



Postal Address:  
Post Office Box 1152  
WODONGA VIC 3690  
President: Brendon Shiels  
Secretary: Graeme Butt  
webmaster@omdsa.org.au  
ABN: 94 762 042 923

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### **Press Release Ovens & Murray District Swimming Association – 27 September 2018**

The Swimming District wants to make it clear that the discussions with Aligned Leisure and Albury Wodonga Council Officers are not negotiations.

What the local competitive swimming clubs are facing is a major increase in the cost of operations that was decided by the Councils and the pool operator. They decided what the amount would be and how it would be collected. The first the clubs knew this was coming was in the issuing of a 14 page Pool hire agreement from Aligned Leisure in response to the clubs request for lane allocations on the 17<sup>th</sup> September. The agreement included \$10/lane/hour booking fee to be charged from 1 January 2019 in addition to pool entry charges. On Wednesday night we were also informed that the lane booking fee would be increasing by 10% annually. There has been no consultation with the Swimming clubs or District prior to this happening, quite to the contrary there had been verbal assurances that nothing would be changing this season.

The 2 meetings to date have not resulted in any change to the underlying \$10/lane/hour charge.

Swimmers do not mind contributing towards the cost of the facilities they use. All our swimmers pay pool admission to use the facilities at rates set by Council. This new lane hire fee is a tax which discriminates against our swimmers.

We have asked why this new tax on our swimming clubs is being introduced. We have been told that our swimming clubs are not contributing enough compared to other codes. We would like to challenge the Councils to produce a report that quantifies that statement. Is it fair to compare an O&M swimming club where 90% of the competitors are aged under 16 years old with an adult football or soccer club?

The Council says they are discounting the hire charge from \$25.80 to \$10.00, we would like to know what swimming facilities in Australia are currently charging \$25.80/lane/hour on top of pool entry to volunteer resident swimming clubs. If we were running Learn to Swim classes as a business in those lanes we would understand charges at these levels. The students at Learn to Swim classes normally have their pool entry included in the lesson fee and are run by the pool operators.

The references to the cost impact of this new tax by Council & Aligned Leisure are misleading. We ask that all costs be calculated on an annual basis excluding the implementation period as the Wodonga clubs train Summer and Winter seasons in Council Pools.

The Albury Wodonga Swimming clubs are volunteer organisations and do not want to collect this new lane hire charge, they have enough trouble getting the Coaching and registration fees from parents and have to regularly write off bad debts. At the level introduced this hire fee dwarfs all other fees paid by swimmers and a few bad debts could easily exhaust cash reserves and cause the Clubs to fold.

If the Councils had come to the clubs and explained that they felt they were not paying their way we would have worked with Council to define the problem, ensure that the comparisons used were correct and work towards a fair and equitable solution - preferably via the facility use fees. We want the public to know this has not happened!

I ask people, is it fair that Joe Public can swim in a lane for pool entry and share with one or maybe two other swimmers, while the competitive swimmer has to pay extra to share the lane with 9 or more other swimmers?

Our local community swimming clubs are very lean volunteer organisations that care about their swimmers they cannot afford this new charge. Swimmers will stop training and Clubs will fold.