

Big spend on changerooms as diving pool sinks



The Warrnambool diving pool in its heyday. Despite its popularity, the pool was closed in 2007 and is now being filled in for possible replacement with a splash pad. Image: Lost Warrnambool

Analysis – Carol Altmann

The closure of the iconic, fun-filled dive pool at Warrnambool's Aquazone still makes no sense to me, nor does the almost \$180,000 it is costing to re-tile the change rooms.

It is a case of where the Warrnambool City Council chooses to spend its money.

When I returned to Warrnambool in 2013, I was stunned to see

the diving pool drained and derelict. It turned out, of course, that it had been empty since 2007 and only this year – eight years later – has the council finally decided what to do with it.

In a narrow vote (4 votes to 3), it was agreed to close it forever because of what was considered to be the excessive cost of repairs and bringing it up to modern safety standards. But was that really the only option?



As a 54-year-old dive pool, it no doubt needed work and in [2012 it was estimated to cost around \\$245,000](#) to repair the leaks and replace the diving boards.

Keep that figure in mind, because we will come back to it shortly.

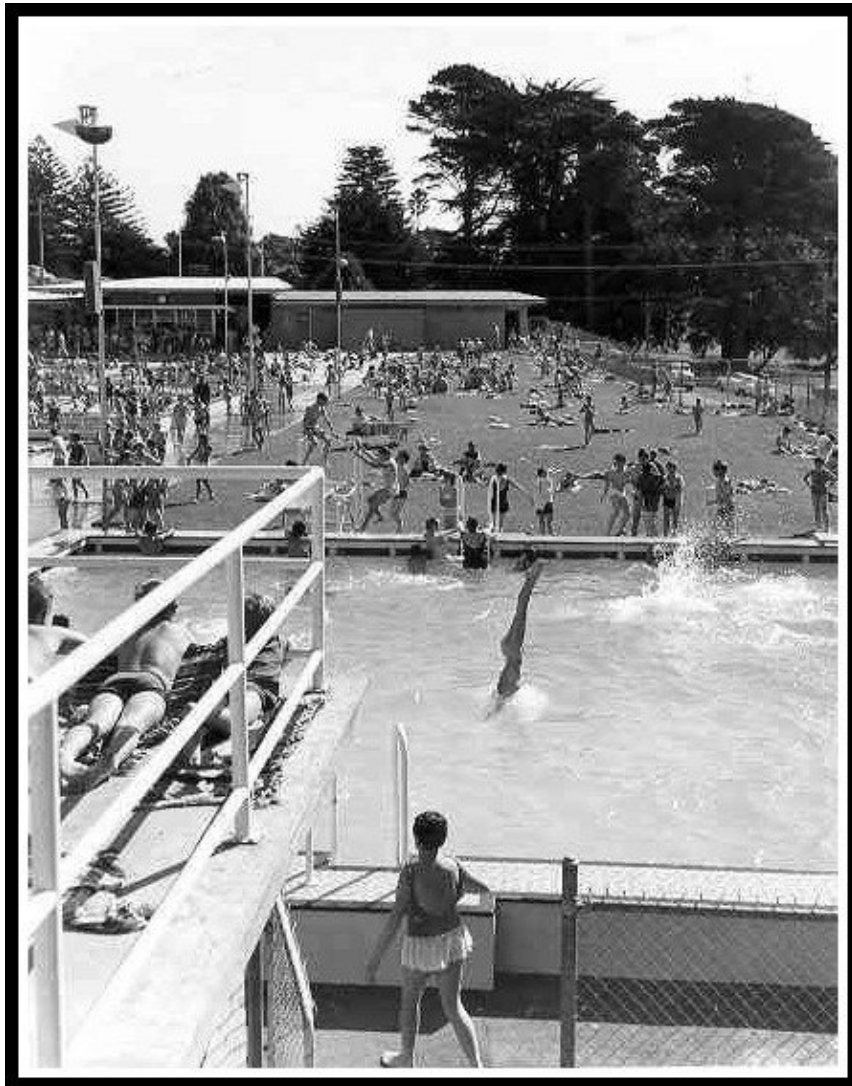
Another problem was that, under new regulations, the pool was 20cm too shallow to permit a 3m diving board.

The council received quotes of around \$1 million to either raise the sides of the pool (which included major changes to the filtration system), or deepen it, plus another \$66,500 a year to maintain it, most of which would be spent on employing a life guard (\$40,000).

Even though half of the cost might have been covered by the State Government Better Pools fund, it was decided instead to close it forever, fill it in and investigate installing a

'splash pad' at a cost of \$550,000.

But there were other options.



Mounting repairs and new regulations proved too much for the Warrnambool diving pool, which is now just a memory for those who plunged, piked and bombed their way through summers. Image: Lost Warrnambool.

One would have been to lower the 3m dive board, which would make it unsuitable for formal competition (but it had actually not been used competitively for years, other than school sports) and still available for fun.

Cr Brian Kelson also suggested another alternative, which was

to make the 3m board a fixed board instead of springing.

This is [exactly what Indigo Council did at the Rutherglen pool](#), when it faced the same issue with its 1-metre boards, but Cr Kelson's idea [didn't even make it](#) to the discussion stage.

Did the whole dive pool really have to go? Or was it a matter of throwing the baby out with the pool water?

It is worth noting that 1300 residents were asked by the WCC for their opinion on priorities at the pool and 20% listed the diving pool first, while 23% favoured a better gym and another 23% selected renewing the 50m pool: in other words, the diving pool would still be a popular place for belly flops, pikes and the occasional 'bomb'. Only 15% opted for a splash pad.

But that is now all water under the bridge.

In the meantime, a large chunk of the \$245,000 that might have been spent on sealing and repairing the diving pool (remember that figure from above?), has been spent re-tiling and replacing mirrors in the changerooms in a project that is due to be finished about now.

The two-stage upgrade is expected to cost at least \$178,000, and we can reveal that at least some of the work in the male changerooms has had to be done again.

Last year, council spokesman Nick Higgins [said the project was costed](#) at \$120,000, but this week said that was wrong and his mistake – **subscribers can see our [full exchange of emails in The Vault here](#).**

As it happens, I just received a quote to resurface, retile and waterproof my leaking 1960s shower stall at a cost of \$1200. The Aquazone job will cost nearly *150 times* more than that. It may be an unfair comparison, but one worth contemplating.

And as you contemplate, please enjoy the selection of images below from the original Warrnambool swimming pool, which opened in 1962. You can also see footage from the [opening here](#) (courtesy of Jack Wilkins). Images below are courtesy of Lost Warrnambool.



