

28 March 2025



Dear Resident,

Re: Redevelopment of the Denise Spencer Aquatic Centre – Planning for the Next Generation

I write to you today on behalf of your Council, not only as your Mayor, but as a fellow resident who understands how important the Denise Spencer Memorial Pool has been to our region for decades — and just how important the Aquatic Centre redevelopment is for our community's future.

I appreciate that there's a lot of information in this letter, but this is a once-in-a-generation project, and I encourage you to take a few moments to learn more about what's ahead.

Since the temporary closure was announced, I and my fellow Councillors have had many meaningful conversations with community members about the project. That's why we felt it was important to write to you directly — to ensure you have the facts: not only about the \$36 million redevelopment budget, or Council's \$12.5 million investment into the project, but also about why Council has made certain decisions, the timing of the closure, and what this means for you and your family.

Council remains committed to being open, transparent, and community focused. That's why I want to take this opportunity to walk you through the journey so far, and what lies ahead.

A Milestone Investment in Our Community

Major projects like this naturally evolve as planning becomes more detailed. From the outset, Council committed to keeping the community informed — and we've done just that.

While initial estimates helped shape the 2024/25 Budget, final tender pricing confirmed that additional funds would be needed to deliver the full community-backed design. At that point, Council had a choice: scale back the project or go the extra mile to deliver the full vision. We chose the latter.

Rather than reduce the scope or compromise on the design that residents overwhelmingly supported, Council worked hard with both levels of government and industry partners to secure the additional funding needed to deliver the full vision.

Thanks to strong partnerships and advocacy, we've secured additional funding to ensure that the community's preferred design remains intact — including \$9.5 million from the Australian Government (Growing Regions Program), \$5 million from the Queensland Government, and \$5 million from Council's APLNG Workers Transition Agreement. These, alongside other industry contributions, mean we're able to deliver this exciting project without further increasing Council's financial contribution.

These outcomes are a testament to this Council's positive relationships with other levels of government and our commitment to delivering real, lasting results for our region.

Sticking to the Vision – Without Compromise

Council has consistently stood by the shared vision developed with the community. I'm incredibly proud of my fellow Councillors and Council staff who've worked hard to secure funding, manage project timelines, and stay true to the design residents supported.

Of Council's \$12.5 million contribution, \$7.5 million has been secured through a low-interest loan with the Queensland Treasury Corporation. This is a fair and forward-looking approach — ensuring that the cost of a facility designed for the future is shared over time, not shouldered entirely by today's ratepayers.

As Mayor, I am incredibly proud of my fellow Councillors and Council staff who worked tirelessly throughout this process. It would have been easier to scale back — but they stood by the vision shared with the community, and the Council contribution discussed during my previous term (2020 – 2024) has remained largely unchanged. That commitment and perseverance means we can now deliver a modern,

accessible, and exciting facility — one that truly reflects what we presented and discussed with the community.

Like most major infrastructure projects, the redevelopment budget also includes a contingency allowance to help manage unexpected costs — and this project is no different. For example, during early site investigations, we discovered elements of the original Roma Baths beneath the current pool — a unique piece of history that requires extra preparation to ensure a safe and stable foundation for the new centre.

A Project Shaped Through Consultation

In 2019, Council invited residents to have their say on the future of the Roma Pool. The response was overwhelming — more than 900 people took part in the consultation process, making it one of the most significant community engagement efforts in recent years.

As part of that consultation, we asked a series of key questions: Should Roma retain a 50-metre pool? Should the facility be relocated to a new site? And, if the pool were to remain at its current location, would residents support a temporary closure during construction?

The response was clear, with 80% of participants supporting the retention of a 50-metre pool, and over 70% indicating they would support a temporary closure if it meant keeping the pool at its existing location and delivering a long-term upgrade.

These priorities, identified by the community and championed through ongoing conversations, have remained central to every decision made on the project.

What We Considered – And Why a Temporary Closure Was the Right Call

Some residents have asked why the existing pool couldn't remain partially open during the construction period. I want to assure you — this was something Council seriously explored. In fact, the initial design was prepared on the basis of a staged construction approach, with the goal of keeping the 50-metre pool open for as long as possible while the new indoor 25-metre pool was being built.

However, as we progressed into more detailed technical assessments, it became clear that this approach carried unacceptable risks. These included:

- Significant costs increase (in excess of \$2M) due to staging and construction inefficiencies
- A longer construction timeline that could have pushed the project into a second summer closure
- Safety concerns with heavy machinery and trucks operating near public areas
- No guarantee of uninterrupted access — parts of the facility could have been closed without notice if safety or structural issues emerged

One of the major drivers for the overall redevelopment was the ongoing water leakage in the existing 50-metre pool, which has been a persistent issue for many years. Continuing to operate the 50-metre pool while excavation for the new 25m pool was underway significantly increased the risk of water infiltration into the construction zone.

This presented a very real possibility that the pool could be closed suddenly and without warning if safety or structural issues emerged — an outcome that would have been far more disruptive and frustrating for our community. Council carefully considered every option to keep the facility partially open — but ultimately made the call that best balanced safety, cost, and delivering the project as quickly as possible.

Council is focused on making the transition as smooth and seamless as possible for our community. We are committed to ensuring that once the new facility is fully commissioned and ready to operate, there will be no unnecessary delays between completion and reopening. We are planning ahead to ensure a timely handover and opening so the community can make the most of the new centre from day one.

All parties involved in the project recognise how important the pool is to the community, and we will be working as hard as possible to reopen the facility as soon as it is safe and ready to welcome the public.

The Closure Window – A Carefully Planned Timeline

Council recognises that the temporary closure of the Roma Pool will be disruptive for many residents, families, schools, and community groups. As planning progressed, it became apparent that some form of closure would be necessary — so our focus turned to a key question: how do we reduce the impact as much as possible?

After weighing all the options, we felt the best outcome for the community was to align the construction window in a way that would affect only one summer season.

With an 18-month build required, there are very limited opportunities to avoid overlapping with multiple peak usage periods. After detailed consideration and consultation with construction experts, Council selected the most efficient and least disruptive schedule — commencing immediately after Term 1, on Friday, 4 April 2025.

This timing allows the closure to span two winter periods and only one summer. Had construction started any later, the project would likely have extended into a second summer, significantly increasing the inconvenience and reducing access to vital recreational and wellbeing activities.

Our shared goal is to have the **new facility open and ready to enjoy by the summer school holidays of 2026.**

What's Included in the New Aquatic Centre

Since the project was announced, I've been asked by a number of residents what exactly is being delivered as part of the redevelopment. I want to take this opportunity to confirm the key features that will be included in the new Denise Spencer Aquatic Centre.

The redeveloped facility will include:

- An 8-lane, 50-metre outdoor pool with grandstand seating
- A 25-metre indoor program and lap pool
- A 10-metre twin waterslide
- A zero-depth splash pad, toddler pool, and junior water play area
- A new entry building, incorporating a kiosk, multipurpose room, and fully accessible amenities
- Indoor changerooms and amenities for increased year-round comfort
- Shaded areas throughout the facility — not only for pool users and spectators, but importantly, for event officials and volunteers supporting swim meets and community events

This facility has been designed to meet the needs of a wide range of users — from families with young children and casual swimmers to schools, clubs, and competitive athletes. Once complete, it will serve the Maranoa community for decades to come.

Strong Oversight and Good Governance

To reflect our shared commitment to transparency and accountability, Council has established a Strategic Steering Committee to guide the project on behalf of the community. This committee has been formed to provide high-level oversight and guidance throughout the planning, construction, and commissioning phases of the project.

The committee includes Deputy Mayor Cameron O'Neil, Council's Portfolio Chair for Major Projects, and Councillor Peter Flynn, Portfolio Chair for Sport and Recreation, along with members of Council's executive team and project staff.

The group will play a key role in monitoring progress, identifying risks, and ensuring that decisions continue to reflect the priorities of the community. Its establishment reinforces Council's commitment to strong governance, transparency, and accountability as we deliver this significant investment for the Maranoa.

Supporting the Community During the Closure

We know this temporary closure will impact many families, groups, and individuals — and we're working together to put support in place during the transition. These support initiatives are being developed in consultation with pool users and service providers, and further details will be communicated in the coming weeks. Some of the support measures being considered include:

- Extended operating hours at regional pools in Wallumbilla, Surat, Mitchell, and Injune (seasonal)
- An increased focus on water play activities as part of Council's school holiday programs
- Education programs promoting water safety and water confidence for young children
- The introduction of low-impact, land-based fitness and wellbeing sessions for those who normally rely on water-based therapy

Boosting Local Jobs and Business Opportunities

A project of this size is significant not only for the facility it will deliver, but also for the opportunities it creates for local employment and economic activity across the region. Council is working closely with the successful contractor, Hines Construction, to ensure there are meaningful opportunities for local businesses, suppliers, and tradespeople to be involved in the project's delivery.

At the same time, it's important to strike the right balance — encouraging local involvement while also ensuring there is sufficient capacity to continue meeting the everyday needs of residents, businesses, and other ongoing projects throughout the construction period.

To support this, and along with other initiatives, we are planning a supplier engagement session in conjunction with the builder, Hines Constructions, Roma Commerce and Tourism (RCAT), and the Department of State Development. Further details will be communicated once finalised.

Demolition and Site Preparation

You may have already noticed the early stages of demolition and tree management. These steps are essential to safely prepare the site and make way for the new centre.

The relocation of the house on Feather Street and the initial round of tree management mark the beginning of a carefully planned transition to prepare the site for major construction. The demolition phase includes the safe removal of the existing pools and supporting infrastructure, the salvage of reusable items, and the relocation of materials used by community groups

Council has looked in great detail at what could be retained or repurposed. One example is the current shade structure, which we know has served the community well over many years. While we explored the option of reusing the current shade structure, technical assessments confirmed that replacing it as part of the new design would be the safest and most cost-effective solution — while also meeting modern safety and competition standards.

In addition to the structural limitations, incorporating the existing structure into the new design would have impacted Council's ability to meet current FINA and Royal Life Saving guidelines, particularly in relation to the required clearance distances between permanent structures and the edge of the pool.

That said, we are continuing to work closely with the contractor to explore options for recovery and reuse wherever it is practical and economically viable. For example, a mobile crusher will be mobilised to the site to allow bricks and concrete from the existing pool concourse and buildings to be recycled and

reused as general fill, minimising waste and reducing the environmental footprint of the project. Every effort is being made to balance environmental care, cost-effectiveness, and long-term benefit.

Operations of the New Pool

I know that many in the community are also keen to understand how the new facility will operate once it opens. Questions such as “Will the pool be free?” or “How will it be managed?” are understandable and important. These matters will be carefully considered by Council in the months ahead. The operating model will need to reflect the size, features, and running costs of the new facility, while also ensuring it remains accessible and welcoming for all members of the community.

We'll keep you updated as these details are finalised.

Staying Connected

Regular project updates will be shared via Council's website and the dedicated Denise Spencer Aquatic Centre Facebook page. You can also contact Council at DSAC@maranoa.qld.gov.au or phone 1300 007 662. A QR code is also included at the end of this letter so you can easily access the dedicated project page and stay up to date with the latest news, events, and progress updates.

Council will also be hosting a **Community Information Session on Wednesday, 23 April 2025** at 5:30pm at the Roma Cultural Centre. I invite you to attend, learn more about the project, ask questions, and hear how Council is supporting the community throughout the temporary closure period.

Looking Ahead

This project represents the largest community recreation investment in our region's history. It's about more than just a pool — it's about creating a space that supports health, inclusion, learning, and fun for current and future generations of Maranoa residents.

Thank you for your patience, your support, and your belief in our community's future. We're proud to be delivering something truly special — for all of us.

Yours sincerely,



Cr Wendy Taylor
Mayor



DSAC Project Website