

WA swimmers in the fast lane

Steve Butler

The biggest splash in Australian swimming is being made in pools across WA.

Swimming WA's nation-leading membership growth of 27.25 per cent in the past year — with the number of members nearly doubling in the past four years to 11,985 — leaves other States trailing. Tasmania's increase is the next best at just 8.9 per cent.

As a growing number of WA swimmers join senior and junior ranks at the national elite level, it is a re-emergence Swimming Australia chief executive Mark Anderson could not ignore.

"There is real momentum building in WA," Anderson said, adding the financial investment from businesswoman Gina Rinehart had been invaluable. "That progress is very tangible and you can feel the energy around the sport in WA.

"We have a number of talented and quality swimmers coming through and if they remain focused they could forge successful careers.

"It is evident there is a commitment across the swimming community to drive real change and our coaches and swimmers are making this happen."

WA swimming's key stakeholders claim the mending of a previously fractured sport has been at the centre of the resurgence, particularly through a better working relationship between the WA Institute of Sport and Swimming WA.

WAIS chief executive Steve Lawrence said swimming was in its eighth year of a 12-year strategy, which he expected to deliver improved results at next year's Gold Coast Commonwealth Games and at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. He said the institute spent more than \$1 million a

year on WA swimming.

Anderson described the WAIS facilities as "comparable to the best training facilities in the world". The State has three high-performance swimming centres in Mt Claremont, Joondalup and Cockburn/Rockingham and another was planned for Perth's eastern suburbs in the next Olympic cycle.

"We've still got work to do and we're still well below where we can be, but what we're seeing as

an outcome is on track for where we want to be," Lawrence said.

Swimming WA has enlisted Olympians Dawn Fraser, Libby Trickett, Tommaso D'Orsogna and Blair Evans as ambassadors to inspire the next generation.

Four WA swimmers — Tamsin Cook, Brianna Throssell, Blair Evans and Jeremy McClure — competed at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio last year. Throssell, Holly Barratt

and Zac Incerti will swim at the 2017 World Championships in Budapest next month, while Jemima Horwood, Taj Jones and Jasmine Hopkins will compete at the Junior World Championships in Indianapolis in August.

Horwood, 15, hated swimming when she was younger because she suffered painful ear infections. But she has grown to love the sport and was chosen to swim for Australia for the first time after her stand-out results at the Georgina Hope Foundation Australian Age Championships in Brisbane in April.

"Everyone is so welcoming and it's such a nice community," Horwood said. "It means so much to be able to represent my country and do something back for them."

Swimming WA chief executive Darren Beazley said he would lobby the State Government to

build 25m pools at schools similar to Queensland, which dominates national swimming at the elite level.



Jemima Horwood

Photo available at
westpix.com.au



Swimming Australia chief executive Mark Anderson poolside at HBF Stadium. Picture: Daniel Wilkins