

2025

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Phillip Swimming Pool and Ice Skating Development - Assembly Resolution of
3 December 2024 - Government Response**

**Presented by
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Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development
February 2025**

Introduction

On 3 December 2024, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a resolution regarding the Phillip Swimming Pool and Ice-Skating Development, calling on the ACT Government to:

- a. Provide the evidence that shows:
 - i. How a 25 metre pool best meets the demand of the future population that is forecast to live in the five kilometre catchment surrounding the Woden Town Centre; and
 - ii. The community's views on the size of the pool;
- b. Provide written reasons why the pool in Batemans Bay was used as a benchmark when the population of the Woden Town Centre's five kilometre catchment was over 65,000 people in 2021;
- c. Provide transparency by clarifying in writing the pools and outdoor areas:
 - i. The funding model and who will pay for maintenance and any operating losses;
 - ii. The operating model and what involvement the ACT Government will have;
 - iii. How access (opening times and charges) is assured in the long term;
 - iv. How the interests of the wider community will be represented in the ongoing management of the private pool and grounds; and
 - v. Who is responsible and accountable for ensuring the pool is professionally managed and maintained and delivers the programs and services typical of a public pool, ensuring people can have a sense of belonging to the pool community;
- d. Extend the date for comments to be received for the DA until four weeks after the above information is received so the community is informed about the characteristics of the development and can determine whether it will meet their needs;
- e. Refer 'swimming pools in the Woden Valley District' to the relevant Assembly Standing Committee for it to consider undertaking an inquiry;
- f. Provide a list of other sites that have been identified in central Woden that are suitable for an aquatic centre, including a 50 metre pool; and

g. Report back to the Assembly by the first sitting week in 2025.

The below provides a summary response against each of the calls on Government within the Assembly Resolution.

Response to Assembly Resolution

A. Provide evidence that shows:

- i. how a 25-metre pool best meets the demand of the future population that is forecast to live in the five kilometre catchment surrounding the Woden Town Centre**

While it is acknowledged that the population within a 5km catchment of Woden Town Centre was approximately 65,000 in 2021, this captures large portions of Weston Creek, the Inner South and portions of the Molonglo Valley and Tuggeranong.

It is also noted that all of the following aquatic and leisure facilities are within or in close proximity of this 5km catchment:

- Kingswim, Deakin – approximately 2km from the Woden Town Centre
- Manuka Pool – approximately 5km from the Woden Town Centre
- Stromlo Leisure Centre – approximately 6km from the Woden Town Centre
- Active Leisure Centre (Erindale) – approximately 7km from Woden Town Centre
- The proposed Commonwealth Park Aquatic Centre – approximately 7km from Woden Town Centre

With this, large portions of the population, particularly in the outer areas of the 5km catchment are unlikely to be serviced solely by the Phillip pool. It is considered that investigating the Woden District in isolation is more accurate of the likely catchment.

In 2021, the population of the Woden District was approximately 39,000 (or 9% of the ACT's population). Treasury's population projections indicate that the Woden District will have a population of approximately 56,500 people in 2060 (or 7% of the ACT's population), with the largest rate of growth increasing significantly from 2040.

Population projections also show that the largest increases are likely in adults, young adults, youth and children (aged 45 years and under).

The Sport and Recreation team in Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) provided advice to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) regarding potential benefits to changing the requirements for the Phillip Swimming and Ice-Skating Centre site under the previous Territory Plan.

Sport and Recreation recommended the Territory Plan could be amended to meet expected standards for contemporary public pool facilities including a warm water program pool, toddlers/leisure pool, learn-to-swim pool and water play splash pad (and the dimensions of each pool).

The proposed changes were endorsed by EPSDD to be included in the Woden District Policy when the interim Territory Plan 2023 took effect.

The requirement to provide an indoor facility comprising of a 25m x 20m lap pool, a 20m x 10m warm water program pool, 500m² of a toddlers/leisure and learn to swim area and other associated amenities will provide for a modern aquatic facility that will service a range of users, in all weather conditions and all year round. The greater focus on toddler/leisure and learn to swim facilities in particular will help service the growing demographic of young families and children.

Beyond the minimum requirements detailed in the Woden District Policy, the proposed development (as detailed in the DA submission) also includes a steam room and sauna, relaxation zone (as part of the warm water program pool), and café adjacent to the main pool entry.

The design of the 25-metre pool and the warm water program pool both propose a pool accessible ramp, which will improve access and usage of these new pool facilities – including Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance.

The proposed facility has been designed in accordance with the Royal Life Saving 2019 guidelines (referenced in Geocon DA submission as part of the MLEI consulting engineers Woden aquatic concept report).

The provision of an indoor 25 metre pool that has a mix of other pool facilities and features is consistent with many new aquatic facilities being constructed or planned to be constructed in other parts of Australia. Some examples include:

- Norlane ARC – located in Geelong, opened in early 2024 (<https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/norlaneanrc/default.aspx>).
- Bay Pavilions – Bateman’s Bay, opened in 2022 ([Aquatic Facilities - Bay Pavilions](#)).
- Surfcoast Aquatic and Health Centre, 20 minutes south of Geelong
 - Design finalised, construction anticipated to be completed by mid-2026
 - <https://www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au/About-us/Works-and-projects/Torquay-and-Jan-Juc-projects/Surf-Coast-Aquatic-and-Health-Centre>.
- Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council awarded a design contract for a new Bungendore Aquatic Centre that will include an 8-lane, 25 metre indoor heated pool and splash pad.
 - [Contract awarded for design of new Bungendore aquatic facility - Queanbeyan-Palerang](#)

- Kensington Community Aquatic and Recreation Centre in JJ Holland Park (Melbourne) – Construction commenced in 2022 and the new centre is expected to open in 2025.
 - Kensington Community Aquatic and Recreation Centre redevelopment | City of Melbourne
- Kew Recreation Centre – Melbourne – under construction
 - New Kew Recreation Centre | City of Boroondara
 - Website details *“You told us you wanted more water spaces for different activities, such as warm water exercise and rehabilitation, swimming lessons and children’s play in addition to lap swimming. We prioritised adding in these programmable spaces and a 25m lap pool over a single 50m lap pool”.*

ii. Provide the evidence that shows the community’s view on the size of the pool

As part of the Planning System Review and Reform Project extensive community consultation was undertaken where some comments regarding the Phillip pool site were received. These were considered and responded to by the ACT Government in subsequent [consultation response reports](#) and [explanatory reports](#). It was also subject to the *16. Inquiry into the Territory Plan and other associated documents* by the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services and approval by the 10th Legislative Assembly.

During consultation on the Woden District Strategy, it was acknowledged that the community appreciated the Phillip Pool and other sports and recreational facilities within the Woden district. These amenities are highly valued by the community for

their contributions to local wellbeing and recreational opportunities. Specific concerns were raised regarding the potential closure and lack of replacement public swimming facilities. The Woden District Strategy was subsequently amended to note that a publicly accessible swimming pool will be retained to service the community.

During consultation on the draft Territory Plan, some submissions from the community raised concerns about the replacement of the 50m pool with a 25m pool which were considered and responded to in the reports referenced above. However, for the reasons outlined above, the requirement for a 25m pool was retained.

The current development application (DA-202443325) has undergone the first of two stages of public notification, in accordance with statutory requirements under the *Planning Act 2023*. Further comments about the size of the pool have been raised in public representations.

B. Provide written reasons why the pool in Bateman's Bay was used as a benchmark when the population of the Woden Town Centre's five kilometre catchment was over 65,000 people in 2021

The Batemans Bay facility is one of many examples (refer to the response to (a) above) where councils across the country are delivering new facilities that include a 25-metre lap swimming pool with a mix of other aquatic/leisure facilities.

The business case for the Batemans Bay facility included the demographic reference for the Eurobodalla Shire (as the area to be serviced by the pool) as 38,028 (in 2016) with a projection of 44,774 by 2036, with the addition of increased population during peak tourism periods.

(https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/149732/Mackay-Park-Aquatic-Arts-And-Cult-Bus-Case-Final-Draft-17-Aug.pdf)

On this basis it was deemed a reasonable benchmark comparison for the Woden Town Centre. The 2021 Census Population for the Woden Valley was 39,279.

When considering population catchments, it should also be noted a range of other aquatic facilities, both private and government owned, are located within 10 kilometres of the Woden Town Centre and provide a mix of facilities and programs. The facilities include the Stromlo Leisure Centre, Lakeside Leisure Centre (Greenway), Erindale Leisure Centre (Wanniassa), Manuka Pool, Canberra Olympic Pool, the proposed Commonwealth Park Aquatic Centre, ANU Aquatics, Kingswim Deakin, Stellar Pool (Phillip). Stromlo Leisure Centre, Lakeside Leisure Centre, the Canberra Olympic Pool and the proposed Commonwealth Park Aquatic Centre all have or are proposed to have 50-metre pools.

The State of Aquatic Facility Infrastructure in Australia report, prepared by Royal Life Saving Australia in 2022, details the ACT is the only state/territory in Australia where all residents (100%) are located within a 20 minute drive of a publicly accessible aquatic facility ([RLS_AquaticInfrastructureReport2022.pdf](#)).

Numerous planning studies, undertaken by specialist aquatic/leisure consultants, detail indoor 50 metre pools are generally only feasible and/or financially viable where there is a dedicated population catchment of 70,000 to 100,000 people.

Examples include:

- City of Greater Bendigo, Community Aquatic Facilities Strategy – August 2023.
 - Details a consideration of indoor 50 metre pool should be considered for a “major” facility that has a population catchment of 70,000 to 100,000, which references requirements outlined by Aquatic and Recreation Victoria. Aquatics and Recreation Victoria (ARV) is Victoria’s peak

industry body for aquatics and recreation. ARV is a not-for-profit member based association.

- Yarra Ranges Council, Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2023-2033.
- Parks and Leisure Australia – Western Australia, Guidelines for Community Infrastructure – July 2020
 - 1:75,000 population – District Aquatics Facility – 25m to 50m lap for recreational and club water space. District facility at a 5-10km population catchment.
- Merri-bek City Council (inner north Melbourne), Aquatic and Leisure Strategy 2018 – 2038.
- Bass Coast Aquatic Leisure Centre Redevelopment Feasibility Study – January 2021
 - <https://www.basscoast.vic.gov.au/assets/agendas-minutes/attachments/H.03-Bass-Coast-Aquatics-Feasibility-Studies.pdf>
 - As detailed below (Additional Background Information) this report details that “Industry benchmarking for example indicates you need a 70,000 to 100,000 population catchment to attract enough users to help pay the operational costs of a 50 metre pool due to its high staffing, services and maintenance costs”.

Some of these inter-jurisdictional studies also highlight the significant additional capital cost associated with the construction of a 50 metre pool over a 25 metre pool, and that the maintenance and operational costs are exponentially higher. This contributes to facilities with 50 metre pools operating at significantly higher deficits.

C. Provide transparency by clarifying in writing the pools and outdoor areas:

- i. the funding model and who will pay for maintenance and any operating losses**

In relation to the funding model and who will pay for maintenance and any operating losses, the land is held under a Crown lease, it is therefore the lessee's responsibility.

- ii. the operating model and what involvement the ACT Government will have**

While the ACT Government does not generally interfere with daily operations of a private block, there are some provisions within a Crown lease that need to be complied with during the operation on the site.

For this site, the Crown lease requires the lessee to keep the swimming pool open to the public, as agreed with by the Territory. The Territory will consider reasonable hours of operation that will provide the community with access to the facility and also allow for scheduled and unscheduled maintenance on the facility.

- iii. how access (opening times and charges) is assured in the long term**

The use of the site and ongoing access to the facility is administered through the Crown lease. The existing Crown lease requires the lessee to use the site for a swimming pool and ice-skating rink, and it includes a clause that requires the lessee to keep the swimming pool open to the public, as agreed with the Territory.

DA-202443325 does not propose any changes to this arrangement. Should changes be proposed by the lessee, a development application seeking a lease variation would be required, and would need to meet the requirements of the Territory Plan. Any such proposal would also require public notification of the development application.

It is expected that the fees and charges to use the facility would be set by the owner of the facility.

iv. how the interests of the wider community will be represented in the ongoing management of the private pool and grounds

While this is a privately owned pool, the Crown lease requires the owner to keep the swimming pool open to the public, as agreed with by the Territory. Some management practices such as open hours are managed through the Crown lease, which as outlined above, is not proposed to be changed as part of DA-202443325. Should a lease variation be proposed in the future, it will be subject to a DA and the requirements of the Territory Plan, including for public notification.

Management of programs and services is the responsibility of the owner of the facility.

v. who is responsible and accountable for ensuring the pool is professionally managed and maintained and delivers the programs and services typical of a public pool, ensuring people can have a sense of belonging to the pool community

The authorised operation on the site is established by the Crown lease. The lessee is responsible for complying with the provisions of the Crown lease and may be subject to compliance actions if a breach is identified. Any potential breach of the Crown lease may be subject to compliance action under the *Planning Act 2023*.

Management of programs and services is the responsibility of the owner of the facility.

D. Extend the date for comments to be received for the DA until four weeks after the above information is received so the community is informed about the

characteristics of the development and can determine whether it will meet their needs

The current development application (DA-202443325) is a significant development and is subject to two stages of public notification. Under the *Planning Act 2023*, the first stage of public notification for significant developments is 20 working days and the second stage is 10 working days.

The first stage of public notification was originally between 20 November to 18 December 2024. Noting the extent of public interest, this period was extended to close on 13 January 2025.

Following this initial public notification period, the applicant will be required to consider and respond to community comments. The Territory Planning Authority (the Authority) will then undertake the second stage of public notification. The Authority have agreed to consider a further extension of this stage for an additional 10 working days, to a total of 20 working days.

The second-round public notification will be communicated through onsite signage, the ACT Planning website, DA Finder app, and surrounding lessees will be advised in writing.

The applicant's statement will be published on the ACT Planning website to allow the community and representors to see the applicant's responses to feedback and advice.

E. Refer 'swimming pools in the Woden Valley District' to the relevant Assembly Standing Committee for it to consider undertaking an inquiry

The Government notes the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services may self-refer matters for inquiry.

F. Provide a list of other sites that have been identified in central Woden that are suitable for an aquatic centre, including a 50 metre pool

At this time no detailed planning or design has been undertaken by the ACT Government to identify other sites in central Woden that may be suitable for an aquatic centre, including a 50 metre pool. The ACT Government will work with land holders in the district on the provision of sports and recreational facilities as the district continues to grow.