

How Council manages public swimming pools



Cairns Regional Council owns five public aquatic facilities across the region and engages experienced commercial operators to manage their day-to-day operations.

This model is commonly used by local governments across Australia. It allows Council to maintain ownership and oversight of community facilities while benefiting from the operational expertise and innovation of specialist aquatic facility managers.

Ownership and oversight

Council retains ownership of all public pool facilities and is responsible for major capital works and specified structural repairs. This includes:

- Major building and infrastructure upgrades
- Significant structural repairs and renewals
- Long-term asset planning and facility improvements
- Ensuring facilities meet regulatory requirements

Council also oversees the contract with the pool operator to ensure agreed service standards are maintained.

Day-to-day operations

The appointed lessee (operator) is responsible for the daily operation, management and maintenance of the facility. This typically includes:

- Employing and managing staff such as lifeguards and customer service personnel
- Maintaining pool water quality and safety standards
- Maintenance, cleaning and upkeep of the facility
- Managing customer service and bookings
- Setting and managing opening hours in accordance with the lease agreement
- Service provision, activation and promotion of the facilities

Competitive Tender Process

Pool operators are appointed through a competitive public tender process. This ensures Council selects an operator who can deliver high-quality services, strong safety standards and value for money for the community.

During the tender process, interested operators submit proposals outlining:

- Their experience managing aquatic facilities
- Operational and Business plans including service offerings
- Staffing and safety approaches
- Financial budgets and forecasts

Council evaluates these submissions before appointing the successful operator.

Funding and revenue

Under the lease arrangement:

- The operator retains revenue generated through gate fees, memberships, programs and other services that may be delivered at the facility.
- Council provides an **annual operating payment** to the operator to support the delivery of aquatic services.

This payment recognises that public pools provide an important community service but often cannot operate sustainably through gate fees alone. The payment amount is determined through the competitive tender process and reflects the cost of operating, maintaining and managing the facility.

Why Council uses this model

This approach helps Council:

- Deliver professionally managed aquatic facilities
- Encourage innovation in programs and services
- Maintain strong safety and operational standards
- Manage costs while keeping pools accessible and affordable for the community

By combining Council ownership with specialist management, the community continues to benefit from well-maintained facilities and a broad range of aquatic programs and services.

