



## President's report – August 2021

On 6 July 2020, Wett Ones members dived back into the water at Sydney University Sport and Fitness, under strict number limits, to resume where we had left off three and a half months earlier and before the (first) COVID19 lockdown. The resumption of squad swimming was a welcome relief for members and hopes remained high for another full year of training and competition. We almost made it, too – sadly, though, COVID19 re-emerged in Sydney and the second COVID19 lockdown saw the lane ropes pulled out of the pool on 25 June.

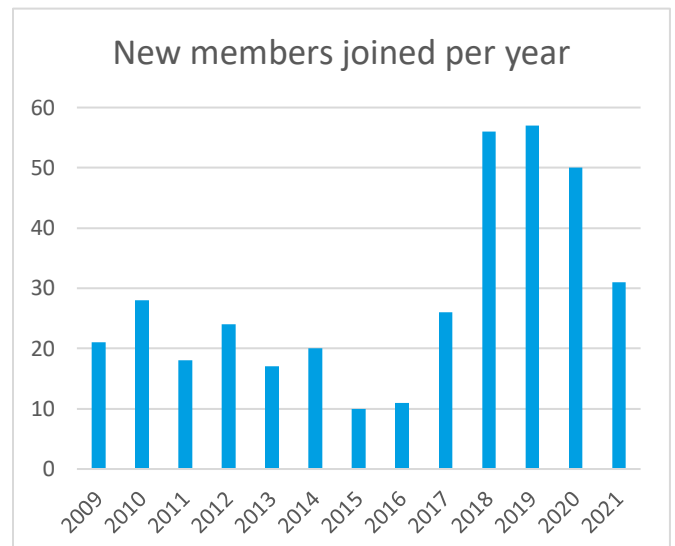
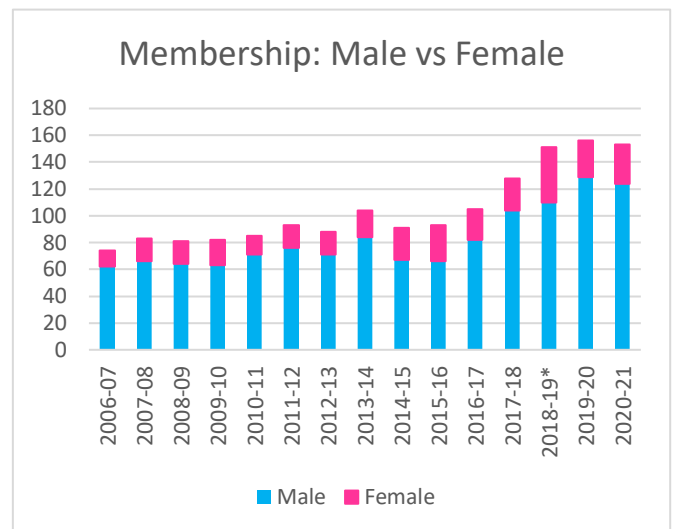
In the 50 weeks between open and shut, however, Wett Ones had yet another successful year in and out of the water. COVID19 forced much change to the way things were done – not just reducing numbers, at least initially, at training sessions, but the competition scene was altered too, with no Branch Points Score trophy awarded and opportunity for championship swims also limited.

### Membership

At the end of November 2020, the Club's membership stood at 185 members, which included 48 new members through the calendar year. As at 30 June 2021, the membership is 153, which is three below the same time last year. Our new membership tally over the past financial year is 55, which is four more than the previous year. I want to thank **Pete Goodare** who, as our Registrar, has ensured that new members are made welcome to the Club and that their details are kept up to date in the Masters system.

Following the resumption of swimming in July last year, the Committee limited participation in training sessions to members only. This restriction was imposed to ensure that our current members, who had been kept out of the water by COVID19, were given a chance to resume their swimming fitness. Once more training space was available, we again welcomed back prospective members to give us a go, asking them to only attend a (quieter) session on a Friday evening or Sunday afternoon.

A key challenge for Wett Ones is member retention – while the Club is able to recruit new members in place of those that choose not to renew their membership (for a variety of reasons), we would like to see more of our current members renewing each year. In 2020, 41



members did not renew their membership for 2021. Only 48 of our 153 members joined the club before January 2018; 27 of our current members have been Wett Ones members for at least 10 years.

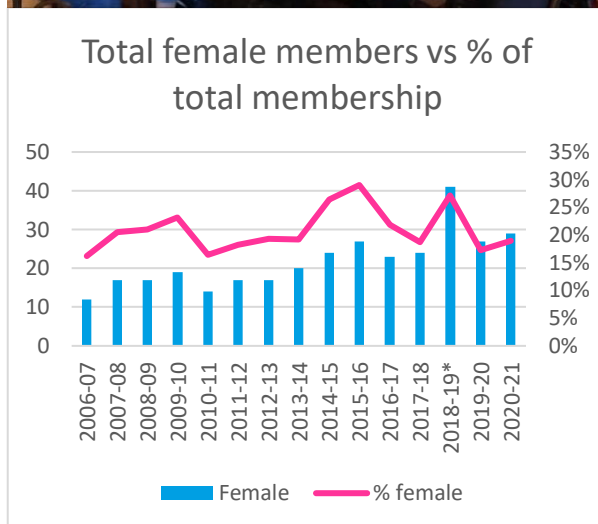
I am obviously encouraged by the number of new faces – now making up more than two thirds of the club membership – and I hope that the new and ‘stalwart’ faces around the Club continue to make the Club the warm, friendly, inclusive and supportive family we have worked so hard to build.

## Female engagement

Bad weather impacted the scheduled Women’s Bootcamp in March this year; despite this, we have seen solid recruitment of new female members, which is up two on last year (to date). Of our current female members, half have joined the club in the past 18 months.

The Club has made a concerted effort to increase female membership – credit is particularly due to **Susie Purcell**, who, as our women’s representative, has coordinated events for our female members, including our Bootcamps. Susie has been given great assistance by **Barbara Wise** and **Janet Bolton**, together with **Megan McLachlan** and **Sam Wolf**, who have been by her side helping at the bootcamps and other social catch ups.

I hope that the Club will continue to do more to encourage more women to come and give Wett Ones a go. Less than one in five of our current members are women – five years ago, this figure was almost one in three. If you have female friends who enjoy swimming, consider bringing them along to a training session – we’re sure they’ll love it!



## Finances

While a separate financial report will be presented, I want to call out the very healthy state of the Club’s finances. Particular credit is due to our Treasurer, **Reg Leones**, for his meticulous reporting of our monthly finances and management of day to day payments.

The Club’s solid balance sheet provides us with flexibility to support member initiatives, but I would be reluctant to see the Club use these accrued savings in short-term pursuits. It would, in my view at least, be folly for the Club to use these savings to offset the ‘fixed’ costs of swimming – such as coaching and lane hire. The Club is fortunate to have some coaches who take no payment for their services – generosity which is greatly appreciated – however this may not always be the case. Our swimming fees are very competitive (often cited as cheap by visitors!) and are carefully calculated to ensure the Club covers costs for lane hire and coaching fees. Importantly, some sessions cross-subsidise other less-busy sessions, providing the Club with sessions that cater to as many members as possible at various times.

## Training sessions

Over the past 12 months, 369 hours of training sessions have been conducted and 6,650 individual sessions booked, including free swims to prospective members. Upon resumption of training last July, our sessions were limited to Sydney University; after lengthy negotiations with Belgravia Leisure, we were able to resume our summer series at Andrew 'Boy' Charlton Pool, introduce a Tuesday morning session at Prince Alfred Park Pool, and work with them for additional opportunities at Cook and Phillip Pool.

Another challenge we continued to confront over the past 12 months was availability of pool lane space beyond Sydney University. To ensure we were looking for lanes at the times members wanted to swim, we conducted a member survey; feedback enabled us to push for a new Thursday evening session in addition to those already available. Attendance at this session, held at Cook and Phillip Pool, is encouraging.

As members would have noted from our regular communications, approaches to Belgravia Leisure for space at the new Gunyama Park pool in Green Square were unsuccessful, largely due to the times in which the pool was available relative to the time members were keen to swim. The limited space available at other pools, given existing long-standing bookings, will make the search for additional space a constant challenge for the club.

I would, however, like to particularly acknowledge **Dayle** and **Josh** at Sydney University Sport and Fitness for their willingness to work with us to manage our lane space at that facility. Wett Ones has been swimming at Sydney University for more than 25 years and we look forward to continuing at this facility into the future – the addition of the new 25m booms and platforms provide additional flexibility to squads and coaches, and we are grateful for the four lanes we have access to at three of our four afternoon/evening sessions.

## Swim league and competition

Another innovation for 2020-21 was the Wett Ones Swim League, held at the Cook and Phillip Pool in November 2020. More than 60 club members participated in the inaugural swim league event – for many, it was their first competition event since IGLA in February (and before COVID19). Members were randomly mixed into teams and pitted against each other across a variety of strokes and distances, with points awarded based on finishing position.

The event was a great success; I want to particularly acknowledge **Luca Alessi, Nick Westaway, David Loader** and **Evan Morris** who were the chief coordinators of the event. I want to also acknowledge the generous support from Masters Swimming NSW, who provided a grant that helped to minimise the participation cost to members. I know there is much excitement and anticipation for the next Swim League!



The number of Wett Ones members swimming at club carnivals has been solid, however it would be great to see a few more women participating! Carnivals held by other clubs are a fantastic way to meet other swimmers, get to know your fellow Wett Ones in a different environment, and benchmark yourself in competition. There is no requirement or compulsion for members to participate, but we will always strongly encourage people to consider having a go.

Sadly, COVID19's return in June 2021 thwarted Wett Ones' planned swim meet, part of Masters Swimming NSW's 'Resurrection' series of events. Once again, **Luca, Nick** and **Evan** were the chief custodians of this event and I know they remain keen to see this event rescheduled as soon as possible (and hopefully before the end of 2021). Thanks to the work of **Mason Womack**, the Club secured a grant from the NSW Government to conduct the swim meet; this allowed the club to significantly reduce the cost to members to participate in the meet.

## Masterclasses

In 2021, a series of dedicated technique masterclasses were held to develop and improve members' swimming technique. Through another grant from Masters Swimming NSW, Wett Ones held nine sessions for members to focus on stroke technique at a 'master' and 'developing' level. The grant funds allowed the club to engage the services of dedicated coaches who were able to drill participants in the various aspects of stroke development and improvement.



These sessions were chiefly driven and coordinated by **Peter McGee** with assistance from **Reg Leones**. I want to thank both of them for their efforts in the success of these events; member feedback suggests that these sessions should be a regular feature of the training program, feedback which the coaches have taken onboard.

## Social events

In addition to the impacts on our swimming life, COVID19 impacted our swimming social life, too. Ongoing restrictions limiting gatherings, dining and other events placed barriers around the extent to which the club's usually burgeoning social calendar could continue. A key casualty was the traditional Wednesday night dinner, and monthly cake night, at The Royal. All credit, however, to the remarkable **Sara Eldridge**, our Social Coordinator, who managed the ups and downs of restrictions to coordinate a number of great events.

The social highlight for the year was the Christmas Party, held at Abattoir Blues at Sydney Olympic Park. It, happily, coincided with a (temporary) relaxation of restrictions enabling people to stand up and drink! All who attended had a great afternoon, with the usually generous hospitality of our host (sponsor and club member) **Andrew Elias** and his family. After such a trying year it was great to be able to give something back to Andrew, who has been a great supporter of the club (and Masters swimming more generally) since joining.

With COVID19 preventing the usual colour of Mardi Gras, Sara arranged for a park-based dance workshop, complete with bubbles, to get everyone feeling the Mardi Gras-mood.



I know that Sara and a small team are busy planning an extravaganza to mark Wett Ones' 30<sup>th</sup> birthday this year – the club will celebrate this milestone on 30 October, and an invitation will be made available shortly to current and former Wetties, families and friends of the club. This promises to be a night full of colour and celebration – let's hope COVID19 keeps a safe distance!

## Other bits and pieces

Thanks to the creative genius of **Mason Womack**, the Club developed a 'new member video', giving prospective members an insight into what to expect from a Wett Ones training session. With voiceovers by **Megan McLachlan** and **James Baber**, and coaching from **Oscar Perez-Concha**, the video was designed to give those curious about squad swimming, and Wett Ones, insight into a usual training session, what to expect and where to go on arrival. I know other Clubs have found this a great resource themselves and I want to acknowledge Mason and the coaches and committee for putting this video together.

Another video created through the year was produced in support of our sister club, Melbourne's Glamourhead Sharks, as Victorians endured an extended lockdown through the winter and spring of 2020. Particular credit for this initiative goes to **Adrian Banks**, who scripted, directed and produced a video that was shared far and wide by the Masters swimming community of Australia. To all who participated, thank you for demonstrating the spirit of Wett Ones and of Masters swimming more generally.



In the second half of 2020 the Club considered, and subsequently adopted, a revised Constitution. Through the work of a small working group, each clause of the Constitution was considered and, where necessary, adjustments made to the text to ensure the document was still fit for purpose. This evolutionary approach saw the changes considered in a two step process – firstly, a general meeting of members was held to analyse each of the changes and consider whether further amendment or adjustment was required. Then, in accordance with the relevant legislation, a Special General Meeting of the Club was held in December (as part of the Christmas party) to adopt in full the proposed changes. Pleasingly, NSW Fair Trading (the regulator) accepted the changes and the new Constitution now stands. I want to thank all members for their participation and engagement in this process – while a dry topic, it is important that our club's rules are up to date and fit for purpose as our club grows.

We are finalising a refresh of the Club's website, using a template developed by Masters Swimming NSW. From a Club perspective, **Janet Bolton** has been leading a project to review, refresh and rebuild our existing website on this new template, which we hope to take live shortly.

## Awards

At our Christmas Party in 2020 we once again recognised the excellence of individuals around the club. In addition to recognising a series of state and national swimming relay records broken at IGLA (and Janet Bolton's two new individual IGLA records), the Club recognised:

Encouragement award: **Jon Lawley**

Most improved: **Marcus Loi**

Training award: **Megan McLachlan**

Male swimmer of the year: **Evan Morris**

Female swimmer of the year: **Di Kennedy**

President's Award: **Brian Osterio**

The President's Award recognises a member of the club – who is not a coach or a member of the committee – who embodies the very best elements of being a Wett One. I was pleased to nominate Brian Osterio for this award given his support for developing swimmers (with his time offered at no cost to participants), for his LGBTIQ+ charity work and his support on the pool deck on busy evenings to check in and welcome swimmers.



## Coaching

In the past year, the Club welcomed **Luca Alessi** as an accredited coach; we were also pleased to see **Haydn Wood** begin his journey to become an accredited coach. Over the summer, we said farewell to **German Ramirez** and thank him for his contribution to the coaching team.

Wett Ones is indeed fortunate to have a group of dedicated, talented and highly-experienced coaches – new members always comment about the quality of the coaching, which is a key reason why we see so many new faces around the pool. My thanks, and that of the committee and all members, goes to **Janet Bolton, Susie Purcell, Luca Alessi, Marko Antic, Peter McGee, Brad Monks, Oscar Perez-Concha, Nick Westaway** and **Haydn Wood**.

I would also like to acknowledge **Brian Osterio** who provides support to our coaches, and to new and developing members of the club.



## Sponsors

We have been fortunate this year to receive grants from the NSW Government and Masters Swimming NSW to support new initiatives at the Club. In addition, we are grateful to our long-standing sponsors **SheCamp, Dentistry at the Cross** and **Abattoir Blues** for their support over many years.

Sponsorship remains an area for further development and consideration. Funds from sponsors enable the club to keep costs low, to support new initiatives and to expand our reach. It can also support members with limited financial means to be more active in swimming events nationally, and internationally. The Club would, I am sure, welcome the opportunity to speak to any prospective sponsor.

## Committee

The past year saw new faces on the Committee, representing renewal and new ideas. As a Committee, we have continued to meet each month, adopting a hybrid of either face to face or virtual meetings. I want to thank the Committee for their efforts on behalf of all club members – we each volunteer our time and I have valued the camaraderie and support of the Committee this past year:

Secretary: **David Prince**

Treasurer: **Reg Leones**

Registrar and Race Secretary: **Pete Goodare**

Safety Officer: **Barbara Wise**

Male swimmers' representative: **Luca Alessi**

Female swimmers' representative: **Susie Purcell**

Coaches' representative: **Peter McGee**

Social coordinator: **Sara Eldridge**

Fundraising and sponsorship coordinator: **Mason Womack**

## And, that's a wrap...

Three years ago, when I began my time as President, the Club set a mission to *'Provide a safe, friendly and supportive swimming environment for the gay and lesbian community, our allies, friends and supporters in Sydney'*, underpinned by three objectives:

1. Improve and consolidate the club's membership, financial position and future operations
2. Increase active participation of lesbian members of the club
3. Encourage increased participation in competitions, including at the Gay Games in Hong Kong in 2022

It is my view that, with the exception of participation at 2022 Gay Games, we have achieved each of these objectives. Since my election as President in October 2018, Wett Ones has:

- Designed a new, stylish and colourful club uniform, and subsidised members' access to the uniform
- Increased our club membership, becoming the largest Masters swimming club in Australia
- Introduced additional morning and evening training sessions
- Topped the points table at the 2020 International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics Championships in Melbourne
- Won the 2019 Masters Swimming NSW Branch Points Score trophy (for the first time)
- Won the 2019 Masters Swimming NSW Club of the Year award
- Conducted dedicated women's bootcamps, aimed at increasing female membership of the club
- Raised funds to provide scholarships to enable members to participate at IGLA Melbourne 2020, and support members in financial difficulty to continue training with Wett Ones post COVID19
- Implemented an online booking system for all swimming sessions
- Moved the Club's financial operations to cloud-based software, and stopped cash transactions
- Conducted two club surveys
- Issued a monthly newsletter to members and a database of more than 650 contacts
- Participated in swimming carnivals across NSW and at State Championship events
- Danced our way down Oxford Street in Mardi Gras events that raised the bar ever-higher for the following year
- Raised funds for mental health charities through our swimming
- Premiered the *Light on the Water* film in Australia as a presenting partner at the 2019 Mardi Gras Film Festival
- Held highly successful social events, including a *Drag Yourself Out* party that is STILL spoken about
- Convened special stroke improvement training sessions
- Successfully applied for financial grants from government and businesses

- Refreshed our club Constitution
- Renewed our website

It has been a busy three years as President – three years of which I am immensely proud. Most importantly, none of these things could have been done without the support of the people who have served alongside me on the Committees I have chaired, and the support of all members. That’s not to say it has all been easy – and I’m certain some of it could have been done better or differently. I also have no doubt that, at times, the pace of change combined with my approach has caused angst and frustration – if that has been the case, please accept my apology. At all times, my interest and intention has always been the betterment of the Club.

Wett Ones was in a strong place when I became President and, while this is something ultimately to be judged by others, I consider it to be even stronger today.

An ongoing area of frustration for some members is the size of the club, and our openness to welcoming (and at times, active pursuit of) new members. I have a strong view on this matter, which has guided my approach to the consideration of the issue whenever it has been debated by members, either at Committee level or on the pool deck. As a sporting club, Wett Ones serves a dual purpose – first and foremost, we are a swimming club. Secondly, and as importantly, we are also a family for those in the LGBTIQ+ community who have an interest in swimming – whether that is for fun, fitness or friendship. Our club today is more than 50 per cent larger than it was when I joined – this is something of which to be immensely proud. We are the envy of many swimming clubs.

Across Sydney, and I assume across other big cities around the world, there has been an explosion of participation in LGBTIQ+ sporting clubs, driven (I assume) by a desire to belong, to participate in sport with likeminded people and to make new friends. In my own case, after moving to Sydney and with an interest in swimming, meeting people, getting fit and becoming more active, I joined Wett Ones in search of these things and a place to belong; my story is not unique, and I can count many members of the club who have sought the club out for exactly the same purpose. For those who’ve come across the seas, we’ve ample lane space to share – we’re a family where one is otherwise absent, a safe space for people to be who they are, to make friends and belong.

Whenever the question of ‘closing’ membership has been raised, I offer this observation: before considering whether it would be appropriate to close the Club’s membership, think about who you would turn away if the Club’s membership was closed or capped? Which swimmer, who might have otherwise joined late in the year, would be denied the opportunity participate in and belong to the Club because they didn’t sign up to early enough to one of the places available? Which of your friends might not have had a chance to become part of the Wett Ones family if the door was not open to them when they were looking for a place to belong? Closing membership is a blunt instrument that creates ‘us’ and ‘them’ – we’re much stronger as a community when we include everyone. The only requirement of your membership should be an ability to swim the required minimum distances, not being first in to renew your membership. Exclusivity is not part of who we are.

The challenge for an ever-growing club is to find a way to balance the need for new members to be welcomed and existing members to feel continued belonging – this is a delicate task but, over my tenure, I have sought to strike this balance in the best interests of all. Again, others will judge the success of the approach.

Unfinished business? Yes. I would really like to see the development of a national league to support LGBTIQ+ aquatic-based sports, building on the momentum of the IGLA Championships in Melbourne. With LGBTIQ+ swimming clubs, and other aquatic sports, spread across the country, and LGBTIQ+ members of Masters swimming more generally, I believe there is a place for greater national coordination, competition and camaraderie. We have good relationships with other local clubs – as the oldest LGBTIQ+ aquatic club in Australia, and the largest outside Europe and North America, Wett Ones can take a leadership role in this area.



I also encourage the new Committee to look at our club record database, and to establishing a formal structure for financial support for members, a Wett Ones 'Foundation' of sorts. The club records database is a valuable resource for all members, and it would be good to see an investment of time and resources made to ensuring it is regularly updated and accessible to all members – in my view, this would be a valuable project in which to invest some of the Club's hard-earned savings. Similarly, establishing a formal trust or foundation structure to better enable charitable giving to support financial outreach to members in need, and support their participation in swimming carnivals, would be a good legacy in celebration of the Club's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I was first elected to the Committee – in the role of Vice President – in October 2017. It is now time for me to take a step back and allow others to take the Club forward. As a Director on the National Board of Management at Masters Swimming Australia, I look forward to continuing involvement with Wett Ones and giving my support to the incoming Committee and leadership.

My thanks again to all members of Wett Ones for your support, encouragement and friendship during my time as President. We have achieved so much together – I hope you are as proud as I am to be a member of Wett Ones.

For the last time, happy swimming,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Hardie', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

**ROBERT HARDIE** | President

*August 2021*