

## CERM PI<sup>®</sup> benchmarks for aquatic centres – indoor pools have an advantage over outdoor only centres

The following provides excerpts of an article that was recently published in the “*Australasian Leisure Management*” (Howat, 2007).

Comparisons between the major categories of centres were based on the record 108 public aquatic centres from throughout Australia that contributed data for the 2006 CERM PI<sup>®</sup> National Operational Management Benchmarks for public aquatic centres.

**The benchmarks** highlight the challenge that outdoor-only centres have in attracting visitors (Table 1). The median benchmarks for all centres in each category indicate that outdoor-only centres attract considerably fewer visits per year (53,000) compared to centres that have indoor pools (over 300,000 visits per year). This large disparity in annual visits is partly explained by other benchmarks. One influence is the smaller median catchment population for outdoor-only centres. However, a major influence is the relatively limited range of program opportunities that outdoor-only centres can provide.

The generally larger multi-purpose centres tend to provide a range of pools as well as dry facilities (eg fitness gyms and in some cases sports halls). Financial benchmarks also vary considerably between Group 5 centres compared to Group 6 and 7 centres. Outdoor-only centres overall charge lower entry fees and generate substantially less gross receipts. While they have much lower gross expenditures, outdoor-only centres have a median subsidy per visit that is greater than the median fee that each visit generates.

**Table 1: Comparison between centres with outdoor-only pools (Group 5) and those with indoor pools (Groups 6 & 7), 2006**

Centre category (n centres)	CERM PI 2006 Group 5 (n=43)	CERM PI 2006 Group 6 (n=31)	CERM PI 2006 Group 7 (n=34)
	median	median	median
<i>Services</i>			
Total visits per year	53,000	365,000	343,888
Catchment population (within 5km)	35,000	69,500	56,500
Program opportunities per week	27	280	238
<i>Finance</i>			
Expense recovery%	50%	86%	87%
Gross receipts	\$153,041	\$1,774,393	\$1,844,487
Gross expenditures	\$366,124	\$2,130,061	\$2,021,920
Fees per visit	\$3.04	\$4.45	\$4.65
Surplus(subsidy) per visit	(\$3.37)	(\$0.66)	(\$0.76)

The contrast between centres with outdoor-only pools and those with indoor pools was duplicated in an analysis of CERM PI benchmarks for public Australian aquatic centres using data from 1997-2003 and reported in the November/December 2005 issue of *Australasian Leisure Management*. Table 2 indicates a relatively high consistency between the collated 2005 and 2006 benchmarks (n = 205 centres) and the collated 1997-2003 data (n = 552 centres). Because the statistical analyses employed in the examination of the 1997-2003 benchmarks referred to means in the 2005 publications, the means for 2005 and 2006 are also reported in Table 3.

Almost identical means are reported for 1997-2003 compared to 2005 and 2006, indicating a close similarity for the collated data sets in respect to total visits per year, catchment population, and program opportunities. However, the increasing financial pressure on public facilities is demonstrated in the less favourable benchmarks in 2005 and 2006 for expense recovery, fees per visit and subsidy per visit.

**Table 2: Comparison between centres with outdoor-only pools (Group 5) and those with indoor pools (Groups 6 & 7), 2005 & 2006 versus 1997-2003**

Centre category	CERM PI Group 5		CERM PI Group 6		CERM PI Group 7	
	1997-2003 (n=552)	2005-2006 (n=205)	1997-2003 (n=552)	2005-2006 (n=205)	1997-2003 (n=552)	2005-2006 (n=205)
	means	means	means	means	means	means
<i>Services</i>						
Total visits per year	96,302	92,071	385,519	400,314	373,604	408,010
Catchment population (within 5km)	74,322	74,042	79,276	89,150	71,079	96,349
Program opportunities per week	54	53	236	245	225	241
<i>Finance</i>						
Expense recovery%	68%	58%	91%	86%	95%	88%
Fees per visit	\$2.10	\$3.33	\$3.51	\$4.28	\$3.40	\$5.39
Surplus(subsidy) per visit	(\$1.74)	(\$3.58)	(\$0.61)	(\$0.93)	(\$0.47)	(\$1.36)

Other such comparisons can be derived from the CERM PI benchmarks that have been compiled each year since 1992, thus providing the Australian public aquatics industry with trend data that is possibly unique in the world for such facilities.

The majority of participating centres are located in capital cities or regional centres, and have a minimum catchment population within five kilometres from the centre of 10,000. However, increasing numbers of centres from more remote areas are also contributing data, particularly smaller outdoor pools located in areas with a catchment population as low as 5,000.

**References:**

Howat, G. (2007). The Bottom Line. *Australasian Leisure Management*, July/August, No. 63.  
 Howat, G. (2005). Aquatic centres with indoor pools outperform those with solely outdoor pools. *Australasian Leisure Management*, November/December, No. 53.  
 Howat, G., Murray, D., & Crilley, G. (2005). Using performance Measures to Assess Performance of Indoor and Outdoor Aquatic Centres, *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management*, 11(1), 6-16.