

# COMMUNITY POOLS **STRATEGY**

TE RAUTAKI O TE PANA KAUKAU  
2025-2035

## 1. Contents

Introduction .....	3
Strategic context .....	4
Vision and Purpose.....	4
Community Facility Principles .....	4
Strategic Framework .....	7
Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi .....	8
Review and amendments.....	8
Waikato District at a glance.....	9
Aquatic Facilities Network.....	11
Waikato Regional Strategy 2024 .....	14
National and Regional Outcome .....	15
Waikato District Outcome .....	16
Council’s Role .....	18
Challenges .....	19
Goal One.....	21
Goal Two.....	22
Goal Three.....	23
Goal Four .....	24



## Introduction



The communities of the Waikato District have a strong connection with the awa that flows through the district as rivers and lakes. The district also spans to both coasts, with vast access to the west coast.

Swimming, water sports and water recreation second nature to a large portion of the community.

Natural bodies of water and community pools complement each other. With community pools providing learn to swim opportunities, fitness, rehabilitation and waterplay opportunities in a controlled environment. Aquatic facilities support water safety and competence which help keep our community safe around natural bodies of water.

Over time, these facilities have grown to become more than just swimming spaces but venues for events, classes and social interactions that build a connected and thriving community.

Waikato District Council's (Council) has invested in community pools, owning and operating one year-round aquatic facility in Huntly and two seasonal pools in Ngaruaawaahia and Tuakau. Council's community pools are aging assets which require strategic direction to guide investment. The development of this strategy is to address the challenges and provide a clear way forward for consistent decision making that aligns with a purpose for aquatics now and over the next ten years.



## Strategic context

### Vision and Purpose

Council provides community pools to support the health and wellbeing of the community. Community Pools are built in many shapes and sizes, supporting a range of water-based activities with the main feature being a pool.

These activities are grouped into three primary areas being:

- 1. Recreation** – play, leisure, relaxation,
- 2. Fitness** – lane sports, health, water sport, hydrotherapy
- 3. Learn to swim**– water safety and competence

This strategy specifically addresses the three community pools owned and operated by Council. While other non-council owned facilities and natural bodies of water are acknowledged as part of the wider network supporting water-based activities, the outcomes are targeted to council owned facilities.

The purpose of Council's Community Pools is:

*Creating accessible, safe, and vibrant aquatic spaces that support swim education, active recreation, and community wellbeing.*

The strategy's purpose aligns with Council's vision of:

**Liveable, Thriving and Connected Communities**  
**He noohanga aahuru, he iwi whai ora, he hapori tuuhono tahi**

### Community Facility Principles

The community facility principles are the fundamental values which guide decision making and management of our community facilities. The six principles have been created through analysing our community's feedback on what they value about their community spaces (Community Outcomes), paired with best practice asset management.

## Principle One: Meets the needs of the current and growing community

- Fit for purpose
- Co-Designed
- Considers the current and changing demographics
- Future proof
- Flexible



## Principle Two: Financially Sustainable



- Cost effective initial build – “bang for buck”
- Well maintained with scheduled preventative maintenance
- Affordable running costs
- Financially Responsible.

## Principle Three: Environmentally Sustainable

- Built future proof
- Can withstand climate change impacts
- Build to last
- Repurposing of existing assets before building new
- Effective network utilisation



## Principle Four: Inclusive and Accessible



- Identifiable and reflective of the community
- Welcoming and accommodating
- Physically accessible
- Financially affordable to use
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design guidelines
- Meet regulation and compliance

## Principle Five: Integrated and Connected

- A well-considered network
- integrated with other facilities
- Built along with supporting infrastructure



## Principle Six: Collaborative and Partnership



- Develop assets in partnership
- Facilities are multi-purpose and enable hubbing
- Working in collaboration with iwi partners
- Governance structure that benefits the community.

## Strategic Framework

The Community Pools Strategy aligns with other national, regional, and local strategies, policies, and frameworks, which is essential to deliver on the Council's vision (Figure 1). The creation of the strategy has been guided by the national and regional strategies, providing the baseline which is then moulded to reflect our community's aspirations and the unique characteristics of the Waikato District.

The Community Pools Strategy does not guarantee or allocate funding towards specific projects or programmes. This is achieved through the Long-Term Plan (LTP) and varied through the Annual Plan where necessary. The LTP is a requirement of the Local Government Act 2002, and outlines Council's priorities and investment plan over the next 10 years.

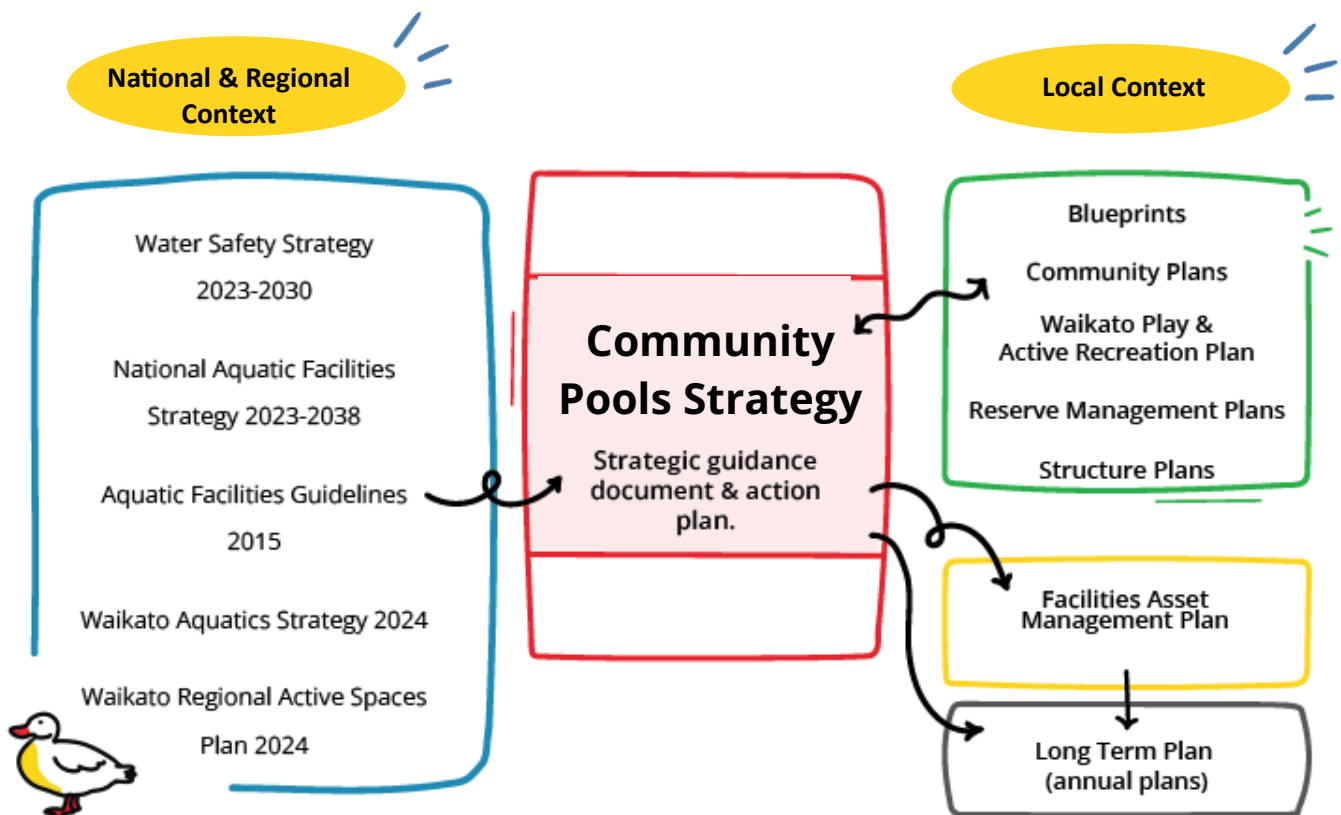


Figure 1: The strategic framework and relationships to national, regional and local documents influential in the creation and implementation of the Community Pools Strategy.

### Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) is the founding document of New Zealand. The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are applied to the decision-making process and management of reserves in the district. Mana whenua continues to maintain a presence and relationship with their ancestral sites and landscapes of significance. This relationship also extends to the taonga, and tikanga of community spaces. Council actively maintains relationships with iwi within the district through established Joint Management Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding.

### Review and amendments

This strategy will guide staff with strategic direction as well as offering guidance to the community. Council will review the strategy from time to time, in response to changing circumstances or better information, to ensure it remains up to date and relevant. Council intends to review it ten years from when it was adopted unless circumstances warrant an earlier review.

Updates and corrections that do not change the intent of the plan e.g., name changes to organisations or other documents mentioned in the document may be made without public consultation as they do not change the intent or meaning of the document. Major amendments to the document should be approved by Council and be subject to public consultation if the matter is significant.





## Waikato District at a glance

### Population

Waikato District has total population of **92,500**. The Median age for the district is **38 years**.

In 2024 the district's population grew by **2.2%**, down from the previous year with a population growth of **3%**.

There are **51.4%** male/tane and **49.3%** female/wahine and **0.3%** another gender/he ira kee anoo within the district.



Waikato District currently has higher percentage of tamariki/rangatahi with **19.9%** compared to the national percentage of **17.8%**. By 2038 the national percentage is expected to drop to **13.8%** while the district percentage stays at **19.3%**.

District residents aged 65 and over move from **14.1%** to **20%** by 2038, where the national changes from **16.9%** to **22.2%**.

### Ethnicity

We have a diverse population, with **77%** identifying as European, **26%** as Maaori, **6%** Asian, **4%** Pasifika and **2%** made up of other ethnicities (Figure 2).

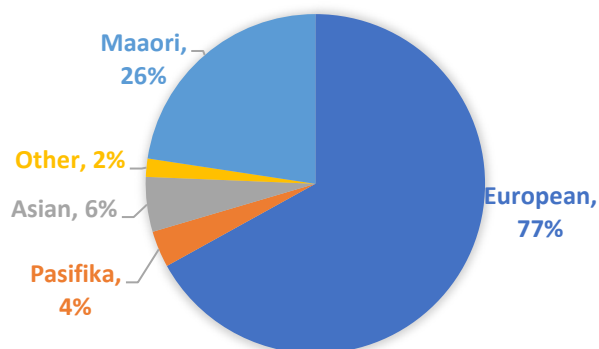


Figure 2: Ethnicity in the Waikato District (Census 2023)





## Personal Income

The median personal income for our residents is

**\$45,300.**

53.7% of the population 15 years and above earned less than \$50,000 in the 12 months ending 31 March 2023.

## Households

The average household income is

**\$130,120.**

Household income growth for the Waikato district was **5.3%** for the year to March 2024.



## Property

In Waikato district the average house value was **5.7** times its average household income in 2024. Housing was more affordable than in New Zealand.

**55.8%** of residents in the Waikato district owned their property. In March 2024 the average rent in the Waikato district was **\$536**, lower than the national average \$560.



### Aquatic Facilities Network

The Waikato district has 48 aquatic facilities, made up of 43 school pools, three Council pools (owned and operated) and two 'other' pools (privately operated). The 48 locations are well distributed across the Waikato District (Figure 3).

Only one aquatic facility (Huntly Aquatic Centre) is open to the public year-round. The remainder of the facilities are seasonal, predominantly operating December to April.

In addition to the three Council pools, 21 school pools and two 'other' pools are available to the community for use. Most commonly, the school pools are available to students and their family by purchasing a school pool key over the summer period.

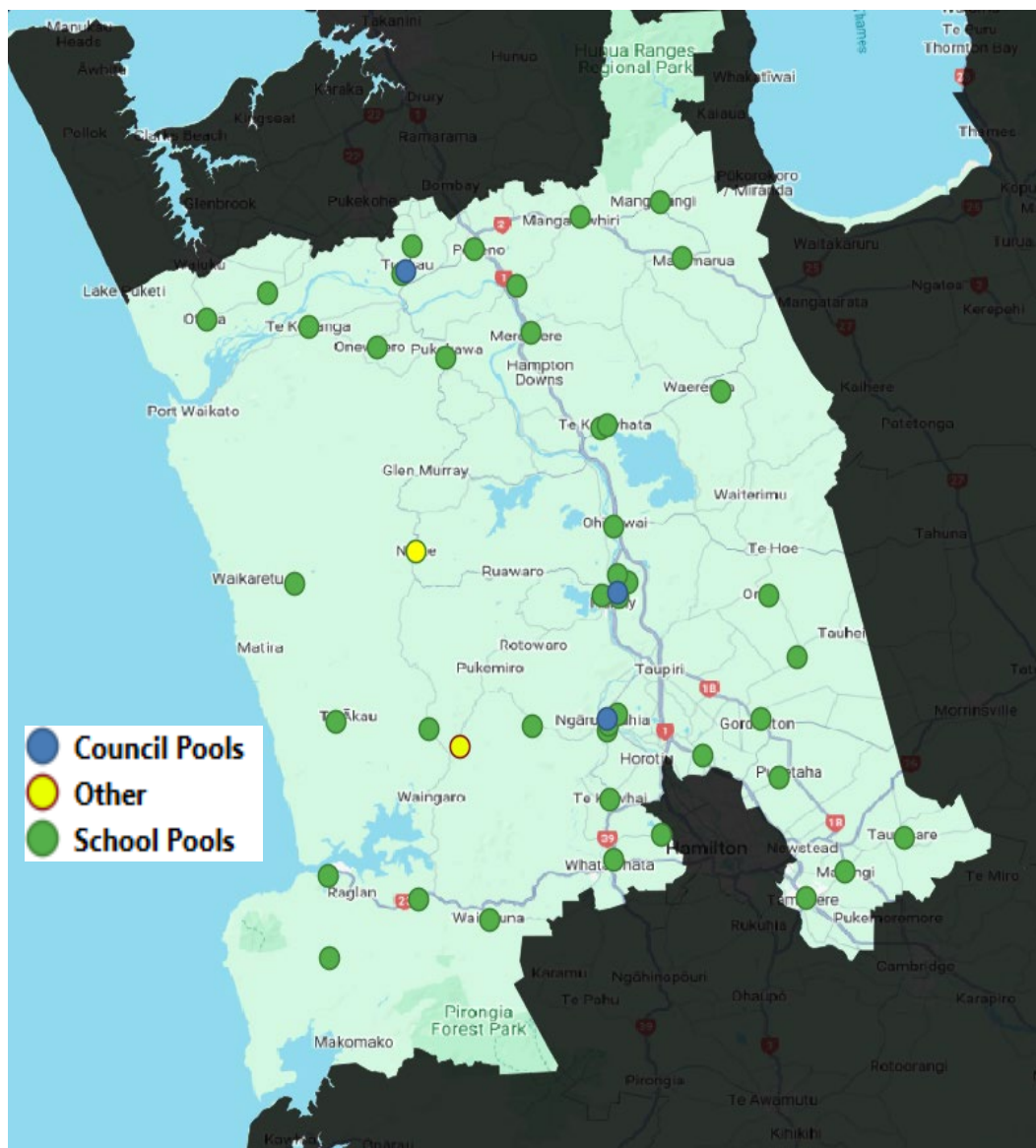


Figure 3 The locations of aquatic facilities within in the Waikato District area.



### Huntly Aquatic Centre:

Huntly Aquatic centre is located just 3 mins away from the Huntly township, neighbouring Lake Hakanoa and just minutes from local primary schools and early childhood centres.

The centre was converted to an indoor pool in the year 2004. A gym and a swim club were eventually added as part of the recreation centre in the year 2011. There is a new electric hot water heat pump installed in the facility, making it one of the first aquatic facilities in the country to adapt an environmentally friendly solution.



Huntly Aquatic centre has 6 lane lap pool, learner pool, toddler pool and a smaller play pool for infants or babies to enjoy splash time. Offering learn to swim lessons and water safety programs. The swim lessons run for 48 weeks. Ages from baby lessons, pre-school, and school ages. In 2024 the facility had over 28,500 visits with users traveling on average 18km to the aquatic centre and stay for 1 hour (Figure 4). Included in these visits are members (approx. 350) and multiple groups including Huntly Swim Club, Huntly Aqua Fitness, Plunket early childhood.

The assets in this facility are in good condition as assessed by the overall asset condition analysis.

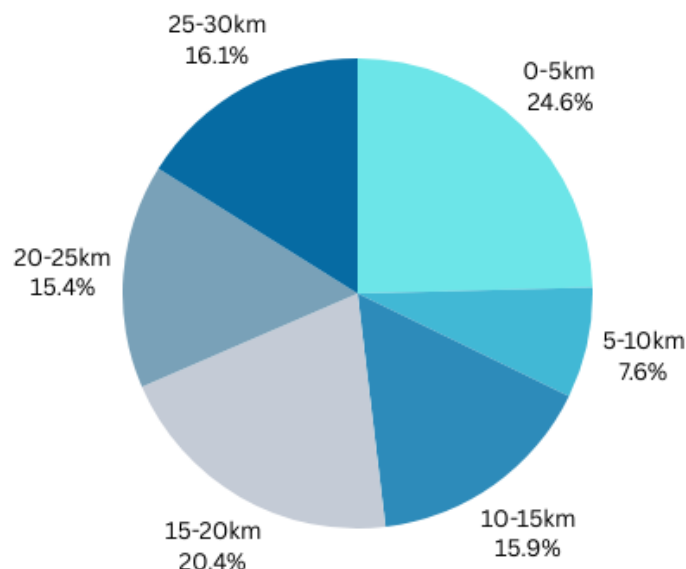


Figure 4: Visitor travel distance to the Huntly Aquatic Centre.





### **Ngaaruawaahia Swimming Pool:**

Ngaaruawaahia Swimming Pool is an outdoor seasonal pool catering to the Ngaaruawaahia and surrounding communities. Opened in the year 1965, the facility has been used by the community for recreation and learn to swim. The facility has a five lane lap pool and a toddler pool.

This is a seasonal pool and is open for four months from early December to the end of March. Opening hours are currently 3.00pm to 6.00pm on weekdays and 12.00pm to 6.00pm on weekends.



The assets in this facility are in poor condition as assessed by the overall asset condition analysis.

### **Tuakau Centennial Pools:**

The Tuakau Centennial pool was opened to the public in the year 1965. The pool is located at the Dr. John Lightbody Reserve. The facility has five lane outdoor lap pool and a toddler pool. The community mainly use the pool for learn to swim and recreation.

The pools are seasonal and are open for four months from early December to the end of March. With weekday open hours from 12.00 pm to 7.00 pm and 10.00am to 6.00pm on the weekend.



The asset in this facility is in a fair condition as assessed by the overall asset condition analysis.



Sport Waikato has led the Waikato [regional] Aquatics Strategy 2024, a region wide assessment of the pool availability and aquatic demand for the current and 2038 population. The approach to the regional strategy is in alignment with the National Aquatic Facilities Strategy 2023, led by Sport New Zealand.

The regional strategy measures three key concepts when analysing supply and demand.

### 1. Aquatic Demand

The Regional Strategy identified that a minimum of 27m<sup>2</sup> of aquatic space is required per 1,000 population (Figure 5).

The type of facility use is under three broad categories:

1. Fitness / Health / Lane Sports / Deep Water Sports
2. Aquatic Competence (water safety skills and learn to swim)
3. Leisure / Play / Relaxation / Hydrotherapy / School recreational access.

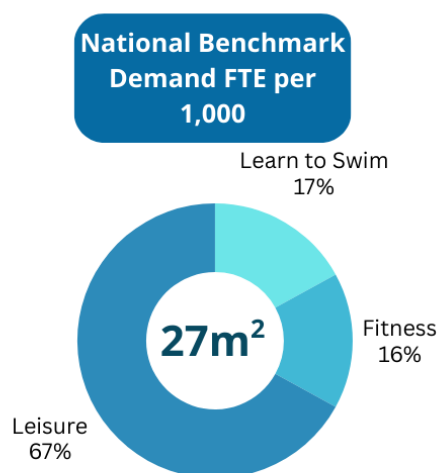


Figure 5: National recommendation of Full Time Equivalent aquatic space demand, and the percentage of space required for each of the three broad activity

### 2. Pool availability

A measure of pool availability is achieved by full time equivalent (FTE). Not all water space is available to communities to use all a facility's opening hours. For example, a facility which is fully available for community aquatic activity or access during early morning to late evening opening hours is assessed as 1 FTE, whereas a facility that is available for a limited season is considered a 0.4 FTE.

### 3. Catchment analysis

The regional strategy completed an assessment of a 30 minute travel time to a year-round aquatic facility. This identified hotspots of well-supplied areas within the district and acknowledged the aquatic facilities outside of the district that are available to Waikato district residence (Figure 8).



## National and Regional Outcome

**Nationally**, there is a shortage of pool space for the current and future population. Specifically, there is aquatic demand for leisure (play, recreation, relaxation) and aquatic competence (learn to swim, water safety) to provide a transgenerational investment in reducing deaths from drowning.

**Regionally**, when compared to the National Demand Benchmark of 27m<sup>2</sup> per 1,000 population there is 187m<sup>2</sup> of total water area per 1,000. When the available FTE water area is considered, there is 28m<sup>2</sup> per 1,000 population, slightly above the national benchmark. However, when the year-round available water area is considered these decreases to 21m<sup>2</sup> per 1,000 population.

**When the balance of FTE water area is considered, there is a significant over provision of fitness focused water, a significant under supply of leisure focused water, with learn to swim water at the benchmarked level.**

As the population of the region is projected to grow, by 2038 the demand for water area is projected to grow. While there is a slight surplus of water area currently, by 2038, it is projected that there will be a shortfall of -2,019m<sup>2</sup> of total FTE water area (-310m<sup>2</sup> learn to swim, -3,584m<sup>2</sup> leisure water, +1,875m<sup>2</sup> fitness water).

There is a significant difference in the availability of FTE pool area with Waipa District indicating a surplus of 1,009m<sup>2</sup> through to Hamilton and Waikato District indicating a shortfall of 1,137m<sup>2</sup> 1,041m<sup>2</sup>, respectively. Therefore, when planning for aquatic provision, network considerations need to be taken including a **cross-boundary/sub-regional approach**.

In the Waikato region, the age groups who frequently participate in swimming activities is predominantly tamariki (aged 5-11), followed by rangatahi (aged 12-17), then adults (aged 18+) (Figure 6).

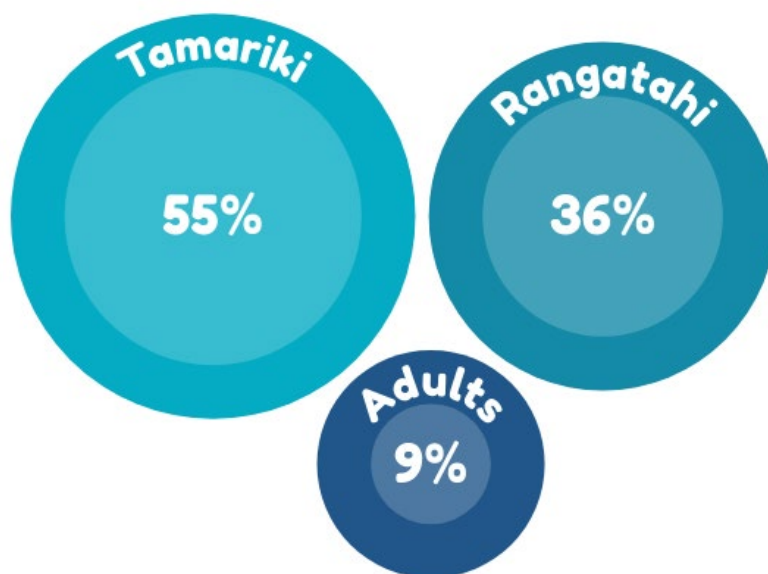


Figure 6: Waikato regional swimming participation by age group



### Waikato District Outcome

Through the work of the Regional Strategy, the Waikato district's aquatic space was measured against the national benchmark (Figure 7). The aquatic space has taken into account the full network of facilities (Council, schools and other).

Each chart shows the percentage of pool space available for each of the three activity categories, with the centre number indicating the total pool area (m<sup>2</sup>) per 1000 residents. From left to right the graphs are indicating the following:

- **National Benchmark Demand FTE per 1,000** – the national recommendation for aquatic spaces.
- **Total Pool Area per 1,000** – the entire aquatic space network within the Waikato district area, and the apportionment of that space by the three activity categories.
- **Publicly Available Pool Area per 1,000** – includes aquatic facilities that have a mechanism for being open to the public, this includes all Council aquatic centres, privately operated facilities and school pools where a pool key is available to purchase.
- **Growth 2038** – considers the aquatic space “Publicly Available Pool Area per 1,000” and applies the forecasted 2038 population.

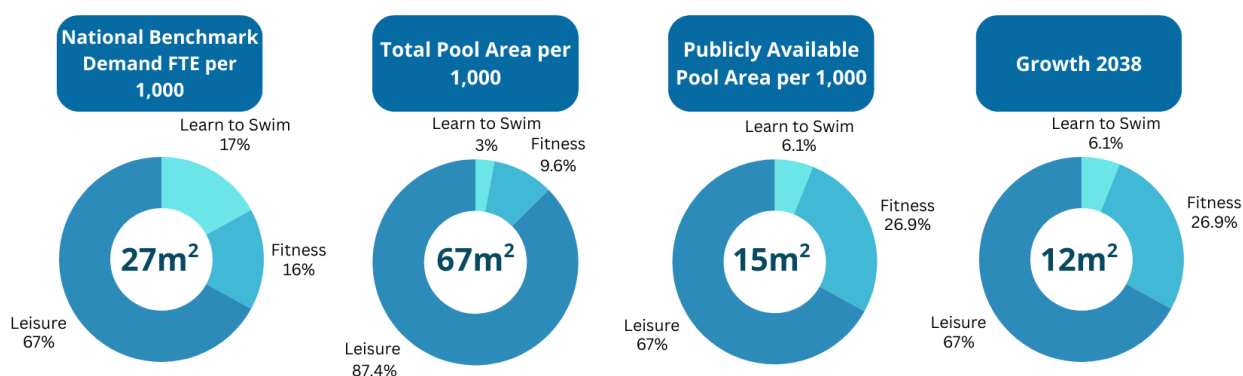


Figure 7: The Aquatic space within the Waikato district utilising the National Demand Benchmark.





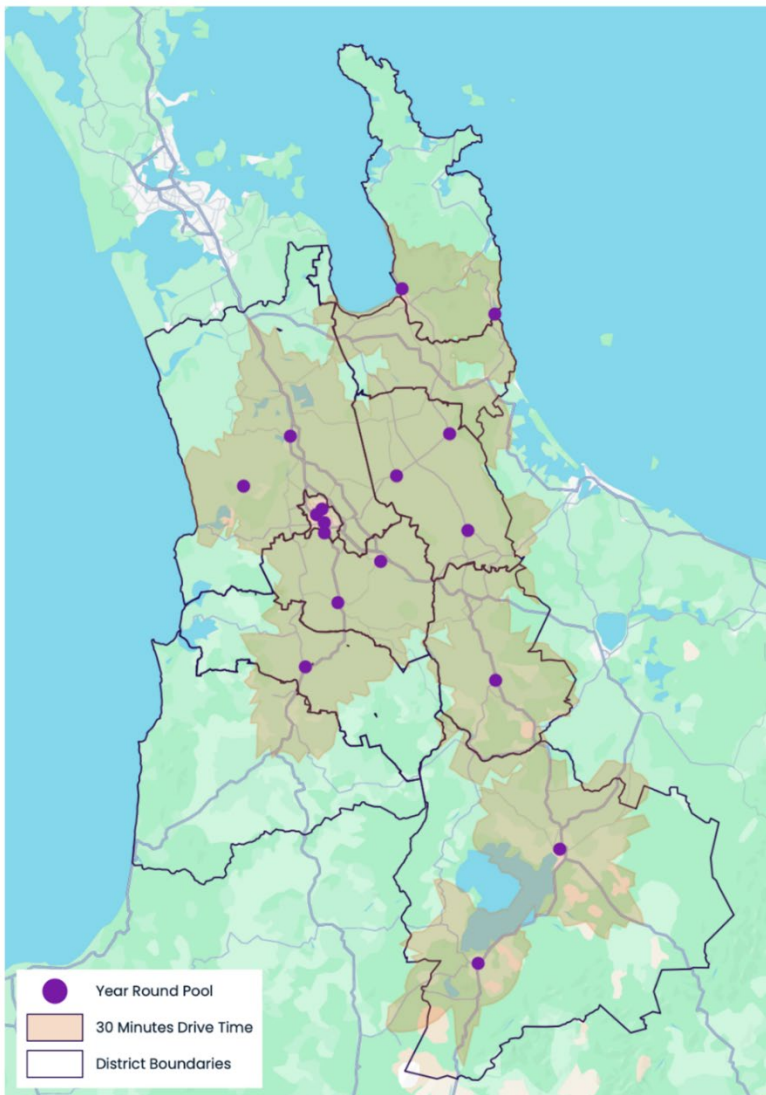


Figure 8: The 30 min catchment of year-round, publicly accessible aquatic facilities within the Waikato Region.

Due to the vast nature of the Waikato district, it's important to consider how aquatic facilities within neighbouring districts service the Waikato district community. Figure 8 displays the year-round pool facilities and the 30-minute drive times within the Waikato Region.

Waikato District has one year-round pool facilities, Huntly Aquatic Centre.

Hamilton City supports the Waikato district's public access to a year-round aquatic facility with Waterworld (Te Rapa) in the Northern of the city. Pukekohe (Jubilee Pool), located in Auckland, caters to those within the north of the Waikato district including townships such as Tuakau and Pokeno.

Non-council operated aquatic facilities within a 30-minute travel time of Waikato District include:

- Jubilee Pool (Pukekohe)
- Swim Zone (Morrinsville)
- Miranda Hot Springs (Miranda)
- Franklin Pool and Leisure (Pukekohe)
- Gallagher Aquatic Centre (Hamilton)
- Waterworld (Hamilton)
- Livingstone Aquatic Centre (Te Awamutu)
- Perry Aquatic Centre (Cambridge)



## Council's Role

Council's role is to enhance a network of community pools available to the community to create accessible, safe, and vibrant aquatic spaces that support swim education, active recreation, and community wellbeing. Council acknowledges the provision gaps evident in the National and Regional Strategies. However, in order to direct investment into the improvements of aquatic facilities within the district, a bespoke and holistic approach is needed.

Council has taken a position to balance our service offerings of community pools to complement our communities' relationship with the awa. Council's key focus is on safety. A community pool that serves the community encompass the ability to deliver on **all** three usage categories –

- **learn to swim** - water safety, competence and confidence
- **fitness** - lane sports, physical activity, water sports, hydrotherapy
- **leisure** – recreation, play, relaxation, school group access

In addition to the enhancement of the pool facilities, there is wrap around assets and services that make aquatic facilities the welcoming, well utilised community space.



**Council's direction** is to:

1. Enhance a network of existing community pools to support all three usage categories.
2. Improve community pools as a community venue with upgrades to supporting infrastructure and services.



3. Where demand<sup>1</sup> exists, a community pool should be accessible within 30 min travel time.

## Challenges

### Cost

Building and maintaining community pools are becoming difficult to build, operate and maintain due to increasing costs. Community pools are intergenerational assets which require long-term maintenance.

As costs increase, it's becoming harder for everyday users and sports groups to afford access to pool facilities, which can limit community participation and the growth of aquatic sports.

Finally, pools use a lot of water and energy, contributing to environmental concerns. Smarter, more sustainable approaches are needed to manage these resources and reduce long-term costs.

### Aging infrastructure

The council owned and managed aquatic facilities were all built in 1965.

Many of the now outdated features are still present today, making the facilities unappealing, and less functional. In some cases, the current designs present accessibility and safety concerns. As facilities are upgraded there is also the requirement to meet new industry and building regulations.

As any asset ages, the on-going maintenance costs may also increase as components begin to wear out. Risk and cost analysis are required to replace components before they present a risk to the public or other assets.

### Accessibility

Pools are a high value community asset for people with impairments, disabilities or people who require rehabilitation. However, many facilities lack the necessary features to support access for people with disabilities and older adults.

Inadequate facility design, such as limited ramps, hoists, or accessible changing areas, creates significant barriers to participation, making it difficult for these communities to engage in swimming, rehabilitation, or recreational activities.

### Network and design constraints

The Waikato District is home to over 92,500 people across a vast 400,000 hectares. The network of pools within the district are well distributed, however the majority operate only seasonally, limiting year-round access and reducing their ability to serve diverse community needs.

Many of the facilities are too small or poorly designed to support certain activities, like competitive swimming, deep water sports, bombing or water therapy. Additionally, limited data on how facilities are used makes it hard to plan improvements or expansions effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Demand is assessed on known user groups or population which meets a financially viable threshold to initiate partnership or investment.



### A growing and changing community

As populations grow and demographics shift, public aquatic facilities are under increasing pressure to meet diverse and changing community needs. There is rising demand for accessible, inclusive spaces that serve a wide range of users across different ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.



## Goal One

Support and encourage access to a range of **services and spaces** to meet the needs of the current and growing community

Our aim is to provide aquatic programmes that are welcoming, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of our whole community—now and into the future. By offering a diverse and accessible range of services, we will ensure that people of all ages, abilities, and skill levels feel supported and encouraged to participate.

It is likely that the demand for these facilities and services will grow into the future. The Waikato district is ethnically diverse, and experiencing high population growth (Figure 2). The Waikato district is expected to maintain the percentage of tamariki and rangitahi (approx. 19.5% of the population), however the population is aging (currently 14% of the population is aged 65+, increasing to 20% by 2038).

Water competence and skills is vital for our community, who have a strong connection to awa (rivers, lakes and ocean). The Waipa flows into the Waikato River at Ngaaruawaahia forming an arterial feature, along with lakes scattered throughout the district. The district also spans to both coasts, with vast access to the west coast. Drowning deaths have increased<sup>2</sup>, with the majority occurring in natural bodies of water. Our aquatic facilities play an important role in promoting swimming skills and water safety.

### Focus area one:

Catering for our community requires a diverse programme to meet the need requirements of all ages, skill levels, and physical abilities. By tailoring a range of services i.e., learn to swim programmes, rehabilitation sessions, clubs training, aquatic fitness classes, community pools become attractive, accessible and welcoming to our diverse community.

### Focus area two:

Enabling well set up, bookable spaces available at an affordable rate for the local community. Events at community pools including whaanau celebrations, school bookings and organised sports all promote active living and wellbeing.

### Focus area three:

Delivering high quality experiences at our community pools relies on well maintained, safe, and efficiently operating facilities. Regular upkeep, timely repairs, and proactive asset management ensures that all spaces remain clean, functional, and inviting. By prioritising operational excellence and facility standards, we create environments that foster trust, comfort, and continued community use.

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<sup>2</sup> Water Safety New Zealand Drowning Prevention Report 2023



## Goal Two

### Ensure our community pools are well utilised and accessible for all users

Swimming can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age, disability or skill level, when appropriate infrastructure is in place. Access to public swimming facilities has come a long way and previously focussed on helping people mobility challenges, but now it's about making sure everyone feels welcome and included.

As our communities grow and become more diverse, it's important that our pools reflect that diversity—no matter your age, ability, background, or experience. With the right design and services in place, swimming for recreation, rehabilitation or exercise can be enjoyed by all. All residents should feel that they have the means and services available to access pool facilities within the district.

However, well utilised aquatic facilities are more than a place to swim, but a place to gather and socialise. The social function of these facilities is growing in importance. Serving as a 'social hub' that provides multifunctional, accessible and affordable places for the community to gather.

#### Focus area one:

Assess and identify barriers to participation in the facilities with the aim to ensure community pools across the district are equipped to support all community members. In addition, continue to monitor trends and new technology that encourages diversity of users at these facilities.

#### Focus area two:

Diving into the full customer experience, understanding why they come and how they would like to use these social spaces. Assessing each facility to ensure the correct supporting infrastructure (picnic areas, play features, accessible changing spaces) meets the needs of the community.

#### Focus area three:

Ensure all community pools provide, safe, inclusive access into the water for people of all ages and abilities by identifying practical, cost-effective solutions suited to each facility. Where steps with handrails are not currently available, assess for opportunities for installation or alternative enhancements that support safer and more inclusive entry. By focusing on achievable upgrades, we aim to reduce barriers and promote equitable access for all users.



## Goal Three

Build a **network of community pools** available to the community and providing a range of activities by exploring **partnership opportunities**.

A network and partnership approach to community pools will provide more of the community opportunity to access the facilities. The Waikato district is in a unique position where neighbouring council aquatic facilities and school pools are frequently used by our community. For this reason, it is important to consider the region as a whole and bordering areas when considering the need for additional aquatic facilities.

The Waikato [Regional] Aquatics Strategy identified 48 aquatic facilities in the district, with only three operated by Council. Although a large proportion of the facilities are seasonal school pools, they are well distributed across the district, often in rural areas that are greater than 30 min travel time to a Council owned and managed facility.

Partnerships are entered into to maximise the delivery of community pools and initiatives. Support from organisations to deliver programmes (i.e. school bus transport to pools) and a range of services contribute to the utilisation of pools. Enabling classes, sports groups, exercise groups and learn to swim opportunities only enhances the offerings of a facility and promotes community wellbeing.

### Focus area one:

Consider partnership opportunities to strengthen the community pools network to areas of the district which are not able to travel to a year-round facility within 30 minutes travel time.

### Focus area two:

Foster relationships with organisations which can provide a range of activities and opportunities for the community to attend.

### Focus area three:

Seek partnership opportunities to support the management, enhancement and development of community pools to enable potential funding opportunities. This includes exploring funding opportunities for equipment, facility upgrades, and programme development to ensure long-term sustainability and improved community outcomes.



## Goal Four

### Environmentally and financially sustainable community pools

Community pools are expensive assets to construct and operate. They are also a high consumer of water and energy, and often have a high carbon footprint. Both environmental and financial sustainability approaches are required to ensure these facilities are affordable and accessible to the community now and for future generations.

An environmentally sustainable approach considers the utilisation of existing assets before constructing new facilities. Of the three-council owned and managed pools, two are seasonal. Seasonal outdoor pools limit the utilisation of aquatic activity but also the facility as a social hub. Investigating the investment required to upgrade the outdoor pools to be open more throughout the year, could remove travel barriers for areas of the community and improve the utilisation of existing infrastructure.

In addition, environmental initiatives should be explored at each centre to increase water and energy conservation and reduce the operating carbon footprint of the assets.

The financially sustainable approach is to deliver the most cost-effective outcome for the community. Facilities are well planned with scheduled maintenance and operate in the most efficient manner that meets the needs of the community. This approach also ensures the community minimises financial barriers (expensive fees) through low entry and hire fees to promote and enable community usage.

#### Focus area one:

Investigate feasible options to extend the operational season of outdoor pool, with a focus on cost effective upgrades that improve year round access. This includes assessing heating solutions, shelters, and operational efficiencies that could increase utilisation.

#### Focus area two:

Prioritise the optimisation and enhancement of existing facilities before building new facilities. When upgrades are undertaken, incorporate environmentally sustainable materials and practices that support climate resilience.

#### Focus area three:

Maintain affordability by ensuring entry fees and booking costs remain low. This includes exploring funding partnerships, operational efficiencies, and pricing models the balance financial sustainability with equitable access for all users.







CREATING  
LIVEABLE, THRIVING  
+ CONNECTED  
COMMUNITIES

