



Returning Swimming to Lake Parramatta – a 72 year journey



Project location – Sydney, Australia



Aerial view of Lake Parramatta



600 metres

Lake Parramatta Swimming – 1930's and 1940's



ON TOP OF
THE WORLD



A group of happy, sun-tanned holiday makers gathered on the diving tower at Lake Parramatta.

Official notice ending swimming

- Elsewhere dozens of official and unofficial swimming locations scattered along the Parramatta River and within its catchment
- But in November 1942 Lake officially closed to swimming due to pollution / drowning concerns

970 Parks, Gardens & Health (2547/J) 23rd November re growing of herbs in Council's gardens and closing of Lake Parramatta as a swimming reserve was received and adopted and the necessary work to be put in hand the Town Clerk to also make enquiries re stocking of the lake with various kinds of fish.

What happened next - 1950's to 1990's

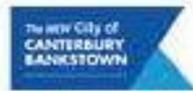
- The catchment supplying the Lake became increasingly urbanised resulting in worsening pollution
- However, a centralised sewerage system was built in the 1960's and 1970's which improved water quality
- Also catchment and streambank remediation works installed in the 1980's and 1990's which again improved water quality

2000's onwards

- The Lake (from a water quality perspective) was probably swimmable from the 2000's onwards
- No particular tradition of swimming in outdoor, natural areas across most of Western Sydney
- Most people would drive to one of the Eastern Sydney beaches
- So, not much community pressure to open the Lake to swimming

What changed and when?

- In 2014 The Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) started a mission “to make Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025”



What changed and when?



- In response City of Parramatta Council reviewed all possible swimming locations in its area of operations – Lake Parramatta was identified as the most promising location for returning swimming

Why was Lake Parramatta selected?

- Scientific work in the mid-2000's had shown that water quality was now very good
- Surrounding natural area / park around the Lake with:-

- Walking tracks
- Toilets
- Barbeques / shelters
- Playground
- Café
- Car park



What did we do to prepare for swimming?

Water quality testing



Installation of buoys and ropes



What did we do to prepare for swimming?

Divers checking Lake floor



New signage



Lifeguards during the summer



What else did we do to prepare for swimming?

- Advice from other Councils with natural areas swimming
- Royal Lifesaving Australia conducted safety audit
- Legal / insurance advice
- Total cost to create new swimming area = about AU\$40,000
- A tiny fraction of the cost of setting up a constructed swimming pool, plus a tiny fraction of the running costs

So, what happened next?

- Lake formally opened to swimming on 24th January 2015, after a 72 year break





KEEP WATCH

Balance - Don't drink alcohol

Relaxing - Don't get too relaxed

Swim - Don't swim alone

Alcohol - Don't drink too much

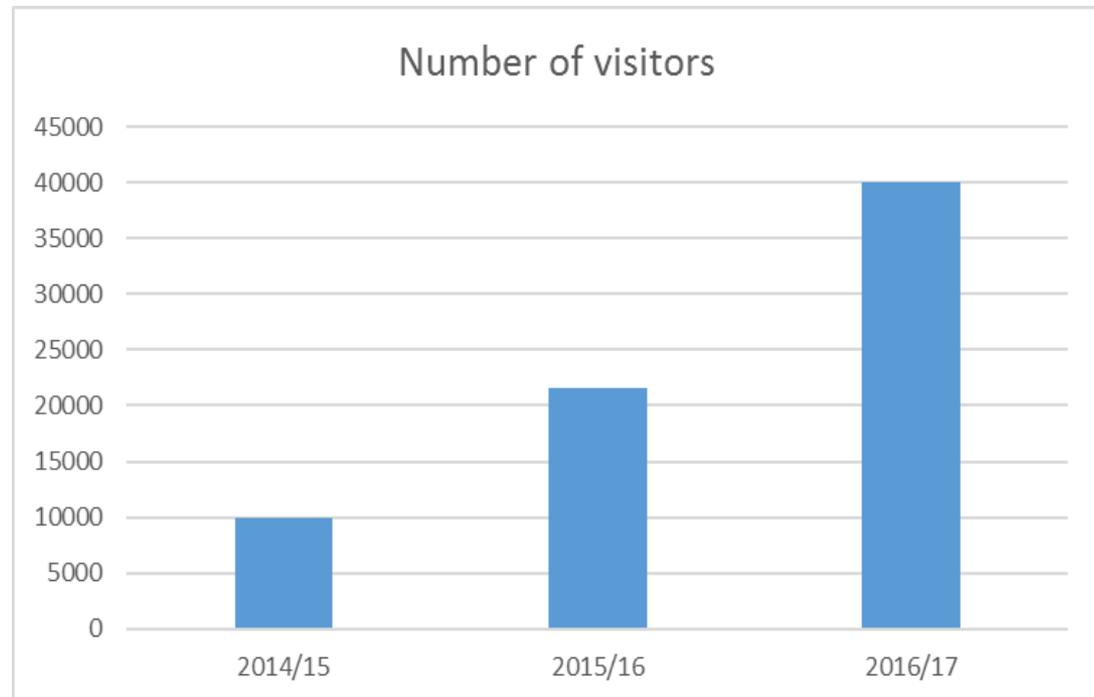
Beating - Don't beat the water

City - Don't drink too much

Responsible - Don't drink too much

What do people think about swimming at Lake Parramatta?

- Lake Parramatta is rated the number 1 attraction in the Parramatta area on the TripAdvisor website (June 2017)
- 93% of visitors report swimming at Lake Parramatta is “good” or “very good”
- Visitor numbers increased by 400% between 2015 and 2017



Other benefits of swimming facility

- Exposes people to the natural environment and reinforces the benefits of natural areas
- No financial cost to use the facility
- Encourages other healthy activities such as bushwalking (trailwalking) around Lake and use of rowboats / kayaks / pedal boats (a hire service)
- Provides a cool refuge during heatwaves
- Allows people to try natural area swimming in a relatively safe environment (compared with ocean swimming with its currents, waves, tides, dangerous animals)

Conclusions

- There is a strong latent community desire to be able to swim in a natural environment
- Based on the success of introducing swimming at Lake Parramatta multiple other locations around the catchment and beyond are actively being considered for returning swimming
- Encouraging people to recreate in the natural environment is likely to increase their interest / positivity about the natural environment