

Competition Review (2025 - 2028)

Proposal for Community Feedback

February 2024



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Following on from the Competition Restructure & Competition Pathway Review (2021 – 2024) that was completed in 2020, Swimming New Zealand (SNZ) set up a Competition Review Working Group to complete the 4-year review leading into 2025 – 2028, one of the previous recommendations from the last review.

The working group is made up of 7 coaches, 2 active swimmers, 2 event delivery staff and 5 Swimming NZ staff members, possessing a vast array of experience within swimming, across varying levels and from across the country.

The Terms of Reference for the working group outlined they would provide expert advice and recommendations for the upcoming 4-year cycle in the following areas:

- Competition structure of competitions at local, regional, zonal and national level – ie: timing of competitions
- Competition formats, age groups and qualifying criteria for competitions at local, regional, zonal and national level
- Competition pathways offered within New Zealand
- The structure of designated and development meets within New Zealand

Competitions at all levels of swimming in New Zealand have been identified as a major element of the delivery of swimming for our community. For this reason, the second Competition Review is an important step in continuing to provide quality racing opportunities for swimmers across the country.



Name	Organisation	Representing
Dale Johnson (Chair)	Swimming NZ	Head of Participation & Events
Gary Francis	Swimming NZ	Olympic Programme Lead
Simon Mayne	Swimming NZ	Paralympic Programme Lead
Carlrine Gillespie	Swimming NZ	TO & Volunteer Development Lead
Kira Morrison	Swimming NZ	Event Coordinator
Willy Benson	Heretaunga Sundevils	Coach
Peter Burgon	Jasi	Coach
David Lyles	Phoenix Aquatics	Coach
Brigitte Mahan	North Canterbury	Coach
Frank Tourelle	SwimZone Racing	Coach
Michael Weston	Coast	Coach
Mat Woofe	Hamilton Aquatics	Coach
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Angeline Hardie	Swimming Waikato	Event Delivery
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A Working Group consisting of 16 members including coaches, active swimmers, event delivery staff and SNZ staff has been formed to complete a review of competitions held throughout New Zealand for the upcoming 4 year cycle (2025 – 2028). This follows on from the previous review recommendations (published in 2020) to conduct 4-yearly reviews.

The Working Group has identified eight key issues within the scope of the review. As an overview only (more details in this document), these eight include:

1. The timing of national events
2. The timing of regional championships
3. A lack of variety available across the competition pathway in New Zealand
4. A missing step in the competition pathway
5. Some Swimming NZ events that required some adjustments, which were:
 - NZ Champs
 - Division II
 - Junior Festivals
6. Inconsistencies in setting meet formats across New Zealand
7. The delivery and understanding of Designated and Development Meets
8. Costs associated with attending and delivering events

Using these eight identified issues as a guide, the Working Group have discussed and debated options, providing eight recommendations (detailed in this document) which are presented as a proposal for the swimming community to provide feedback on. An overview of the recommendations are:

1. Articulate a competition pathway – graphic provided in Appendix 1 too
2. Updated timing of national events – graphic provided in Appendix 2 too
3. Updating timing of major regional championships – graphic provided in Appendix 2 too
4. Recommendation for meet types at social and foundation levels
5. Setting meet formats
6. Adjusting Designated Meet criteria
7. Updates to Div II
8. Updates to Junior Festivals

The swimming community has the opportunity to review this document and provide feedback on this proposal by completing the Community Feedback Survey by Sunday 10 March. Following this feedback opportunity, the Working Group will review the feedback and review the proposed recommendations, updating if deemed necessary, before submitting the final recommendations to the Swimming NZ board.

It is crucial that the swimming community take this opportunity to provide feedback on this proposal during this feedback window to assist with setting up the 2025 - 2028 competition calendar.



One of the first tasks for the Competition Review Working Group was to review the current state of competitions held across New Zealand. This review was conducted via a survey of group members, and identified key issues that formed the basis of the focus areas the Working Group wished to propose recommendations and solutions for, to improve the delivery of competitions in New Zealand.

The key issues identified by the Working Group (in no particular order) were:

1. The timing of national events

Three factors were identified as issues to address:

- NZ Champs and NAGS are too close together on the calendar.
- NZ Secondary Schools and NZ Short Course are too close together on the calendar.
- NZ Short Course is not being held in the school holidays.

2. The timing of regional championships

Whilst acknowledged that this is a result of the previous Competition Restructure & Competition Pathway Review, clashes of when regional championships were identified as an issue to address. Part of this issue also noted a lack of collaboration across the country when setting the competition calendar.

3. A lack of variety available across the competition pathway in New Zealand

Some issues were identified across the competition pathway such as:

- Lack of team-based competitions
- Lack of clear break in season
- Lack of race practice being utilised
- Lack of valuing each competition for its role in the competition pathway

4. A missing step in the competition pathway

The Working Group felt that significant racing opportunities were restricted for swimmers, compounded by regional championships being held in the same period and on the same weekends.

5. Some Swimming NZ events that need some adjustments to better suit the competition calendar and pathway

Three events were noted for having some issues that needed addressing:

- NZ Champs
 - The financial viability of the event in its current format as a standalone event
- Div II
 - The timing of Div II on the competition calendar
 - The length of the competition
 - NAGS swimmers competing at Div II
 - Slower than qualifying times
- Junior Festivals
 - The timing of Junior Festivals on the competition calendar
 - The gap between Junior Festivals and NAGS for 12 years turning 13 years

6. Inconsistencies in setting meet formats around New Zealand

Some issues were identified to provide clarity on the following when setting up competitions:

- Qualifying times
- Age as of date
- Age group bands
- Event scheduling (ie: don't need every event)
- Length of competitions

7. The delivery and understanding of designated and development meets

A few issues were identified with the current state, including limiting regions to 10 designated meets, a lack of collaboration when selecting designated meets within the regions and a lack of understanding/education within the community.

8. Costs associated with attending and delivering events

It was widely acknowledged that the inflation and costs are making attending and delivering events increasingly difficult for participants and event organisers alike. The trend of decreasing membership numbers and participants at national events over the past few years was noted.

In addition to the above issues identified, the Working Group also identified reasons both why swimmers may participate and why swimmers might leave the sport, to be useful reference points when discussing and reviewing competitions in New Zealand. Whilst it was acknowledged that every individual has different motivations and reasons for their decisions, these key themes were beneficial for aiming to shape a proposal that has the needs and wants of swimmers as the priority.

The key themes of both lists have been provided below (in no particular order):

Reasons Why Swimmers May Participate

- Friends & Social
- Fitness and being active
- Personal challenges and ability to achieve goals
- Ability to succeed at different levels
- Relays & Team Camaraderie
- Positive environment
- Feel of the water
- Results
- Trips away with friends

Reasons Why Swimmers Might Leave The Sport

- Cost
- Poor Coach Engagement & Delivery of Programme
- Lack of fun and social environment (training and competitions)
- Swimming is difficult and a massive time commitment
- Lack of variety and lengthy meets at all levels
- Opportunities for 18+ years
- Messaging of what success looks like in competitive swimming (ie: only successful if you become an Aquablack)
- Lack of team opportunities

The Working Group has spent time discussing what recommendations they would provide as solutions for the issues identified. The Working Group has provided 8 proposed recommendations for review by the community with the opportunity to provide feedback, as part of the Competition Review process.

Please see the recommended solutions overview below, with some appendices to provide further insight further in the document.



Recommendation 1

Articulate a Competition Pathway

The Working Group felt that an important first step to assist in the Competition Review was to outline the competition levels by articulating a competition pathway. This enables the community to have a clear understanding of the varying levels of competitions offered in New Zealand, as well as highlight that racing at each of level is something to be celebrated and crucial to the development of swimmers across all levels of the competition pathway.

At the same time, the working group hopes that demonstrating the social competition level may showcase that there is a level for swimmers to stay involved in club swimming, and encourage those who aren't aspiring to swim in the competitive and performance levels that there is still a place to enjoy our sport.

The proposed competition pathway aligns with the Sport NZ Development Framework and outlines which events sit in each level of competition:

- Performance
- Competitive (broken into two tiers - national and regional)
- Social
- Foundation

Within this competition pathway, it is important to note that all levels involve competition, and some meets may cater for multiple levels at the same time for different swimmers. An example of this could be a swimmer at club night for the first time, which would be foundation and social competition at the same time. In the same manner, some social competitions may also move into the competitive tier 1 space.

A visual overview of the proposed competition pathway can be found in Appendix 1.

Recommendation 2

Updated Timing of National Events

The Working Group discussed the timing of events at length, following a review of the current timing for national events on the calendar. Since the previous Competition Restructure & Competitive Pathway Review in 2020, it was felt that there were some timing adjustments that would better suit the calendar for the swimming community. The current cost of living was taken into account for this planning, acknowledging that events better spread across the year could be better suited to families.

Please find the summary and explanation of each update:

NZ Champs

The recommendation to separate NZ Champs and NAGS on the calendar was to provide a better opportunity for age group swimmers who are ready to attend both as part of their development. The number of swimmers attending NZ Champs in recent years has been unsustainable for the event and it was felt that separating the two events on the calendar might increase the likelihood that swimmers may wish to attend both.

Therefore, NZ Champs has been assigned on the calendar in the timeslot that High Performance has indicated as best suited to providing our swimmers aiming for international selection.

We are aware that the university exams are around this time and will endeavour to host outside of these dates.

NAGS

The Working Group felt that NAGS should sit at the end of the summer period prior to the Term 1 school holidays. This allows SNZ, regions, clubs and swimmers the opportunity to race at Australian Age as one of the premier age group meets in the world, whilst forming a separation on the calendar between NAGS and NZ Champs.

NZ Short Course

The Working Group felt that the change of date for NZ Short Course into August (mid Term 3) from the previous Competition Review was not the best option to continue, as most swimmers that competed are still at school. It was recommended that the event be moved back into the first week of the Term 3 school holidays, so students aren't missing a whole week of school.

It was also acknowledged that one of the key reasons for shifting out of October during the last review was to support the age group programme sending a team to Australian State Teams, which has not returned to the calendar post-Covid pandemic.

NZ Secondary Schools

Whilst this event was not factored into planning in this previous Competition Review, the Working Group acknowledged the popularity of students representing their school and therefore the need to include this event on the competition calendar.

The shift in NZ Short Course allows these two events to separate on the calendar, providing more opportunity for students to compete at both championships if they wish as part of their development.

Off Season

The Working Group made note of highlighting when swimmers would have an off season within the proposed calendar. With the proposal, there have been a few opportunities provided for a break.

- **Christmas & New Year**

Kiwis love to have a break with whanau and friends in the summer, so the calendar accommodates having a break during this period.

- **Second Week of School Holidays**

Some major national events have been positioned in the first week of school holidays so that age group swimmers can enjoy the second week of holidays with their whanau and friends.

A visual overview of the proposed calendar can be found in Appendix 2.

Recommendation 3

Updated Timing of Major Regional Championships

The Working Group had a lengthy discussion around the best way to structure the competitions in Tier 1 of the competition pathway. The group felt that having the ability for swimmers to attend major racing opportunities and travel as a club team were positives and strengthens the major regional championships.

The group felt that these major regional championships served an important step in the competition pathway, as the major racing opportunity within the zone, as well as welcoming those from other parts of the country to raise the standard of racing.

The group noted that this recommendation requires greater collaboration from the local event committees and regions when setting their calendars, to avoid clashes and provide swimmers more opportunities to race during their preparation for national championships.

The group noted the success of this delivery in Australia, where state championships are spread out during the lead into Australian Championships. This has seen club teams travel interstate as part of their preparations, something that was deemed to be a positive for providing more opportunities for swimmers to race at the Competitive Tier 1 level of the pathway.



Recommendation 4

Recommendation for Meet Types

The Working Group didn't wish to dive into prescribing exactly what meet should be held when and where at the social and foundation levels of the competition pathway locally, feeling this is better left to regions who have a better understanding of their local needs. However, the Working Group did want to make some recommendations to clubs and regions planning their local calendars.

1. Clubs and regions should endeavour to provide more variety of meet types within the local calendar. A particular mention was made to increase the number of team-based events offered – eg: leagues and dual meets.
2. Clubs and regions could look to offer shorter meets that are around 2 – 3 hours in length, more often. This would increase the opportunities to race during the season.
3. Clubs and regions don't need to offer every event on the schedule for each meet. This was noted as a potential way to offer shorter meets.
4. Clubs and regions should value the use of club nights and inter-club carnivals as a social event that also provides a great opportunity for race practice and fundraising opportunities for the club.



Recommendation 5

Setting Meet Formats

The Working Group discussed the rationale for setting qualification criteria for national events to set some consistency. The group felt that it was inappropriate to prescribe the event details for regional and local events but hoped that providing an explanation for setting these at the national level would assist.

Age as of Date

Whilst the Working Group completely understood the rationale behind having an Age as of Date consistent from year to year, it felt that this would be challenging to continue given the proposed calendar changes. In this case, the recommendation was to have the Age as of Date as the first day of competition for all meets held in New Zealand.

Age Group Bands

The Working Group discussed the age groups at length and recommended the current age groups remain the same at national events – 13yrs, 14yrs, 15yrs, 16yrs, 17-18yrs.

Qualifying Period

The Working Group suggested that the qualifying period commence on 1 January the previous year. This allows for swimmers to qualify at the event the previous year.

Recommendation 6

Adjusting Designated Meet Criteria

The Working Group felt that the current state of designated meet delivery wasn't meeting the intention of the last Competition Review.

The Working Group has recommended that the Meet Approval Policy (007) be revised to have "Approved Meets" where swimmers can achieve qualifying times for national meets when the minimum technical officials requirements are met. The policy will be updated to provide minimum requirements for less lanes, in order to make meets such as Time Trials with less lanes utilised more attainable in fulfilling the Approved Meets requirements.

As part of this recommendation, the Working Group has sought to remove the limited number of Approved Meets per region.

Meets that don't pass the Approved Meets requirements will be "Unapproved Meets", in which swimmers won't be able to achieve qualifying times for national meets. However, these meets have been identified as a good opportunity for developing swimmers skills and technical officials skills.

Recommendation 7

Updates to Div II

The Working Group had multiple discussions around various aspects of this event, particularly as the group was working through the proposed competition calendar. The Working Group felt that Div II held an important place in the competition pathway, as a stepping stone for swimmers working toward National Championships.

The Working Group felt that the event would work well over a weekend in May, with the event being held after NAGS and promoting the value of the Major Regional Championships in the competition pathway. The event would be held as timed finals to be held over 5 sessions from Friday to Sunday. The Working Group has also noted that no NAGS swimmers should be permitted to swim at Div II.

Recommendation 8

Updates to Junior Festivals

The Working Group discussed the Junior Festivals at length. The group felt that Junior Festivals were better placed toward the end of the summer, in the February and March period. These festivals would continue to be held within zones for 12 & under, and held as the major racing opportunity for this age group.

The Working Group recommended that qualifying times be reinstated for the 12 years age bracket to help prepare this age group toward those wishing to step into the NZ Age Group Champs as they turn 13 years old.

The recommendation was to have these events held over consecutive weekends, with the host region to have a greater involvement in delivery of the event.

The Working Group did acknowledge that regions should look to host Have A Go meets locally at the start of the summer period as part of welcoming young swimmers into the club swimming space, which would cover the gap created from moving the festivals away from November.



Conclusion

With the proposed recommendations and appendices, the Working Group has intended to provide solutions to the eight issues that were identified. Through the eight proposed recommendations, the Working Group believes that this proposal is providing the sport with the following benefits for the next 4-year cycle (2025 – 2028).

Next Steps

This document has been made available to provide the swimming community the opportunity to provide their feedback on the proposed recommendations and solutions. The process for providing community feedback is outlined below, as well as the next steps.

- The community may provide feedback on the proposed recommendations and solutions by Sunday 10 March.
- The community feedback received will be reviewed by the Competition Review Working Group and adjustments made to the draft proposal if required.
- The final recommendations from the Competition Review Working Group will be presented to the Swimming NZ board (May 2024).



1. What has happened to the training cycles established in the previous Competition Review?

The Working Group discussed the training cycles at length as part of the review and felt that the proposed competition calendar provided more regular significant racing opportunities. However, the group has still maintained separation of major national championships to cater for coaches and swimmers who plan their training cycles.

2. Why hasn't an XLR8 programme replacement been mentioned in this document?

The Terms of Reference of the Working Group for this Competition Review didn't include XLR8 or other participation programmes within the scope.



Proposed Competition Pathway

The Working Group has stated that draft recommendation 1 has provided an updated Competition Pathway displaying the varying levels of swimming competitions. These levels also align to Sport NZ’s Sport Pathways Framework.

Pathway Level	Events
Performance	Selection on NZ teams for international competitions (eg: Aquablacks team)
Competitive – Tier 2	NZ Open Water NZ Champs NAGS NZ Secondary Schools NZ Short Course
Competitive – Tier 1	Div II Major Regional Championships Regional Championships Junior Festivals
Social	Club Nights Club Champs Inter Club Carnivals Leagues Dual Meets
Foundation	Have a Go Meets

Proposed Competition Calendar

The Working Group has put together this proposed competition calendar to indicate when major events would be held during the year. Exact dates and venues will be confirmed closer to the annual event.

Pathway Level	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Performance						
Competition - Tier 2	NZ Open Water		NAGS			NZ Champs
Competition - Tier 1	Region LC #2	Region LC #3		Masters	Div II Region LC #4	
Social & Foundation	Rather than prescribing when social and foundation level events should be held, some recommendations have been provided below					

Please note this proposed competition calendar is subject to change following additional information and feedback

Proposed Competition Calendar

The Working Group has put together this proposed competition calendar to indicate when major events would be held during the year. Exact dates and venues will be confirmed closer to the annual event.

Pathway Level	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Performance	World Aquatics Pinnacle	World Para Pinnacle				Qld Champs
Competition - Tier 2	NZ Sec Schools			NZ Short Course		
Competition - Tier 1		Region SC #1 Region SC #2	Region SC #3 Region SC #4			Region LC #1
Social & Foundation	Rather than prescribing when social and foundation level events should be held, some recommendations have been provided below					

Please note this proposed competition calendar is subject to change following additional information and feedback

Proposed Event Details

NZ Open Water Swimming Championships

- Timing: January
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 2

NZ Swimming Championships

- Timing: June
- Length: 5 Days
- Pool Set Up: Long Course
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 2
- Format: Heats & Finals
- Age Groups: Open, Multi-Class Open

NZ Age Group Swimming Championships

- Timing: March (late)
- Length: 5 Days
- Pool Set Up: Long Course
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 2
- Format: Heats (combined age groups) & Finals (age groups)
- Age Groups: 13yrs, 14yrs, 15yrs, 16yrs, 17-18yrs, Multi-Class 13-18yrs

NZ Secondary School Swimming Championships

- Timing: July (late)
- Length: 4 days (6 sessions)
- Pool Set Up: Short Course
- Level: Competitive – Tier 2
- Format: Timed Finals
- Age Groups: 13yrs, 14yrs, 15yrs, 16yrs, 17-19yrs

NZ Short Course Swimming Championships

- Timing: October (1st week of Term 3 Holidays)
- Length: 5 days
- Pool Set Up: Short Course
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 2
- Format: Heats (includes age timed finals) & Finals (open)
- Age Groups: 13yrs, 14rs, 15yrs, 16yrs, 17-18yrs, Open, Multi-Class Open

Proposed Event Details

Division II Swimming Competition

- Timing: May
- Length: 3 days (5 sessions)
- Pool Set Up: Long or Short Course
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 1
- Format: Timed Finals
- Age Groups: 13yrs, 14yrs, 15yrs, 16-18yrs, 19+ yrs

Major Regional Championships

- Timing: Spread across months leading into national championships
- Length: discretion of hosting region
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 1
- Format: discretion of hosting region
- Age Groups: 13&U, 14yrs, 15yrs, 16yrs, 17-18yrs, Open, Multi-Class Open

Junior Festivals

- Timing: February (late) – March (early)
- Length: 2-3 days (weekend)
- Pool Set Up: Short Course
- Pathway Level: Competitive – Tier 1
- Format: Timed Finals
- Age Groups: 10&U, 11yrs, 12yrs