

**Submission to Newcastle City Council  
on Council Draft Delivery Plan 2013-2017**

**Entry Pricing of Inland Pools**

5<sup>th</sup> June 2013

The Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign (SMSPC) is a community group that was established in 2007, to defend and promote the Mayfield Swimming Centre, when the Pool Service Delivery Model of that year first proposed its closure.

Since then we have engaged constructively with Council on many levels to advocate on behalf of Mayfield Pool, and Council's other inland pools. We have conducted a series of meetings with council staff where we have communicated the community's aspirations for the pool, and offered our assistance - with a range of new ideas and initiatives for pool management, and with financial analysis.

We have also contributed significant time and effort to promoting the pool's infrastructure and culture, encompassing support for solar heating; the design and installation of the community mosaic; provision of musical entertainment; and organising a range of special community events.

For enquiries on this submission, please contact Stephen Clarke on (0435) 543 683.

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This document is footnoted with active web links wherever needed to support statements made. If you only have a print copy, you can more easily follow the links if you download a copy from

<http://www.mayfieldpool.com/docs/SmspNccDeliveryPlanJun2013.pdf>



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**Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign**  
A Community Group Supporting Community Resources  
[www.mayfieldpool.com](http://www.mayfieldpool.com)

## Introduction

The primary reason given by Council in 2007 for the proposal to close Mayfield Pool, along with increasing costs, was the declining attendances. The same reasons are being given today regarding the current proposal to close Stockton and Beresfield Pools.

Declining attendances should indeed be of great concern. Attendance levels are the critical indicator of value delivered to the community through these significant public assets.

And yet, in the last five years, Council has performed no analysis or market testing to determine the impact on attendance of its own entry pricing policy. While prices have increased sharply over this period, no serious consideration has been given to the effect that these rising barriers to attendance are having.

The fact that entry pricing must impact on attendance is easy for everyone to grasp. We all tolerate price increases to a certain point, before we change behaviour - either by switching to a cheaper alternative (if we can find one) or by consuming less (if we can't). SMSPC believes that entry pricing for Newcastle's inland pools has crossed this threshold, resulting in a wide range of adverse consequences.

These include retarding or preventing swimming safety skills in children; reducing fitness and exercise levels throughout the population; increasing the incidence of lifestyle diseases such as obesity and diabetes; reducing the mobility of the elderly and disabled; reducing social cohesion; reducing the engagement of youth in constructive activity; and the active fostering of disadvantage in Newcastle's less affluent suburbs.

The severity of all these issues could be moderated with assets that Council already owns, that are already largely paid for through direct subsidy from ratepayers, if Council was less determined to claw back the relatively small percentage of operating costs that the entry fees actually contribute.

Of equal concern is that, since Council has never conducted market testing, it has no idea of the price point at which it should be operating to maximise the value of aquatic services delivered to the community, relative to cost, by optimising the utilisation of its pools. It has simply raised prices each year, on the assumption that patrons have an unlimited capacity and willingness to pay more and more for the same service.

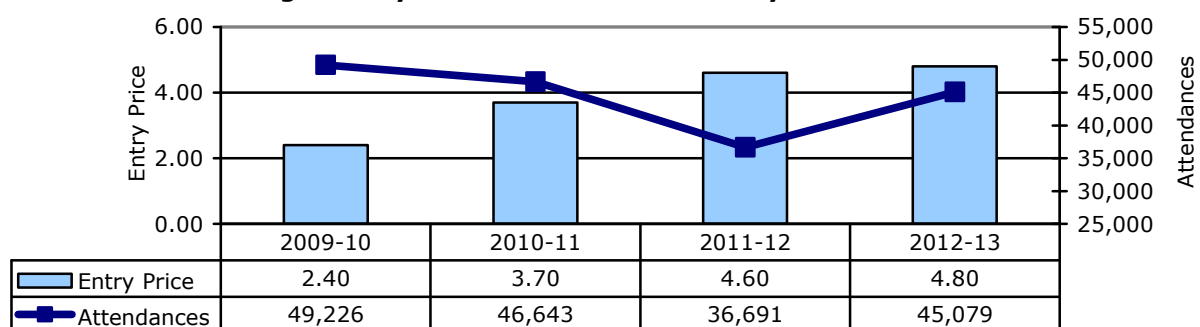
Of course, this is not the case at all. Many people are excluded entirely by their limited means. Others are forced by high prices to use the pools less than they would like to; or to travel some distance to swim at the beach, or remarkably, the ocean baths, which Council provides at no entry charge, despite having greater operating costs than the inland pools.

This is not abstract conjecture. We are a local community group, and are well aware of the impact that high pricing is having on the pool usage patterns of ourselves, and a wide range of others in the area.

For the inland pools, Council offers a complicated pricing regime of senior and pensioner discounts, full and half season passes. There is no discount offered for children or students, so the average working family must pay full price for all members (unless four or more are entering together).

For simplicity, the rest of this submission will use the full price Single Entry at Mayfield Swimming Centre as the benchmark for comparison. Let's start by reviewing how this has changed over the last few years.

**Fig 1. Entry Price vs Attendance at Mayfield Pool**



This chart gives us immediate insight into the price sensitivity of the pool's patrons. The entry price has increased steeply over this period, doubling in three years. Most of this occurred in the first two season intervals depicted, and as we can see, it was accompanied on both occasions with corresponding steep declines in attendance.

The unprecedented long and hot summer we have just experienced<sup>1</sup>, together with a relatively small seasonal price increase, has allowed attendance levels to partially recover in 2012-13.

However, the constraints that price barriers at these levels are imposing on the pool's capacity to operate efficiently and fulfil its charter as a public asset, should not be dismissed by anyone with a genuine interest in good public management. In the absence of market testing, we simply don't know what they are.

Thankfully at least, Council is not proposing to further raise entry prices in 2013-14, but intends to keep them at the existing \$4.80 level, before resuming marginal price increases in future years.

Nevertheless, SMSPC believes a much better deal is possible for Newcastle residents and ratepayers alike, through progressive thinking, and the willingness to experiment and rethink the underlying cost/benefit reality in which our inland pools are operating.

The following sections of this submission explore the range of unfortunate circumstances and consequences - for the Newcastle community and Council's operations - arising out of current pool entry pricing policy.

We conclude by submitting, for Council's consideration, an alternate pricing strategy that we believe will have minimal or zero effect on overall revenue collected. A strategy which offers great promise to increase the value delivered to the community, while returning critical market data to Council to help guide management of the pools towards a long-term sustainable future.

## Current Pricing Policy Contravenes Strategic Plan

Newcastle City Council has prepared, in the form of the Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan, a comprehensive and worthwhile framework to guide long-term decision-making.

That Council aspires to achieve the many social objectives outlined in the strategic plan is highly commendable. The stated objectives have such self-evident merit that it is difficult to imagine that any enlightened democratic government would not embrace them with a deep commitment.

And this makes it all the more puzzling to discover the extensive conflicts between the aspirations of the Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan, and the reality of Council's current pool entry pricing policy.

Presented below are verbatim excerpts from the strategic plan, followed by commentary highlighting how the current price barriers are entirely contrary to the stated objectives.

### Vibrant and Activated Public Places

Objectives	Council Says
3.1 Public places that provide for diverse activity and strengthen our social connections. 3.2 Culture, heritage and place are valued, shared and celebrated. 3.3 Safe and activated places that are used by people day and night.	For a place to be vibrant and successful it must be meaningful, engaging and accessible to all. Increasing the accessibility of our public places for people of all ages and abilities increases the levels of activity and vibrancy of a place and has positive health benefits.

Over the last three seasons, the accessibility of our inland pools has been dramatically reduced through the imposition ever more prohibitive price barriers.

For our kids, this has meant a restriction of opportunities to learn and practise swimming, to have fun with their mates after school in a healthy outdoor environment, and to get exercise for their growing bodies.

<sup>1</sup> <http://theconversation.com/hot-summer-yes-the-hottest-12505>

For our adults, this has made it more difficult to stay active, fit and well, and to stave off endemic lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and obesity. High entry prices need long visits to justify the expense, and are entirely inappropriate for the 20 minutes per day exercise regimes that many would like to adopt.

Mayfield Pool is a beautiful grassy environment that has great potential for “place-making” and becoming a venue with “activity” and “vibrancy” that acts as a unique cultural hub for Newcastle.

SMSPC has demonstrated this repeatedly by providing entertainment under the banner of Sound Waves At Mayfield Pool. There is always deep appreciation from patrons for having live music in this idyllic setting. The concept of community performance has great prospects to showcase local talent in a relaxed outdoor setting which is not associated with alcohol.

But if we are asking musicians to play for free, we need to offer them at least an audience in lieu of payment. And the high entry price barriers at Mayfield Pool relentlessly counteract our promotional efforts to build an audience culture around these events.

In direct contradiction of the objectives of the strategic plan, entry pricing policy is in fact undermining the efforts of the community to add activity and vibrancy to this valued public place.

### Caring and Inclusive Community

Objectives	Council Says
4.1 A welcoming community that cares and looks after each other. 4.2 Active and healthy communities with physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. 4.3 A creative, culturally rich and vibrant community.	We recognise the importance of mental, physical and spiritual health to our overall wellbeing. We would like more activities and facilities for our ageing population. Younger people are looking to engage in a range of activities with more opportunities in neighbourhood centres.

Our inland pools promote mental health through the provision of relaxed and comfortable public spaces. They promote physical health through the ideal exercise of swimming, which works the whole body, while being gentle on joints and avoiding injury.

They promote spiritual health by bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds, in clean, friendly environments, peerless amongst Council’s other properties. Not to mention promoting public safety - for all, but in particular for our kids - by allowing them to learn and practice the essential life skill of swimming, with their friends, in a fun and supervised environment.

And yet Council, in recent years, has seemed hell-bent on closing our inland pools down, or denying access to them by raising prohibitive price barriers.

At least price concessions are offered to our seniors, but even they are being deprived of the potential of the pools to support value-added activities, such as aquarobics and yoga classes, which would benefit them greatly.

Such classes typically cannot charge more than \$10 per session, so private instructors need regular and sizeable groups to cover their time and administrations costs and their enterprise viable. But the imposition of Council’s high entry fees on top, and the restrictive impact these have on potential class attendance, undermine the whole proposition.

We all want our young people to have opportunities to engage in a range of activities. Mayfield Pool is a neighbourhood centre where this has been happening for decades through swimming; through sports such as soccer and basketball; and many other activities that have been organised, using the pool as a venue. At Mayfield Pool, young people engage in constructive activity and mix with society of all ages.

There is real potential to establish a volunteer lifesaving program at the pool, giving our young people the opportunity to make a significant contribution through civic duty, while reducing operating costs. But the high entry price barriers are currently excluding many young people from our pool, and working against the development of a culture that would support this type of program.

In direct contradiction of the objectives of the strategic plan, entry pricing policy is in fact restricting the health benefits that the inland pools can deliver, and undermining their potential to engage the community – whether young or old - in positive and rewarding activity that promote personal and social wellbeing.

## Open and Collaborative Leadership

Objectives	Council Says
<p>7.1 Integrated, sustainable long-term planning for Newcastle and the Region.</p> <p>7.2 Considered decision-making based on collaborative, transparent and accountable leadership.</p> <p>7.3 Active citizen engagement in local planning and decision-making processes and a shared responsibility for achieving our goals.</p> <p>7.4 The City of Newcastle: A local government organisation of excellence.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for genuine and representative community engagement in local decision-making. Engage and partner with the community in achieving Newcastle 2030.</p> <p>Widespread community involvement in local planning makes good sense for the design and use of assets and services. Our services are better suited to community needs and achieved with efficient use of resources.</p>

Over the last three years, the Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign has repeatedly expressed concern to Newcastle City Council over the increasing entry price barriers being imposed on our inland pools.

SMSPC has repeatedly requested access to pool operational data in order to contribute commentary and analysis to the ongoing dialogue surrounding management of pools.

We acknowledge the efforts made by council staff in the last year to provide some of this data, but there are still omissions preventing SMSPC from making a fully informed contribution to these local planning decisions.

In particular, we are still seeking a response to sections 1a, 1d, 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a, 6b, 6c, 7a, 7b, 7c and 7d of our Request to Newcastle City Council for Information On Pools and Public Facilities<sup>2</sup>, dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Please contact us for an additional copy of this request if needed.

Through years of constructive effort and engagement, SMSPC has established itself as the voice of the community regarding pool service delivery and entry pricing. This submission document is only the latest example of our ongoing endeavours.

SMSPC is saying to Council, clearly and unequivocally, that inland pool entry prices are too high. We have been saying this for a sustained period of time. We believe that current pool pricing policy constitutes neglect of community needs, and prevents the efficient utilisation of these public assets.

We hope that this time, Council will abide by the objectives of its own strategic plan, and finally give serious consideration to what the community is saying.

## Current Pricing Policy Actively Promotes Disadvantage

Being mindful of the wide-ranging negative impacts of high price barriers on the community, and the benefits to be gained by lowering them, SMSPC ran a campaign, at the 2012 Council Election, to advocate for a free entry policy for Newcastle’s inland pools.

This campaign attracted widespread support from candidates, the media and the public at the time, and resulted in a total of six councillors who were sufficiently convinced of its merits to raise a motion in support of this progressive concept at the Ordinary Council Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> November 2012. They eloquently expressed, at the time, the wide range of practical, operational and social justice benefits it would have.

Throughout this debate, those opposing free entry to inland pools have characterised the concept as financially reckless - that Council can’t possibly afford to provide costly services to the community without expecting them to make a user-pays contribution.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mayfieldpool.com/docs/RequestForInfoNov2011.pdf>

And yet, they make no such reference towards our two ocean baths, long operated as free services to the public, even when they have much greater operating costs.

## **Ocean Baths And Inland Pools**

When comparing the ocean baths to the inland pools, the annual costs are only part of the story. Ocean baths have much higher capital costs, because their buildings and plant, operating in a highly corrosive environment, need regular renovation and replacement.

The renovation of the Newcastle baths completed in 2009 carried a cost of \$4.5 million<sup>3</sup> - a blowout of 45% over the figure that Council had estimated when it began the project only a year earlier.

And every so many years, this exercise needs to be repeated as the effects of sea, salt and wind take their inevitable toll. Even now, Council is making a substantial capital allocation in budget section 3.1.1 for similar repairs to Merewether baths.

By contrast, Council's net annual subsidy to Mayfield Pool is \$335,000 – to cover all expenses including staff, power, water, chemicals, building maintenance, depreciation and corporate administration charges.

That such disproportionate Council expenditure is directed towards coastal swimming facilities is surprising, when one considers that residents in these areas already have endless beaches available to them, right on their doorsteps. That these Council facilities are also exempt from the burden of the user-pays expectation which afflicts our inland pools is truly astonishing.

## **Advantage And Disadvantage**

The coastal suburbs are among the most affluent in Newcastle. Recent census data<sup>4</sup> reveals that both Merewether and Newcastle - where the ocean baths are located – are high on the list of suburbs with greatest proportion of high-income households.

The same data reveals that Mayfield and Wallsend – where two of our inland pools are located - are high on the list of suburbs with greatest proportion of low-income households.

So we have a bizarre situation. Council is spending handsomely to provide a surfeit of free swimming options in suburbs whose residents are most able to pay entry fees. At the same time, Council is refusing to provide any free swimming options in suburbs whose residents are least able to pay entry fees.

Instead, it has raised entry price barriers for inland pools to levels that are prohibitive for many residents, caused these magnificent public assets to be underutilised, and then repeatedly threatened their closure. This destructive and short-sighted approach is having real, negative impacts on communities who should be entitled to benefit from the inland pools in their neighbourhoods.

Too many of our kids are not learning to swim, either well or at all. Too many of our kids are spending their childhoods in front of screens instead of exercising through healthy activity. Too many of our young people are suffering from social alienation, through lack of opportunity to integrate positively with broader society, leading to costly vandalism and antisocial behaviour, and the diminishing of our community.

All of our aquatic facilities are powerful and positive forces in combating these profound social ills.

## **Coastal Kids And Inland Kids**

For a child in Mayfield or Wallsend to get together with friends at their local pool after school each day costs \$24.00 per week – and more on the weekends. A child in Newcastle or Merewether can have this same experience at absolutely no charge, thanks to Council's one-sided largesse.

While Council offers half and full-season passes for inland pools, the savings are marginal, even questionable. Single full-season passes were \$272.00 in 2012-13. A child would need to visit an inland pool each weekday

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/479676/cost-blow-out-ocean-baths-repair-bill-hits-45m/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/351010/hunters-richest-residents-revealed/>

for twelve consecutive weeks before they would start to see any savings at all – prior to that, they will have paid an even higher entry price per visit than the \$4.80 hurdle they must jump for single entries.

And in any case, those who most need to be offered discounts cannot take advantage of season passes, because they do not have the excess cash flow required to make upfront payment, or cannot accept the risk (even likelihood) that they will be unable to sustain the high levels of usage needed to benefit from them.

This whole dilemma, of course, is one that residents in Newcastle and Merewether are mercifully spared, through Council's benign and preferential attitude towards their local swimming facilities, which are provided at no charge, though costing more.

Naturally, all Council facilities are provided for the benefit of all its residents. But those who live close to these facilities are the disproportionate beneficiaries, an effect which is strongly magnified by such inconsistent entry pricing policy.

It is much more important in low SES neighbourhoods that the local public swimming facilities should be accessible, because residents in these areas have low private pool ownership, and lower access to private transport, limiting their ability to benefit from facilities in other areas.

Council should be striving to manage our aquatic facilities with the objective of rational allocation of resources for the greatest possible benefit. It's hard to escape the conclusion that it would make more sense to charge for ocean baths, make the inland pool free, and have coastal dwellers travel inland to enjoy them.

## **Current Pricing Policy Prevents Efficient Utilisation**

Quite apart from any considerations of fairness, equity or social justice, there are compelling reasons to believe that Council's inland pool pricing policy is broken, purely in terms of responsible financial management.

Council has a duty to deliver to the community the maximum value of services that can be achieved from any given level of expenditure, with a minimum of waste. The Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign believes that Council is falling a long way short of this with their current approach to managing inland pools.

This becomes very clear when we consider the financial equations that govern public swimming pools.

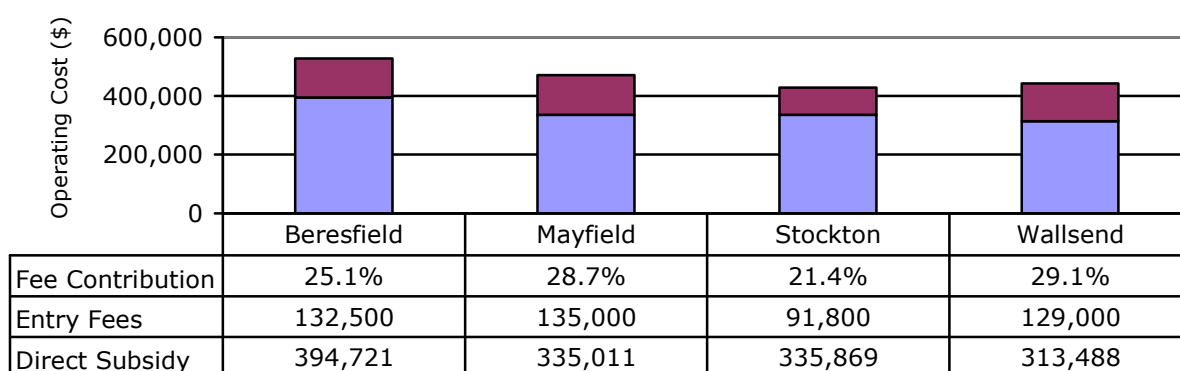
### **Public Pool Financial Equations**

First, let us consider that pools are fixed cost assets. The major cost components are lifeguards and administration services, power, water, chemicals, and machinery and building maintenance. These costs are essentially unchanged whether we have only a single attendance at each pool for the whole season or 100,000 attendances.

The key to efficient operation of swimming pools is to achieve the maximum patronage (as measured by the seasonal attendance count) for that fixed investment. But as demonstrated earlier, the price sensitivity of patrons means that entry fees – particularly high entry fees – run entirely counter to this objective.

Next, let us consider that pools are only able to achieve a marginal cost recovery. Even with the high entry fee regime currently in force under Council's user-pays policy, the contribution that entry fees make towards the operating costs of Beresfield, Mayfield, Stockton and Wallsend pools is less than 25%.

**Fig 2. Budget Contribution of Entry Fees towards Operating Costs 2011-12**



It should be noted that the budgeted revenue from entry fees was not achieved at any of these pools in the 2011-12 season. In fact, analysis conducted by SMSPC<sup>5</sup> suggests that Council actually lost entry fee revenue overall that year, because the price hikes it introduced had such a severe impact on attendance.

These are the financial circumstances of public pools everywhere. People want to use them, but misguided attempts at cost recovery have the side-effect of suppressing patronage, which prevent these facilities from delivering their full potential of value to the community.

Newcastle City Council spends ratepayer funds to provide excellent aquatic facilities, and then wastes this investment, allowing significant spare capacity in these facilities to stand idle, locked away behind artificial price barriers which alienate them from a patron community who would use them much more, if they could only afford to. And all for the sake of a minimal clawback of operating costs.

### Entry Pricing And Attendance

Council has no idea of the extent of the negative effect that entry prices are having on inland pool utilisation, because it has never conducted market testing with an alternate pricing regime. So, to explore the potential gains from more efficient management of our inland pools, we must rely on estimates.

SMSPC has had many discussions on exactly this topic, with a wide range of community members, over the last couple of years. Our findings are that not everyone's behaviour would be changed to same extent.

Those who can comfortably afford the existing entry fees will be unaffected. However there are many who would like to visit a pool every day, but at the moment are only visiting occasionally, on weekends, when they can spend enough time to justify the expense.

Overall, SMSPC estimates that Council could achieve a 50% increase in attendance if it were to cut entry pricing in half, and a 150% increase in attendance if it were to implement free entry for inland pools.

### Subsidy Per Entry

SMSPC believes that subsidy-per-entry, representing Council's contribution towards the benefit that an individual derives from a visit to an aquatic facility, should be the benchmark for the efficient delivery of aquatic services.

Subsidy-per-entry is a metric already widely used within Council, and here, we find ourselves completely in agreement with Council's goal of minimising the subsidy-per-entry, to ensure that aquatic services are being delivered as efficiently as possible.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mayfieldpool.com/docs/PoolRevenueImpact2012.pdf>



So let's consider how subsidy-per-entry is affected by the alternative pricing regimes proposed above, assuming that we are able to achieve the estimated increases (50% for half price, 150% for free entry) in attendance.

The table below explores these scenarios for Mayfield Pool. Note that Entry Fee and Attendance figures are based on projected actual data for 2012-13 as supplied by Council. The rest are based on budget data for 2011-12, these being the most recent figures available to us.

	<b>Current Pricing</b>	<b>Half Price</b>	<b>Free Entry</b>
Entry Fee	4.80	2.40	0.00
Attendance	45,079	67,618	112,697
Operating Cost	470,011	470,011	470,011
Entry Fee Revenue	135,000	101,250*	0
Direct Subsidy	335,011	368,761	470,011
<b>Subsidy Per Entry</b>	<b>7.43</b>	<b>5.45</b>	<b>4.17</b>

\* Entry Fee Revenue at half price is taken to be 75% of that at current pricing (150% attendance at 50% charge)

As demonstrated above, significant improvement in subsidy-per-entry can be achieved by operating at half-price entry, and even greater gains are possible with a free entry policy. This reflects the elevated operational efficiency that is achieved when entry price barriers are lowered or removed.

The reality is that Council already pays 75% of the cost of inland pools. Through a marginal increase in funding to cover some - or all - of the remaining 25%, dramatically higher yields in terms of attendance can be achieved, driving the subsidy-per-entry way down.

### **Lower Entry Prices Are Logical**

Council already well understands the logic in favour of free entry for aquatic facilities, and applies it without hesitation to our ocean baths. But the same rational approach to maximising utilisation of fixed-cost assets has never been extended to include our inland pools.

SMSPC understands that Council is in difficult financial circumstances at present. But this is exactly why it should be trying to squeeze maximum possible value out of its existing assets and investments.

A funding increase of **10%** (from \$335,011 to \$368,761) could produce a **50%** increase in value delivered, under a half-price entry regime.

A funding increase of **40%** (from \$335,011 to \$470,011) could produce a **150%** increase in value delivered, under a free entry regime.

We expect Council to apply the same rational approach to managing the inland pools that it does with the ocean baths, to achieve maximum public benefit for ratepayers funds invested. So why does it not?

### **Current Pricing Policy Is Far From Best Practice**

Low cost or free entry public swimming facilities are sound social and financial policy, and this is well understood by local governments across Australia and around the world.

Many progressive and prudent administrations are providing fully or highly subsidised swimming facilities to their communities, because they recognise them as a public good that is worth the investment, and can only be operated efficiently through minimising or abolishing entry price barriers.

Some cursory internet research has revealed a wide range of contexts of free and low-cost freshwater pools, from individual facilities to large-scale statewide programs. Many were free for everyone, other were free for children and/or seniors.

Perhaps the most striking contrast found with Newcastle City Council pricing was that pools almost everywhere else, regardless of adult pricing, offer a significantly reduced child entry fee. It is a poor reflection on Council's priorities towards our children's health and safety that we have no such thing at our pools.

All of the councils listed in the tables below have found the will, and the means, to provide truly accessible aquatic facilities for their populations. They have actually achieved what Newcastle's 2030 Strategic Plan is only talking about:

- Public places that provide for diverse activity and strengthen our social connections (3.1)
- Active and healthy communities with physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing (4.2)

## Across Australia

Wollongong City Council, NSW <a href="http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/facilities/beachespools/pages/pools.aspx">http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/facilities/beachespools/pages/pools.aspx</a>	
Berkeley Pool	Free
Helensburgh Pool	Free
Western Suburbs Pool	Free
Hay Shire Council, NSW <a href="http://www.hay.nsw.gov.au/SportRecreation/SwimmingPool/tabid/87/Default.aspx">http://www.hay.nsw.gov.au/SportRecreation/SwimmingPool/tabid/87/Default.aspx</a>	
John Houston Memorial Swimming Pool	Free
Townsville City Council, QLD <a href="http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/facilities/swimming/Pages/riverwaylagoons.aspx">http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/facilities/swimming/Pages/riverwaylagoons.aspx</a>	
Riverway Lagoons	Free
Great Lakes Council, NSW <a href="http://www.greatlakes.nsw.gov.au/Facilities/Pools/Tuncurry_Pool">http://www.greatlakes.nsw.gov.au/Facilities/Pools/Tuncurry_Pool</a>	
Tuncurry Pool	Free
Baw Baw Shire Council, VIC <a href="http://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/Things_To_Do/Leisure_Activities/Swimming">http://www.bawbawshire.vic.gov.au/Things_To_Do/Leisure_Activities/Swimming</a>	
Drouin, Neerim South, Trafalgar, Thorpedale, Rawson pools	Free

## Around The World

Auckland Council, New Zealand <a href="http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/parksfacilities/PoolsLeisureCentres/Pages/freepools.aspx">http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/parksfacilities/PoolsLeisureCentres/Pages/freepools.aspx</a>	
Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa Centre; Otara Centre; Papatoetoe Pools	Free
All other pools	Free for U16
Medway Council, United Kingdom <a href="http://www.medway.gov.uk/leisureandculture/leisurecentres/swimming/freeswimming.aspx">http://www.medway.gov.uk/leisureandculture/leisurecentres/swimming/freeswimming.aspx</a>	
All swimming pools	Free for U11, 60+
Manchester Council, United Kingdom <a href="http://www.manchestersportandleisure.org/swim-free">http://www.manchestersportandleisure.org/swim-free</a>	
All swimming pools	Free for U16, 60+
Toronto City, Canada <a href="http://www.toronto.ca/parks/swimming/prices.htm">http://www.toronto.ca/parks/swimming/prices.htm</a>	
All swimming pools	Adult C\$2.00, Child C\$1.00
City of Oklahoma, United States <a href="http://www.okc.gov/parks/pools/">http://www.okc.gov/parks/pools/</a>	
Northeast Pool, Woodson Pool	Free
Massachusetts, United States <a href="http://www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/pools.htm">http://www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/pools.htm</a>	
All government swimming pools	Free
New York City, United States <a href="https://foursquare.com/nycparks/list/nyc-parks-free-outdoor-swimming-pools">https://foursquare.com/nycparks/list/nyc-parks-free-outdoor-swimming-pools</a>	
All outdoor swimming pools	Free

## Recommendation to Council

Our firm view is that free entry is the best option to maximise the value that our inland public pools provide to our communities. The analysis presented earlier indicates that dramatic increases in utilisation, with resulting reductions in subsidy-per-entry, could be achieved under this strategy.

Events since the last Council election have made clear that although there is strong support among current Councillors for a free entry trial, there is not majority support at this stage.

And yet Council has no alternative plan to achieve, or even ascertain, the optimal calibration of the inland pools' business model, nor to address the inequity of service delivery across its aquatic facilities.

We therefore suggest a compromise proposal.

It is designed to properly test for the first time, the impact that high prices have on attendance, and the increases in patronage that could be achieved with these barriers lowered. In the process, it will be a step towards a fairer deal for one of Newcastle's most socioeconomically disadvantaged regions.

**We propose that Mayfield Pool be operated at half-price entry for the next three years.** This is a critical market testing exercise, where attendance changes at Mayfield can be normalised against attendance changes at the other pools, eliminating the uncertainty associated with seasonal weather differences.

**Why one pool only?** It should be clear by now that we advocate reducing price barriers at all of our inland pools. But many Councillors have repeatedly expressed concern about cost. Making this change at one pool only will allow the gathering of invaluable operational data at minimum, and possibly zero, net cost to revenue.

**Why Mayfield pool?** Mayfield has a great advantage for this exercise – a committed and highly organised community group that stands ready to throw its support behind the trial. We will realize its full potential, through promotions and events at the pool, to attract new patrons and foster the development of regular pool-going habits across a broad cross-section of the community.

**Why three years?** Rising entry prices have taken their toll on patronage over several years. It will take time to undo that damage and build a more activated culture around the pool - even for awareness to spread that the pricing regime has changed. But this also is valuable data, giving us indicators of not only the potential increase in patronage, but also the timeframe that might be required to achieve it at the other pools.

There is a unique opportunity here for Council to live up to the objectives of its strategic plan, and work together with a community group in a constructive and concrete process to explore and develop a fairer, more sustainable way of managing public facilities.

If successful, it could become the model for many other similar enterprises, paying rich dividends through better utilisation of public assets; higher levels of service delivery per ratepayer funding; and a healthier, happier and safer community in Newcastle.

We hope and trust that Council sees these merits, and is prepared to embrace this opportunity.