

Cr Angela Owen

Chairman of Council (2015 – 2019)
Councillor for Calamvale Ward



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21 February 2020

Ms Leigh Russell

Chief Executive Officer

Swimming Australia

Via email

Dear Ms Russell

RE : MODESTY PROTECTING SWIMWEAR TO PROMOTE INCLUSION

I write on behalf of families in my electorate who are seeking for Swimming Australia to uphold their policies of inclusion by ensuring all, but particularly young swimmers are enabled to swim competitively, at all levels, wearing swimwear which protects their modesty. My electorate is the most multi-culturally diverse in the City of Brisbane and our local community is built on a foundation of tolerance, inclusion, and respect for one another.

I refer to the statement of the former your in the Inclusive Swimming Framework in which it is stated on behalf of Swimming Australia, inter alia, *"we accept our responsibility to ensure all Australians have the chance to become involved, develop and excel in swimming"* and that *"every Australian should have the opportunity to be involved in swimming in the role and level of their choosing"*. In conjunction with your statement in the Strategic Plan Towards 2032 – that *"we are building a culture of courage and capability, with a fierce dedication to finding new and powerful ways to engage with and connect to our ever changing tribe"*.

At this point I would like to raise that currently the swimwear restrictions Swimming Australia imposing on swimmers, particularly young swimmers, DOES NOT uphold the capacity for swimmers to participate, and more specifically compete at a higher level, of THEIR choosing.



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Utilisation of the Inclusive Swimming Framework as a blueprint to guide Swimming Australia is currently causing it to fail to meet the necessary pillars which you claim to advocate. Quite specifically, through the EXCLUSION of swimmers by not permitting modesty protecting swimwear, the Framework collapses into being a document comprised of nothing but words rather than being an active process of inclusion.

I recognise that Swimming Australia, and yourself as CEO, may not be as involved as I am in dealing with many cultures combining together. Further it may be that you are not receiving the important feedback from State Swimming bodies, nor from District levels or coaches that swimmers are retreating from participating competitively because of the embarrassment and humiliation they feel when they are told they cannot compete wearing swimwear which protects their modesty. This is often being dictated in an insensitive manner via announcements over loudspeakers at carnivals, which exacerbates unwanted attention being drawn to swimmers, and this is hardly an atmosphere of inclusion.

For many of these swimmers they are scared to voice their needs which is why I am advocating on their behalf. The sentiment expressed to me is that it is easier to give up swimming because it is too hard to battle the institution. The current restrictions on swimwear deny opportunities rather than promote them.

I wholeheartedly support local swimmers and young people in particular pursuing an active and healthy lifestyle. Through my advocacy I have ensured an \$8m Aquatic Centre has been delivered in my local community, which is equipped to foster talent and potential at all levels for swimmers. As a former competitive swimmer myself I understand how important the right training facilities are, but I also know how wellbeing and body issues can impact on young people.

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I write to raise this issue with Swimming Australia directly as young swimmers in my electorate are advising me they are being formally restricted from competing at a level of THEIR choice because they are not permitted to wear modesty protecting swimwear. Whether they wish to wear such swimwear from a perspective of faith or body self-consciousness they should not be discriminated against by current swimming competition regulations which deem such swimwear as non-conforming.

My understanding of FINA imposed swimwear restrictions on Swimming Australia brings me to the point of asking yourself as CEO of Swimming Australia – what has been done to advocate internationally for these young swimmers to ensure if the swimwear is deemed not to be performance enhancing, and just modesty protecting, that it may be permissible to wear when swimming competitively?

Could you please advise the following;

- What avenues are available for swimmers to swim at elite level wearing modesty protecting swimwear?
- Why are anti-discrimination considerations overridden by Swimming Australia and FINA in respect of the swimwear options for competitive swimmers?
- What capacity or processes are available for review of swimwear or appeal of restrictions on swimwear either for Swimming Australia or FINA?
- How restricting choice of swimwear can be deemed to be complying with your principles of Inclusion and non-discrimination, especially if a swimmer elects to wear it from a gender based modesty perspective or faith based perspective ?
- How can young swimmers achieve their full potential and compete or participate at the level THEY choose if you are denying them the right to wear modesty protecting swimwear?



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Further, I seek your advice as to what Swimming Australia has done to

- Overcome,
- Adapt,
- Modify, or
- Address

the swimwear provisions to focus on how swimmers are able to participate in competitive swimming which truly reflects the diversity and inclusiveness of swimming.

I have taken this opportunity to write to you direct in the hope it will embark on a process which will improve equity and inclusion for swimmers.

Your earliest response would be appreciated. I am happy to discuss this further if required.

Kind Regards

Councillor Angela Owen

Councillor for Calamvale

Cc Anti Discrimination Commissioner

Cc Minister for Youth & Sport - Senator the Hon Richard Colebeck

Cc Jans-Anders Manson - Chairman FINA Swimwear Approval Committee

