



## SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS WATER POLO (BOWRAL WATER POLO)

40<sup>TH</sup> YEAR CELEBRATIONS - 2022 – BRIEF HISTORY



Around 1978/79, Bowral Pool staff Kevin Connors and Tony Fahey worked on developing the Bowral Water Polo competition that we know today as Southern Highlands Water Polo. Tony Springett supported the pool staff and became the Club's first President. The Club celebrated 25 years in the 2004-05 season and planned to celebrate 40 years during the season 2019-20.

Covid played havoc with plans and the celebration has been postponed (3 times!) until 8 October 2022, to be held at the Mittagong RSL, a long time supporter of our Club. Local Water Polo competitions have also been challenged by the pandemic with season length reduced and player numbers impacted. The Club is planning for a revitalised comp starting early October, see [website](#) for details.

The Bowral Water Polo Competition actually started on 6 February 1980, a Wednesday, with the 6 teams (See SH News story above – 6 February 1980). Until the late 90's, all competitions were played at Bowral Memorial Pool, Mondays for the Senior Comp and Tuesdays for Juniors, with players enduring many seasons of sometimes bitter conditions in the unheated water. Heating of all local pools was



undertaken from around 1996 with Mittagong Pool first enjoying a new gas system which warmed the water to around 24 degrees – many a time the gas ‘blew out’ and we were reminded of the early days playing in very cold Highland’s water! At this time, the Club relocated competitions to Mittagong and adopted this site as ‘home ground’. In 2015, the Frensham School opened the Centenary Pool at Mittagong and thanks to the support of the school and operators, ‘Aquabliss’, the Club has been able to use this wonderful facility. Mittagong and Bowral Pools have also been used since 2015, especially for Junior competitions and the many representative events held in the Highlands.

In 1998 at Mittagong Pool, with support from a Council Grant and a number of generous material and labour contributions from the Water Polo community, a Clubhouse was built. The Clubhouse was shared with Mittagong Swimming Club and local schools providing useful shelter and a store for much of the Club’s equipment and records. Unfortunately, the Clubhouse was lost in a vandal fire in 2017 with much Club equipment, and sadly records, destroyed. The saga of Mittagong Pool is another story that will be covered elsewhere, suffice to say that our ‘home ground’ has only been available for around 14 weeks over the last 6 seasons due to what is now regular flooding of the site. The majority of games are now played at Aquabliss Centenary Pool.

The Club has hosted around 7 NSW Water Polo Country Club Championships over the years, the first in 1983 and the most recent in 2020 just before the Pandemic hit. The Club also has produced 2 National Representatives (Erin and Kelly Douglass), 9 State Players (Heather Rouen, Gary Grant, Rob Langford, Kate Scruton, Ben Douglass Jenny Balla, Jack Cockington, Lauren Balla and Elise Balla) plus a number of Juniors who have represented the Club over the years at various levels. Daniel Marsden, captain of the Australian Men’s Olympic Team in 2000 supported training for our Juniors around the Sydney Olympics and will be guest speaker at the 40th Anniversary Dinner.

The Club has supported many thousands of players over its rich history with teams in Flippaball, Juniors, Seniors A & B Grade plus dedicated Women’s competitions over the years. During the post-Olympic era, the Club boasted over 30 teams in annual competitions and was understood to have the largest Junior Competition in NSW around that time. Development of Junior players has been a major feature over the years of water polo in the Highlands. The atmosphere and spirited competition on Junior Comp nights is a pleasure to watch with many players continuing their water polo involvement in senior school and beyond.

Supporting the competitions has been legion of administrators and referees – we thank them all, and the Anniversary is an opportunity to acknowledge their support. The Club also has enjoyed the support of three Patrons for many years. Sadly, our Patron, Australian Water Polo captain at 2 Olympics and a playing legend all the way into his seventies – Ray Smee – passed away in 2019 which was a huge loss to water polo and our Club. Currently, founding President Tony Springett OAM, and legend of Sydney Uni Water Polo Club, Carl Phillips, are our Patrons. Tony was President for over 18 years and has been active at poolside and in the background for the whole life of our Club. Carl moved to the Highlands in the 90’s and has been involved as an administrator and player over the years bringing a wealth of



knowledge to the Club – and an uncanny ability to attract financial support – over his time. A whole chapter could (and has been) written about Ray who was extremely generous with his time and support for the Club over more than 2 decades. Many Junior players (and Seniors for that matter) have benefitted from Ray's talents as a player and coach. Over the years 14 Club stalwarts have been recognised as Life Members, many still supporting the Club in various ways.

Although many records were destroyed in the 2017 fire, we are putting together a rough chronology of personnel, awards, events and winning teams over the last 42 years. Details of Junior achievements and results are being refined and all will be available at the 40<sup>th</sup>.

Tickets to the 40th Anniversary Dinner are available here:

<https://www.revolutionise.com.au/shwpolo/events/62233/>

and there is a building Gallery of photos here:

<https://www.revolutionise.com.au/shwpolo/gallery/2509/>

We look forward seeing players and supporters at the 40<sup>th</sup>, and to celebrating 50 years in 2030!

We would also love to embellish the above brief history – any contributions (and photos) welcome at [shwp@outlook.com](mailto:shwp@outlook.com) !

Please contact Miles Lochhead (0409 038 366), Leanne Butcher (0409 248 135) or Greg Burke (0414 079 403) or [shwp@outlook.com](mailto:shwp@outlook.com) with offers of support or questions.

Club website: <https://www.revolutionise.com.au/shwpolo/home/>