

Destroy a local pool in haste, repent at the l

A stately public pool is threatened by plans for a new facility. Surely global warming compels us to keep what we already have.

By **CLARE WRIGHT**

THERE'S a pub at the T-intersection of Hoddle Street and Queens Parade that has a fresh paint job and a catchy new logo. As you iddle in your car, invariably stuck at the intersection lights, you are tempted by the cheeky motto: "Think global. Drink local."

It's clever. The slogan takes the mickey out of its pious progenitor, while at the same time capitalising on the inconvenient truth we are all beginning to take as common sense.

That is, to be able to enjoy the pleasures of our First World lifestyle, we'll need to wind back the clock to some more traditional modes of leisure and consumption.

Such as walking down to the humble local pub for a little liquid refreshment rather than driving the gas-guzzler to the latest hip bar or suburban beer barn.

A couple of kilometres up the road, there's a further reminder that local issues can have macro effects. If you sweltered through this summer in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, you couldn't have failed to notice the stoush between Moreland Council and its burghers over another favourite local watering hole — the Coburg Olympic Pool.

This seasonal outdoor pool is sandwiched between the old Pentridge Prison (now a housing development) and Merri Creek. Built in 1965, it's the sort of community treasure that loyal patrons love precisely

because it's such a secret haven. It's more like a country pool than the bathing facilities I associate with my suburban childhood summers.

The pools are framed by lush grasslands and shaded by the peppercorn and eucalypt trees that line the Merri Creek. In a former life, the spot was a gathering place for the local Woiworung people.

Two summers ago, a second dispossession occurred when Moreland Council closed Coburg Olympic Pool without warning or explanation. When I and other regulars made hot and bothered inquiries, we were told the pool had leaks and would reopen when they were repaired. Good faith propelled us through the winter months.

But when the temperature soared again late last year, council erroneously claimed that due to water restrictions, the pools could not be filled. The council and Yarra Valley Water played pass the political parcel all summer.

Federal MP Kelvin Thomson recently

threw himself in the deep end by writing to federal Minister for Climate Change and Water Penny Wong with a request for funding. He cited the need for healthy and active lifestyles for the already poorly resourced children of the northern suburbs. A neighbourhood splash may yet produce far-ranging ripples of concern.

Moreland Council has declared that it has no intention of closing the pool permanently, but it is tendering a grandiose scheme to lure a private developer into using the prime creek-front land to build a new indoor/outdoor leisure centre. Apart from obese children, the minister might have more heavy-hitting reasons to apply her portfolio responsibilities.

For instead of a low-rent few patches of water in which people can wade and paddle through the peak summer days, picnicking under the trees with other families or friends, Moreland Council wants an air-conditioned, high-tech facility where supposedly more modern leisure-seekers with

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ESSAY IDEAS COMMENT

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little white cords dangling from their ears will puff away on treadmills, oblivious to the climatic conditions.

Instead of an estimated \$350,000 to upgrade and reopen the current pool, millions of dollars will be spent to pour more concrete (with its insatiable water requirements) and erect more tilt-slab walls and install more of those energy-chewing but oh-so-slinky downlights.

Conservationist David Suzuki has warned that the world has a decade to change its habits if our planet is to survive. We must pare things back, he says. Live more simply.

Is it old-fashioned, or indeed far-sighted, to suggest that in a sun-drenched, sea-girt country, local outdoor swimming pools represent a relatively cost-efficient, egalitarian and environmentally sustainable way to deliver a host of social, recreational and health benefits?

In the face of climate change realities, the dripping wet philosophical questions need to be asked. Is bigger always better? Is

newer necessary? Is deeper more deserving? Do we really need an aquatic centre when a pool and a shady tree will do?

Existing public infrastructure must be maintained (if retro-fitted for energy and water efficiency) rather than quietly abandoned or expediently buck-passed. Perhaps more resources need to be spent to promote and market unique community assets such as the stately old Coburg Olympic. Perhaps — to ensure economic viability and enhance social equity — municipal, state and federal authorities need to sidestep boundaries, pool their resources and enter into partnership arrangements to keep seasonal facilities afloat.

One thing's for sure. To safeguard the future of this hot and thirsty land, we should all adopt the motto: think global. Swim local.

Dr Clare Wright is a postdoctoral research fellow in history at La Trobe University and author of *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia's Female Publicans*.