a textured world’ (Ingold 2013). I do this as a participant observer of informal open water ocean swimming groups, swimming in the open water, rather than closed water of a swimming pool. I will describe one typical Australian coastal town, Bicheno Tasmania, and the backdrop influence of the ocean to everyday life and aquatic culture. Stories told of swimming in the ocean by swimmers in Bicheno Tasmania, illuminate contrasting experiences. On the one hand, man versus nature, where ocean is nurturing or menacing and heroes thus formed. On the other hand, feeling comfortably ‘at home in the water’ where water is a non-threatening place - a place to enjoy physicality and other pleasures of swimming, while romancing the aesthetics of ‘being at one with the water’.

### **Research methods and data sources: (ethnography)<sup>37</sup>**

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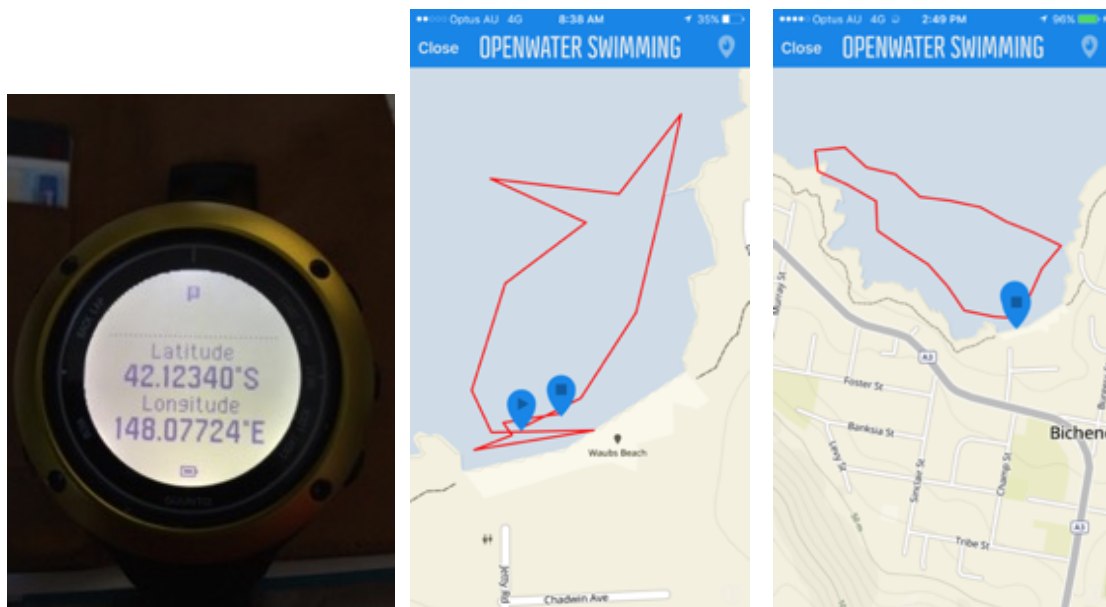
<sup>37</sup> ‘The objective of anthropology I believe is to seek a generous, comparative but nevertheless critical understanding of human being-and-knowing in the one world we all inhabit. The objective of ethnography is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience’ (Ingold 2008: 69).

‘Going swimming’ with my friends in the Bicheno Coffee Club is a near daily habit that preoccupies my attention and the organisation of my day. Gathering stories, photographs, and recording an interesting sighting or experience already occurred through the groups’ facebook page. Rather than seek out another ocean swimming group to study, I formalised record-keeping more systematically. I developed a more empathetic ear and keener interpretive eye or camera lens. There are many ocean swimming groups in Australia, so choosing to study one of them as an example, the Bicheno Coffee Club, is like a case study, from which generalisations can be made about all ocean swimming groups. I did not use case-study as my research strategy because the Bicheno group is an outlier from typical warmer water places in heavily populated areas that ocean swim groups can be found. I was interested in the swimmers lived experiences of the water rather than studying a typical ocean swimming group, which is why I use the framework of ethnography to inform the design of my inquiry. Much of the entire process of design and observation methods was experimental, remaining open to learning as a neophyte researcher and as surprising events occurred. Hence dropping the map-making process using GPS enabled body tracking devices, even though I think they have a useful function for a research project collating ‘emotions’ over time, used in conjunction with story-telling in art and words. Bio mapping, or emotion mapping requires an amount of education for the participants to understand the concepts and to cue experiential language for creating initial maps. Using ethnographic frameworks of looking listening and feeling with the people I was interested in and subsequent interpretation, I learned processes of interviewing, writing field notes, and how to re-tell their stories. Rather than interpreting an experience with a dolphin or foggy goggles or a cramp from my perspective, I paid attention to others telling of the same experience. As a result, my records of daily happenings became more reliable, as a more representative recall of what happened in the water amongst the whole

group not just me and a few of the faster swimmers who I usually buddy-up with.

Consequently, I increased my understanding of the many meanings of swimming that other group members held to be important. Swimming improvement and fitness is important to me but chatting (while having a rest and treading water) was more important to others.

Taking photographs of sea creatures was a prime motivation for one woman, and improved mental health was a motivator to another woman, to keep turning up and taking the plunge in often very cold water.



**Figure 61** Body tracking device model Suunto Ambit2S showing latitude and longitude of swimming location and mapped tracks of my swimming paths as wanderings in Waubs Bay, Bicheno Tasmania 2016 Personal files

I initially found the downloaded data pictured as lines on a map interesting. After a month, the lines-on-maps became a distraction to the meaning-making moments that yielded more personal and richer understanding through narration of swimming experiences. The maps of tracks grew into objects, carrying a sense of objectivity, which was not my intention.

Measuring and travelling along linear point-to-point swimming tracks was less important than embracing the challenge of swimming in cold water, in the ever-changing open ocean and the invigoration a swim provided. The Bicheno Coffee club swimmers have become part of the cultural identity of the town of Bicheno and a tourist attraction in the process!

### **Bicheno town description and its swimming culture**

The water in Bicheno is open most of the time, although in storms pushing up 5 metres swells, it's only the bravest or foolhardy who get in the water to swim. The small tourism and fishing town of Bicheno is situated half way up the east coast of Tasmania. It is typical of small villages on the east coast of Australia, where great holiday memories are forged. Bicheno's economic history includes, whaling, sealing, a port to export coal, wool, fish and timber, tourism and more recently, farmed abalone and wines. It has a micro-climate, making it the warmest place in Tasmania, heated by an average of 7 hours of sunlight per day. It became a post war holiday destination, secured with the construction of the Silver Sands hotel in the 1960s - 'the first resort hotel in Tasmania'. There is a joke that half of Tasmanians were conceived in Bicheno at the Silver Sands, such was its popularity for holidays. Penguin viewing is now the main tourism attraction in Bicheno particularly for interstate and overseas guests. Secondary reasons for visitors to stay in Bicheno include free, beautiful clean white sandy beaches, boat and shore fishing and diving, crayfish and abalone to eat, and cool climate wineries.

### Coffee club description and contexts

In this scenario exists a small group of swimmers who endure the cold ocean to swim together regularly. The Bicheno Coffee club wild ocean swimmers is the name of a group of adults who live and swim in the small coastal town of Bicheno on the east coast of Tasmania. I am part of this group, gathering since 2011. We gave a name to ourselves one day as we dried off, realising that after a year, we were beginning to form up as a cohesive pod of regular swimmers, starting each morning just after dawn at Waubs Bay beach. True to dry Australian humour, we called ourselves the coffee club because we didn't ritually drink coffee after a swim. But the name stuck, with a later subtext addition, 'wild ocean swimmers', because it sounded cool. The number of people swimming at different times, grew from 6 to about 30 over a few years and we have grown into our name - coffee or ginger tea has become the post swim drink. The first winter of swimming was difficult as we acclimatised to the cold water and experimented with wetsuits and other skin covers to make it bearable to stay in the water for about a half hour swim. To begin with, swimming a distance of about 300 metres out to the farthest mooring-buoy was considered a great accomplishment.

Later, as fitness and confidence grew, new, interesting tracks, such as to Cod Rock 600 metres away, was added as the next milestone of achievement. Of course, 'the island', Diamond Island, 2 kilometres away, became a challenge as well. And then, going around the island, that was the biggest challenge of all! The swimming experience described above, is typical of the sort of swimming experiences to be had inside the main swimming area of Waubs bay; personal interactions, private solitude, mixed paces and strokes, varied flexible destinations, and a keen awareness of the vagaries of the water and other life in it.

On occasions maybe a cup of hot coffee too. Until 2011 there was a weak swimming culture, despite the strong aquatic cultures centred around surfing, commercial fishing and diving.



**Figure 62 Views of Waubs Bay Bicheno where the Bicheno wild ocean swimmers make ephemeral ‘tracks and traces’ as they wander swimming, ‘wayfaring’ around the bay.**

### Background geography and demography of Bicheno

Bicheno is typical of smaller (900 permanent residents) coastal towns in Australia so I proffer this description. Holiday accommodation and food services provide employment, along with fish, wine and olive farming and retirement lifestyles. There is a tennis court, bowling club, medical centre, an RSL club, a primary school for 90 children and a childcare centre. There is a low key surfing culture in the town but until the swimmers gathered, there was not a visible swimming culture even though swimmable water and boating surfing and diving made it possible. The ocean temperatures range from 11C in August requiring a wetsuit, to 20C in March. The water is mostly picturesque, beautifully aqua clear. Bicheno has a reputation of the best scuba diving in Tasmania. Bathing and wading in the ocean occur on hotter days without wetsuits, but most ‘swimmers’ bathe vertically or plunge and stroke for a few metres only.

There is no public swimming pool and only a small 10m x 3m solar heated pool 1.2 metres deep at the primary school. Three hotels have small pools for guests. The daughter of the surf shop owner conducts aqua and learn to swim classes in the families small lap pool. Another part-time school teacher also conducts private lessons in their 18 metre, 1 lane pool, and hires it out to patrons for \$10 hour. The public high school sited in the town of St Mary's, is a 45minute drive from Bicheno. It hosts a 25 metre indoor heated swimming pool that many Bicheno children can use if they attend the high school. Bicheno primary school students attend in-term lessons there and have their school swimming carnival at Mary's too. The public can use it too if they show a CPR certificate and pay for a seasonal electronic entry card. The school pool was built with funds and labour from the local community in the 1970s as one older resident, Bev informed me. It is outdoors and solar heated but not used to its potential because of the cold air and 24 degree average water temperature. And it is unattractive. The ideal water temperatures for learning are 27-30 degrees.

Generally, the swimming skills of Bicheno children are below average Australian standards, because of cold water preventing practise and or parents who cannot swim or do not like to get in the ocean because of perceived shark threats (conversation with school teacher Matt Woolley 2018). The safest beach to swim is Waubs Bay beach, once called Safety Beach in the 1970s. Surf lifesaving Australia rate the beach as a low hazard, 3/10 and its Australian beach number is tas0144 (Beachsafe app). It consists of small-grained soft white sand, on a 150 metre long beach, 'bookended' by rounded granite rocks with attractive orange lichen growing on them. The Bicheno surf lifesaving club is the only club that promotes and teaches swimming and water safety skills. But they only conduct 6 x 2 hour club days each year. It has been operating for 10 years but only as its own entity for



just 4 years when, partially due to the Bicheno Coffee Club swimmers, 20 adults, some of them parents of child members, achieved their bronze medallion award for surf lifesaving. This award includes a swimming fitness and distance test consisting of a run of 200 metres then swim 400 metres then run 200 metres. First aid knowledge and water rescue skills are expected. There is a small surf clubhouse overlooking the beach, which houses equipment, and provides an outside hot water shower and BBQ facilities for members. The Bicheno surf clubhouse won an architectural award, but it is not like the large not for profit surf clubs in NSW and Queensland that have restaurants, gambling machines and gymnasiums for fundraising.

The evolution and constancy of the swimming group is therefore a modification to the way the ocean has been used by locals, which has altered the attitude toward relationships with the ocean, ever present in conversation and life of the inhabitants, whilst the swimming skills and fitness of many locals have improved tremendously. There is now a swimming culture in Bicheno where 8 years ago there wasn't. Waubs Bay is the home swimming place of the Bicheno swimming group.



**Figure 63** Left Bicheno wild ocean swimmers underwater amongst the kelp growing on rocks they swim above and right some of the group kitted up ready to swim outside the surf club house designed to look like a crayfish pot. The shower delivers hot water from a small tank for 8 minutes, a most delightful treat post swim.

### **Other enthusiastic pods and legends**

Before I moved to live in Bicheno in 2009 and helped to develop the wild ocean swimmers, I first became aware in 1997 of the hidden culture of enthusiastic people who swam in the ocean. The Prevelly Penguins were in my 'back yard' in the Margaret River region in southwest WA. I met them wandering bare chested down the sand into the water for their morning swim. The location is better known for its quality surfing waves and surfing lifestyle than non-flaunting swimming. The older men of the Prevelly Penguins quietly and unrecognised at that stage, went about their business of plunging dipping and swimming for half an hour for about a 500 metre round trip swim, parallel to the beach from Prevelly to Gnarabup and back. Many of them were war veterans and retired and came together to support each other emotionally and socially through the activity of swimming and coffee around a fire pit afterwards. They respectfully invited me to swim with them and asked me to be their patron, which I humbly accepted. Prevelly beach is protected by an offshore reef, which blocks the powerful waves which surfers enjoy on adjacent reefs, so most of the water in the bay is relatively flat and calm making for easy swimming, but it is still unbounded by walls and definitely open water.

Also in 1998 I had my first experience of open water ocean swimming racing, by participating in the Rottne Channel swim in a team of four, for a charity fundraiser. Rottne swim as it is fondly nicknamed is conducted annually in February when the Indian Ocean is a warm 23 degrees. Over 3000 participants enter each year as solo, duo or a team of four. The four team-swimmers equally share swimming the distance, in rotations of 5-10 minutes for about 5-8 hours, across the 18 km stretch of water from Cottesloe beach to

Rottneest Island. One swimmer starts from the sandy beach at Cottesloe, Perth, while the other 3 team-members and support crew board their support boat in Fremantle and motor around to the swimming corridor. The relay changeovers occur by diving off the boat, physically tagging the hand or foot of the swimmer in the water, then climb back on the boat. It wasn't just swimming in water without walls that I had to adapt to.

Even though I was an experienced surfboard rider, in the ocean for 20 years, I was scared of swimming in it without the board. I certainly did not feel at home in this water. I felt vulnerable and anxious. My swimming training for the Rotto swim in 1998 consisted of laps parallel to the beach at Prevelly or Cowaramup Bay, in depths where I could touch the sand with my underwater swimming hand! It took two seasons of ocean swim training slotting myself amongst fellow swimmers, to reduce my fears of dark shadows, unusual shapes and movements of things on rocks and sand. Diving down to have a closer look helped, as did familiarity over time. Eventually I could swim comfortably with caution not fear. I doubt I would do it again though, because of a spate of 15 fatal shark attacks along the populated south-western Australian coastline from 2000-2018

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-16/man-attacked-by-shark-near-gracetown-in-western-australia/9662422> accessed 17 Feb 2019.

Long distance endurance swimming has great appeal to some hardy swimmers. Long distance ocean swimming has become a theatrical stage where heroes (gender inclusive) perform and legends created. (Martin Strel, Des Renford, Tammy van Wisse, Shelley Taylor Smith, Lynne Cox<sup>38</sup>). Man vs nature 'conquering the sea or river' is a common

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<sup>38</sup> Lynne Cox swam part of the Bering Strait in 1987 helping to broker civil relationships between cold war enemies Russia and USA. Gorbachev said at the signing of a missile treaty with US president Reagan "Last

theme, exhilaration and self-discovery is a later trope in the history of long distance swimming. While swimming steadily, a swimmers' mind can wander off in a dreamy state, or into active imagination of what might be in the water (Nichols 2014). The ramifications of man-vs-nature themes of the sea, yield fertile material for long distance swimming dramas; stormy seas, rocky coasts, dumping waves on sandy beaches, treacherous currents, threatening monsters of the sea, dark moonless nights, illicit love, escape from tyranny, howling winds that extinguish guiding lights.

In the greek legend of Leander and Hero, Leander would swim each night across a stretch of water called the Hellespont (Dardanelles Strait) to his lover Hero, a priestess who lived in a tower on the other side. Hero lit a lamp to light her lovers' way. One night, Hero's lamp was extinguished by wind and Leander lost his way. He drowned through fatigue and overcome by waves, establishing water as retributive character, punishing their illicit love. The distance is 4½ km and would take a fit experienced efficient swimmer about 90 minutes, or 60 minutes if swum with the current. The English poet Byron swam the Hellespont in 1810 as a homage to Leander, and was better known in continental Europe for his swimming feats than his poetry (Sprawson 1992). Swimming the Hellenspont is now a unique, numbers-restricted annual swim. Great Australian male swimmers Murray Rose and Ian Thorpe have been involved in the promotion of the event, as both have been

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summer it took one brave American by the name of Lynne Cox just two hours to swim from one of our countries to the other. We saw on television how sincere and friendly the meeting was between our people and the Americans when she stepped onto the Soviet shore. She proved by her courage how close to each other our peoples live" (Cox 2004: 275).

associated with the aesthetics of swimming, which the greek myth and Lord Byron's legend infer (Rose 2013; VeniceBiennale 2016).

A similar swimmers' love story from New Zealand is about the Maori characters Hinemoa and Tutanekai. Unlike the greek story, in the Maori story, the swimmer, Hinemoa, was female.

The Maori love story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai has been told around the shores of Lake Rotorua for centuries. It tells of the illegitimate young chief Tutanekai of Mokoia Island and his high-born paramour, Hinemoa, whose family forbade her from marrying him. To prevent her from meeting him they beached their waka (canoe) but the strains of his lamenting flute wafted across the lake nightly and the smitten Hinemoa resolved to swim to him. One night, buoyed by gourds, she set off towards Mokoia but by the time she got there Tutanekai had retired to his whare (house) to sleep. Hinemoa arrived at the island but without clothes was unable to enter the village, so she immersed herself in a hot pool. Presently Tutanekai's slave came to collect water and Hinemoa lured him over, smashed his gourd and sent him back to his master. An enraged Tutanekai came to investigate, only to fall into Hinemoa's embrace (Hornabrook 1966).

### Aboriginal swimming legend

Bicheno has its own swimming heroine, Waubedobar, a palawa aboriginal woman, after whom Waubs Bay is named. Early observations of aboriginal people swimming are those recorded through the eyes of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans who did not have the understanding of swimming that now exists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Aboriginal women in pre white eras were the divers for food such as shellfish and seal cubs and were reported in Tasmania by GA

Robinson on Bruny Island south of Hobart in 1829 as competent in the water. They were also playful as George Augustus Robinson noted with their 'hallooing'.

The females are in general very adept swimmers and are enabled to procure a surprising quantity of shellfish upon the single immersion in the water. The most remarkable shellfish is called halitosis or ear shell (mutton fish), which forms a very substantial food for the natives, and though of a strong and rancid taste is relished by many Europeans. They are found adhering to rocks considerably below the surface and are procured by diving. The task devolves upon the women who plunge into the deep with a basket of their own manufacture (made of plaited grass with surprising neatness and ingenuity), which they invariably fill ere they rise again. This basket is slung over the left shoulder so as to hang by the side under the left arm; a chisel stick is held in the right hand or between the teeth. The women are trained from children to swim and dive so that when grown up the water becomes their element.

GA Robinson Bruny Is. 28th September 1829 In Plomley *The Friendly Mission* page 87

Further entries in George Augustus Robertson's diaries as recreated in Plomley (1966):

The women are great adepts in swimming. It surprised me to see them plunge into the heavy breakers among the rocks to dive for crawfish and mutton-fish.

I observed that in general before they plunge into the water, that they stand on the rocks in rather an obscene position and chant a song and then plunge into the water.

24<sup>th</sup> March p136

Two females belonging to my natives swam across and, a small catamaran having been procured, they were brought over with the exception of one of the old man's wives, but not without a great deal of hallooing and swimming back and forward.

25<sup>th</sup> March 1829 p138 (Plomley 1966).

Sometime before 1824, Waubedebar rescued two white men she had been fishing with when their boat capsized and was rewarded with gratitude and respect to have the bay named after her (and a gravestone erected after her death). Aboriginal women are known to be good swimmers because as indicated, they were responsible for diving for shell fish, swimming to gather birds eggs from rocks in inaccessible rocky cliffs (interpretation of a Palawa aboriginal tour guide at Cape Grim NW Tasmania, 2018) and to furtively approach basking seal pups then clubbing them for food. Therefore, swimming and long distance swimming was more to do with transport, pushing a canoe across a river, or food gathering, than sport and recreation although water play and games have been documented, how much time and value was placed on water recreation is open to speculation. Pre colonisation aboriginal aquatic games have been recovered and some are documented in a Traditional Indigenous Games resource published by the Australian Sports Commission (AUSSPORT 2008). There are reports of Australian aboriginal swimmers doing long distance swims in relation to desperation, to escape incarceration on islands. Two women on Kangaroo Island south of Adelaide, swam 9km in cold water back to the mainland, one with a 'piccaninny on her back' (Stronach 2017).

Swimming, apart from the function of food gathering or transport was for fun in spontaneous racing games and play in everyday life. Cashman explains that 'Aboriginal sport ... did not exist as a separate compartment of life. Sport ... was inseparable from ritual and daily life' (Cashman 1995: 13).

The details of Waubedebar who lived with the sealers she rescued, are scanty, so it is not known how far offshore the boat capsized and in what sea conditions the rescue occurred, so comparisons with the filters of 21<sup>st</sup> century swimming know-how is guess-work. The

known elements of the story involving an aboriginal woman's swimming skills is romanticised, a continuing way of mythologising waterwomen.<sup>39</sup>

Mindful of past aboriginal presence by the Oyster bay tribe in Waubs Bay, besides Waubedebbar who was from the northern islands, we Bicheno swimmers look to their culture for an understanding of what it is to be in one's country, and know intrinsically from our daily lives in the water homemaking, that the water can be a place to inhabit (Vannini 2014; Malpas 1999; Casey 2001). It's not just firm dry land or the thresholds of the sea where im-placement can occur to live life.

Swimming skill and environmental understanding are fundamental givens in making water a home or 'their element'. Waubedebbar would have had to know where to safely enter and exit the water, as even a small swell can wash a swimmer back up on the rocks and the water drops off into deep overhead water only a few metres from rocks. She would have had to know her capacity to make a rescue strategy according to her skill and fitness to swim a distance. (Although lifeguard education warns that under distress, irrational decisions can be made to rescue another person, with the rescuer often becoming the drowning victim and the swimmers in trouble end up getting rescued). SLSA.org.au. What we will never know is; Did she tow the two sealers back clinging to an upturned boat? Did she drag them back one by one? Did she do one arm over or one arm under stroke? What

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<sup>39</sup> Romanticised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a way of interpreting women's traditional roles at the time and attempts to understand the mystery of how some humans could swim in water and how some people couldn't. Representations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century swimming heroine in water has been interpreted by McLachlan (2009), showing that competitive swimmers are interpreted as mythical-typologies, whereas compared with one 'more real' fictional swimming character from a New Zealand novel.



time of the year was it – very cold August 10 degrees or a warmer 20 in March? Whatever way she performed the rescue, the white settlers admired her ability and bravery as greater than something they were capable of. We 21<sup>st</sup> century swimmers revere her memory.

### **Routines and experiences of the ‘coffee club’**

I begin with a journal entry from the autumn of 2016 as a typical example of a morning swim with fellow swimmers, in my hometown of Bicheno Tasmania.

Cloudy, so the sunrise colours are not so bright this morning. Nick and Miranda turn up too (he dragged me out of bed she says), air is warm and sand not so cold, but a fairly low tide = lots of beach. Help each other zip up. Water is a bit lumpy, not oily smooth like yesterday. We agree to swim to the buoys mixing fast and backstroke, doing ‘cueing exercises’ at the buoys to help swimming qualities. End up swimming to each buoy or boat, racing sometimes. Pam and Ely peel off from the group with their cameras and follow a stingray. The red Waubs Bay fishing boat motors in and secures to its mooring. Hope they see our bright coloured caps. After the crew disembark, Liz feels playful and stands on the front of the Waubs Bay, hanging on to the anchor chain, must be a ledge just underwater for her to stand on. She looks like an ornamental figurehead. Andy swims under one side of the boat to the other, then reappears swimming around the stern, then Dave dives under after Andy. Steve in his kayak reports the water temperature as 16 degrees. I see Milt on the beach and say ‘my coffee has arrived, I’m going in’. The other four play a bit longer around the large red boat before swimming freestyle back into the beach to say a friendly hi to Milt and me drinking coffee from the bakery. Wash off sand and salt under the hot shower at the surf club, chit chat and then home in the car. (Journal entry 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016)



**Figure 64 Bicheno wild ocean swimmers in the water, pausing in their ‘tracks’ to pose for a photograph. The destination of Cod Rock is a milestone of achievement as is Diamond Island far right corner of the image. Photos courtesy by permission left, Ely Evans, right, Steve Masterman 2016**

### Inhabiting the water, creating community

Consistent experiences of swimming together, has created a new community in Bicheno and with it a new sense of emplacement that was not felt or understood prior to participation in morning swims over months and years. Here are two entries from my notebook in June 2016 that describes my experiences and reflections. It demonstrates a sense of evolving community developing tribal rituals, in the process of making the place we swim, as a home in the water.

June 14<sup>th</sup> the days are short in Bicheno in June. It is dark soon after 5pm. I need to bring the wetsuit inside before the evening dew settles on the black neoprene hanging over a garden chair on the deck. The worst thing in the morning is trying to put on a damp wetsuit. The routine of bringing in the wetsuit before dark is soothing in its regularity. A full stop to one cycle but also a capital letter for the beginning of a new day, which starts with a cold water swim with friends at dawn. The second worst thing after putting on a damp wetsuit, is going from warm and dry to full immersion, cold and wet. But the first

best thing of the days I go swimming, is the process of getting ready; turning on the electric kettle for a hot drink, slide the curtain open to check the sea for wind and swell squinting through the half-light, slipping into a swimsuit, pulling the wetsuit on halfway, heating up rubber shoes and anticipating who might be there today and where we would swim to. The colourful glow of a sunrise might excite me to pick up the camera for a snapshot, before making a cup of tea.”

Another reflective entry a day later demonstrates an awareness of unexpected affects from participating with my fellow swimmers.

June 15<sup>th</sup> there is something curious happening. It's new and exciting, intriguing. Andy and Pam and Rob commented on it yesterday too. The Coffee Club has an impact that is surprising to me. And I'm involved in the happening, not directing it; I'm being carried by it. Like the metaphors of *support* and *flow*, that water provides. It's like a longing has been activated and met. It's something to with *being* in place, not just one meaning of the overused idea of 'being at home in the water'. It's bigger and more ontological. Reflecting on the effect of going swimming in wild cold water is something some of us do. How we express our insight varies. Andy writes poetry. Graphic, emotional sometimes, weirdly incoherent words reflecting as dreamers do mixed scenes, sensations and random seemingly unconnected thoughts. But that's what swimming does, living in the moment then fleetingly later, time compressed or then expanded and then back to now. Ely takes pictures with her waterproof camera permanently strung over her shoulder so she can swim freely with it. Her Facebook postings match her happy statements of enjoyment, pleasure and satisfaction. Feeling less afraid, more competent, abstracted too 'yeah I like to go swimming' as her voice fades out with a knowing look and dreamy remembrances while we hover around our cars recalling what we saw or felt. Pam takes pictures too especially of marine life she sees. A weedy sea dragon is elusive so far. Many a time we have had to do some online research to identify an animal in case it stung or bit. What or who are we

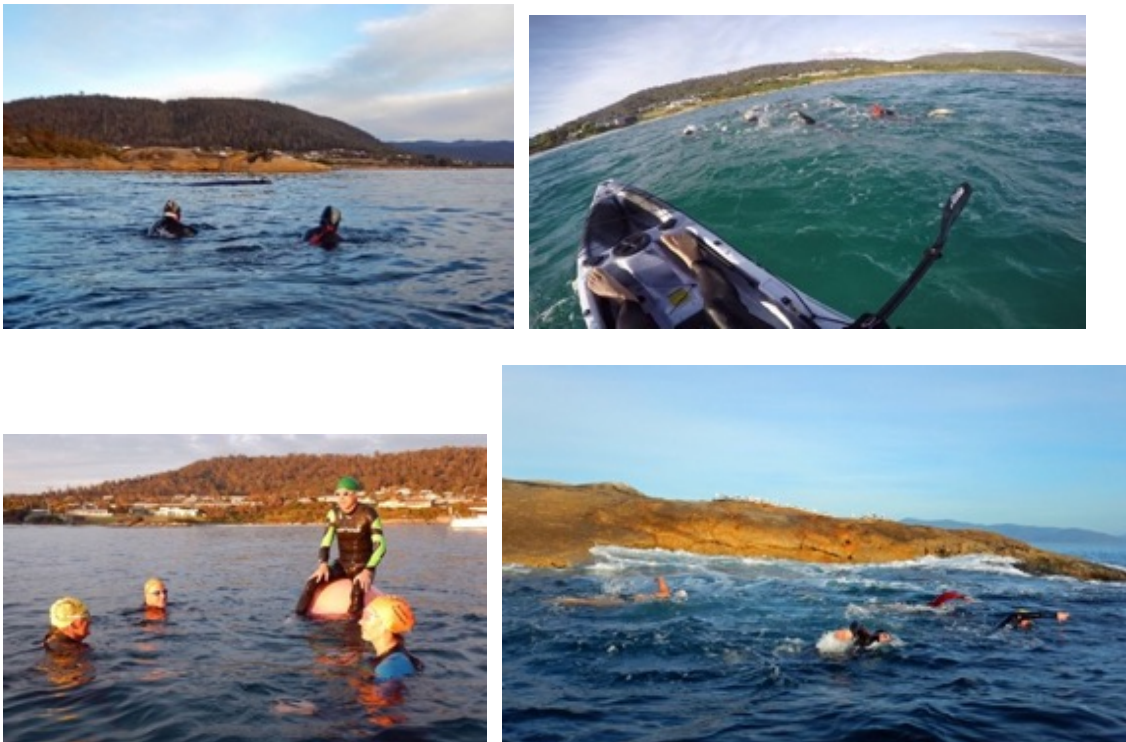
swimming with? Who are we sharing this aquatic life with? We connected with lady scientist from Hobart, Lisa Anne Gershwin who developed a jellyfish identification app that we road tested for her. We discovered critters called salp (planktonic tunicate) that were not jelly fish. Salp are all shapes but not sure if the phallic pink knobbly ones called pyrosomes are also a type of salp like, the rope like strings of yellow and purple individuals joined together with a clear gelatinous shroud around it<sup>40</sup>. We are all trying to grasp in words what is happening to us, in conditions that are different every day. It's not an add-on to life, it is a way of life replete with personal rituals which give structure and significance to the activity. Yes going swimming is planned and consciously prepared and enacted. But there is something else happening, created by the doing of it. It's surprising what we feel like during and after - feeling like a family and member of a tribe, a sense of feeling wholly at home.

Nick says 'I feel enlivened, I know it's a way to refresh my work brain', Rob says 'I just like the way I feel and it's amazing that we humans can swim through water', Agather says 'it's changed my life, I'm more confident, not depressed, my arm works better since I had the stroke and I can turn my neck', Andy says he just can't wait to get there, 'it's so satisfying to swim distances and feel it become easier. It's so different, I didn't know this was what swimming could be about'.

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<sup>40</sup> Our ecological awareness is sharpened by marine creature encounters, so we can see and understand human impact on our local coasts. Salps bloom like jellyfish, and when they die they act as a carbon repository, taking carbon from the surface in its body, down to the sea floor when it dies. This understanding inspires confidence (reducing anxiety) in the surprising dynamics contributing to the resilience of earths' ecosystems.

My ocean swimming experience with a group of like-minded colleagues resonates with what I understand of academic authorities who write about a *sense of place*, dwelling, and belonging. Anthropologist Keith Basso studied the Western Apache interprets their ‘wisdom sitting in places’. Tim Ingold writes about being alive through movement, while Edward Casey dissects the history of place and its rediscovery of the philosophy of place in a transient world/era. Ocean swimming has gifted me an existential meaning, comfort and context to my more than human relationships in natural environments and convivial joy with my human friends.



**Figure 65 Bicheno wild ocean swimmers have encounters with sea mammals such as this humpback whale top left, and stop to rest, converse and regroup. There is an ethic of mutual responsibility and care. Sea conditions and weather are different every day. Large swells and storms do not deter some of the more adventurous swimmers. Jelly fish tend to stop people getting in, but dolphins are welcomed encounters. Photos courtesy of Steven Masterman who paddles in his sea kayak with his dog Smooch most days, as lookout and safety back stop.**

### Water not just land can be a place for dwelling

The idea of dwelling, is a philosophical study of the nature of being, developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and extended by others later in discussing emplacement and being-in-the-world. Swimming is a form of case study of the application of dwelling through knowing and understanding the nature of *being, and a sense of place*. Swimmers can have a deep sense of knowing and belonging through their personal and social experiences in water, as exhibited by the Bicheno swimmers. David Seamon is an academic who specialises in the philosophy of place and placelessness. He makes the observation of placemaking, expressed by Casey (1994, 1996) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) that place serves as the condition of all existing thing, to be is to be in place, we are bound by body to be in place. This for example the physical form of the human body immediately regularises our world in terms of her-there, near-far, up-down, above-below and right -left (Seamon 2010). I sense that this concept of the reality of the body-in-the-world rather than a representation of the body in the world, is similar to Sheets-Johnstone's multidimensional understanding of the primacy of movement in knowing and understanding self in the world.

The physical, water-immersed swimming body regularises human life in the aquatic world too, such as; immersion underwater, on water, breathless, deep exhale, balance, imbalance, blurred distance, obscure shapes, clear sense of the envelope of water pressure. Water, not just land can be a place for dwelling and the experience encourages observation and stimulates aesthetics.

17<sup>th</sup> June here I am swimming along face down noting shadows, seaweedy rocks and patches of creamy rippled sand, and having my mind wander to thinking about Mary Harvey of Bicheno, ‘the constables wife’ who was called upon to rescue the Allen boys from their capsized boat. Deep inhales and tummy squeezed exhales makes my brain very clear. She only managed to rescue one boy, the other drowned. The ghosts of the past made me shiver more, making me swim closer to and more attentive to my buddies’ welfare. Yikes, a rush of cold water flushed down my back, the velcro must have come unstuck through the seaweed. But I admire the beautiful colours and shapes of the weed and feel blessed by the beauty around me, grateful for my physical health to enjoy it.

Liz is one of the Coffee Club swimmers, she is studying theology part time and while swimming one day, she recomposed the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm in praise of the wetsuit. It is reproduced with her permission and is called *The Wild Swimmers Psalm*

The Lord is my wetsuit, and shall never perish  
 He protects me in cold waters, he shields me from stingers and rocks  
 He buoys my soul. He slipstreams me straight as an arrow.  
 Even when I swim through dark kelp and deep water I fear not  
 For you are with me; zipped up you surround me.  
 You keep others in my company and you bless us all.  
 You pour oil to calm the waters and our blessings overflow  
 Surely goodness and mercy shall be with me always as I dwell in you forever.

By Liz Grey 2016 with permission

It's not just the wetsuit that takes care of us, but each other. By observing others and be comforted by others watching where and how you are. Watching is not an uninterrupted gaze, because you can't swim face-in styles and keep your eyes above the water on someone. 'Watching' is a sensing of the other. We get to know each-others' patterns of pauses, speeds, and stroke rhythms, so a glance toward a person swimming beside me every breath, 3 to 4 times is enough to understand, by the shapes of the splashes, orientation of the head and torso if that person is slower or faster or 'limping'. I then adjust my speed and attention and may grab their ankle to stop them and ask if they are ok. Once I did this with Jane a musician, and we had a longer conversation. She said, 'some people think it's boring swimming out here, but it's not, it's like swimming in an aquarium'. And off we went again. We self-reflect and pinch ourselves that we are swimming out here in the cold open ocean but explain to our mocking and disbelieving friends that if prepared with the right gear it is very enjoyable after the first flush of cold – reminding ourselves in the process that we actually do this and once upon a time, didn't know the beauty, stimulation and community of it.

Just as on land, traversing popular hiking trails or surfing through crowds on city streets, comfort at-home-in-the-water rhythms become obvious in body language and effect on water. Low rounded splashes (rather than high vertical splashes), softer low pitch splash sounds, fewer air bubbles pulled underwater, less stopping, smoother arm sculling, softer voice tones, less voice talk and more gesticulations to communicate, smooth water trails, narrower wakes...all indicate 'at homeness'. Having control of the physics, managing emotions, skill of knowing how to propel, self-understanding to manage energy output over time and distance within ones' capacities also lead to a sense of being at home in the water. Feeling neighbourly sharing the experience, whilst having one's own individual



swimming adventure means an exposed, public presence, but having private personal moments as well – that can be shared or held closely in ones' secret memories.

### Fear or revulsion of the ocean

As already narrated, some people do not enjoy swimming in the ocean. Their perspective and choice must be respected when provisioning swimming facilities and lessons. Open water swimming poses a tension between revulsion and pleasure. Some people cannot make the leap to create 'homeliness' in the ocean. Tales of dread, danger, sharks, jellyfish stings, fatigue, breathless swamping by waves, are background to the mindset of some people entering the ocean to swim. For some such as Megan of Bicheno who loves to swim and had an enjoyable squad swimming childhood, she cannot overcome her fears and imagination anymore, to swim over kelpy rocks, beyond the sandy bottom in Waubs Bay. For Megan she does not feel at home in Waubs Bay, but some of her family does. Robin on the other hand chooses the times she swims. She avoids swimming on days that are dark, cloudy, windy, stormy, rough wavy seas. 'I only feel comfortable and enjoy it when it's calmer, I just don't feel safe or happy in the water when its rough.' Jeanne wont swim before the sun comes up. 'Who walks around their house in the dark?' she retorts. Why swim around when the night animals are waking up for a feed! They're not going to have me for breakfast.'

A dimension of wild in Bicheno is cold water. Another dimension is that there is limited history of any swimming tradition to 'tame' or colonise the swimming places along the Bicheno coast. A new habitation of the ocean has developed in Bicheno and other coastal

locations around Australia, people inhabiting the ocean as swimmers, not fishermen, surfers or sightseers. One of the delights of ocean swimming is the ever changing and dramatic nature of the sea, it is emotionally and visually stimulating.

There are other swimming tribes or pods making 'homes' in the ocean around Australia, some that I have swum with. They are communities of practise, providing a sense of belonging with a unique swimmer identity that I easily slip into as a guest (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Group members (formal and informal membership) have their own body rituals, dress codes, vernacular language, informal 'rules', skill routines, which forges trust and reciprocity through shared actions meanings and values. Research demonstrates that organised sport groups Informal groups also strengthen public health and social cohesion from what I see and hear of the active open water swimming groups. (Bailey et al. 2013: 298). The semi-formal 'Bold and the Beautiful' morning swimmers at Manly beach are one such community of practise. They wear hot pink coloured swimming caps, to identify themselves from others in the water. Two waves of swimmers leave the beach, one at 6.30 am, the other at 7am and swim from the surf club beach to Shelley beach and back, a total of 1500metres. Swimmers can do 'a double' and can also register name and attendance on a website where memorabilia such as a calendar of photos from the past year is available for sale. There's a great deal of happy energy as friends greet each other, words for cold bandied about and a hum of chatter as the swarm moves from the boardwalk to the edge of the water and plunge together in the shore break and beyond. Seeing the resident port jackson shark is like a trophy. Happy birthday is sung for one of the punters, while I participated several times and learned the rituals. I felt a bond with the strangers, comfort in numbers in unfamiliar water. They helped me to feel

welcome at home in their place. When my niece and sister started swimming with the Bold and Beautiful, it cemented a stronger bond between us, through shared novel experiences, even though we swam on different days or in different places.

Sisterly bonds and friendly banter amongst the Bold and Beautiful swimmers, are some side effects of swimming which are symbolic and able to be represented. My keener interest is the embodied, sensual and immediate experiences of the activity of ocean swimming - that words can only begin to articulate.

#### Affective experiences inspire challenges and poetry

Open water, ocean swimming is a type of alternative sport. Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) speaking of surfing snowboarding and researching alternative sport say:

the pleasures pains and divergences of physical movement are integral to cultural participation, yet few studies to date have realized the complexities of the emotional, sensual and aesthetic aspects of such experiences. Much like the participants themselves, researchers (ourselves included) often struggle to communicate the lived experiences of alternative sport experiences. What, if any, characteristics make the movements of alternative sport unique? How do we convey the sensual, affected and affecting alternate sport body?...without reducing experience to language discourse or representation of the 'Lieb', the living feeling, feeling sensing, perceiving and emotional body subject. If embodied meaning is to be found primarily in 'modes of action or ways of life', researchers, perhaps, need

to rethink some of the basic notions of what a body is and does as an acting, perceiving, thinking, feeling thing (Thorpe and Rinehart 2010: 1269).

I use selected swimming episodes of Bicheno wild ocean swimmers to write about lived experiences. To begin with, one swim affected Andy so much, that it inspired him to write a poem about it.

*Bluejump Sunday*

Island ocean deep blue sea

Huggin kelp and rocks tight maybe

Round the rounder rock

Commin back again

Old familiar coves

Unfamiliar moment rich

Frolick island burble

Uncaged untroubled

Living in the happening

Arm over each stroke

Wrasse darts there

Wave breaks here

Water paddlers

Worlds shared

Ocean communion

Oily talkative sea

South pacific union

Island ocean speaks

Feels like home

Sand. Reef. Outcrops.

Rising from the deep

Bring home spirit found

Immersion complete

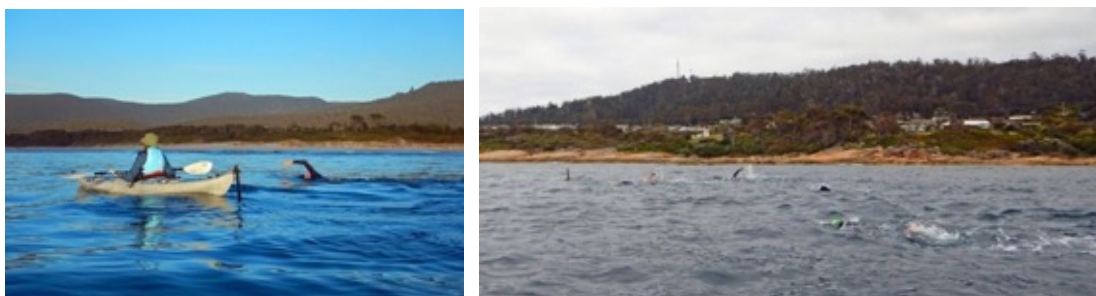
Island ocean deep

by Andy Hamilton Bicheno 10<sup>th</sup> January 2016 used with permission

Another inspiration was to extend the duration and distance of swimming to a challenge dreamed up by Andy, as an exploratory 18km swimming trek. One day he and his wife were walking over the hills overlooking the beach and Andy thought why not try and swim from Seymour to Bicheno? I am not inspired to do extreme long distance swimming, but Andy's poetry and his enthusiasm hooked me to participate for some of the distance.



**Figure 66** Map marked up by Andy who swam the whole distance from Seymour point/Long point, to Waubs bay in 5 hours. He was accompanied by his daughter on a stand up paddle board in 2016 and kayakers in 2017. Other swimmers dropped in at various points along the way to swim some sections. Personal files.



**Figure 67** One of the Bicheno wild ocean swimmers, Andy, during his long swim from Seymour to Bicheno in 2017. Other swimming buddies joined him for the last 30 minutes of his 5 hour trek. Photos Steve Masterman with permission Bicheno 2017

As far as we know, no-one had ever tried to swim from Seymour to Bicheno. A little known previous, swimming story at Seymour, involves a drowning accident in the 1860's. The twin Allen boys went fishing in a boat that capsized. Mary Harvey 'the constable's wife' skilled in boatmanship, recovered the boys who were 'inexpert in boats'. Sadly, one drowned, but the other was rescued clinging to the keel of the boat. Mary Harvey was regarded as a heroine and for this and other heroisms during her life, she received a 20pound pension until her death in 1911. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article64875034>

This is a selected piece of my 'report' of the Seymour to Bicheno swim in February 2016.

Willy Weather app was consulted carefully nearly made us decide to swim Bicheno to Seymour, but the wind looked like it would be manageable, so the original plan was kept, swim north to south. Convoy of cars and swimmers to Seymour from Bicheno, took about 20 minutes. Excitement and apprehension in the air, but all fully committed. Walkers well kitted and prepared, paddlers and swimmers. Tho Ely later realised that crocs aren't the

best slippers to walk in for 18km. Land support trustworthy. Just no motor boat water support....Hope we don't get too far from shore... Swam out with Kay and Susanne beyond the waves and Liz rendezvoused with them and brought them 'home'. At least 7 km. Finally Rhys and Pam and Rob appeared, but way, way, way out to sea!!! NOO. I don't want to swim out there. At least 1 km. Gotta bring them back in. Too far out. I don't want to swim out THERE! I got cranky. I swam out though and intercepted them. As we chatted the wind blew them another 50 metres further out. Hey you gotta come back inshore! No the waves are breaking they argue. Well at least come back in 500 metres. Come with me follow me. I'm realising I'm frightened and that I might need to abandon them to deal with my own fear. Swim, exhale swim exhale, backstroke, backstroke. Cor blimey they're not angling back in. That's it I shout to Pam who had peeled off to accompany me. I shout this is exactly where I did not want to be. I do not want to be HERE. This is not what I want. I'm going off on my own journey, sorry Rhys and Rob. I don't want to see New Zealand today.

Another perspective is by Susan Terhorst who swam 7km of the 16km on the Seymour to Waubs Bay trek.

This was a big one, I had done a 5km swim in the Derwent recently, but that was tame compared to this! This was REAL ocean.....it was to be a 6km swim we were told.....it looked further to me.....it was!

My fear crept in.....I pushed it back and smiled at my swimming buddy Kay who had no visible doubts, just excitement showing on her face. I looked at the break as the sets rolled in and felt some alarm that the waves were breaking so far out to sea. We would have to swim beyond the break, and that seemed a very long way indeed!

Then, Shane arrived her strong presence commanded our attention, telling us how to get through the sets to behind the break. Wait and then push under the wave, heaviest part of the body on top hands burying into the sand and then push back up again. She helped to propel us forward, assertively.....we saw splashes, we swam out towards them, the kayak and paddle board and swimmers. The water was soft and smooth on the face, we tasted the salt and felt the movement of the water. We were about 100m out to sea, and in a deep and very wide expanse of ocean, now it was time to swim.....

Relief, our paddler Liz was there to greet us.....she looked well equipped and soon took charge of our direction. Slow steady arms, rhythmical breathing, trying to relax and settle into the swim. How long would it take to settle into this swim.....thoughts of sea monsters and great white sharks consumed me.....I pushed them aside...a flapping tow bag strap made me think something was touching my feet and following me....I told myself to focus on moving forward and breathing.....but it was hard to relax.....out of my element.....aware of my insignificance.....the fragility of it all.....this was insane.....had to keep up with Kay, she seemed to be swimming smoothly, effortlessly....I was floundering, gasping, fearing being left behind.....

We eased around the corner passed the white sandy beach of the shore and onto the rocky section. Soon the rhythm set in.....over and push through, breathe.....how to stop the bobbing of my head.....lessons out at sea with Liz suggesting ways to make the swim easier. Less looking up, more looking down.....Kay so strong, ahead of me. Battling to keep up!

Swim towards the v between the two tiny hills, never ending wide ocean.....stop for water and peanut biscuits.....energy renewed thanks to Liz.....our dependable paddler!

Then at last we were at the sandbank at Diamond Island, surfing onto the sand, standing up, feeling safe again, this was possible.....now we had the last stretch across to the Bicheno Surf Club. This seemed far shorter than before.....we stopped to take in the rays



of light and swirling seaweed beds and caught sight of a magical school of almost transparent blue fish swimming by.....it was beautiful!

Almost there, arms were aching, I wondered in awe, how on earth did the others manage to swim so far.....an amazing feat.....unforgettable.

This was Kay Neill's account:

Understanding that mad Andy and a few fellow nutcases were swimming at least 16k, we nevertheless were severely challenged at the prospect of a 6k first ever in serious open ocean.

Lovely to find Liz waiting to paddle us along our way, directing our passage, supplying much appreciated homemade biccies and seriously beneficial coaching tips.

Kay swam way off out to sea, Suz tagging along. New Zealand was briefly considered as a possible landing point. Liz sorted us out, made a suggestion or two about what we should be doing with ourselves swimwise and led us to a more do-able destination.

There were times when Waubs kept getting further and further away, there were times when the water was chock full of predators.

There were times when the rays of the sun shone up from the ocean floor through the kelp gardens and lit up a thousand silver-blue fish and it was like being home.

And then we got home.

Great day. Great times. Great new friends. Thanks.

The appeal of wild swimming may derive from an ontological human impulse to be safely joined with the natural world rather than be oppositional. The goal of many swimmers or

the unexpected outcome of swimming - to feel at home in the water - can be traced to the same urge to reconciling the dialectics of safety and danger, home and faraway, harmony and discord. On the other hand, motivations to swim in open water may just simply be a yearning to recover a sense of how the natural world tastes, smells and sounds. Self-acceptance, wonder, exhilaration and belonging are some unexpected outcomes, affects, of swimming with the Bicheno coffee club wild ocean swimmers.

### **Homemaking or Placemaking in the ocean – how is it done?**

We make swimming in Waubs Bay home by living our lives in and through across and along there. We are not ‘conquering’ or taming the sea, we inhabit it. Place and space interpretations have a long history, with the view of place as ‘filled space’, challenged by Edward Casey in his books *The Fate of Place* 1997 and *Getting Back into Place* 2009. The water in Waubs Bay Bicheno is not an open-ended container as space can sometimes be described (Casey 1997). Nor is it a place made from neutral space, a tabula rasa<sup>41</sup> waiting for culture and history to be inscribed. It is a lived place where an informal group of adults have swum daily for seven winters and summers. Waubs Bay does host other people’s lives encapsulated in stories that can be retold, such as its namesake, aboriginal woman Waubedebbar. Place is storied. Another story is the festivities around the annual sailing regatta in the 1980s and 1990s captured in photos of Bicheno history and recalled by Miranda as a child as highly anticipated ‘bigger than the Hobart show’. It is also a

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<sup>41</sup> an absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals; a clean slate DICTIONARY

beginner scuba diving place where rare weedy seadragons can be seen and a place where children in the surf lifesaving nippers program learn water rescue skills and become comfortable in the water. The Bay is used for research as well by the Australian Maritime college, to assess seasonal fertility of crayfish, revealing insights of significance to the economy and social well-being of Bicheno. Considerable amount of living occurs in Waubs Bay, the swimming group have just added another layer of story to it.

The story of Waubs Bay here is of more recent place-making by the Bicheno Coffee club wild ocean swimmers. I use the experiences of individuals and the group to discuss place and what *being at home in the water* may mean to this discussion. Place is not geographically limited; place is about living/being in the world. In the geography of aquatic based places, the boundary between land and water is not sharply defined, even for where the beach is dry and the water is wet. Our foot prints, thoughts and conversations connect the getting in and the getting out day after day, crossed over by strangers walking through the invisible but inhabited tracks of our life. 'Here we are again' Phil states the obvious one morning. The edges of sand or rocks and water have continuity into the water and the water comes out and swashes over the sand, sometimes with uninvited violence, other times obedient to moon tides. The soft boundaries extend to the surface of the water in relation to the bottom, in relation to the shapes of the hills, the horizon and human made features. This description is a description of life lived in the world. The animals in the water become sisters and brothers to swimmers, fellow animates sharing the underwater rooms or the skyward air for the sea birds and their transient flight paths or dive-bombing fishing antics. The permanent rocks along the shore, similar to ephemeral cloud shapes, take on anthropomorphic characteristics.

Just as home owners decorate their homes and have celebrations, in the winter of 2016 some Bicheno swimming group members decided to ‘dress’ a large cone shaped rock, at the west end of Waubs beach with a knitted ‘beanie’ by ‘yarn bombing’ it. Yarn bombing is a version of artistic graffiti, wrapping street objects or tree trunks and branches with stitched together knitted lengths of wool. Deniliquin NSW wool artist, Josephine Nathan taught us how to do ‘arm knitting’ in the evening warmth of a lounge room, using our arms as a knitting needle. The stitches produced are large and open like a fishing net see figure 9. It was intended as a temporary, ephemeral installation, as a celebration and acknowledgement of winter and cold air and water. The beanie on the rock was also a reverent response to mother rock watching over sister sea. It was an attempt at the veneration of our place and life in the water adjacent to the rock. It was kind of silly in a frivolous joyful way too. One local was unimpressed by the ‘ugliness’ and undressed two smaller wrapped rocks before removing the main one ourselves before a massive forecast stormy swell, which would have disrobed the rock with one wave.



**Figure 68** The ‘beanie’ rock ‘yarn bombed with arm knitting created by Bicheno coffee club members and local knitters, Bicheno winter 2016 Personal files

### Dwelling at home in the sea in Bicheno

The nature of the swimming engaged in by the Bicheno Coffee club wild ocean swimmers, sheds light on the question of being, and dwelling, in ways that have been surprising to me. It may be because of the mobility and homogenisation of world cultures, that a close engagement with a specific place, is grounding, in unique terrain, weather and pioneering novelty. Poet and environmental historian Professor Pete Hay from Hobart, emphasises the authenticity of living and caring aspects of feeling connected to and at home in place;

To dwell authentically is to dwell in place. It is to dwell within one's home. As Heidegger sees it, the essential character of modernity is homelessness; and we are doubly homeless, because not only are we estranged from home, but we do not know that we are estranged from home. This is why we readily tolerate the obliteration of places we hold in affectionate regard. We feel pain and loss; but we are unable to find a reasoned justification for our pain or a reasoned argument against the right claimed by developers and governments to impose pain and loss upon us. We need to become aware of the responsibility that dwelling entails...Our task is to take care for places....This is what it means to dwell, which is for Heidegger 'the essence of human existence' (Hay 2002: 160).

There are unexpected outcomes of having made a home life in the ocean. Wild ocean swimming in Bicheno is an avenue through which to scrutinise human existence and pathways for social cohesion. It is about how near daily swimming has surprised us with knowledge about ourselves and others. Including nonhuman others, such as the stingray, the draughtboard sharks, salp, crabs and octopus, dolphin and seals and the submerged rocks and kelp, clanking mooring chains and ever-changing sand bottom patterns.

### Swimming is social -Sharing life in the water with friends and family

Contrary to popular belief, swimmers are not isolated individuals. Swimmers are social. They are living their life in water. Dwelling in place is social. Ocean swimming especially makes dwelling in water prominent, tame water such as contained in pools can have a similar effect, but it is more subtle, perhaps obscured by other effects emphasised for the benefits of swimming participation. The statement 'Swimming is an individual sport', implies loneliness, asocial, compared with sports like running cycling kayaking or surfing. Yes, swimming sport is not a team game unless it is a relay, but it is more mutually co-operative than is typically represented. Communication occurs during swimming, using 'body language' and a sense of proximity rather than talking or continuous eye contact. Andy and I often swim side by side alternately going faster-than-comfort speed and back to comfort speed. One day while doing this pattern I accelerated out of sequence, so Andy had to chase my toes. Instead of slowing down to my speed when he levelled with me, he kept swimming fast past me. We continued this game for 5 minutes or so unpredictably taking off and slowing back level again. A patch of thick floating seaweed eventually stopped us, and when we lifted our faces out of the water we both laughed and laughed about the impromptu chasey game we'd made up as we were going along.

Out in the ocean without walls and lane lines, the Bicheno swimmers play another game called 'rafting', borrowed from Milt Nelms who uses the activity as a learning tool for his competition-swimming clients. Rafting with 6 people involves 3 swimmers side by side and three more directly behind. Rafting with 8 swimmers may consist of 4 lines of 2 people side-by-side, toe to hand. Each swim close together, so as arms deliberately and

distractingly, touch or bump nearly every stroke. The second row touch the toes of the swimmer in front. If the front swimmer goes too fast, they lose the foot touch and if the back row swimmer goes too slow, they fall out of formation too. The idea is to adjust position and regulate speed to stay in a tight raft of swimmers for a set duration or until the raft disintegrates. The little penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) that abound in the sea and shore in Bicheno make rafts – swimming closely together for safety in the water and while waddling across the sand together toward their burrows in sandhill vegetation. They are the smallest species of penguin, shy in daylight, but huddle together to make themselves look bigger as group than as a solitary individual. Swimming close together as a tight ‘raft’ is challenging because it goes against the typical polite and regulated distances of swimmers in pools, (such as the ‘5 second send-off’<sup>42</sup>) and bobbing around in wave swash at beaches. Rafting also simulates open water swimming races that have no lane ropes or bottom lines, where competition swimmers are packed together tightly along the shortest line of travel. Rafting is confusing and annoying for some visitors. Alex kept his distance to start with on his first go at a human raft – much to the chagrin of other raftees, before it was explained to him that he had to go as slow as the slowest swimmer. He said ‘that doesn't feel good, it’s hard, but I get it, I have to pay attention to the person next to me and in front of me and stay with them even they drift off a bit – hmm that's different, I feel I should be swimming my own straight line not wandering off course led by a crooked swimmer’. The rafting game is the activity that has created the greatest empathy, compassion, and group cohesion than most other formalised or informal activities in and

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<sup>42</sup> When training in a squad, swimmers follow each other in a ‘circle’ around the black line. The fastest swimmer leads the lane and the next swimmers depart from the wall 5 seconds apart. About 12 swimmers can then fit in one lane in a 50 metre pool.

out of the water. Rafting constrains the swimmers very much in place, in the confined place of bubbly cloudy water, with a community of like-minded neighbours. Accidentally standing on a stingray's wing also engenders empathy – not getting stung, but the fright from the slimy liveliness. Reveals that things-that-can-eat-you-in-the-ocean thoughts are very close to consciousness such as the discovery of a whale rib.



**Figure 69 Liz, alias Lizzard, finds a whale rib protruding from the sandy bottom in Waubs Bay and extracts it with help. It inspired her to write a poem about it. Photos Steve Masterman with permission Bicheno 2016**

*The Raising of the Rib (Eubalena australis)*

This is the ballad of Lizzard and Pam,  
 Waubs Bay discoveries not quite to plan  
 They swam to the bommies to visit a friend,



Holy Moses the Ray, round a crevice and bend.

Watched her tail drift as the waves gently surged  
quite happily nestled, her body submerged.

Left her content they found a fish school,  
Exploring the weed out from the rock pool,  
when an object half hidden caught Lizzard's keen eye  
and she dived to explore it and Pam wondered why.

Lizzard pulled it and loosened a tube long and weighty,  
She turned to Pam her maritime matey,  
Pam dived down and yanked and loosened it heaps,  
One more dunk and it was up for keeps.

A rib from the mighty sea leviathan,  
was it slaughtered by man?  
or did it perish in blue?

Its carcass picked bare to trabeculae  
and buried sand deep until this special day.

The sea reveals it's secrets; tho'  
you must be present to see them so.

A daily swim gives an opportunity  
to share special finds with our community.

My poem, aha! and so it is.

By Liz Grey 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2017 Used with permission



**Figure 70 Bicheno wild ocean swimmers Waubs Bay 2017 Personal files.**

Shared experiences and identity generate social cohesion. Identifying as a swimmer is one sort of characterisation that creates the potential for people to connect and meet as equals. Self-identifying as a swimmer, is declarative of ‘belonging’ to a community of practise whether the swimming is a formal or informal member of a squad, club or ‘pod’ of swimmers. Even sharing water and swimming in sync with strangers in a pool is a form of allied kinship in ‘performative regulation’ simulta-neously a matter of negotiated order and self-imposed disciplinary power (Scott 2010). Membership in its broad sense is belonging to a group of people enjoying similar activities and shared experiences. ‘Are you with the swimmers?’ asks a waitress at the hotel where dinner will be shared. The Bicheno ocean swimmers are an identifiable cohesive group in Bicheno, which adds to the richness of the whole community and its identity. The group has also become a tourist attraction after East Coast Tasmania tourism featured the Coffee Club swimmers in an online advertisement in 2015. Travellers on their morning walk before bussing off to their next destination, stop to admire and chat with us as we enter or exit the water.

It is rare for a swimmer to swim alone without anyone else in proximity in or out of the water. Lone swimming is strongly discouraged by water safety educators and public safety signage. Admittedly, some swimmers aren't joiners, who like solo swimming for the solitude and spontaneity. But are they really alone? Even if the swimmer is taking a swim, other people notice - their car in the parking area, the rhythmic splashes along a regular path at a habitual time, polite g'days at the waters' edge, familiar shoes placed at the end of the path and the tell-tale wet hair and goggle face impressions at the café coffee pick-up. In smaller communities, locals know the people who swim for non-competition reasons. Just as the dog walkers are seen or the runners running the streets, the fishermen on the rocks or out in a boat. They are part of the fabric of the local culture and how the local outdoor natural environments are used. Sometimes though, a stranger comes to the village who uses it differently, like a house guest who folds the towels in a different way.

There was a swimmer in Bicheno in the summer of 2017 who was making tracks through the water along the shoreline of Waubs Bay and into the wharf area called the Gulch. He wore a black dive hood and a diving mask and snorkel, unlike the colourful caps that the Bicheno coffee club ocean swimmers wear for visibility – for boaties and each other. He was nicknamed 'shark bait'. He appeared mysteriously, swimming innocuously through and across the zig zaggy paths of the wild ocean swimming group. The masked swimmer disappeared just as strangely as he appears. Some of our group blocked his passage one day in order to meet him and ask if he was OK swimming alone and half-jokingly defy his 'trespassing' OUR place. He was very irritated to have his rhythm interrupted but explained he was training for a long distance ocean swim in Perth and was fine. He said he lives in Spain, but he sounded Australian, so the mystery elevated. Despite his lack of motivation to 'join in' with the Bicheno Coffee Club swimmers, his presence influenced

our sense of ‘ownership’ of the bay, yet we felt an empathy with him for his enjoyment of swimming and admiration for his effort, but concern for his solo swimming without a buddy. On land, walkers, runners and dog walkers also kept a concerned and fascinated eye out for him, so his presence and his swimming wanders became part of the land-lubbers experience of the seacoast too. The masked man swam on his own, yet he was not alone. Other people, in a sense, swam with him by keeping track with him from the shore or with their eyes from their house. That he had a goal to swim in a supervised timed ocean swimming event, indicates he has a sense of belonging to a community of practise – the ocean swimmers – but not the intentional community, the Coffee Club.

Within the varied swimming communities of practise there are stated and unstated ways of going about swimming expressing cultural differences and similarities. Over time, rituals become tradition. For example, the All season surfers at Cronulla beach, place their shoes at the end of the beach path, before walking across the crunchy yellow sand into the water with just their ‘speedoes’ on and seek out waves to body surf. The men had come together most mornings for 30 years mainly to body surf. Some of the Prevelly Penguins in Margaret River check their craypots on the way past the reef where they were set the night before. The Spotty Dog fitness group (now called BondiFit) roll and tuck their gear bags against the surf club door before sauntering across the sand at North Bondi and catch the rip out to ‘the back’ of the breaking waves to receive further instructions from coach Spot. Pool swimmers, ocean swimmers, masters swimmers, learn to swimmers, nippers, triathletes, each have a specific culture but share general swimming culture: knowledge of dressing for swimming, the most suitable swimsuit or wetsuit for active swimming, loose warm clothes, leak proof goggles, durable caps. Swimmers know how to share swimming spaces, slowing down or speeding up to overtake, not to clash arms, avoid kicking a

passing face, doing circle swimming around a lane divided with lane lines. Swimmers know how to move through water, and many have a desire to improve, sharing where to get information to get better at swimming, or give tips to each other. Through repetition, a joint understanding from experience over time, builds a library of knowledge of the vagaries of the weather, slight pool temperature changes, modified shorelines, tidal fluxes, and the ebb and flow of fitness capacities. Sensory data is able to be noticed through attention and awareness. The swimmer who ‘perceives herself in the depths and horizons, in the midst of an entire teeming place-world is not in a confusing kaleidoscope of free-floating sensory data’ (Casey 2009).

Places are not added to sensations any more than they are imposed on spaces. Both sensations and spaces are themselves implaced from the very first moment, and at every subsequent moment as well (Casey 2009: 321).

## **Wayfaring**

Ingold’s (year) neologism *alongly* is a word he concocted to express the way inhabitants move through the world and integrate what they observe and experience, into knowledge. He says, citing the example of scientists collecting data to be mapped – ‘there is lateral integration of data points on the surface of the world and vertical integration of categories of ‘things’ classified and tabulated. Surfaces of places can be mapped, every surface place in the earth has a co-ordinate of latitude and longitude, elevation and depth in relation to the seas surface. Held together each point is linked together as a chain and so is laterally integrated. Regions and local ecosystems can be identified by classing climate, vegetation,

habitation to integrate data. Both produce knowledge. But he asks what about local knowledge of the inhabitants? How is that integrated?’

‘Inhabitants know as they go, as they journey through the world along paths of travel.....Inhabitant knowledge is integrated alongly. Thus instead of the complementarity of a vertically integrated science of nature and a laterally integrated geography of location, wayfaring yields an alongly integrated, practical understanding of the lifeworld. Such knowledge is neither classified nor networked but meshworked’ (Ingold 2011: 154).

The Bicheno coffee cub swimmers do more wayfaring swimming than direct line swimming. Swimming through the world along wayfaring paths of travel, meshes experiential knowledge with a practical understanding of the world as already indicated from diary entries and related conversations.

Wayfaring according to Ingold (2011) is a wandering here and there, with little concern for arriving at a destination. In figure 64 Ingold symbolises wayfaring by the wiggly line, and direct line swimming is symbolised in the straight line. I’m not satisfied with Ingold’s depiction of wayfaring, as movement is multi-dimensional. Even walking a flat surface involves sky filled horizons, peripheral vision, up and down rhythms in joints and spinal compressions. Swimming movement is even less flat. Rotations, undulations, up and down in different amounts of buoyancy and sinking, the bodies’ balance system constantly making adjustments. And that is just the movement. Perceptions created, word pictures invoked, each add cognitive dimensions that are not planar. Of all of the many morning excursions ‘through the water along paths of travel’ the general direction toward a landing

place/arrival is suggested by someone in the swimming group, with the understanding from experience, that the line of travel may be interrupted by the sighting of a sea creature or by stopping along the way to rest and talk or as in the case of faster swimmers staying with the slower swimmers by circling around or doubling back.

“We walk down to the beach from the carpark in Jetty Road chatting and making fun of each other’s peculiarities. The wind, the swell, the smoothness of the surface, how light or dark it is, has already been noted. These features will be taken into account when deciding what direction to take and the how of what we do as we go. Cold is usually mentioned in way or another. Someone traces a circle in the sand with their foot and we take our shoes off and place them inside the circle. A symbol of unity and sign to passers-by that they are not random shoes forgotten. Dylis’ new pink \$4.50 slip on shoes from Swansea store, is noted. While making final adjustments to wetsuits caps and goggles we pick up each-others mood, energy levels and ask “which way today?” Do you want me to organise some learning activities I ask? Or do you just want to saunter in your own bubble? ‘I feel energetic today, so do I, me too so let’s do some trains<sup>43</sup> on the way to Cod rock, we haven’t done rafts for a while, OK let’s get to Cod first..Pam says I’ll go the scenic route I want a photo of that big stingray I saw yesterday...Ok the orange caps are going this way...Andy and Liz do you want to do slow fast on the way? Yeah ok. And then direction and how to go decided upon we each have our way of getting wet adjusting to the cold water and the first rush of moving” Journal entry March 2016.

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<sup>43</sup> Following one behind the other, in a line, hand to toe. The last person speeds up and sprints to overtake the others and slot in to the lead position. It works best with 3 to 4 people. The train continues until you get too tired or have enough of the game.

Straight line swimming is proper calculated swimming for end goals, whereas wayfaring is swimming a way of life. It has been challenging to me to drop my dependency on swimming measurements. Time and distance, heart rates, stroke counts, lap counts, angles and force measures are integral to the sport and fitness culture of swimming. Opening up to other ways of enjoying swimming has been liberating, whilst finding other people who already know the joy of swimming as a manner of living. Straight line swimming as already expressed can be viewed as a contrivance, made up for standardised sport races. Does this end gaining approach diminish the developmental benefits of swimming in ways that explore interactions with the water and is so doing increase perception? Swimming is interactive, the body with water in a cyclical feedback loop. Swimming interanimates. It is a concept that I am still evaluating, and not fully confident in describing, so I use Casey's (2009) exquisite explanation of being in place below, as a reflective piece to meditate upon.

### **Interanimation**

There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it. Knowledge of place is not, then, subsequent to perception— as Kant dogmatically assumed— but is an ingredient in perception itself. Such knowledge, genuinely local knowledge, is itself experiential in the manner of *Erlebenis* “lived experience” rather than of *Erfahrung*, the already lapsed experience that is the object of analytical or abstract knowledge. (Kant significantly speaks only of *Erfahrung*). Local knowledge is at one with lived experience if indeed it is true that this knowledge is of the localities in which the knowing subject lives. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.. I am not proposing a merely mute level of experience that passively receives simple and senseless data of place. Perception at the primary level is synesthetic - an affair of the whole-body sensing and moving. The primacy of perception



is ultimately a primacy of the lived body – a body that...is a creature of habitual and cultural and social processes (Casey 2009: 321).

Perception of the water while swimming and the awareness of the environment around the water is a key feature of swimming in place. Casey is one of the few writers who has helped me to articulate the feelings, the sensations, the placefulness of swimming and so I continue to quote him out of respect and gratitude.

But perception remains as constitutive as it is constituted. This is especially evident when we perceive places: our immersion in them is not subjection to them, since we may modify their influence even as we submit to them. This influence is as meaningful as it is sensuous. Not only is the sensuous senseful, it is also placeful. As Steven Feld<sup>44</sup> puts it, ‘as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place’. The dialectic of perception and place (and of both with meaning) is as intricate as it is profound, and it is never ending (Casey 2009: 322).

Movement of a swimmers’ body through water leaves no visual trace after water has closed over the hole, and the turbulence has settled. Even though water is elastic, experience ephemeral, the body is emplaced, it is somewhere, as the swimmers’ body traverses place.

There is much more to be said about the role of the body in place, especially about how places actively solicit bodily motions. At the very least we can agree that the living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement: lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them. Even if such bodies may be displaced in certain respects, they are

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<sup>44</sup> Steven Feld 1996 “Waterfalls of Song” p 91 in Steven Feld and Keith Basso, eds., *Senses of Place*. Pub; School of American Research Press, Santa Fe NM

never placeless; they are never only at discrete positions in world time or space, though they may also be at such positions... By the same token however places belong to lived bodies and depend on them...Just as there are no places without the bodies that sustain and vivify them, so there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and traverse... Bodies and places are connatural terms. They inter-animate each other (Casey 2009: 327).

The notion of inter-animation further illuminates the sensuous dynamics of swimming in ways that I have not been able to previously grasp or explain. The idea derives from Keith Basso from his study of the Western Apache, reported in his book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996).

anthropologists have paid scant attention to one of the most basic dimensions of human experience – that close companion of heart and mind, often subdued yet potentially overwhelming, that is known as sense of place. Missing from the discipline is a thematized concern with the ways in which citizens of the earth constitute their landscapes and themselves to be connected to them...missing is a desire to fathom the various and variable perspectives from which people know their landscapes...and missing is an interest in how men and women dwell (Basso 1996: 106).

The ‘longing’ satisfied by swimming in the open ocean with others, that I described earlier, taken from a journal entry in 2016, is I believe this constitutive human need to dwell in place, a philosophical subject I am keenly interested in. I am also interested in the phenomena of swimming in the surface of the water. The combination of these two interests, swimming and place are the subjects of my photographic practise. My interest is called topoanalysis, a concept developed by Gaston Bachelard and explained by

Tasmanian philosopher Jeff Malpas meaning the investigation of places. A referent is toponophilia, the love of place (Malpas 1999).

I reflected on what swimming meant to me in 2012, writing with reference to interanimation and topoanalysis. The following musing goes some way to explaining why wayfaring swimming is more meaningful and interesting to me than direct line swimming and why I discuss it in relation to swimming in the ocean in Bicheno.

My work is a topoanalysis (Bachelard) of the place where a human is most effective in moving a dwelling in the water, the floating layers. A person actively dwelling in the floating layers of water interact with physical forces such as gravity, buoyancy and torque. Torque is a curvilinear sinking of the bodies weighted mass. Perceptivity of the swimmer to pressures flows, displacement of water and perception of water and space around the body, provide feedback to the sensory system, in relationship. It is a kind of dynamic mapping of water and human body interanimating. Human and water mutually enliven. The human displaces water, uses energy from it to move and to stabilise, while the water is displaced 'seeking' stillness in the equilibrium of flat unmoving surface. My definition of swimming therefore is an expression of a living-sensing moving body as the creature interanimates water (Shane Gould notes to self 11<sup>th</sup> January 2012).

Wayfaring swimming facilitates interanimation, from a thinking perceiving moving body. Straight line swimming diminishes it but still can provide an attentive swimmer, a sense of place.

Wayfaring swimming is different in that it becomes 'a way of life'. The swimmer inhabits the water, not just swimming in it using the body as a means of transport or their body occupying a surface, indexed according to its locations. Life is manifest while swimming,

dwelling occurs, ‘the world presents itself as a field of habitation’ (Ingold 2011: 163).

Wayfaring involves exploring, experiencing evaluating and then further exploration and so on. This is how life and learning functions, how wonder is stimulated, understanding forged and skill improved.

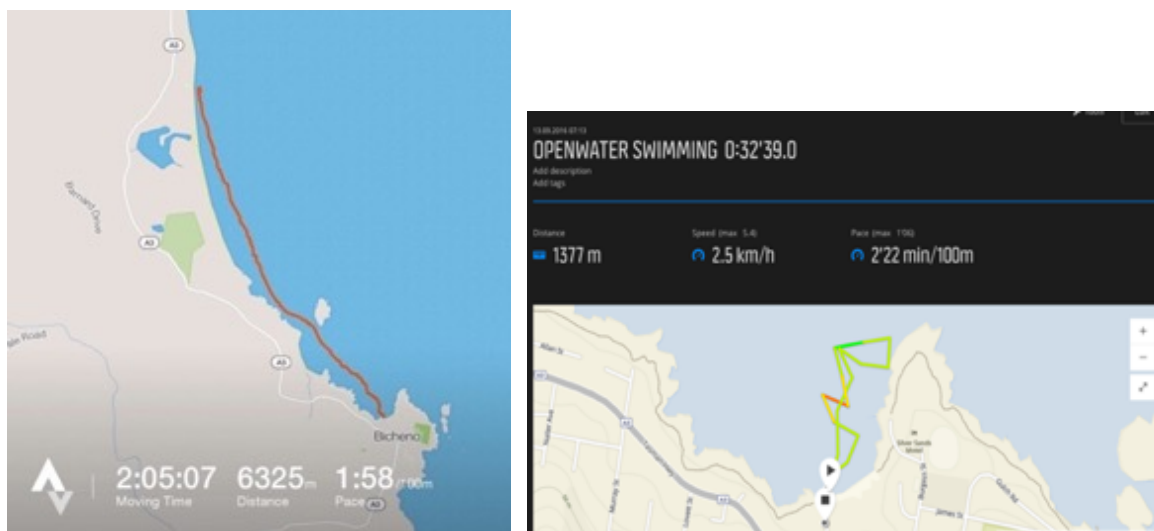
Destination focussed swimming, plotting lines of transporting the body from one destination to another, valorises the straight line. In fact, Ingold asserts ‘the straight line has emerged as a virtual icon of modernity, an index of the triumph of rational, purposeful design, over the vicissitudes of the natural world’(2011, p.152. Straightness is associated with rational thought, as against sensory perception, science against traditional knowledge, male against female, culture against nature. The hegemony of the straight line is a phenomenon of modernity, not culture in general. Sport and recreational swimming, evolved in the modern era, so it is unsurprising that swimming in a straight line can be presumed to be the rational way to swim. Following the black line in a pool is especially rational.

I experimented with a GPS enabled waterproof watch to make maps of swimming tracks. I called them emotion maps - converting quantitative dots on lines of travel across a surface, into qualitative insights annotated later with recalled moods or sensations from along the way. Emotion mapping originated with the derive of the Situationists in Paris. They made maps of their observations in their city street wanderings, calling it psychogeography – ‘the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviours of individuals’ (Debord and Vague 2011).

The derive (drifting) is a way of moving through the city by abandoning the usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find

there....it is a mode of experimental behaviour used by Situationists, an avant-garde group of people, were most politically influential in Europe in the late 1950s and 1960s (Knabb 2006: 2).

Psychogeographic mapping is a tool used to combine quantitative data with qualitative data and was used speculatively for this project. My maps of swimming tracks in Waubs Bay yielded interesting data and pretty maps but are limited in recording affective moments in meanderings. I found soon after the experimental phase of making the first few maps, the map-making process and emotion annotations became too contrived. Interviews and diary entries became a better source of recall for this project than the annotated GPS maps.



**Figure 71** Maps of swim ‘tracks’ made with body tracking devices. From this type of map, emotion maps were made. Additionally, emotion maps were created from recalling multiple similar composite journeys. Sample emotions annotated ‘Ooh feels cold, what was that I just trod on? geez I’ve lost fitness, breathless, just tickled Jo Jackson shark, darn foggy goggles, scared of that dark shape, wow that’s beautiful, I feel amazing, I can really feel the water today.....’

Despite my critique of ‘direct line’ swimming, it does have important value for a swimmer. Point to point/destination/direct line swimming has function and can be

satisfyingly enjoyable in similar ways to the circuitous wandering of how wayfaring swimming is done. Children I observe in pools and rivers initiate spontaneous racing such as ‘race you to the pontoon’ where the direct line will probably help the winner. Getting to Cod Rock (600metres) or to ‘the island’ - 2km for the first time is a milestone accomplishment, celebrated with hugs, maybe a photograph and vigorous back slaps and later recounted back at shore, bragging to other friends and family and possibly recorded on the groups facebook page. Going those distances requires fitness, encouraging buddies, trustworthy companions, skill and bravery to overcome fears.

Another land based version of swimming wayfaring is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century involving the city street wanderings of the flaneur and the flaneuse in Paris (Coates 2017). A later version of the flaneur is the derive. While the strollers in the city were wandering the streets observing people and architecture, swimmers were wading and bathing naked, protesting against class divisions, and church and state controls of appropriate behaviour. They were less organised than the streetwalkers, but equally influential culturally through recreational lifestyle changes encouraged by the romantic notions of European and German poets. The ‘call of nature’ poets Wordsworth and Coleridge and Goethe, the preeminent advocate of naturalphilosophie movement in Germany were keen swimmers, as was Lord Byron the English poet as already mentioned (Sprawson 1992).

I mention this history of ways of living and moving on land in urban areas, because it relates to the growth of participation in open water swimming. Swimming has historically been at times, a socially disruptive activity, very different to the benign representations and actions of swimming in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tammy van Wisse’s marathon swims as a ‘human water quality tester’ is an exception. Some swimmers are transgressive. There are instances in Australia where swimming pools and swimming sites have been contested

spaces for gender, class and race (Pitt 2010; Overington 2017; Perkins 2016). I am proposing that the popularity of swimming recreation and swimming sport in open water in the 2010s, is a kind of protest against technologized/industrialised life, the ordered, measured, monitored world, concretised in 'the swimming pool' which pool swimming demands metaphorical straightness, compliance or conformity.

Nick, a swimmer from Bicheno says 'I like swimming outside of walls. Pools remind me of the artificiality of the built environment and constrained business of city streets and chemical smells. The ocean makes me feel more connected to the natural world, open spaces. I am much more productive with my work when I swim in the ocean, even if I swim in a pool it doesn't have the same effect as the sea.' (Interview June 2017).

Adult swimmers with a yearning for less structure, physical challenge and nature engagement, take to ocean swimming like the transgressive city wanderers protesting stifling and bureaucratic city life in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am sure that many informal openwater swimming groups are unlikely to yield to an organised authority, in favour of their own independence and flexible participation.

Deep and strong breathing used for swimming can carry swimmers away into a meditative state. The muffled sounds of water flows, gurgled bubbling exhales and repetitive stroking, foster entry into 'the zone', a pleasant, even blissful state - a flow state where time can be compressed or slowed down (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). In this state I meditate on a quote or a concept or a creative plan.

One of these days Andy and Liz and I were musing about perception – what is real, what is imagined, why do some people notice more in the water or feel more of the water than others. We agreed that metaphor such move like a dolphin, and poetry helped perception,

as did making art and digitally remixing photographs. Describing and re-lating movement experiences that are sensory, cannot be fully reported in the language of mechanical measurement. Sheets-Johnson (2011), Smith (2007), Ingold (2011) and Manning (2009, 2013) are eloquent writers on the subject of embodied sensory experiences. Andy Liz and I in conversation also agreed that making a destination the primary focus diminishes the journey/process. We each exaggerated this idea on our way to Cod Rock, Liz finding treasures either lost fishing lures, or a different sort of fish while experimenting with deeper arm swimming. Andy thought of a joke chuckling to himself along the way as he wandered east then west then north east, slowing his arrival moment to coincide with slower paced swimmers. Similarly, I slowed down by doing backstroke and underwater breaststroke between intervals of freestyle all the while thinking about this quote that I related to the aquatic environment...

To understand how people can inhabit this world, means attending to the dynamic processes of world formation in which both perceivers and the phenomena they perceive, are necessarily immersed. And, to achieve this, we must think again about the relations between surfaces, substances, and the medium (Ingold 2008: 1801).

Yes it was obvious to me, my perception of immersing in and moving through water reveals and affirms dynamic processes between the surface of water and its interface with air, the substance of my flesh interacting in a way that enabled me to move through it, and the medium of water – how different each stroke is, how different the thickness of water is in varied depths and imagined layers of flotation. Catherine said she had never noticed that until she imagined it and then it became ‘real’ in her experience by paying attention to it. After Andy shared his joke and Liz excitedly showed her new treasure, I mused out loud whether we would notice less or more if we took a straight line than by wandering in



curves and zigs and zags. Later at home I read about different sort of lines in life and the world as expounded by Tim Ingold (2007) in his book 'Lines: a brief history' which I immediately put into my swimming context and the possible differences between direct, straight line swimming and wandering swimming in a non-direct line. Wandering has become the preferred way, because arriving doesn't really matter so much as 'wayfaring alongly' as Ingold (2011) suggests.

While swimming-wandering 'the scenic route' close to the kelpy rocky shoreline Liz, with her keen treasure-finding eyes, saw an unusual object in the sand in chest deep water, something that was not a rock, nor a pipe nor tree branch. Like a hen with chicks, the splashes and duck diving legs in the air alerted Pam, Agather, Jeanne and Elly who scurried over to where Liz was wrestling with the object, trying to uncover it and pull it out. A team effort, muscling, laughter and breathlessness, helped to slide the long object as round as an arm out from under the sand and into the air. It was a whale rib. The treasure of the year! Bicheno was established as a sealing and whaling port in the early 1800s so the whale bone could have been buried from that long ago. Extensive whaling ceased in the 1880's so unless it was from a more recently deceased whale, the bone may have been an animal that was harpooned and rendered into oil to light the streets of London. The mystery of the found whale bone stimulated a search for stories about the whaling industry and current seasonal whale watching. June is the whale migration season, the day before the discovery find of the rib, two southern right whales swam slowly in an arc into Waubs bay just after we the swimmers got out of the water.

The old stories of place making in Waubs Bay by the whalers, blended in a meshed way with the more recent place making by the Bicheno Coffee Club swimming wayfarers.

There are some swimmers who are less interested in the quantitative measures than the qualitative experience of their swims. These are more likely to be the ocean/open water swimmers, unconstrained by swimming pool walls and lanes, who are as Ingold 2011 describes, ‘Wayfaring alongly in the world rather than the body transporting itself across a surface from one location to another’ (Ingold 2011: 161-63, 49-52). I use this framework to try and understand the dynamics of the evolution of the coffee club swimming group in establishing a sense of place, exemplified by the many ways the swimmers have made ‘a home in the water’.



**Figure 72 Transport and Wayfaring conceptualised with lines**

## **Conclusion**

Swimming as a way of life, is that why Australians are considered a nation of swimmers? Water places are homely? Most of the ‘members’ (there is no formal membership) of the Bicheno wild ocean swimmers, swim for the journey, not the destination – although as I’ve already narrated, destinations are significant. The attractiveness of Wayfaring swimming as ‘a way of life’ may be the motivation for a rapid increase over the last 30 years in the popularity of ocean swimming amongst adults. These many groups or ‘pods’ of swimmers around urbanised coastal areas do swim and confirm Australia as a nation of swimmers, but not in the typically perceived way and motivations of swimming – to count laps in a

straight line, measuring distances and recording times. Naming ocean swimming as wayfaring opens up suggestions of something else happening in and around water that has not received the attention it deserves – for understanding swimming culture and place making attachment to aquatic environments. Swimming ‘for’ the journey is immediate, sensuous, learning through movement, and educating perception while having perception aroused.

Recreational open water/ocean swimmers are more likely to be wandering along approximate routes of travel, than swimmers with time and distance grids to follow and to execute scheduled pre-planned tasks. Swimming pool swimming is transport back and forward and has industrialising characteristics – productivity, efficiency, yield, outcomes, standards, exemplar replication – swimming laps is a form of industrialised transport and defines swimming. It’s not to say that this has less value, it is just that wayfaring has not been identified and valued enough.

The Bicheno wild ocean swimmers grow into knowledge of self and the culture of swimming, by swimming. Cultural content is not passed along by transmission, encoded in words and symbols, the defining feature of the genealogical model of cultural dissemination (Ingold 2001: 1). Cultural content and knowledge is lived and learned through what Ingold (2001) calls ‘enskilment’ rather than cultural dissemination transmitted through enculturation. What this means for swimming, is that if more swimmers are vertical in the water than horizontal, then that is a cultural form that needs to be acknowledged and catered for. If horizontal swimming is the most desirable cultural model of Australian swimming to be perpetuated, then those skills need to be learned and practised.



## Chapter 6 Understanding swimming culture in Australia: mixed meanings, politics of evidence, managing impressions and more-than-representation.

I have distilled many insights from investigations and descriptions documented in earlier chapters of this thesis and will now outline the final significant feature exposed in my research of the culture of swimming - the limitations of representation to describe, report and discuss swimming culture and experiences of swimming. Swimming in Australia is not what it is made to appear to be, even the definition of swimming has mixed meanings that are not clearly stated. There are six issues that contradict the way swimming is represented.

1. Swimming is portrayed as a valued all-inclusive activity that binds Australians with a sense of belonging through a way of life of mutually understood cultural meanings and customs. This portrayal is a generalisation, some people do not understand or participate in the culture of swimming, and so feel excluded from this identity narrative.
2. There is confusion about the roles of swimming organisations, and some ‘weirdness’ about duplicated organisational services.
3. There are poorly obtained survey data and statistics for participation information. As a result, some cross-referenced data quoted, does not make sense.
4. The numbers of people participating in competition race swimming is overstated, creating an impression that doing sport swimming is widespread. There are only 67,000 registered competition swimmers with Swimming Australia Ltd and only

750 people have represented Australia in international swimming events in 123 years up to 2018. A blurring of data for participation in recreation swimming with data for sport swimming is exploited to manage the public impression that many more people compete in swimming than in reality. The virtuous cycle of sport is invoked in the process, as well as the political imperative for a nation to engage in international sports to remain a member of the global community, similar to the value of inclusiveness from membership of the United Nations (Grix 2016).

Consequently, arguments for sports funding involve arcane power struggles between swimming institutions, who vie for public prominence and industry leadership, ‘masking the methods by which power silently operates to inscribe rigid norms and to ensure political dominance’ (Murray, Holmes, and Rail 2008: 272).

5. General swimming standards are more optimistic than realistic. Appearances in representations of national identity to advertise/market the country through a reputation of a swimming nation, is blurred with actual abilities - more precisely, lack of abilities. This false perception is serious. It is at the expense of people’s lives and missed potential to take full advantage of the affordances that being able to swim well can provide.
6. Affective aspects and pleasures of swimming are portrayed in a simplistic manner as *fun*, without delving into the far-reaching existential meanings of wholistic swimming experiences – in the natural world and the natural element of water.

To summarise, swimming sport and recreation is caught up in the consuming demands of a marketplace for recreation. Swimming industry has to compete against other sports and recreations in what has become a task of managing impressions in order to attract

participants (Goffman 1959). Keeping up appearances is one tension that swimming organisations have succumbed to in an era of competitive marketing, electronic social media and self-monitoring; ‘an entanglement of assemblages of corporate and personal self-tracking technologies’ (Lupton 2014: 8).

### Representation

At the root of the seven issues outlined above, is the limits of representation to illuminate understanding of physical culture (Andrews 2008; Giardina and Newman 2011).

Philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) initially critiqued representation arguing that beginning in the seventeenth century, philosophers developed an unhealthy obsession with the notion of representation. They compared the mind to a mirror that reflects reality (Rorty 1979).

Later commentators such as Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) added to an understanding of representation by discussing perception. They say

‘perception is not just a simple mirroring of a pre given environment which is what representation is sometimes taken as i.e. the mind is a mirror of nature (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991: 134-37).

In the process, mind is separated from body.

I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, the ways in which swimming is represented in a dualistic frame with words, pictures, abstract concepts and symbols – a binary in which mind is considered separate from body. Doing swimming and knowing how to swim is too important a human activity to have a meaningful understanding of it limited by a disembodied theory of mind, meaning and thought.

The representational theory claims that the mind operates on “internal representations” (ideas, concepts, images) that can re-present (and thereby “be about”) external objects and events. The representational theory has its source in dualistic metaphysical views that mind is separate from and different in kind from body, that what is inner, is different in kind from what is outer, and that we have a direct access to the inner, that is not available to us for the outer (Johnson 1987). The naturalistic theory of embodied meaning, mind and language that I am developing through swimming, is at direct odds with classical representational theories of mind.

#### Embodiment, an alternative way of knowing swimming

Embodiment theories by comparison with representational theories of mind is about experience, interacting with an environment.

Embodiment theory sees percepts, concepts, propositions, and thoughts, as patterns of experiential interaction, not as quasi-objects (mental entities or abstract structures). They are aspects or dimensions or structures of the patterns of organism-environment coupling (or integrated interaction) that constitute experience....as we will see, thoughts are modes of interaction and action. They are in and of the world (rather than being about the world) because they are processes of experience. I argue for a non-dualistic nonrepresentational view of mind as a process of organism-environment interaction ” (Johnson 2007: 113-17)

Neither I nor Johnson is saying do away with representations such as language and concepts but develop flexibility in the framing of meaning in the dualism of representation used in common senses and objectivist scientific and philosophical models.



Objectivist accounts of meaning and rationality do not tell the whole story. Objectivist approaches treat meaning in a fairly narrow sense, as a relation between symbolic representations and objective (mind-independent) reality (Johnson 1987: 18).

I adhere to the naturalistic explanation of meaning espoused by Johnson: that making sense of the world via meaning, is embodied<sup>45</sup>;

meaning involves the blending of the structural, formal and conceptual dimensions on the one hand and the preconceptual, non-formal, felt dimension on the other. Meaning resides in neither of these dimensions of experience alone, but only in their ongoing connectedness and interanimation (Johnson 2007: 273).

I agree with Turner (2008) that

‘an understanding of embodiment and lived experience is crucial for the study of the body in sport....by recapturing the phenomenology of human embodiment, avoid the reduction of bodies to cultural texts’ (Turner 2008).

The sensations of swimming I and many others enjoy or are frightened by, can be better addressed within a framework of embodiment as described above. Curriculum could be served well by incorporating and framing the learning of swimming in sensory language and less as mechanical direction.

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<sup>45</sup> An embodied view is naturalistic, insofar as it situates meaning within a flow of experience that cannot exist without a biological organism engaging its environment...it sees meaning and all our higher functions as growing out of and shaped by our abilities to perceive things, manipulate objects, move our bodies in space, and evaluate our situation (Johnson 2007: 10-11).

### What is meant by swimming?

Ways in which swimming is represented in Australia in cultural texts, (as a national identity narrative, and a cultural symbol of a way of life), tend toward abbreviating swimming bodies to a cultural text. This is due to the problem of representation neglecting the felt dimension that Turner (2008) and Johnson (2007) and Andrews (2008) recommend. The phenomenology of human embodiment is crucial in the study of sport, but swimming is smothered by symbolic and accountable performance oriented processes. One problem in both representing swimming and more-than-representation is that representations of swimming are stereotypes of being in the water, under the blanket heading of swimming, a word with multiple meanings. Consequently, the idea of swimming can be interpreted ambiguously, which may be a limitation to the effective communication of swimming information and a basis of the vagueness of statistical data collected and used by the swimming industry. I critiqued statistics in chapters 2 and 3. Saying what you mean and meaning what you say applies in this case, hence my question ‘what is the intended meaning of the word swimming? The following is an example of a scenario where mixed meanings of swimming revealed to me a problem of representation when the SAL CEO explained to me his job to attract membership.

Swimming organisations have to carry out their purpose of one of three functions – water safety, education, and physical activity. As I stated above, these organisations compete with each other for public attention and funding. As a result, much of the organisations’ attention goes toward marketing its branded services. One of the first interviews I conducted in 2015 was with Mark Anderson, the then CEO of Swimming Australia Limited. I asked him to describe the purpose of his organisation. He said ‘to increase

membership'. I was shocked as I expected a response as something like; 'provide and manage inclusive and rewarding swimming experiences at all levels of ability, with an aim to attract to and maintain swimmers in the sport of swimming through clubs and coaching squads'. I was probably naive of the function of a CEO and their challenging responsibilities, so my further questions and his frank answers became an education in the rigors of sports marketing and management. That interview alongside studying financial and membership reports propelled me down the path of inquiry about how swimming is organised and represented by the industry to a market of potential swimming consumers.

A problem is that the varied empirical embodied actions in swimming movement carry the same label, *swimming*. Someone swimming laps for competitions is doing a vastly different sort of swimming than someone cooling off swimming in their backyard pool. Not only the body technique is different, the motivations to swim, and outcomes from the type of swimming are divergent (Mauss 1973). Embodied actions and practises of swimming have been taken for granted, overlooked by academics and uncritically scrutinised by communities of practise (Crossley 2007). Overlooking embodiment reflects on a gap in knowledge about the physical act of swimming and its cultural forms. Without clear word-qualifiers to communicate meanings, some people will miss out on felt swimming experiences beyond rational experiences of swimming lessons, a form of functionalism (McLachlan 2012). The mission of the Australian Water Safety Council is to reduce drownings and improve swimming skills, so no-one misses out, on knowing how to swim. Being clear about what sort of swimming is being marketed is an essential element in education, safety and participation.

The felt dimension is entirely valid for meaning making and generating knowledge of self, others and the natural world, through and in swimming experiences. Swimming is more than functionalism. Passing over the felt dimensions hollows out inquiries into swimming. Common rational representations of swimming are swimming-as-technique, a medical solution, or industry process, which misses essences of swimming that attract humans to the recreational activity. The essences are found in the sensations, the bodily interactions, affective experiences that I realise may be difficult to measure and represent. Brain imaging devices have not yet been constructed waterproof, so we rely on artists and writers to help interpret experience. I therefore propose that swimming is more than word or picture descriptions of swimming-like actions or physical immersion in water. Swimming cannot be reduced to a description of a series of mechanical actions in response to the aquatic environment, because the body is not just an input device whose role it is to receive information to be processed by the mind (Vannini 2015; Thrift 2008). The body in water has to problem-solve unusual sensations, for example instability and unpredictable access to air (Nelms 1997-2001). The body and the world is a resource for problem solving not an input output device like a computer, which is one model for understanding cognition (Ingold 2000/2011: 165). The mind in that frame, is considered to occupy an interior space of the skull, processing 'mental models' and representations of the world. Clark (1998) rejects this model of cognitive science, replacing it with the understanding that it is processing loops that yield intelligent action, not confined to the interior spaces of mind, but freely penetrating both the body and its environment (Clark 1998: 83-84).

The swimmer in/with water is an active agent, not a passive recipient of stimuli. The swimmer seeks out information that specifies meaningful properties of their environment (Ingold 2000/2011: 165-66). Pressures and flows, suspension and water rhythms are some

properties of a swimmers environment with which a swimmer relates (Nelms 2018b). The nature of swimming demands an experiential approach.

Swimming can be a very personal experience of interaction with the water. Swimming is an immediate physical experience. There is nothing else like the water in the human domain that replicates the physics and sensations of immersion and movement in water. This apparent attribute indicates that representation is inadequate for the study of swimming and cultures arising from it. No experience of swimming can be had without the context of the bodies' engagement (embodiment) with the watery environment. A discussion of reality-representation in swimming indicates the challenge of understanding swimming and that even the idea of embodiment has critics. Embodiment discourse can fail to recognise the moving, dynamic body, as Ingold (2013) acknowledges;

Embodiment as dance philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1998, p360) complains, fails to do justice to animate form: it fails to recognize the primacy of movement and its dynamic tactile- kinesthetic-kinetic correlates. Walking and dancing are modalities of what Sheets-Johnstone calls thinking in movement. To think in movement is to know as you go along, to improvise, rather than to calculate a trajectory in advance of its behavioural execution. As you proceed on your way, you grow older and wiser. Thus knowledge grows as the organism-person grows, along the multiple paths of its entanglement in a textured world (Ingold 2013: 357).

Swimming discourses tend toward the rational reasons to swim for safety, as a life skill, to maintain a healthy body, to be a responsible citizen rather than thinking in movement, tactile-kinaesthetic-kinetic correlates. Other discourses highlight pragmatic reasons to move and swim. Stephen Smith (2007) advocates the importance of movement to child development and education, social relations with adults and people who are different, as

well as developing environmental awareness (Smith 2007). Jorgenson (2011, 2013) showed that children under 5 who have swimming lessons have better classroom attention and mathematical knowledge when they start school (Jorgensen and Grootenberg 2011). A study of social development of children in a Sydney swimming club demonstrates sensible reasons and beneficial effects of children's participation by training with a club (Light 2010). As I have already said, there is a gap in research frameworks and knowledge beyond the artists, of the aesthetics, the sensations, the rush of movement of swimming. Determining alternate interpretations and frameworks for understanding swimming and the physical culture is a source of both fascination and frustration to me.

There are, and there will always be, miserable days in the lives of researchers. These are the days when the inevitable realization that our work is utterly inadequate at apprehending the intricate textures of the lifeworld subjects of our analysis and description strikes with its mightiest force.....depiction it appears is futile (Vannini 2015: introduction page 1).

Fortunately, I found philosophic mentors to aid my study and interpretation of swimming culture and acts of swimming.

Thrift (2008), Vannini (2015), Thorpe & Reinhart (2010), Lorimer (2005/2008) are my guides to employ the ethos of non-representational theory. Non-representational theory is sometimes called more-than-representational theory (Lorimer 2005). Naming it thus, is a response to the limitations of representationalism in interpreting and understanding a swimmers' lifeworld (Lorimer 2008; Thorpe and Rinehart 2010; Thrift 2008; Vannini 2015). I extend this discussion about more-than-representation later in this chapter. In addition to the limits of representation and the hope of more-than-representational methodologies, there are other factors and dynamics that determine swimming discourses.

Australian swimming organisations maintain considerable prestige and authority, developed over historical time, reinforced with affirmations of reputation. *Australia is a nation of swimmers* is one of these affirmations, and a discourse in itself as I have identified and critiqued so far. What I have identified is that rather than a nation of swimmers, Australia is a nation of swimming organisations. Each institution is in a power and relevance struggle, while in tension between public service and business performance. Foucault identified that discursive practices in specific institutional settings regulate the conduct of others and he was interested in the relationship between knowledge, power and the body in society (Hall 2001). The swimming body in Australia is the object of a leadership struggle. A contest to regulate and influence the swimmer, to act and behave in a certain way. Swimming for safety is public health issue, while active swimming bodies are potential customers. Because of this, swimming is a unique activity requiring specific approaches to managing participation, skill acquisition, while remaining safe. Ways in which swimming is organized, taught and regulated is a sought-after model by other countries seeking to create National Water Safety policies and foster a swimming culture. Copy-cat culture will not work in other countries because of the complexity of culture in the milieu of Australian geography and society. For example, swimming knowledge and curriculum, are entwined with distinctive institutional structures; layers of Australian government, skills training in the education system and a diverse co-operative commercial swimming industry. My aim has been to deepen the understanding of swimming culture and open other ways of knowing and doing swimming. To that end, I ask the question again ‘what factors shape and constrain representations of swimming and should or could swimming be represented and practiced differently?’

## **Power and language in swimming discourses**

It is evident that in the process of managing impressions about swimming, that subtle tools of controlling power and authority in the culture are used. Scientific objectivist representational approaches are invoked in swimming discourses as the declarative ‘gold standard’ of research and used not just as a management and research tool but by interdependence as a form of control. Other mechanisms of control are; exploiting fuzzy statistics, perpetuating mixed meanings, neo managerialism and performativity demands on industry workers.

Representation takes advantage of multiple ways of interpreting an image, a word or other symbolic signs. The authorities in swimming discourses have until the recent past, failed to delineate types of swimming – exploiting ambiguities of the meanings of swimming as they choose to represent it. As an example, the extent of influence and power in the swimming industry can be seen in the changing role of SAL. Instead of maintaining responsibility for competition swimming, Swimming Australia are gaining influence in several ways; by gradually taking on custodianship of swimming through Pacific aid, via a blanket invitational appeal to all Australians to swim in January and by becoming an alternate knowledge bank for swim schools through Swim Australia and Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA).

I will now demonstrate the problem of fuzzy statistics partially due to the ambiguities of the word swimming. Underplaying the true readings of statistics is a form of control, while protecting a well-funded industry from the embarrassment that Australians do not all swim or swim well as some interpretations of surveys say.



Through my observations and analysis, I notice that there is a disparity between representations of swimming, statistical data and actual ways that swimming is practised. Therefore the research question ‘what is swimming?’ is a valid line of inquiry, alongside the rhetorical question ‘do people swim when they go swimming?’ A monosemic definition of swimming could be ‘an experience of suspension and or ambulation in the water’ (personal conversation with Milt Nelms, Bicheno Tasmania March 2019). Inquiry into swimming culture not only requires linguistic understanding of the meanings of swimming, but also requires human imagination to create categories, metaphors, concepts, schemata and mental imagery, emanating from bodily experiences, to create meaningful understanding of phenomena (Johnson 1987). Thus, metaphor is an essential tool of analysis for studies of movement cultures. Metaphors are not intended to be literal propositions to fit objective reality. Metaphor is an imaginative understanding that influences the nature of meaning and constrains our rational inferences (Johnson 1987: 95).

The polysemic nature of the term swimming is an obvious explanation for multiple interpretations and mental images. Cultural convention is another rationale for the existence of multiple meanings of swimming. Distinguishing the differences between types of swimming that people do has implications for the overall scheme of swimming funding, pool design, swimming education and drowning prevention actions. Swimming organisations rely on surveys to gain information they need about swimming habits. Surveys and polls are outsourced to commercial market research companies. With this valuable cultural participation data, organisations such as RLSSA, Austswim, SLSA and SAL can apply for government funding and sponsorships, as well as design programs to meet needs revealed through interpretations of the data.

My interpretive analysis of the quality of data obtained from survey and market research companies such as GEMBA, Roy Morgan, Omnipoll, indicates that the types of questions asked, are inadequate, because the poor questions do not elicit responses that provide reliable understanding about what type of swimming people are doing. The best participation data collected by Omnipoll, is about swimming ability, collated in the 2018 National Coastal Safety report compiled and published by Surf Life Saving Australia. The following quote references the survey methodology used by Omnipoll Market Research, for the section ‘The Australian Community Analysis’:

‘Information about community swimming ability, behaviours and attitudes to coastal safety, risk perceptions, safety strategies and rescues was gathered from the SLSA National Coastal Safety Survey. Conducted by Omnipoll Market Research, the latest survey was run online over the period 12 - 19 April 2018 among a national sample of 1,597 respondents aged 16 and above. The study was carried out in compliance with AS-ISO 20252 -Market, Social and Opinion Research. To reflect the population distribution, results were post-weighted (on age, gender, geographic strata and education) and projected to Australian Bureau of Statistics data. The Australian population aged 16 and above (the reference population for this survey) is 18,712,000’ (SLSA 2018: 66).

One of the questions was about self-assessed performance ‘can you swim 50metres in the pool?’ and ‘can you swim 50metres in the open ocean?’

Swimming is a broad generic term as indicated, but dictionary definitions and common understandings describe swimming as ‘a sport or activity of propelling oneself through the water using limbs’. Fundamentally, the definition of swim in the Macquarie dictionary (2005) involves moving through water, by movements of limbs or in the case of fish, fins and tails. It entails gliding travel, body movements, immersion and suspension and

managing physics such as torque, (heavy hips falling down and around the centre of buoyancy, the lungs) and the lack of a firm platform. Simple observations show that many people spend a lot of time swimming in the water in a vertical orientation, not the dictionary description presuming a horizontal orientation, typical for effective 'travel' swimming. When vertical, the physics of the hips are in a familiar land-based orientation.

Vertical swimming is varied – it may involve partial immersion, some body movements and minimal suspension. Is that swimming too? Possibly not, according to a social norm that swimming is performed in a horizontal position. The ubiquitousness of vertical swimmers is so obvious, it is a wonder that no-one has investigated why and what it means in the overall scheme of swimming funding, pool design, swimming education and drowning prevention actions.

Not all Australians are swimmers by the definition of swimming above, compared with observations showing the pervasiveness of being in the water, but in an upright position, not ambulating much if at all, except by walking through water. The National Coastal Report (2016, 2017) does mention Swimming and Wading in describing what activity was being undertaken before drowning occurred (IPSOS 2016).

Not all immersion is travel swimming, not all swimming is horizontal travel, yet being upright in the water occasionally plunging and moving with arms and legs in swimming like motions is observed or self-reported as swimming. What a paradox! In order to understand what sort of swimming is being referred to, the word needs qualifiers such as – recreation swimming, learn to swim, swimming training, ocean swimming, competitive swimming, swimming race, wading, bathing (old fashioned). Yet statistical data collect for the Australian Bureau of statistics for participation in physical activity does not distinguish between the types of swimming. Other independent surveys also generalise the word

swimming in their surveys such as Roy Morgan who determined that '7 million Australians make swimming Australia's favourite participation sport' (RoyMorgan 2014). The questions asked for this survey are: Which sports/activities do you participate in occasionally ? Which sports/activities do you participate in regularly? (Nagaratnam 2015).

Note the interchange of the words sport and activity – which are disparate pursuits. The Australian sports commission Clearinghouse for Sport has an entry What is Sport ? Compiled by Dr Ralph Richards (a former swimming coach), who acknowledges that any definition of sport will be contentious because of interpretation, contexts, and perception (Richards 2015). Most definitions of sport in documents listed by Richards (2015) include human activity involving physical exertion and skills with elements of competition and rules governed by organisations. The National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework (2011) agreed by all Australian Governments, defines Sport as;

A human activity involving physical exertion and skill as the primary focus of the activity, with elements of competition where rules and patterns of behaviour governing the activity exist formally through organisations and is generally recognised as a sport.

And Active recreation as:

Active recreation activities are those engaged in for the purpose of relaxation, health and wellbeing or enjoyment with the primary activity requiring physical exertion, and the primary focus on human activity ("National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework" 2011).

Another definition of sport and activity is provided in a conceptual model designed by Brian Pink (2008), an Australian Statistician. The purpose of the conceptual model is to aid interpretation and development of Australian Bureau of Statistic surveys. He uses

varying levels of exertion over time and the intention, in order to model categories of sport and physical activity and sedentary behaviours and gives swimming as an example:

Swimming can be undertaken as a competitive sport or recreationally. Swimming at the beach often uses no sporting rules and is a 'physical recreation' activity and not a 'sport'. As with any other activity, the intensity, duration and frequency of the activity has an impact on whether swimming will provide fitness benefits. Swimming as a physical recreation activity may provide some fitness benefit – children swimming in the backyard pool or at the beach are usually fairly active. What needs to be considered is that some people may swim simply to cool off, such as taking a 'quick dip' at the beach. Even though this is commonly referred to as 'going for a swim', a leisurely dip requires minimal physical exertion and may be low intensity activity and provides a limited health and/or fitness benefit. Swimming may also be undertaken purely for exercise in free time, with many people swimming laps for exercise rather than for recreation. This would be exercise, but not sport or physical recreation and this form of exercise is likely to provide health benefits if undertaken regularly and for sufficient duration (Pink 2008: 16).

Pink's 2008 conceptual model can be used to understand the differences between swimming sport and swimming activity. The model needs to be revived and provided to market survey companies. For example, data summarised from a survey commissioned by 'Swimming Australia Limited is 'fuzzy'. SAL sourced information from GEMBA (a private data collection agency) and Roy Morgan for this confusing quote from a SAL website newsletter, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014.

Research tells us that 6.2 million Australians swam in the last 12 months. We know that there are 2.4 million recreational swimmers who swim for health and fitness benefits, and 1.2 million children who learn to swim annually (Rayment 2014).

I tried to apply some logic to this quote and concluded with the following reasoning: An ABS survey of Children's participation in Cultural and Leisure activities in April 2012 only identified swimming as an organised sport, not a leisure activity. 7300 households were surveyed and identified that 17.7% of 5 to 14 year olds participated in organised swimming. The population of children between 5 and 14 years old was 6 million in 2012. 17.7% of 6 million is 1,062,000. Competitive swimming membership of swimming Australia in 2012 was 77,577. Somewhere there are 984,423 children 5-14 who are doing some sort of swimming sport ! Where are they? They could be doing competition swimming in triathlon, nippers (5-14 year old activity:11,000 in 2017), school swimming, mass participation ocean swims, or in winter swimming clubs. Or the data is seriously flawed.

With the indistinct data about swimming participation, and indistinct definitions, how can funding for sports and activity be distributed appropriately for swimming pool construction, renovation, maintenance grants, swimming education and swimming sport, without comprehensive data?

To begin with the intended meaning of swimming - connotations and denotations being deployed in statistical questions - needs to be thought through. Agencies who use photographs to convey meanings of swimming also need to be enlightened about the power of their image to confuse or mislead. A meaning that is attributed to swimming emanates from bodily experience and so is open to individual or cultural interpretation.

Meanings are also determined by who is describing it and for what reason. A meaning of swimming can also be perpetuated through common use and is one way culture is strengthened. As already discussed, freestyle with side breathing as well as wave jumping are both considered by different water users as swimming. Media photographs of swimmers in water on hot days connote a meaning of Australianness. In the same way, photographic images of smiling children splashing in blue water, used to advertise a swim school contain denotive meanings, literally, ‘come to our swim school and learn to swim, it will be fun’.

Parental expectations of the methods and outcomes of their child learning to swim also vary from moral character building to safety to learning through playful fun. One Australian/Chinese parent I spoke with said they didn’t want their child to go to lessons to have fun, he wanted their child to work hard and learn to swim<sup>46</sup>. According to a RLSSA survey, parents are keen to have their children show they can swim a distance of 50metres, which is a higher perceived value than water safety skill of treading water in clothes for deep water for 3 minutes (RLSSA 2017d). It appears from the RLSSA survey of parents and caregivers, their mental image of doing swimming is doing laps of freestyle. I ask, are the children also learning skills for the imagined wading and bathing in a backyard pool? – or a kid swimming back to shore after getting tipped out of an inflated tyre? Those latter

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<sup>46</sup> I observed and ‘read’ photographs and wordage on swim school websites and swim school advertisements at swimming pools - many are marketing their program using the meaning-loaded word ‘fun’. I wondered about this wide spread stratagem as it seemed deliberate to counter some previous strategy or negative experience of children or their parents in their swimming lessons. Further inquiry led me to scrutinise the Austswim swimming teachers manual. Learning through play appears to be the underpinning pedagogical design of the Australian learn to swim curriculum. Fun is closely associated with play.

two possibilities have to be considered when designing and delivering curriculum and may need to have the customer – the parents – have a better understanding of the wide variety of swimming experiences that swimming lessons are preparing children for. Conversations I had with swim school owners expressed their frustration with some parents who demanded expediency to the end goal of swimming 50 metres freestyle. Consequently, swim schools had to bow to parental pressure to reduce water safety lessons - perceived as playing games, not serious travel swimming instruction. Kelly Rae of Oceanic Water Babies (Perth WA) and Bev Annesley in Margaret River owner of Annesley Aquatics with 40years experience in the swimming lesson industry, resorted to providing 1 hour of lectures for parent clients as an induction to the conceptual frameworks guiding their infant and pre-school programs. When I asked if they needed to do a similar induction for parents of school aged students, they both agreed it would save a lot of time passifying parents who did not understand the pedagogical concept of learning through play, or the bigger picture of lifelong swimming activities.

In conclusion the polysemic nature of the meaning of swimming, and culturally agreed upon interpretations, spawn apathy or inattention toward what is actually happening in waterways and pools around Australia. Upright postures in the water are so common that the occurrence is unremarkable, overlooked in favour of the ‘real’ business of swimming programs and facility provision for lap swimming. Jumping in and out of a pool, playing marco polo chasing games or ‘breaststroke strolling’ (disparaged as being outside the pathway models) slowly across a river is mundane and not ‘proper swimming according to the definition of swimming corresponding to the dominant discourse of what swimming is in Australia. Yet those people using the water in playful or functional ways, describe their experience as swimming.



Inclusive planning decisions cannot occur because the survey questionnaires and statistical data collection processes ask poor questions of respondents, because they neglect to acknowledge the diversity of practise. I am sceptical of AUSPLAY data too. AUSPLAY replaced the role of Australian Bureau of Statistics who until 2014 collected data on participation in sports and activity, data required to approve funding and plan for health improvement initiatives. Participation data collected by AUSPLAY through interviews between October 2015 and September 2016 are illogical.

In an interesting development initiated by the ‘custodians’ of swimming, Swimming Australia, The Australia Swims campaign created by SAL in 2018 and again in 2019, is an institutional acknowledgment of the diverse expressions of swimming, validating non-sport swimming activity as a cultural ‘artefact’ [www.australiaswims.com.au](http://www.australiaswims.com.au).

#### Politics of evidence based research

RLSSA reports repeatedly invoke the reliability of their research by the declaration that their studies have been conducted and analysed by using evidence based research methodologies. Evidence-based models are objectivist, fitting well with the global audit culture - that refers to a technology and a system of accounting that measures outcomes and assesses quality in terms of so-called objective criteria such as test scores (Denzin 2009: 155). Repeated use of the term in RLSSA reports, consolidates it’s frame while excluding other perspectives, the frame gains ‘muscle’ with use (Lynch 2014a). Systematic reviews and reports from the trial programs and analysis from the collection of statistical data are produced not just as a methodology but also under the paradigm of evidence based

research, ‘a methodological fundamentalism, ill-suited to dialogues with others, critique and emancipatory agenda’ (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010: 116).

As described in chapter three there are many swimming organisations in Australia that are competing for the same pot of money and audience attention in the public health projects of water safety. The competition places pressure on institutions to differentiate themselves and be seen to have something distinctive to offer. RLSSA has chosen to situate their mission in the health sphere and less so in the education sphere. RLSSA spokesperson Justin Scarr announced this change of focus in 2016 (personal communication).

#### Health research increasingly employ the ‘evidence-based’ model

These conditions can be described as state ‘science’, a regime that privileges economic modes of governance and efficiency (McLachlan 2012). The Cochrane taxonomy and research database is increasingly endorsed by government and public health policy makers (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010). Although this ‘evidence-based’ paradigm ostensibly promotes the noble ideal of ‘true knowledge’ free from political bias, in reality, this apparent neutrality is dangerous because it masks the methods by which power silently operates to inscribe rigid norms and to ensure political dominance. Scholars are in a privileged position to oppose such regimes of power and foremost have the duty to politicise what hides behind the distortion and misrepresentation of ‘evidence’ (Murray, Holmes, and Rail 2008).

Qualitative inquiry luminary, Norman Denzin also warns of hegemonic politics of evidence;

‘Global efforts to impose a new orthodoxy on critical social science inquiry must be resisted, a hegemonic politics of evidence cannot be allowed. Too much is at stake’  
(Denzin 2009).

The ‘politics of evidence’ has already regrettably pervaded drowning prevention and water safety institutions, excluding reliable interpretivist and critical methods of inquiry, and even de-legitimising forms of inquiry other than orthodox scientific method.



**Figure 73** Sad news of another summer drowning in 2019 has widespread distressing effects not only on the affected family. News report January 5<sup>th</sup> ABC online, screenshot from iPhone personal files.

The domain of drowning research should not be about the politics of ‘quantification’ versus ‘qualitative’ methodologies or ‘subjective’ versus ‘objective’. Drowning affects the whole of society. Practical solutions should be sought by interrogating all available possibilities.

It is not just the method or science that I am critical of but what underlies the invocation;

the political workings of power that silently operate behind the mask of objectivity,  
inscribe rigid norms and standards that ensure political dominance, and set the agenda with

regard to what questions about “truth” can be asked and by whom (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010: 109).

I regret the limitations of EBR in swimming and water safety research despite useful data emerging from surveys, reviews and polls, because rigid norms and standards of EBR are preventing other valid drowning prevention strategies and concepts from being investigated and used, to attempt to solve the drowning problem. Turf wars occupy considerable attention occurring between each of the peak swimming organisations vying for ascendant authority, as if they are competing commercial brands.

I have even considered a cynical opinion that Australia is not a nation of swimmers, but a nation of competing swimming organisations. YMCA has entered the race too. The YMCA organisation manages a number of swimming pools in NSW, providing their brand of swimming curriculum. I recently noticed a pamphlet at Ku-ring-gai Fitness and Aquatic centre, West Pymble, Sydney invoking ‘evidence-based’ curriculum, “designed by leading experts in the aquatics field.” See Figure 72



**Figure 74 Posters and pamphlets displayed at a YMCA managed public swimming pool in Ku-ring-gai, Sydney. Left Description of status of YMCA swimming lessons as ‘evidence-based’ and ‘designed by leading experts’. Right Poster hanging in entrance hall advertising swimming lessons, encouraging parents with photographic representations of happy children, splashing and with kickboards, a symbol for a tool for developing swimming skills meaning ‘not just fun but serious too’.**

### Duration versus distance

One of the neglected concepts in swimming reports is the affective responses to the physics of a human body in water. Swimming is a sensory activity felt and done with the body. More sensory language and metaphor in curriculum would enhance learning. *Feel* for the water is a vernacular term used internationally amongst competition swimmers, with varying interpretations (Colwin 1999). Mechanical responses to buoyancy and sinking are mentioned in the Austswim manual for Teachers of Swimming and Water safety (AUSTSWIM 2014b: 66-72). The ideas of horizontal ‘balance’<sup>47</sup> is taught in the AUSTSWIM and ASCTA coaching curriculums, but the emotions of a human unstable and horizontal in the water, who are normally uprightly oriented, are not considered<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Balance in swimming was developed by William (Bill) Boomer USA through the 1990s as he worked with college swim teams and presented in lectures at swim coaches conferences. He presented his ideas of ‘balance’ in a comprehensive lecture series co presented by Milton Nelms at the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Conference Broadbeach Queensland May 2002 and appropriated without attribution by ASCTA in published conference proceedings and Australian coaching manuals.

<sup>48</sup> The idea of swimming emotions and water emotions is a term and concept developed by Milton Nelms and Shane Gould. Used in swimming programs in Sweden [Gilla Vatten], Fiji and USA and presented at World Aquatic Development Conference Lund 2014, 2016 and 2018. Unpublished works and contact with Milton Nelms miltnelms@gmail.com

Emotions are a subjectivity which Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) write about in alternate sports – sensations that are more-than-representational. Fear, anxiety, pleasure and concerns of unstable suspension in water are expressed in body language and body movements that inhibit learning [GILLA VATTEN TEACHER TRAINING, see footnote 47] . Emotions arising from instability and disorientation off vertical land based stance are fundamental barriers to learning to swim and to managing unpredictable water movements or deep water (WCDP 2017). Moving water and deep water is where most drowning occurs. The instrumental, auditable end goal of swimming is a distance for a certificate, overrides *water-relationship* skills. I adhere to notions of developing water relationships as a value for duration for safety rather than the typical value of being to swim a distance as a measure of competence and by inference, safety. Sustained duration-based management of the water in my opinion is a more reliable (see source and further information in footnote 46).

Being able to manage suspension in deep water for a long time is a more reliable learned skill than being certified or taught to just make 50 metres without stopping. In my observations, this misunderstood fact, about humans-in-water managing the physics of water, is a prime cause of drownings and poor swimming skills reported in SLSA surveys and RLSSA assessments (SLSA 2018; RLSSA 2016b). Repeating what I stated earlier, AUSTSWIM teaching and benchmark skill standards may not be rigorous enough. Parents too, have ‘bought in’ to the rating of the 50 metres distance as the ‘gold standard’ measure of swimming ability, and so they urge swimming instructors, whom they are paying, to get to that outcome as quickly as possible – not realising that they are putting their children in harm’s way, by not spending the time required to explore and play-learn about water physics in order to manage ‘water emotions’ for duration (RLSSA and AUSTSWIM

2010). The authority of swimming organisations and their well promoted standards, cultural beliefs of how to assess swimming ability and the prestige of competition swimmers setting potential ability benchmarks, create a recipe for a dogmatic system, buoyed up by the faith and trust of people who participate in the swimming culture. This is an example of the political hegemony of the paradigm of evidence-based research.

Cultural beliefs are a form of power cyclically reinforced by swimming organisations and agreed to by the ‘customers’ of swimming who not only buy services but also the identity narratives. I celebrate my insight to the widespread use of the EBR paradigm, because it demonstrates the significance of the culture of swimming in Australia – that the many reports created from surveys, experimental programs and polls, are honest attempts to get to the ‘truth’ of why drowning occurs and how to prevent it and attempting to provide respectable, trustworthy, swimming know-how.

I will explain some limitations of EBR methodologies and the paradigm, by drawing further on the arguments of Denzin, Silk, Bush and Andrews (2010), who lay out a reasoned case for the limitations of EBR in social research and what Denzin states, as a spokesperson for qualitative research and the controversies of evidence-based models ‘fighting to gain ascendancy in the evidence-quality-standards discourse’ (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010; Denzin 2009: 139).

Physical culture – physically active body practices, discourses, and subjectivities etc. can only be understood by the way in which they are articulated into a particular set of complex social, economic, political, and technological relationships that comprise the social context.... In the more specific sense, the physical comprises a litany of “events,” the moments of practice that crystallizes diverse temporal and social trajectories through

which individuals negotiate their subjective identities (Frow and Morris 2000: 352) in (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010).

Swimming and water safety are unique domains. The most significant aspect is that swimming and water safety is a human concern, about bodies moving in and managing aquatic environments. Body-beings also ascribe values, meanings, imagination, enact relationships, experience joy, sorrow and other subjectivities to water experiences, articulated into cultural milieus, economic and political structures. Silk and Andrews (2011) call for the production of ‘the type of knowledge that is able to intervene into the broader social world and make a difference’ (Silk and Andrews 2011: 4). I attempt in this study, to ‘make a difference’ by revealing masked power relations in the swimming industry (Atkinson and Gibson 2017).

Despite the dedication and empathetic concern of employees of water safety institutions to reduce drowning accidents, the methods of researching and implementing programs are increasingly locked into a model of research that has greater implications than the RLSSA may realise, the model of evidence based research, which is limiting the effectiveness of the intended outcomes, to reduce drowning. One Swedish masters study of a migrant swimming program (Gilla Vatten) demonstrates a successful way to reduce fear of water and has been taught to over 300 teachers in Sweden 2014-2018 (Kihlberg-Bysted 2016). Elements of the program was shown in two poster presentations by Gould and Nelms at the 2017 World Conference of Drowning Prevention with no interest of organizers, strong interest and curiosity from a small minority/number of participants (WCDP 2017). The program in Sweden and another in Fiji do not use the paradigm of ‘Evidence-based’ but do use forms of evidence to design the principles and demonstrate effectiveness. I co-designed the programs with Milton Nelms but I am not an aggrieved party. I am frustrated



though to be ‘locked out’ of the conversation about drowning because the Brain swim/Gilla Vatten/Nelms Method swimming program paradigm does not conform to dominant methodologies. When I first noticed the repetitious proclamation of EBR in RLSSA research reports, I inquired into the nature of evidence.

EBR is not just a legitimate ‘scientific’ method, it is also a paradigm, possibly even an episteme.

An episteme then, is the accepted and dominant manner of gaining and organising knowledge within a given historical period (Murray et al 2007 in Silk Bush and Andrews 2010 page 109).

In the process of imbuing such power to the episteme of EBR, the method is transformed to a strategic apparatus used in discourses, disciplines and institutions (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010). RLSSA therefore, asserts its authority and power in the swimming industry by the way it gains and organises knowledge, excluding other ways of knowing and ‘finding out’ about how swimming is done and organised.

What is most interesting in identifying the mechanism of EBR used by RLSSA is the unique milieu of swimming and water safety research and education located in health research (and drowning classified as a non-communicable disease) which necessitates the utilisation of EBR to assert RLSSA’s authority – remembering that RLSSA is the Australian Government’s proxy representative with WHO, and primary spokesperson for the Australian Water Safety Council. Additionally, being able to swim and not drown is so important to Australians that scientific methods to find objective truth is vigorously pursued.

Based in the doctrines of logical positivism, and following Murray et al. (2008, p. 273), “this view betrays an almost unshakeable faith in the human capacity for unbiased or objective observation and analysis.”

As alluded to above, in this formulation, science becomes supplanted by ideology shaped by the commercial and moral logics of neoliberalism.<sup>49</sup>

Not only RLSSA frames their research in the frame of EBR – which is also an instrument of neo-liberalism (Silk, Bush, and Andrews 2010). The swimming institution AUSTSWIM uses an instrument of EBR, the concept of the gold standard. AUSTSWIM is positioned as the swimming systems provider, the best systems in the world.

‘In a world first, AUSTSWIM has been accredited against ISO/IEC 17024 for how we train, accredit and licence AUSTSWIM Teachers in Australia. “ [www.austswim.com.au](http://www.austswim.com.au) accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 2017 (bold letters reproduced as published).

AUSTSWIM takes responsibility for swimming education and have won awards for their teaching manual and ISO standard for teaching systems. Education research has also moved into the objectivist paradigm, that wholeheartedly adopts corporate models of efficiency and accountability (Lynch, Grummel, and Devine 2012; Silk and Andrews 2012). There is another problematic issue in understanding and describing swimming culture in Australia and that is multiple meanings of swimming, using ‘swimming’ as a collective noun.

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<sup>49</sup> In short, “neoliberalism” is not simply a name for pro-market policies, or for the compromises with finance capitalism made by failing social democratic parties. It is a name for a premise that, quietly, has come to regulate all we practice and believe: that competition is the only legitimate organising principle for human activity, society is conceived as one big market (Metcalf 2017).

## Swimming and Affect

Swimming in water is something humans are capable of but the aquatic environment is vastly different to land, so being able to swim shows how adaptable humans are to novel physical and emotional situations. When on land, humans are upright in gravity, stabilising through triangulating vestibular senses with firm ground underfoot, and an horizon perceived visually or other cues to horizontality/verticality...Learning to cope with this strangeness occurs through repeated experiences in water, opening up into a unique way of knowing-about-the-world and a resultant sense of control of the physics and the emotions that goes with that sensation (Nelms 2018a, 1997-2001). Some of the euphoria gained from swimming derives from this learned adaptation to release from gravity. Becoming a master of gravity, is the stuff of superheroes.

The swimmer swimming is potentially an especially interesting 'resource' for providing clues to big philosophic questions about cognition and perception, representation and affect. There is something about swimming that is unique for all human experience, that is; the experience of buoyancy and moving through a fluid. 'Giving up' control in gravity, to trust the water to hold you up, can be life changing and therapeutic. Trust in the lifting forces of water can be transferred to other areas of one's life for those feeling 'unsupported' emotionally or physically.

‘I still have trouble believing that you can ‘lean on your lungs’<sup>50</sup> and they will hold you up’ Jenny says. ‘But it requires letting go of distrust first. I find that so powerful for myself and others I have helped learn to swim’ (Conversation with sister Jenny Pryce 2011).

Launceston school teacher Susie Bower, used swimming activities in 2008-2010 to build confidence that was lacking in some of her students who were struggling at school and home. She was adamant that tennis or bushwalking would not have had the same effect as the confidence and self-acceptance gained from guided movements and games in the water.



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<sup>50</sup> The idea of ‘leaning on your lungs’ (rather than your hand) relates to broader concepts about human beings’ *relationship with the water*, a paradigm developed by Bill Boomer, USA in the 1990s and 2000s working with college swimmers in NCAA competitions, at the University of Rochester NY and consulting with USA coaches and swimmers and celebrated NCAA and Olympic coach, Richard Quick at Stanford University. Boomer’s lectures at coach conferences in Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and USA are unpublished. Discussion about and access to some of the digital presentations can be had by contacting his colleague Milton Nelms [miltnelms@gmail.com](mailto:miltnelms@gmail.com) Both Bill Boomer and Milton Nelms introduce novel metaphorical language to express their unconventional ideas to the international culture of swimming education and performance swimming.

**Figure 75 A Bicheno ‘wild ocean’ swimmer turning and pushing off ‘Cod rock’ a 600m destination from the start in Waubs Bay.**

Through the flow of the swimmers’ experience in figure 75, she is interacting and evaluating the environment with her body. Water temperatures, barnacles on the rock under her feet, surging swells around the rock, other human companions, shadow light play, sunshine rays, detached seaweed collisions, small ‘gummy’ draughtboard sharks slinking amongst the attached seaweed, muscle and lung exertion, anticipating coffee and warm shower in another 10 minutes, composing a prayer, admiring the sunrise – perceiving, interanimating, swimming.

Through swimming I appreciate the complexity and beauty of the environment I live in and have a sense of humble gratitude and wonder. I am aware of tides, swell directions, wind strengths, water temperatures, notice washed up detritus on the beaches after storms, all of which provides me with a sense of place, belonging, since moving from another state. Caring relationships fostered through watching out for each other’s safety in the open ocean, extends beyond the water to everyday life events and artistic urges. There are other felt dimensions from which to generate value and meaning, such as some aesthetics of swimming – relaxation, stimulation, metaphorical support, grace, beauty, the ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of harmony-with-nature of ‘being at home in the water’. Swimming aesthetics inspire poetry and song, painting, photography and storytelling. Swimming has psychological and social impact/affect, providing a rich source of stories – everyone I interviewed or chatted with appears to have a swimming story. Telling the stories to me functioned as way to create a social connection with me. I was surprised how many stories were self-deprecating or told as an apologetic confessional ‘I’m not a very good swimmer’.

The affects just described are in addition to the immersive sensory experiences of being in and moving around in the water. Swimming is a bodily experience interanimating with the environment, and as Johnson and others assert – meaning imagination and reason is based in the body, in the mind (Johnson 1987; Clark 1998; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991). Therefore, and with permission from Milton Nelms who originated the notion, I describe and define swimming as an interactional experience, or more succinctly, interanimation, an organism-environment interaction. Representation alone, is an inadequate instrument to understand and study interanimation.

My experiments with emotion maps of Bicheno swimmers, recorded very real experiences and responses to the tracks and traces made by doing ‘wayfaring’ swimming in Waubs Bay. The feelings recorded by the participating mapmakers were very much part of their meaning of the experience and knowledge of the social and physical environment. Johnson (2007) says there is still today a culture of misunderstanding of and prejudice against aesthetics, dismissed or neglected as ‘subjective’ judgement and taste discounting quality, emotion and feelings (Johnson 2007: xi) . For Tim Ingold (2008, 2011) wayfaring becomes a metaphor for human activity and social organisation which he explains in an essay about walking (Ingold 2011). The word walking can be substituted with swimming in this quote.

Movements of all kinds are profoundly social activities which are both perceptive of the world and generative and transformative of it. Walking therefore becomes an act of mobility but also one of education, a practice of enskillment, a way of knowing, a process of storytelling, and a ritual of communion between the human and the more-than-human world. Walking is therefore studied for more than just its empirical value as a kinetic practice (Ingold and Vergunst 2008).

Interanimation is when a person animates an environment and the environment in turn animates the person (Basso 1996: 55). In this process, responses are required moment to moment from whatever information is perceived about one's body, in relation to the sensed forces-response-cycle occurring in wading, floating, moving through and in water.

Swimming movements are both perceptive of the world and generative and transformative of it. When I swim, my perception of the world changes, it is transformed. When I swim, it generates heightened perception of the world. This is 'affect', making a difference, which is what is occurring amongst open water swimming groups such as the Bicheno wild ocean swimmers.

Researchers do experiment with ways to report on affective dimensions of movement. One such study is of Australian children learning to play cricket. The researchers used children's own drawings of their experiences to elicit, through later dialogue, values and meanings of the experiences of learning cricket, which showed changes in some childrens' value systems (for physical activity) and for a sense of self-worth, aspects that are each difficult to measure and quantify (Georgakis and Light 2009).

The meaning of swimming though, has been hijacked by objectivist sciences that can measure effects (results, consequences) while diminishing aesthetics. As a result, conversation about swimming is instrumental, that is, serving to pursue an aim such as a health outcome or drowning prevention, a fitness aim, or a competition goal. A junior swimming certificate will show how far the child can swim and how long they can tread water but doesn't have a section that allows a description/assessment of affects – such as whether the child is still fearful of deep water, enjoys learning to improve, or feels included in a group who could now swim in a deep river without parental supervision. The

certificate becomes the goal, not the skills of swimming know-how - or as Ingold and Vergunst (2008) describes, a practise of enskillment.

### More-than-representation

I have attempted to use the emerging methodology ‘more-than representational’ methods for studying the teaching, reporting/narrating and doing swimming. As an emerging paradigm, it is a challenge to all, to develop it by using it experimentally, as I have in this project with guidance by Vannini (2015) Thrift (2008) Ingold (2000) and (Lorimer 2005).

What I do confidently adhere to, is that humans make meaning of the world through bodily experiences, which is eloquently pointed out by Thorpe and Rinehart (2010) in their article about more-than-representational theory, in studying alternative sports such as surfing and snowboarding.

‘While the symbolic and representational aspects of alternative sport are important and deserve critical academic attention, the alternative sporting body is more than a source of representation; the pleasures and pains, convergences and divergences of physical movement are integral to cultural participation (Thorpe and Rinehart 2010: 1268).

Yet few studies to date have realized the complexities of the emotional, sensual and aesthetic aspects of such experiences. Much like the participants themselves, researchers (ourselves included) often struggle to communicate the lived experiences of alternative sport participants. What, if any, characteristics make the movements of alternative sport unique? How do we convey the sensual, affected, and affecting alternative sport body? Arguably, many of the theoretical and conceptual tools (as well as styles of presentation



and communication) typically adopted by alternative sports scholars do not facilitate such understandings. This problem is not unique to research on alternative sport cultures.

In recent years, scholars from an array of disciplines within the social sciences and humanities (e.g., cultural geography, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, critical studies of sport and physical culture) have expressed concerns that experience is too often reduced to language or discourse or representation. Despite a recent turn to the corporeal, it has been argued that much of this academic work continues to privilege the disciplined, exploited, and controlled body (that is, the body that serves as a ‘screen for the social’). Howson and Inglis<sup>51</sup>, for example, observe that, while sociology may have done much to illuminate the *Körper* – the structural, objectified body – it has yet to come to grips fully with the *Lieb* – the living, feeling, sensing, perceiving and emotional body subject.<sup>52</sup> If embodied meaning is to be found primarily in ‘modes of action or ways of life’, researchers, perhaps, need to ‘rethink some of the basic notions of what a body is and does as an acting, perceiving, thinking, feeling thing’ (Thorpe and Rinehart 2010: 1268-69).

More-than-representational theory not only foregrounds the living, feeling, sensing, perceiving and emotional body subject. It also includes critique, with a goal to identify power imbalances and make change for the better (Thrift 2008). It is an ecological approach which is a scientific paradigm of integrated wholes. An ecological approach is concerned with relationships between living organisms and the physical surroundings.

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<sup>51</sup> Howson and Inglis, ‘Body in Social Theory’; (Howson and Inglis 2001) also see Ford and Brown, *Surfing and Social Theory*

<sup>52</sup> See Kirmayer, ‘Body’s Insistence on Meaning’, 380 (Kirmayer 1992).

Studies of swimming generally lack the rigour of critique and minimise or ignore affect<sup>53</sup> in order to make a social and political difference to people's lives and redress situations where power imbalances occur. Swimming organisational reports tend to tow-the-corporate-line. There are some studies and reports that do use criticality for some issues such as; sex abuse (Smith and Panel 2013; McLellan 2015), poor swimming skills (RLSSA 2017c; Pidgeon et al. 2018), bullying and body control in coaching (McMahon and Penney 2013; Zehntner 2016). There are other issues in swimming culture that need critical inquiry, that I did not have room to discuss. For example swimmers who are discouraged from participating in swimming clubs when they do not fit with the dominant model of swimming training six or more sessions a week. The 'pathway' model of sport swimming directs children to elite competition end goals requiring extreme time commitments (Goldsmith 2017). The pathway model tends to exclude children who only want to swim for recreation a few times a week, be in a club and a squad, but have time for other sports and recreations or unstructured play and family time.

## **Conclusion**

During the four years of research and following google alerts I observed a change, a trend in popular media and published books facilitating conversations about affective, immersive and subjective experiences of swimming. The 'conversations' go beyond the usual instrumentalism of childhood swimming lessons, drowning news reports and abstraction of

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<sup>53</sup> The definition of affect is to make a difference, not to be confused with effect, both a noun and verb which means a result or bringing about a result.

watching or doing sport swimming races. There appears to be a growing interest in an awareness of shared pleasures of swimming, the sort of ‘oh you swim too?’ realisations opening up. For example discovering and acknowledging the significance of special swimming places, which establish a sense of geographical and social place, a sense of belonging to a shared way of life, which is what culture is – shared ways of life (Hall 1996). In the process, as stories about swimming experiences surface, they fuel the thrilling enthusiasm of adults embracing open water swimming and subsequently an emerging social coherence around interanimating with water.

Swimming is undeniably an embodied experience, replete with sensory-kinaesthetic and social affects. Therefore, there are limitations in the uses of representation alone to describe, report and discuss swimming culture and experiences of swimming.

Additionally, an accurate assessment of what is happening in the culture of swimming in Australia, cannot be hijacked by the limitation of evidence-based-research (EBR). EBR is not just a method of gathering and reporting evidence, it is a paradigm serving the purpose of objectivist approaches and scientism, an excessive belief in the power of scientific knowledge and techniques. Other qualitative or subjective knowledge frameworks such as more-than representation could be resources for the Australian Water Safety Council and the institutions contracted to fulfil its aims to reduce drowning, improve water safety and increase swimming participation. It is time to stop managing the impression that Australians are swimmers and actually work on helping more Australians to be actually skilful. Models and frameworks that already exist are available, even though their adoption would require a change in perspective, which is one function of this thesis.

‘Over the past thirty years, a new systemic conception of life has emerged at the forefront of science. New emphasis has been given to complexity, networks and patterns of organisation leading to a novel kind of systemic thinking’ (Capra and Luisi 2014).

Swimming ability in Australia could be better and fewer lives lost to drowning, if approaches to teaching, curriculum content and research could be freed from the restraining shackles of dualistic mind-body-separation, epistemological and methodological frameworks, to the minds and methodologies of people and organisations with an ecological, systems approach.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

“Swimming” in Australia, as a subject of inquiry, consists of an extraordinary variety of avenues to for a researcher to pursue. I elected to use my social position in Australian sporting history and my professional life experiences on which to base the choice of the topics I interrogated, matching questions I had about the culture of swimming. My perspective shapes my interpretation as noted in the type of questions I asked of research participants, the methods of inquiry I employed, and the people and places I chose to observe and document. My qualitative research project has been a disciplined, rigorous, thoughtful and reflective study in the paradigm of critical and interpretive inquiry (Denzin 2009: 153). I have used both broad and specific sets of data to gain trustworthy answers to my research questions (Quinn-Patton 2015; Shenton 2004; Ravitch and Carl 2016).

The aim of this thesis was to deepen the understanding of Australian swimming culture and to potentially open space for other ways of knowing and doing swimming in Australia. Specifically I addressed the following research questions:

- How is swimming represented, practiced and experienced in Australia?
- What factors shape and constrain these representations and practices?
- Could, or should, swimming in Australia be represented and practiced differently?

In this final chapter I make conclusions and recommendations from the thesis. I discuss how insights from this study might enhance swimming organization and instruction in Australia - recognising diverse users and their experiences to ensure inclusive opportunity, and creative development of swimming practices.

### Swimming is significant to Australians

My cultural inquiry of swimming in Australia has shown that there are ample manifestations affirming that swimming is significant to many Australians, and that for some, participating in some form of swimming culture, provides a sense of belonging to a community of practise with a distinctive shared identity. Three notable examples of cultural swimming lore are; knowing what a rip is and secondly understanding the broader meaning of water safety helicopters flying over swimming beaches patrolling for sharks. A third feature of swimming lore is, knowing what a ‘good’ swimmer is.

Swimming is also enjoyed by those with a backyard pool. The patchwork of backyard pools seen from above indicate values for private pool recreation. Public pools are supplied by most municipal councils that are well-managed and attractive places to ‘hang out’ socially as well as swim. Some councils supply indoor aquatic centres which provide patrons with climate controlled spaces with a focus on ‘body projects’ revealing a governmental/public value for swimming health, sport and recreation. Admission costs can be prohibitive for regular use though, so families migrate to free swimming places such as unpatrolled beaches and rivers – where unfortunately, most drowning occurs.

Australian parents are persuaded about the importance of their children knowing how to swim and have a sense of obligation to expose their children to the water - so swimming lessons are considered a rite of life passage but can be expensive for a family with several children. Further evidence of the foregrounding of swimming in the lives of Australians can be seen in water safety messages promoted through schools and in public service announcements. Each of these examples demonstrates that swimming activity and places

to swim, permeate life in Australia, contributing to a sense of cultural identity in national identity discourse. The discourse includes judgement of competence.

Not just swimmers can speak knowledgeably about fast swimmers, but I found that taxi drivers, and other people not involved in a swimming culture have an understanding of swimming sport. Consequently, one characteristic identifying a good swimmer is one who swims fast with discerned 'good technique'.

Recreational beach swimming is associated with sunny outdoor lifestyle and less so with fast swimmers. One discourse in swimming coaching is that surf swimming spoils pool swimming technique. What I am pointing out here is, impressions about people at the beach compared with impressions of people doing fast swimming in pools. Pool swimming is more representative of Australian identity than surf swimming, due to high visibility of Australian swimming champions in international mega-competitions, even though surf ironmen and women can be seen on live television and successfully compete in international championships. The international perception of Australians as aquatic animals may be indeterminate, as the origin of international perception 'Australians are swimmers' may be due to one's perspective as the following interview demonstrates.

It is more surfing and lifeguarding that international people associate with Australians and swimming. Go anywhere in the world and there will be an Australian lifeguard at the local waterhole or pool. The Duke and surfing are also iconic images that associate Australians with water and swimming. It is very easy for an Australian to get a lifeguarding job anywhere in the world because Australians are associated with water and swimming. Pool swimmers are really only seen at the Olympics. Bondi Lifeguard and Home and Away have much more consistent exposure around the world. (Conversation with Craig Fisher, lifeguard, father, swimmer, lifesaving competitor SUP instructor, Margaret River 2019.

Craig helped to design the standards for the pool lifeguard competition for International Life Saving Society in the 1990s ).

### Swimming and standing in water are popular

From my inquiry, I conclude that swimming certainly is a popular activity in Australia, but the sort of swimming being done in reality, is not what is thought/presumed. I question the self-reported statistic of people who say they are competent or very competent swimmers (SLSA 2018). In fact, some basic common sense has not been applied to observations of thousands of people ‘swimming’ when they are just standing in the water. Early in my inquiry, when I noticed this phenomenon of vertical swimming, I asked ‘do people swim when they go swimming?’ This simple rhetorical question derived from intuited impressions, has extensive consequences for pool design, lesson curriculum, parental expectations, self-assessment and water safety protocols.

Vertical swimming indicates a lack of horizontal swimming skills, especially to have the face inside the water and do rhythmic side breathing while maintaining momentum.

Vertical swimming may also indicate a lack of fitness, or avoidance to submerge. Finally, vertical swimming can also disguise the swimmers’ inability to manage over-head depth water. I asked six physical education teachers – do you think boys particularly do fake breathing and cheat on their swimming test to pass?’ Each one affirmed yes with a shrug and a laugh. The benchmark swimming certificate of ‘stage 4’ Swim and Survive involves



a skill set indicating the ability to manage deep water hovering in clothes for 3 minutes and swim a distance of 50 metres with side breathing.

Only 30% of people surveyed in a SLSA data set indicate they are competent swimmers, and 20% of 11 year old children cannot swim 50 metres. I believe the figures are more woeful than these. There will be clusters of regions of swimmers who are highly competent and other areas that show more non-swimmers than swimmers. Questions must be asked why these Australians are not better swimmers. Are children getting enough exposure to learning and practising? Is the curriculum failing children with fewer hours of movement experiences and subsequent poor physical literacy than previous generations? Are extreme/adventure/casual sports and activities diverting children away from fundamental swimming lesson skill acquisition? Is the pathway structure of youth swimming sport a barrier to ongoing participation? Does there need to be another type of participation product post-swimming lessons, but not with a focus on racing? Are teachers passing children without the requisite skills, in order to satisfy administrative quotas<sup>54</sup>?

#### Lack of criticality in self-regulated industry

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<sup>54</sup> Bev Annersley from Margaret River said in 2016 that she was aware of a supervisor in the 1990s in the Western Australian education department demanding more numbers of children be signed off as passing their stages, to fulfil expected quotas. The supervisor did not inquire what was the cause of fewer numbers becoming swimmers, as they were just expected to show performance accountability, not critique the system (Ball 2003).

There appears to be an absence of critical inquiry about many aspects of swimming culture and subsequent lack of interrogation of culturally held beliefs. For example the belief in Australia's prowess in swimming races and the popularity of swimming, is causally explained by a deterministic argument; Australians are swimmers because we are 'surrounded by sea'. I have heard the same assertion made in other island states as a rationale for why children should learn to swim. "'we' or 'they' should learn or be able to swim because we/they are surrounded by water".

The theme of poor or limited critique is the tenor of the swimming industry and the culture. I have some unexplained discomfort about the intractable problem of drowning and the inadequacy of existing approaches to solve the dilemma. I hope my research project contributes to knowledge about water safety and drowning prevention. I will certainly continue to experiment with potential solutions and document further insights beyond this more general study of swimming culture. Even though there is great concern about preventing water accidents and providing opportunities to swim, there seems to be a manufactured atmosphere that is dictated by the performativity requirements of neo-managerial structures (Ball 2003). Dedicated managers and workers within the swimming industry have to continually self-report to justify their jobs and account for their work, especially in any not for profit institutions. As a result, they defensively maintain the status quo (through invoking the paradigm of evidence based research as a trump card) inevitably avoiding any disruptive innovation (Beckman and Cooper 2004).

### Swimming is more-than-fun

Repeating the statement about research process, and how to identify features of the swimming culture: I had the challenge that I needed to shape the methodology to a

problem or feature that revealed itself in the research process, not have a research method shape the way the problem could be investigated. So much so, that features revealed such as vertical swimming and slogans are problematic when designing solutions to concerns about drowning and poor swimming skills. They are examples of commonly accepted but unquestioned components of the culture of swimming.

Representing swimming as fun is another limiting problematic feature I identified in cultural discourse. I have been involved with adults who have gained agency through learning to swim as an adult, finding existential meaning in relationships, work and personal empowerment. The aspect of agency and existential meaning derived from swimming is downplayed in dominant representations of swimming. Agency is having the ability to be *affective* (Lorimer 2005: 84). The trope that sport develops moral character needs to be examined in the light of novel ideas of agency, a more nuanced understanding of human psychology and social development than a moralistic notions embed in old ideas of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> C ‘muscular Christianity’ – developing moral character for the sake of nation and class (Winterton and Parker 2009; Ingold 2001). Swimming is so much more than the ‘funnest sport’ or distracting fun. Swim schools commonly entice customers with a sales pitch of lessons that are fun. Swimming Australia invoked fun with the superlative tag line ‘super serious fun’ for the 2015 BHP Billiton Aquatic Super series in Perth.



**Figure 76 Advertisement for 2015 BHP Billiton Aquatic Super Series swimming competition, invoking fun to entice swimmers to the sport and spectators to watch the event.**



**Figure 77** Screenshot 2015 from a USA swimming campaign promoting swimming in the USA as #thefunnest sport. USA Swimming and Swimming Australia share similar marketing strategies to entice new members. Australia Swims campaign is the Australian version.

There is room for practising swimmers to talk about their own immersive swimming experience, tell their story, their experience (Riessman 2008; Sacks 2012). Dominant storytelling about swimming uses instrumental language and narratives about passing a test, doing a distance, a time, or the number of kilojoules used. Swimming can be a distracting pleasure for some or a functional life-saving skill or a door to aquatic recreation and employment (Sherr 2012). A growing interest in the affordances of *blue spaces* sheds new light on why people want to swim, not just why they should swim (Foley 2017; Fjortoft 2004; Couper 2017). Existential studies of physical culture practises might examine how diffuse existential suffering is reproduced through sports exercise and physical activity: or by contrast, how recognising and embracing the absurdity of meaning in any physical culture practise might actually produce radical and authentic moments of human pleasure (Atkinson and Gibson 2017: 158).

## Appendix

### Biography May 2019

Shane Elizabeth Gould AO MBE

Born in Sydney in 1956 with a childhood in Fiji and Australia and briefly California. I have 3 sisters and lived with both parents in suburban cities and towns. My father Ron Gould was involved with marketing in the travel industry and had a high value for international experiences via travel, providing worldly perspectives. My mother Shirley Gould was a social worker and interested in Christian, Buddhist and New Age theology.

During my teenage years when I was an elite swimming athlete, my parents guided me through the maze of media, and public events with the ethic of 'be respectful and listen to other people's interesting stories'.

I was exposed to philosophy and Christian ethics through a Catholic High School in Mountain View California 1973, which ignited a life-long curiosity about great ideas and ethical viewpoints; for example, I read *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, while on a surfing road trip across Australia when I was 18. I was later exposed to philosophy and feminist theory through Murdoch University undergraduate studies mentored by Dr.Patsy Hallen and later through Uniting Church and Catholic womens groups in Perth. My professor of environmental studies at Murdoch University was Prof Peter Newman a sustainable cities expert. I applied my convictions about living sustainably by living simply on a farm for 22 years as a part of the 1970s-1980s 'back to the land' movement. I raised 4 children (and now have 6 grandchildren) and engaged with my local community, while developing teaching abilities, farming, building, gardening and animal management skills. I learned via books, short courses and hands on workshops, including Certificate courses in work place training and assessment and documentary filmmaking.

From 1998 I re-engaged with professional sport and was involved with the Opening Ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, by carrying the torch and other associated commercial appearances. I also established a swimming improvement business, teaching adults in four countries. A chance encounter with the great thinker Edward de Bono, who coined the notion of lateral thinking, stimulated me to pursue possibilities of different ways to teach and do swimming.

Ultimately I came to a series of questions that I have addressed in this thesis, studied at Victoria University, Melbourne. The doctorate was an extension of curiosity after completing a masters degree in the geography department of University of Tasmania in 2010 in which I focused on swimming pools as a public open space. Dr Peter Hay and Dr Aidan Davison were my mentors. In a second masters degree in the Academy of Arts at UTAS completed in 2012, I enquired about how swimming was represented and communicated in swimming images in contemporary art. I also have another connection to the Olympic movement through being a representative of a cultural committee through the world Olympians association.

I continue to make public comments when asked, about the state of swimming and swimming culture in my public position as an Australian swimming legend and now as a public intellectual. Representation continues to be a theme in my life, added to by an appearance on a reality TV show in 2018, Australian Survivor, filmed in Fiji, where I became the season 3 winner and the sole survivor. Swimming cultures in the western pacific, particularly Fiji as a case study, are of specific interest, which I intend to document, once my doctoral studies and associated writing and film projects are completed.

## Interview questions



### Sample Questions for adult interviewees, working in swimming industry.

Thankyou for agreeing to answer my questions.

1. What is your role in your organisation?
2. What are some swimming goals of your organisation? If you cannot speak on behalf of your organisation, then what are the swimming goals of your job ?
3. What do you think is meant by *Australia is a nation of swimmers*?
4. Do you think that swimming is a *popular activity in Australia*? What gives you this impression?
5. Can you notice any changes in swimming practices or what people do in the water since you first became involved in the swimming industry?
6. When you go to the water, what do you do ? Do you swim?
7. Do you have any significant stories or anecdotes about your swimming experiences, that you would like to share ?



Interview questions at school, semi structured group interview.

**Even if you cannot swim or don't like to go swimming, I would like to know your feelings and opinions.**

1. When you last went swimming, (when was that?) what did you do?
2. What is your favourite swimming place?
3. Tell me about what you enjoy most about going swimming?
4. What stops you from going swimming or getting in to the water?
5. Do you have any bad memories of swimming ?
6. Do you do any swimming sports ?
7. If you compete in swimming races, how often do you train and how many hours a week maximum and average would you be training?
8. How would you improve your experience of PE swimming or the organisation of PE swimming sessions?
9. Do you ever get told off when you are at a swimming place? Do you think it is fair?
10. What is the best feeling you have when you are in the water? This may be the same answer as question 3 or it may be different.



Ethics permission and consent forms

**Invitation to participate in research.**

**Do you want to be involved in a SWIMMING RESEARCH PROJECT ?  
in June 2015**

**..... I'm looking for people who are 13 or 14 years old .....**

I'd like to know stories of your swimming experiences and what swimming means to you. If you can't swim, or don't like swimming, I'd like to know about that too.

This project is being done by Mrs Shane Gould as part of a PhD study at Victoria University, Melbourne.

The study is asking questions about what young people in Australia like and don't like, about the popular activity of swimming. It involves being interviewed as a group and being photographed while swimming at usual swimming places (beach, pool or river) on a weekend.

If you are interested in knowing more about the research and want to be involved, please fill in your name age and class on the tear off the part of this letter below.

Yes I want to come to the talk by Shane Gould on \_\_\_\_\_ to get more information.

At a room at \_\_\_\_\_ school, to be advised

-----**Cut off here and bring bottom note back to school office** -----

YES I want to come to the talk by Shane Gould on \_\_\_\_\_ for less than 20 minutes to get more information, about becoming involved in a research project about swimming in Australia.

Name

Age

Class

Date

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into the popular activity of swimming in Australia.

**The project aims** to study the popular activity of swimming in Australia. As the student researcher, I have narrowed down the investigation to one group of Australians, 14 year old young people. I already know that different individuals and groups 'do swimming' in many different ways. What is not known is what swimming means to young people, if anything, what attitudes they may have towards swimming (or not swimming), and if they find pleasure or beauty in doing and being around swimming places. I also want to know if they feel included or excluded from swimming. This research involves interviews, photographing and watching 14 year olds when they are in and around a swimming place. Swimming places could be a public pool, a river or a beach.

**Procedures** You will be asked to read and listen to an explanation of the research project to become informed about the study then give your written consent if you agree to participate. You will be asked to make yourself available to be interviewed at school and make time to go to a swimming location to swim or be around the water. While there you will be watched and have notes written about what you are doing. You may be also photographed. You will be asked to participate in a discussion about photographs taken and printed onsite.

**Risks** There are very few risks involved, but breach of privacy and confidentiality is one possibility, and another could be from recalling bad memories or an uncomfortable experience which could cause distress.

### **CERTIFICATION BY Research Participant**

I, NAME of Participant

of ( town name)

I certify that my parents/guardians have provided written consent and I am voluntarily giving my assent to participate in the study titled :

Swimming in Australia, a bigger picture: 14 years olds experiences in rivers, oceans and pools

being conducted at Victoria University by Dr Brent McDonald Chief Investigator

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Mrs Shane Gould (student researcher) [shane.gould@vu.edu.au](mailto:shane.gould@vu.edu.au) +61 0419716190

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Voice recorded Interviews
- Being photographed in and around swimming places in the water, above the water and from the land
- Group discussions of printed photos taken of me and or my fellow students swimming or around swimming places
- Video and voice recorded discussions of the photographs

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the supervising researchers

Dr Brent McDonald +61 3 9919 4656 [brent.mcdonald@vu.edu.au](mailto:brent.mcdonald@vu.edu.au)

Or Dr Fiona McLachlan +61 3 9919 4225 [fiona.mclachlan@vu.edu.au](mailto:fiona.mclachlan@vu.edu.au)

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email [Researchethics@vu.edu.au](mailto:Researchethics@vu.edu.au) or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Letter to principal of a school

14<sup>th</sup> May 2015

To the Principal of

Dear

My name is Shane Gould and I am writing to you as a student of Victoria University where I am doing a PhD study project 2014-2017, about the popular activity of swimming in Australia.

It is a qualitative social study in the school of Sport and Exercise Science.

The title is *Swimming in Australia, a bigger picture: experiences of 14 year olds in rivers oceans and pools.*

I am hoping that you may be able to assist me, by helping me to access students at your school in grade 8 or 9 who are around 14 years of age. This is the age group I am focussing on for my field research of semi-structured interviews, observations of swimming activities and onsite discussion of photos taken while at a swimming site. I would like to hear stories from people who don't like to or can't swim as well as those who like to play, surf, race or hang out around water.

If you are amenable to assisting my research, it would involve you in two phases.

**Phase 1**

- Your time to read and consider my request and share it with your staff
- If in agreement in principle, read more about the project and procedures and confirm potential dates
- Print and send out an information paper I supply you with, to students and parents in year 8 or 9 with an indication of interest return form.
- Collect indication of interest forms, count them and advise me by email or text message

I would then confirm my physical presence at the school in Launceston to give a verbal explanation to students, distribute and collect informed consent and conduct the research interviews. Observations sessions at swimming sites would be out of school hours.

**Phase 2**

- I would work with you to schedule an information session at your school for me to deliver in person and to hand out informed consent forms
- Facilitate the collection of consent forms with a box I provide at the school
- Provide a room or space at the school for me to conduct semi- structured group interviews with assenting participants
- Receive updates of the progress of the research

I would like to do the fieldwork in late June before the end of term. I reside in Bicheno, TAS

*This is an academic project not a media project, nor is it attached to my celebrity/fame.*

I look forward to hearing from you by email or phone

Sincerely

Mrs Shane Gould

**‘Focus group’ post swim, onsite interview schedule**

**Eliciting stories from participants, cued from photographs taken at a swimming site.**

Can you please look through these photos and pick one that you want to tell me about?

1. What is going on in this photo?
2. Why are you doing that?

Pick another photo please.

3. What is going on in this photo?
4. Why are you doing that?
5. What do you like about being here at the swimming place? Such as being out of the water or in the water?
6. What have I missed in the photos of things that I chose to take?
7. Are adults too bossy here with too many rules or not enough rules ?
8. Is there something important to you about swimming that a photograph could show? Or do you need words to express it?
9. If you weren't swimming now what would be doing instead?
10. Do you have any swimming stories dangerous, funny, sad or ordinary that you'd like to tell ?

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