

Coaching Review

Final Recommendations Report

2025



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Acknowledgements from Chair of Coaching Review Working Group

As the Chair of the Coaching Review Working Group, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank each of the coaches from our community who provided feedback during this review. The feedback received during the early stages of this review were instrumental in providing the Working Group with a strong background of the current state of support for coaching across the country. The issues that were identified were the driving force behind the recommendations that the Working Group has landed upon in this review.

I'd also like to acknowledge the contributions of my 13 fellow members of the Coaching Review Working Group. Each member provided valuable and considered insights and perspectives throughout the process, respectfully debated and considered all stakeholder feedback. The Working Group worked well together to land on the final recommendations that we believe will continue moving our support for coaches forward as a sport across the country.

Therefore, a special thank you goes to the members of the Working Group for their time and support throughout this review. Your contributions to help move our sport forward are greatly appreciated and we are looking forward to bringing these recommendations to life.



Dale Johnson

Chair - Coaching Review Working Group

Head of Participation, Competitions & Engagement - Swimming NZ

As part of Swimming NZ's recent review and refresh of its Statement of Strategic Direction, it was acknowledged that coaching, which plays an important role in the delivery of swimming at all levels, was not as prominent as it should be. Studies show and Swimming NZ agrees that coaches are integral in every part of the sport. Whether its the first time a young swimmer comes to their local swimming club, a swimmer wants to race at any level of competition or a swimmer wants to represent New Zealand on the pinnacle stage one day, coaches play a significant role in how these experiences are delivered.

To address this, Swimming NZ instigated this Coaching Review to identify the current issues within the broad swim coaching space within New Zealand, and provide recommendations for how they should lead and provide greater support for coaches into the future.

A Working Group was developed to conduct the review and consisted of ten club coaches alongside four Swimming NZ staff members. The group consisted of a range of experience levels and diverse coaching perspectives, including a blend of rural/metro, gender and spread across the country, as well as coaches of different age groups, squads and pathways coached within New Zealand.

A consultation period was utilised during the early stages of the review, where coaches completed a survey to provide feedback on their current state and opinions for how to improve the support they need as swim coaches. The survey received 30 responses, from which the Working Group identified 27 issues within the scope of the review and refined these to five key focus areas. As an overview, these key focus areas were:

1. Coach Pathways and Education Framework
2. Strategic Direction and Leadership for Coaching
3. Ongoing Development for Coaches
4. Recognition for Coaches
5. Strong Relationships for Coaches

Over a period of meetings and months, the Working Group used these five identified issues to form recommendations for the strategic direction of coaching within New Zealand.

Below is a brief overview of the recommendations the Working Group has made in this review. They have separated these recommendations into two sections, with five key recommendations and five additional supporting recommendations.

Key Recommendations

1. Update the Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction to increase the importance and prioritisation of coaching
2. Develop a Coaching Strategy to deliver upon the Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction
3. Establish a formalised Memorandum of Understanding that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of Swimming NZ and Swim Coaches & Teachers NZ
4. Clearly define a New Zealand Coaching Framework
5. Develop an annual education and development plan for coaches

Supporting Recommendations

6. Implement a mandatory New Zealand Swim Coaching License
7. Introduce an Aquablack Numbered Coach list
8. Ensure that recognition of coaches at all levels is prioritised
9. Provide a platform for coaches to access useful resources
10. Ensure regular and targeted communications are shared with coaches at all levels



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The scope of the Working Group included:

- Engagement, collaboration and communication platforms between coaches, regions and Swimming New Zealand
- Clear pathway for coaches to get involved and develop throughout the sport
- Education, safeguarding and qualifications to be a swim coach within New Zealand
- Continual development for coaches within New Zealand
- Recognition of coaching achievements at international, national, club and local levels
- Systems to provide feedback to Swimming New Zealand and local regions
- Challenges that coaches face in the current climate

Name	Organisation	Representing
Dale Johnson (Chair)	Swimming NZ	Head of Participation, Competitions and Engagement
Cameron Leslie	Swimming NZ	Disability and Para Swimming Participation Manager
Simon Mayne	Swimming NZ	Paralympic Head Coach
Graham Hill	Swimming NZ and North Shore	Olympic Head Coach
Willy Benson	Heretaunga Sundevils	Coach
Tracy Breuer	Kiwi West Aquatics	Coach
Greg Cummings	Liz van Welie Aquatics	Coach
Brigitte Mahan	North Canterbury	Coach
Alison Fitch	Hamilton Aquatics	Coach
Glenn Hamblyn	Comet	Coach
Ash Rankin	Alexandra and Cromwell	Coach
Emma Smith	Aquagym	Coach
Graham Smith	St Paul's	Coach
Aidan Withington-Edwards	Swim Rotorua	Coach

The process for the Coaching Review took place between October 2024 and November 2025.

1. Working Group Formed

Expressions of interest were sought to be involved in the Working Group, with the coaches then voted upon by the coaching community as to who they would like to represent them on the Working Group. From the initial 18 expressions of interest, ten club coaches alongside four Swimming NZ representatives were invited to form the Working Group.

2. Initial Feedback Survey

An initial feedback survey was created and shared within the Working Group. Each of the 14 Working Group members completed the survey to gauge the current state ahead of the Working Group introduction meeting.

3. Introduction Meeting

The Working Group had an online meeting to discuss expectations, scope of review, research and readings, and Sport NZ insights. Following this meeting, a community coaching survey was developed and shared to all swim coaches within New Zealand to seek their feedback.

4. Coaching Community Feedback Survey

A survey was shared with swim coaches across New Zealand seeking their feedback on their current state and their opinion on items within the scope of this review. 30 coaches completed the survey between December 2024 - February 2025.

5. Identified Issues

From the results of the two surveys, the Working Group identified 27 issues within the scope of the review. The Working Group further summarised these into five key focus areas that needed addressing. These five key focus areas identified were used to drive the face-to-face meeting and the starting point for recommendations moving forward.

6. Face-to-Face Meeting to Propose Recommendations

The Working Group had a face-to-face meeting to discuss ways to address the issues identified and present a draft coaching pathway and draft recommendations.

7. Shared Draft Proposal to Working Group for Feedback

Following the face-to-face meeting, the draft proposal was collated and shared to the Working Group to seek their feedback. This took place between March and May 2025.

8. Reviewed Feedback from Draft Proposal

The Working Group feedback was collated and reviewed. The draft proposal was updated and fleshed out further to generate the draft recommendations document.

9. Reviewed Draft Recommendations

The Working Group and targeted coaches from New Zealand reviewed the draft recommendations and provided feedback between September - October. The Working Group met virtually to discuss the collated feedback on multiple occasions and collectively landed on their final recommendations.

10. Working Group's Final Recommendations Submitted to the Swimming NZ Board

The Working Group's final recommendations were presented to the SNZ Board for their approval.

11. Final Recommendations of the Coaching Review Published

The Working Group's final recommendations were presented to the community.



One of the first tasks for the Coaching Review Working Group was to review the current state of coaching in New Zealand. This review was conducted via understanding the:

- Current state and context of Swimming NZ and Swim Coaches & Teachers NZ
- Number of coaching memberships held
- Breakdown of gender within coaching community
- Membership analysis of year-on-year participation rates
- Analysis of gender and age group rates
- Volunteer challenges for coaches
- Initial feedback survey from coaches
- Secondary Coaching Community Feedback survey
- Working Group member discussion

The Working Group was presented with 27 issues within the scope of the review.

From this, eight initial issues were identified as:

1. A lack of leadership and strategic direction for coach development and support within New Zealand
2. Uncertainty as to who should take ownership and leadership within the coaching space in New Zealand
3. An unclear pathway for coaches to develop in New Zealand
4. An outdated education framework and lack of course delivery provided within New Zealand
5. The need for development opportunities to be outlined and provided for coaches throughout New Zealand
6. A desire for face-to-face engagements to be organised for coaches in New Zealand
7. The opportunity for recognition of coach achievements, service and acknowledgements to be enhanced
8. Relationships with different key stakeholders can increase the challenges coaches face to deliver upon their role within their environment

The Working Group refined these and identified 5 key focus areas that formed the basis of the focus areas the Working Group wished to propose recommendations and solutions for. The key focus areas identified by the Working Group (in no particular order) were:

- Coach Pathways and Education Framework
- Strategic Direction and Leadership for Coaching
- Ongoing Development for Coaches
- Recognition for Coaches
- Strong Relationships for Coaches

The key focus areas identified above guided the Working Group when making recommendations moving forward. The recommendations have been outlined in detail on the following pages.



Recommendation 1

Update the Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction to increase the importance and prioritisation of coaching

The Working Group felt that the Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction needs to be reviewed and updated to re-enforce the strategic importance of coaching to the overall strategic goals of the organisation and the wider sport.

More specifically, the Working Group believes that coaching should not only sit within the Performance pillar, but rather also more prominently elsewhere in the strategy, given coaching is not solely focused on working with performance athletes. The Working Group noted that coaching has the biggest impact upon a participant's experience and coaches work with athletes at all levels of the sport.

Within the updating of the strategy, coaching should be more prevalent to be valued as a priority. It is encouraged that clear measurable goals and actions within the strategy will further enforce the importance of coaching moving forward.

Current State

The current Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction only states coaching as part of the Performance pillar, with one related measurable goal of having a minimum of four coaches developed to be able to be the Aquablacks Head Coach.

Working Group Comment

It was acknowledged that historically Swimming NZ has not been heavily involved in the coaching space, with this previously being led by the Swim Coaches & Teachers NZ. However, the Working Group emphasised the crucial role that coaches play in the participant experience within swimming at all levels, and believes Swimming NZ needs to reflect this in their statement of strategic direction.

Recommendation 2

Develop a Coaching Strategy to deliver upon the updated Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction

The Working Group felt that there needs to be a Coaching Strategy developed to deliver upon the updated Swimming NZ statement of strategic direction. This strategy would provide a more detailed direction for coaching within New Zealand and be the guiding document moving forward.

Current State

There is currently no Coaching Strategy that is the guiding document for swim coaching within New Zealand.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group highlighted that Swimming NZ would need to ensure that they were sufficiently resourced to implement the Coaching Strategy once it was developed, with this being a crucial part of delivering upon this recommendation moving forward.

The Working Group has also recommended that all parties involved with supporting the delivery of coaching in New Zealand should adopt the same Coaching Strategy to ensure there is complete alignment moving forward.



Recommendation 3

Establish a formalised Memorandum of Understanding that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of Swimming NZ and Swim Coaches & Teachers NZ

The Working Group felt that a formalised document was necessary for strengthening the partnership between Swimming NZ and the Swim Coaches & Teachers NZ and would clearly define the roles and responsibilities for both organisations to deliver upon the Coaching Strategy within New Zealand.

The Working Group noted that the feedback received during the review process identified that there has previously been a lack of ownership and leadership for coaching, and felt that taking steps to formalise the roles and responsibilities for both organisations would be crucial to addressing this moving forward.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group made particular note that this recommendation is crucial for the growth of the sport. It has also recommended that the formalised partnership have measurable goals/indicators with timeframes attached for both parties to hold each other to account for delivering upon the Memorandum of Understanding.

Recommendation 4

Clearly define a New Zealand Coaching Framework

The Working Group acknowledged that the feedback received during the review identified a desire from the wider coaching community for a framework to be developed for coaching within New Zealand.

The Working Group agreed and felt it was important to provide an overview of the different levels within the swim coaching landscape. They saw value in identifying the different levels for coaches within the sport, noting that the levels available will differ from club to club and that these levels aren't linear. They stated that each level has a crucial role to play in the delivery of the sport across the country.

To complement this Coaching Framework, the Working Group identified the need for up-to-date education courses to be offered regularly in New Zealand. The Working Group emphasised that education would be crucial, and how these courses need to complement the framework.

Current State

There is currently no clear framework or pathway provided for coaching within New Zealand.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group acknowledged that articulating a pathway for coaching is not straight forward, and has opted to use the word “framework” instead of the word “pathway” due to the non-linear nature of coaching.

The Working Group also acknowledged that coach education courses have been offered infrequently and some feedback has been received that course content hadn't been updated for years.

Recommendation 5

Develop an annual education and development plan for coaches

The Working Group has emphasised the importance of regular education and development for coaches across the country. They identified there are multiple different modes and delivery models to achieve this. Therefore, the recommendation is that a plan should be developed each year to best accommodate the current needs in relation to the Coaching Framework.

The Working Group is cognisant of different opportunities available and recommends that all options are considered each year to best accommodate the development of coaches. It was acknowledged that the needs for coaches may adjust from year to year, and therefore suggested that all opportunities should be explored to complement the Coaching Framework.

Some examples of delivery models the Working Group identified, but not limited to, include education courses, mentoring, conference, webinars and local workshops.

Current State

There have been various development opportunities provided to coaches in recent years, ranging from an annual conference to online webinars, targeted coach development programmes and education courses. However, these have been conducted infrequently and without a broader Coaching Strategy and Coaching Framework to guide the direction and accommodate the annual needs.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group gave consideration to recommending specific opportunities, such as an annual conference, however they acknowledged that whilst face-to-face development is beneficial, there are multiple delivery models that should be considered. In this case, the Working Group wanted the recommendation to be flexible to accommodate identified needs each year.

Recommendation 6

Implement a mandatory New Zealand Swim Coaching License

The Working Group has identified the need to implement a nationwide license, setting the standards required for coaches, given the lack of this currently existing. The Working Group has recommended that this license be designed to recognise swim coaches who have completed a certain level of swim coaching education, in addition to other safeguarding and integrity education.

Within this recommendation, the Working Group has stated that the license should become mandatory for all coaches attending Swimming NZ competitions, and strongly encouraged for all coaches employed or contracted in New Zealand.

Current State

Swimming NZ does not require coaches to have completed any formal education or qualification to hold swim coaching positions. However, Swimming NZ does enforce requirements to obtain coach accreditation for their competitions which include a valid Police Vetting clearance and completion of three online modules relating to safeguarding and integrity.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group was specific in noting that Swimming NZ needs to take ownership of setting the standard for swim coaches within New Zealand, and therefore take responsibility for designing and implementing this license.

The Working Group made a particular note that all recognition of prior learning and/or experience needs to be accounted for when rolling out the license to existing coaches. The Working Group has asked that an implementation date be communicated for when the mandatory requirement will be enforced from, providing time for coaches to achieve and obtain the license.

The Working Group gave consideration as to the best way to enforce the mandatory requirement, noting that situations vary across the country. Nevertheless, they strongly encourage all coaches to obtain the license as it is viewed to be beneficial for all parties - the coach, their employer and the sport.

Recommendation 7

Introduce an Aquablack Numbered Coach list

The Working Group has recommended one way to improve the recognition of coaches is to introduce a Numbered Coach list for Aquablack teams. The intention is for this to mirror the criteria for the Numbered Athlete list, meaning coaches who are selected on New Zealand pinnacle teams in the role of a coach will receive a number and be celebrated as an Aquablack coach.

For clarification, New Zealand pinnacle teams that are recognised as Aquablack teams are:

- Olympic Games
- Paralympic Games
- Commonwealth Games
- World Aquatics Championships (long course)
- World Para Swimming Championships

For creating this list, it has been recommended that Para Swimming teams will be recognised from 2022 when the Para Swimming programme became part of Swimming NZ. This also mirrors what occurred for the Numbered Athlete list.

Current State

Swimming NZ does not have any formal recognition of coaches who are selected on to Aquablack pinnacle teams.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group acknowledged this would be a significant project to undertake to ensure the accuracy of the list across the history of Swimming NZ teams, but felt this to be a worthwhile project to celebrate the selection of coaches on pinnacle teams.

Recommendation 8

Ensure that recognition of coaches at all levels is prioritised

The Working Group felt this recommendation was crucial as part of celebrating the role that coaches play in the delivery of the sport across all levels of the Coaching Framework. The Working Group identified two particular items that should occur within this recommendation:

1. Announce the coaches selected on New Zealand teams as part of team announcements
2. Celebrate and recognise the coach of every swimmer selected onto a New Zealand team as part of team announcements

For both items listed above, the recommendation includes celebrating the coach in both written announcements published on digital channels and also as part of a team presentation if announced at the end of a national championships.

Extra Consideration Required

The Working Group has also identified two areas that need more consideration as to how they can be best accommodated within this recommendation:

1. Further scoping required to recognise service of coaches
2. Further scoping required to celebrate the achievements of coaches across all levels of the Coaching Framework.

The Working Group acknowledges there is a gap for recognising and celebrating coaches across all levels of the Coaching Framework, and recommends further consideration be given to address this moving forward.

Current State

The Working Group acknowledged that the recognition of coaches selected onto and coaches of swimmers selected on teams has occurred recently since 2024.

Recommendation 9

A platform is provided for coaches to access useful resources

The Working Group identified that access to resources would provide opportunities for continual development for coaches, and complement the Coaching Framework. The Working Group believes that an online platform where coaches can access resources to enhance their planning, broaden their thinking or grow their knowledge would be beneficial.

Ideas for content to shared on the platform include, but not limited to, are:

- Readings
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Documents
- Templates
- Race Analysis Spreadsheets

Current State

There has not recently been access to useful information and tools.

Recommendation 10

Ensure regular and targeted communications are shared with coaches at all levels

The Working Group stated that regular communication, including updates and reminders, are crucial.

The Working Group has acknowledged that emails aren't always the best contact method for coaches, but like most of modern society they are regularly on their phones. Within this recommendation, it has been suggested that regular communications are shared on a digital medium(s) that provide coaches updates and reminders that they can view in bite-sized pieces on their phone, as coaches are more frequently on pool side than at their computer.

The Working Group identified a couple of potential options, but not limited to, to explore:

- Coach Newsletters (recommended to be shared quarterly)
- WhatsApp Community Group for Coaches

Current State

Emails tend to be the current form of providing updates. There have also been infrequent coaching newsletters from Swimming NZ in 2024 and 2025.

Working Group Comment

The Working Group believes having a quarterly newsletter solely for coaches provides the opportunity for Swimming NZ to provide important reminders, useful information, updates and latest news, and recognise coach achievements from the last three months. The benefit of newsletters is that it can also be shared as a URL link to be easily accessed on a phone with interactive links.

Conclusion

The Working Group believe that coaches have the biggest impact upon the participant experience of swimming. For this reason, they have made these recommendations to provide the required overall strategic direction and leadership for coaching within New Zealand.

The Working Group has outlined five key recommendations and five supporting recommendations within this review.

The Working Group acknowledges there is work to be done to bring these recommendations to life, but believe the implementation of these recommendations will make a significant difference to swim coaching and the positive impact coaches play in the delivery of swimming in New Zealand.

Next Steps

This report is the guiding document for improving and embedding the recommendations moving forward.

