

# Australian Aquatic Curriculum Reform: Treading Water Carefully?

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the status of aquatics within the national Australian Health and Physical Education curriculum with a particular focus on the past decade. Swimming and water safety always has held a prominent place within Australia's Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area throughout modern history. The first national school HPE curriculum framework has recently been released, representing a growing number of stakeholders and focus areas. This raises questions surrounding the content traditionally delivered in schools under the HPE umbrella and how the new curriculum may be enacted. Early signs, such as the release of the *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* (ACARA, 2012), and the response from the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER), indicated a diminished value and place for aquatics. This concern was reinforced and intensified by the final version of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (HPE) framework (F-10). The continued difficulties facing swimming instruction include the costs and time faced by families and school communities. This paper further explores the potential impact this curricular change may have on children's swimming and water safety within Australian schools.

*Keywords:* learn-to-swim, swimming and aquatic skills, water safety instruction, drowning prevention, curriculum reform, school curriculum, health, physical education.

## Curriculum Reform: Treading Water Carefully?

Australia has recently developed its first national school Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum framework, significant because HPE is the learning area in which swimming and water safety is embedded. Surprisingly, with the release of the *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* (ACARA, 2012), followed by a media release from the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (ACHPER), swimming and water safety seemed to have a diminished presence.

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As a HPE focus area, aquatics has had less representation in the curriculum development than in previous reforms. The extremely limited presence of swimming within the final Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE) framework is very concerning. While the curriculum framework is awaiting final endorsement, it has been publicized, and state and territory governments have been encouraged to implement it. It is being implemented and is heavily influencing various schools' curriculum programs around the country. The national curriculum was recently reviewed, and there was general satisfaction with the way this curricular framework had been developed and with the final result (Australian Government, 2014). The review stated, "Australia is one of only a few countries that combines the strands of health and physical education into one curriculum and this aspect seemed to be regarded positively in the submissions we received" (Australian Government, 2014, p. 203).

The only place swimming, water safety, or aquatics is mentioned in the entire AC: HPE framework is in the glossary. Under the definition of fundamental movement skills (FMS), locomotor and nonlocomotor skills are defined as "rolling, balancing, sliding, jogging, running, leaping, jumping, hopping, dodging, galloping, skipping, floating and moving the body through water to safety" (ACARA, 2014). In its final report, the government opined, "No explanation was given as to how the curriculum writers made decisions or how achievement standards were determined. They seem to have been constructed on a relative rather than absolute basis" (Australian Government, 2014, p. 96).

One possible reason for this diminished presence of aquatics and swimming is the number of focus groups who advocated and competed for prime positions in the curriculum. A key finding in the government's review claimed "Submissions and consultations and the opinion of the subject matter specialist suggest that it is overcrowded and needs some slimming down" (Australian Government, 2014, p. 206). The HPE learning area focus groups include mental health promotion, sexuality and reproductive health, food and nutrition, safety, drug use, respectful relationships, personal identity and sense of self, physical activity and fitness, and games and sports, as well as aquatics and water-based activities (ACARA, 2012). It has been suggested during the review that ACARA has "endeavoured to be all things to all people" (Australian Government, 2014, p. 95) which is identified as a flaw.

Media articles and literature have cited the difficulties for some families and school communities when it comes to the financial burden of swim lessons imposed by the swimming and water safety curriculum (Thompson, 2012; Lynch, 2012; 2013a; 2013b; Larsen, 2013; Symons, 2013). Financial pressure, combined with reduced curricular presence, is potentially ominous for aquatics and challenges the importance of swimming and water safety curriculum within Australian schools. The purpose of this paper is to describe aquatics' position within the Australian curriculum over the past decade and to reflect on the potential impact that this new HPE curricular framework may have on its future.

## Curriculum Concerns

Many believe that swimming and water safety knowledge, understanding, and skills have been under-represented in the *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* that was released in March 2012. Given that the draft "provides broad direction on the purpose, structure, and organisation of the Health

and Physical Education curriculum, it is intended to guide the writing of the Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum from Foundation Year to Year 12” (ACARA, 2012, p. 1). Hence, the noticeable absence of swimming and water safety in the draft was detrimental as it led to a limited role in the AC: HPE framework.

Reference to topics associated with swimming and water safety only had three mentions within the entire curricular draft. The word *water* appeared once, while *aquatic* appeared twice. The scope and sequence of Years 1–2 (typically 6–8 years of age) states, “Students are developing a greater level of autonomy in these years and need to learn how to take responsibility for their own safety at school and at home, with a particular focus on protective behaviours, safety near roads and *water*, and in relation to medicines” (p. 11). In Years 3–4 (typically 8–10 years of age), the draft declares, “The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education will provide opportunities for students to experience a variety of activities in a range of different physical environments (such as *aquatic*, natural/outdoor, community, recreation etc.) to further support and encourage lifelong physical activity participation” (pp. 12–13). With the Years 5–6 (typically 10–12 years of age), scope and sequence reports, “Students in these years continue to participate in a range of movement activities in a variety of contexts which may include outdoor settings, community recreation settings and *aquatic* environments” (p. 14).

Swimming and water safety as a physical activity was only generally referred to and the choice of language used within the document appeared to give teachers autonomy in deciding whether swimming is suitable, using phrases *such as* and *may include*. The curriculum is a general framework (Lynch, 2014) or as Penney (2014) described, “a flexible framework conceptualized as text.” It appears that it allows teachers and schools to decide on whether aquatic knowledge, understanding, and skills are covered, which is often determined by teacher confidence and competence in aquatics (Peden, Franklin, & Larsen, 2009; Lynch, 2012).

An incident following the release of the draft reinforced for me the diminished role for swimming and water safety. The Minister for School Education and Minister for Early Childhood and Youth, the Hon Peter Garrett, advocated that swimming and water safety represented a core of the draft curriculum in a media release:

The new curriculum includes a focus on teaching water safety and awareness, swimming skills and first aid skills, from the first year of school onwards. Every student will be required to learn basic water safety, how to ‘propel their body forward in water’ and basic first aid (Ministers’ Media Centre Education Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio, 2012).

These remarks were alarming, considering the lack of aquatic knowledge, understanding, and skills represented in the curriculum draft. ACHPER replied to the Minister’s statement by saying, “This is an ill-conceived first release and tells only part of the story of the breadth and importance of the learning area” (ACHPER, 2012). They further wrote,

ACHPER believes that the focus on water safety, first aid, and bullying as the core of the learning area will send the wrong message to schools, specialists, and classroom teachers about the relative importance of other areas particularly movement and physical activity. The H & PE curriculum is considerably broader than the issues that dominate this release (2012, p. 1).

There was no denying that whatever swimming and water safety would contribute to the framework, evidenced by the initial draft, it also was considerably less than previous curriculum documents (e.g., National Statement and Profile for Health and Physical Education) (Australian Education Council [AEC], 1994a; 1994b). Subsequently, swimming, water safety, and aquatics has been practically omitted in the final AC: HPE framework.

### **Role of Swimming and Water Safety Within the Australian Curriculum National Statement and Profile for HPE (AEC, 1994a; 1994b)**

A quick review of the last national Health and Physical Education curriculum documents within Australia provides a platform for the argument that swimming and water safety has been neglected in the latest framework. While AC: HPE has been developed and is available, each state and territory have had their own HPE curriculum syllabi/framework developed from the previous 1994 National Statement and Profile (Lynch, 2014). Although the syllabi/framework differed slightly in terminology and general layout of the document, “There is some agreement in that the strands/main ideas are typically aligned with year levels” (Dinan-Thompson, 2006, p. 34).

The 1994 national HPE profile and statement were similar in roles to the current framework developed. “Statements provide a framework for curriculum development in each area of learning. They define the area, outline its essential elements, show what is distinctive about it, and describe a sequence for developing knowledge and skills” (AEC, 1994a, p. 1); whereas, “the Profile offers a means of reporting on student learning” (Kirk 1995, p. 2; Glover, 2001). Hence, parallels can be drawn with the present framework which “describes knowledge, skills and understanding organized by learning areas and that form the entitlement of a learning area” (ACARA, 2010, p. 17) and also “provide for a nationally consistent approach to assessment and reporting” (ACARA 2010, p. 22).

In the main 11 areas of learning within HPE, swimming and water safety was clearly evidenced in two of the main areas. The heading, ‘Fundamental movement patterns and coordinated actions of the body,’ included the statement, “These skills are developed through play, games, sport, gymnastics, dance, *swimming* and outdoor activities” (AEC, 1994a, p. 2). In addition, within the safety section, the AEC clarified:

Personal and community responsibilities over such issues as health-promoting and protective behaviors, violence, substance use, sexual behaviour, and safety on the roads and in the *water* are important aspects of the health and physical education area (1994a, p. 3).

Furthermore, the AEC listed nine specific goals in the HPE area which included learning the following:

Develop the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, plan strategies and implement and evaluate actions that promote growth and development, participation in physical activity, fitness, effective relationships, and the safety and health of individuals and groups.

Be involved as a skilled participant in play, games, dance, gymnastics, *aquatics*, sport, outdoor activities, leisure and recreation. (1994a, p. 7).

Three strands were listed in the statement. Embedded within the second strand (“Human functioning and physical activity,” specifically within the “Movement and participation” and “Challenge, risk and safety” sections), swimming and water safety is again advocated. The three HPE strands were divided into four bands of schooling: (1) Band A lower primary, (2) Band B upper primary; (3) Band C lower secondary, and (4) Band D postcompulsory years.

Dissimilar to the latest draft of the Shape paper, swimming and water safety was evident from the beginnings of school in Band A:

Students participate in water activities to develop confidence and competence. They enter and leave water safely, move through waist-deep water, submerge to retrieve an object, float with aids and propel the body through chest-deep water on front, back or side (AEC, 1994a, p. 20).

Regarding water safety from the earliest levels of school, it declared, “They [children] learn about water safety, develop their survival skills, learn basic first aid procedures (such as how to treat a minor cut or burn) and how to get help in an emergency” (1994a, p. 23). This was supported by Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA) who proclaimed the best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation was during childhood (2010).

Within Band B (upper primary) the statement expressed the following, “Students learn survival techniques of sculling, treading water and floating and sculling strokes and develop their skills for swimming extended distances on front, back or side, demonstrating arm action, kicking and breathing patterns” (AEC, 1994a, p. 27). It recommended that, “They extend their water safety and survival skills” (p. 30). Swimming and water safety continued to progress throughout the remaining bands.

The strong presence of swimming and water safety within the HPE national framework was vital as “State and territory school and curriculum authorities are responsible for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum” (ACARA, 2010, p. 25) which often resulted in dilution during the interpretation process from framework to implementation of class lessons in schools. As Ewing outlined, this dilution was common where “A teacher or other educator interprets the formal curriculum (perceived curriculum) and then enacts, translates or operationalises this curriculum in a classroom” (Ewing, 2010, p. 40). This was acknowledged by ACARA (2010, p. 10):

Jurisdictions, systems and schools will be able to implement the Australian Curriculum in ways that value teachers’ professional knowledge, reflect local contexts and take into account individual students’ family, cultural and community backgrounds. Schools and teachers determine pedagogical and other delivery considerations.

Also, as stated by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, “Swimming lessons were part of the curriculum but up to schools to implement” (Thompson, 2012). Hence, it can be argued that the more

general the swimming and water safety presence was in the HPE Framework, the less chance it had of being implemented for all children, which was exacerbated in a geographically large and diverse country such as Australia. The amount of swimming and water safety details differed between the curriculum documents of states and territories, derived from the national statement and profile (1994), but nonetheless they were mostly well represented.

**New South Wales.** In the state of New South Wales, the Personal Development Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) 1999 syllabus was revised last in 2007. It had 8 strands: Interpersonal Relationships; Safe Living; Personal Health Choices; Active Lifestyle; Dance; Gymnastics; Games and Sport; and Growth and Development. Water safety and emergency procedures were within the Safe Living strand, and aquatics were within Games and Sport. Aquatics included water familiarization: buoyancy, water safety, and survival skills; water confidence; mobility; floating/movement skills; basic swimming strokes; water safety/rescue skills; stroke development; diving; and emergency procedures (Board of Studies New South Wales, 2007). The syllabus also advocated the importance of aquatics by stating, “Fundamental movement patterns and coordinated actions of the body skills are developed through play, dance, gymnastics, games, sports, *aquatics* and other recreational activities” (p. 8).

**Queensland.** In the Queensland Health and Physical Education Years 1–10 Syllabus (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1999), swimming and water safety was one of the five specialized skills for movement listed within the core content. The specialized skills for movement were the following (p. 25):

- Individual games, sports, and other physical activities
- Team games, sports, and other physical activities
- Dance and other rhythmic activities
- Adventure and challenge activities
- Swimming and water safety

**Victoria.** The state of Victoria used the Victorian Essential Learning Standards document, which included a detailed description of the learning focus from preparatory level to year 10 (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013). The swimming and water safety concepts are recorded in Table 1.

**South Australia.** South Australia had an R-10 Health and Physical Education Framework teaching resource (2004) which had four sections: Early Years (Reception–2), Primary Years (3–5), Middle Years (6–8), and Middle-Senior Years (8–10). This resource had three strands: Physical Activity and Participation, Personal and Social Development, and Health of Individuals and Communities. Similar to the Queensland syllabus, swimming and water safety was one of the five aspects within the Physical Activity and Participation strand represented in each sector. This curriculum document was similar to the other comprehensive states such as Victoria and New South Wales, although it had more detail. Readers are encouraged to peruse the detail on p. 18 of the HPE learning resource by visiting the following link: [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/ATT/%7BF51C47E3-B6F3-4765-83C3-0E27FF5DD952%7D/R-10\\_H&PE.pdf](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/ATT/%7BF51C47E3-B6F3-4765-83C3-0E27FF5DD952%7D/R-10_H&PE.pdf).

**Table 1 Swimming and Water Safety Learning Focus P-10**

Level	Swimming and Water Safety Concepts
Level 1 (preparatory) learning focus	They practice a range of movement patterns in aquatic environments such as: wade-in entry to and exit from shallow water; float with a buoyancy aid; perform a basic leg kicking action with a buoyancy aid; recovery from an unaided face down float; glide to a standing position; and be rescued with a rope or stick.
Level 2 (year 1 & 2) learning focus	They practice a range of movement patterns in aquatic environments. These could include: combining arm and leg movements to move through water on the front and back for 10 meters; performing a torpedo on the front for three to five meters; pushing off the bottom or side of the pool and gliding both with and without flotation aid; and treading water.
Level 3 (year 3 & 4) learning focus	In aquatic environments they practice a range of movements such as: propelling the body on the front and back using freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and survival backstroke for 10–20 meters; and a land-based rescue.
Level 4 (year 5 & 6) learning focus	They consolidate their mobility and safety skills in aquatic environments and develop confidence and responsibility in the water by, for example: swimming competently for a continuous distance of 50 meters (25 meters in freestyle and 25 meters in another stroke); demonstrating sound breathing and stroke techniques; throwing a rope or buoyant object to a person at least five meters from the side of the pool and pulling or instructing them to safety; and performing survival techniques of sculling, treading water, floating and survival strokes for an extended time (four to six minutes), while clothed, in a pool and/or in open water.
Level 5 (year 6 & 7) learning focus	Students develop their swimming stroke techniques and proficiency in a range of water safety skills as they participate within an aquatic environment. This could include: swimming for a continuous distance of 150 meters, changing between freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke or survival backstroke; and while clothed, performing correct survival techniques, including sculling, treading water, floating and survival strokes for an extended period of time in a pool or open water.

The South Australian HPE curriculum Framework differed from other states because it deliberately stipulated that safety was the responsibility of teachers when it was outsourced to swimming instructors.

Recognising that teachers have a prime responsibility for the duty of care and the learning program for all children and students when non-teachers are involved in the delivery of programs within health and physical education (e.g., teachers are responsible for behaviour management when students are being taught by *swimming/aquatics* instructors and when external providers have input into learning programs) (Government of South Australia, 2004, p. 11).

**Tasmania.** Within Tasmania, the HPE curriculum was named The Tasmanian Curriculum Health and Wellbeing: K–10 Syllabus and Support Materials (Department of Education Tasmania, 2007). Two key focus areas, (1) Movement Skills and Concepts and (2) Safety, included respectively:

Skills for movement, games, sports, dance, gymnastics, rhythmic activities, *swimming and water safety*, outdoor adventure, and challenge activities

Behaviors and practices that promote personal and group safety in varied environments such as home, classroom, playground, school, outdoors and community, *aquatic*, road, fire, sun safety, bushwalking (p. 13).

Sample Learning Opportunities, a section of the syllabus document, described the range of learning for students as they progressed from kindergarten to year 10. Similar to the states of Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia, swimming and water safety was well represented throughout the various year levels. For example, from the early years of education (Stages 1–6) *aquatics* included (p. 32):

- Use equipment in simple water games and activities.
- Enter, exit, and move through water safely.
- Attempt, with support, to float on front and back.
- Put face in water and blow bubbles.

**Northern Territory.** The Northern Territory (NT) Curriculum Framework: Health and Physical Education Learning Area (NT Department of Education and Training, 2002) identified learning outcomes for all NT learners from transition to year 10. Within the Participating in Physical Activity and Movement strand, this document stated, “. . . development as a skilled participant in play, games, sports, gymnastics, *aquatics*, outdoor activities and recreation” (p. 230).

An indicator of the Promoting Individual and Community Health strand was “. . . recognise dangerous situations and seek help, e.g., someone in difficulty in the water” (p. 236). In addition, “Recognise surroundings and areas of danger or risk, e.g., storm water drain, savage dog in yard, busy road” (p. 237) and “Identify and apply rules for safe activities in familiar settings, e.g., *water/bike/pedestrian* safety, game rules, *pool safety*, safety at home and school” (p. 237).

Indicators in the Participating in Physical Activity and Movement strand included (pp. 251–254):

- Tolerate movement through different environments, e.g., *water*, seating, transport, play/program equipment, toilet, shower.
- Participate in *water awareness* activities.
- Participate in outdoor and/or indoor recreation activities individually or in a group, e.g., sand and *water*, play, obstacle course, gardening, skating.
- Tread water and propel self across pool wearing a flotation device.
- Perform water confidence activities, e.g., move through waist deep water to retrieve a floating object, float with assistance using flotation aids, enter and leave the water safely.
- Propel body through chest deep water on front, back, or side across the pool.
- Use above-water and below-water arm recovery to propel body on front, back, and side.

- Discuss the importance of safety issues in physical activity and apply these, e.g., rehydration, maintaining equipment, following road rules, wear elbow/knee pads for roller blading, *safe aquatic procedures in pools, rivers, and open water*.

**Western Australia.** In the state of Western Australia, the Curriculum Framework Health and Physical Education Learning Area Statement (Government of Western Australia, 1998) had five learning outcomes:

1. Knowledge and understandings
2. Attitudes and values
3. Skills for physical activity
4. Self-management skills
5. Interpersonal skills

The outcomes “. . . in the Health and Physical Education learning area are interrelated and all contribute to the development of healthy, active lifestyles for students” (p. 117). Within the Skills for Physical Activity area, students participate “. . . competently and confidently in physical activities such as play, games, sports, gymnastics, *aquatics*, dance, adventure pursuits and other active recreation” (p. 119). Specifically, *aquatics* included “. . . demonstrate skill in aquatic environments through swimming and water survival techniques” (p. 120). While swimming and water safety was prominent, this framework did not list the depth of details similar to those of other states’ curriculum documents.

Water safety was represented “. . . through their involvement in modified sports, gymnastics, dance, *aquatics* and outdoor pursuits; students learn about participation, basic game tactics, rules, safety procedures and how to avoid injury” (p. 126). In addition, “Their knowledge of injury prevention includes areas such as road use, safe bus and car travel, pedestrian and bicycle safety, *water safety* and sun protection” (p. 125).

**Australian Capital Territory.** The Australian Capital Territory (ACT; 2007) P-10 curriculum (Every Chance to Learn Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools, Pre-school to Year 10) was organized into 25 Essential Learning Achievements (ELA) and eight Key Learning Areas. Health and Physical Education was one of the key learning areas and had three ELAs. This curriculum document was most dissimilar to the other states and territories. Paradoxically, it was most similar to the proposed national AC: HPE framework. It did not begin swimming and water safety in the early years of school. The four bands of development were Early Childhood, Later Childhood, Early Adolescence, and Later Adolescence. The first evidence of swimming and water safety appeared in Later Childhood when the text said, “. . . practise the application of fundamental movement skills to create movement sequences in a range of physical activities (e.g., *aquatics*, minor and modified games, dance, gymnastics, track and field).” Another key similarity with the drafted national Shape curriculum was that swimming and water safety was seldom mentioned.

## Identified Problems in Schools and Politics

Although swimming and water safety has been prominent in Australia’s curriculum documents across states and territories, this trend has not continued within the latest national AC: HPE. From the eight HPE curriculum documents, surprisingly

it is the smallest state/territory and political capital that has influenced the recent proposal the most: The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Every Chance to Learn Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools, Preschool to Year 10 (2007).

This reduced presence coincides with an increase in school principals declaring they are "... considering axing swimming as parents struggle with costs" (Thompson, 2012). This is supported by the Victorian Opposition, which has called for the State Government to subsidize school swimming lessons, after an increase in the rate of child drownings (Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC], 2012b).

Most Australian primary schools have qualified swim instructors from externally provided programs. Peden, Franklin, & Larsen (2009, p. 202) found, "Aquatic activity was outsourced at 88.1% of primary schools surveyed and was most commonly outsourced to commercial learn-to-swim teachers." Regular provision of swim lessons by schools can be an issue due to restrictions which include "... legal liability concerns, time and cost constraints, increasing workloads, staff/student ratios, difficulties coping with varied skill levels, and a lack of adequately qualified staff" (Australian Water Safety Council, 2008).

Reducing swimming and water safety in curriculum documents is an easy option for governing authorities looking to reduce responsibilities and costs. I believe it defeats the whole purpose of the development of the national curriculum reform which is to provide consistency and uniformity across the country. The purpose of the latest national reform was to enable a fair social curriculum throughout Australia, a large country consisting of diverse school contexts. Australian academic education commentator and professor at Sydney University, Robyn Ewing, stated, "The most important driver for a National Curriculum should be about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students" (Ewing, 2010, p. 127). This is evident through the goals established at the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA; 2008), which drove the national reform:

- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
- Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners; confident and creative individuals; and active and informed citizens.

Issues surrounding funding need to be overcome as stressed by the Gonski report which found that "School funding is not simply a financial matter. Rather, it is about strengthening and securing Australia's future" (ABC, 2012a). Further, "It says every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family, or the school they attend" (ABC, 2012a). It appears that the reduction of swimming and water safety within the AC: HPE is not consistent with such proclamations and will enable schools to cull swimming and water safety from the curriculum if they choose. This will cause a greater divide between social classes and school systems, namely disadvantaged Australian children will be further marginalized and at greater risk of drowning.

## Conclusion

The last national curriculum statement and profile in Australia (AEC, 1994a; 1994b) represented swimming and water safety thoroughly and consistently from the first level to year 10 of school. State and territory syllabi and curricular documents

derived from the national statement were detailed. Swimming and water safety was prominent in essential content. Only one state or territory curriculum document (from ACT) did not specifically include swimming and water safety from the early years of school.

I believe this one territorial document has unduly influenced the latest national AC: HPE and subsequently has diminished the aquatic and swimming knowledge and skills provided in schools. In the latest proposal, swimming and water safety was not featured until upper primary school even though the best time for children to become confident and competent in and around water is during the early years (RLSSA, 2010). The AC: HPE has immense influence in determining the future of swimming and water safety within schools. As promised by the Australian Government's media release (Ministers' Media Centre Education Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio, 2012), swimming and water safety deserve a strong presence. Simply stated, the curriculum designers and developers have it wrong. Swimming has been the loser in Australia's ambitious attempt at being world leaders in curriculum design (Australian Government, 2014).

The under-representation and diminished role of swimming and water safety undermines one of the key purposes of the national curriculum reform: a socially just education. Every child deserves the right to learn how to swim and be safe around water, especially in a country such as Australia with a culture closely associated with enjoying water activities. This diminished role needs to be amended before final endorsement of the national curriculum occurs.

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