

# Wet, wild and convivial: Past, present and future contributions of Australia's ocean pools to surf, beach, pool and body cultures and recreational coasts

## Search

Enter search terms:

Search

in this series

[Advanced Search](#)

[Notify me via email or RSS](#)

## Links

[Edith Cowan University](#)

## Browse

[Collections](#)

[Disciplines](#)

[Authors](#)

## Author Information

[Author Guidelines](#)

[Submit Research](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Thesis Submission Guidelines](#)

## Links

[Graduate Research School](#)

## Paper Locations

[View Papers on map](#)

[View Papers in Google Earth](#)

## THESES: DOCTORATES AND MASTERS

### Wet, wild and convivial : past, present and future contributions of Australia's ocean pools to surf, beach, pool and body cultures and recreational coasts

[Download](#)

[Marie-Louise McDermott](#), *Edith Cowan University*

#### Date of Award

2012

#### Degree Type

Thesis

#### Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy

#### School

School of Communications and Arts

#### Faculty

Faculty of Education and Arts

#### First Advisor

Associate Professor Rod Giblett

#### Abstract

I investigated the past, present and possible futures of Australia's ocean pools, over a hundred public seawater pools sited on rocky surfcoasts, so that waves wash over their walls. My interdisciplinary analysis informed by actor-network theory explored their contributions to surf, beach, pool and body cultures and recreational coasts. Ocean pools have since the nineteenth century been far more significant in the surf, beach, pool and body cultures of Australia and South Africa, than in those of Britain and the United States. Most of Australia's ocean pools lie within state of New South Wales, and my work strengthens the case for recognising Australian and NSW ocean pools as having distinct collective identities and affinities with their South African counterparts. Ocean pools are sites of social and environmental learning that challenge efforts to establish human mastery over wild natures and depictions of coastal environments as mere stages for enacting human activities unconstrained by non-human nature. They also challenge the notion that people prefer to swim and bathe at patrolled beaches or in private or public pools far less wild than an ocean pool. They are evidence that supervision by suitably trained and equipped lifeguards or lifesavers is not the only or the most satisfactory way to adequately safeguard bathers and swimmers from the dangers of the sea. Australia's ocean pools demonstrate that regardless of race, class, gender, age or ability, people can and do make themselves at home in pools shared convivially with wild nature and well-suited for sustained, unsupervised recreation and sport on rocky surfcoast. Ocean pools serve as places of refuge, therapeutic and restorative environments, adventure playgrounds, convivial public spaces, visually appealing cultural landscapes, brands, icons and symbols. Australia's ocean pools are unified by their sites, their affordances and core actor-networks linked to their fundamental and enduring identity as 'wild but safe enough surfside pools'. Rocky shores and coastal waters characterised by surf, sharks and rips are among the most persistent macro-actors in these networks that include bathers, swimmers, tourism and transport networks, news media, local councils and progress associations. Australian ocean pools that gained a further identity as 'public pools for competition and carnivals' acquired additional actor-networks strongly linked since the late nineteenth century to amateur swimming clubs and schools, and since the twentieth century to surf lifesaving clubs and winter swimming clubs. Those ocean pools nevertheless, remained predominately recreational facilities. As other types of public pools became more affordable, Australia's ocean pools remained popular despite gaining new identities as an 'unusually hazardous type of public pool' and 'a type of facility no longer created'. The growing threats to ocean pools and their actor-networks are a further unifying factor. As sport and recreation venues cultivating healthy, convivial relationships with wild nature and possessing unrealised potential as centres for

 INCLUDED IN

[Sociology Commons](#)

#### SHARE



community engagement, learning and research, ocean pools are worth emulating on other rocky shores and in other public places. My work strengthens efforts to sustain and create ocean pools and supports further studies on seawater pools and their actor--networks.

#### Recommended Citation

McDermott, M. (2012). *Wet, wild and convivial : past, present and future contributions of Australia's ocean pools to surf, beach, pool and body cultures and recreational coasts*.

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/517>



[Home](#) | [About](#) | [FAQ](#) | [My Account](#) | [Accessibility Statement](#)

[Privacy](#) [Copyright](#)

In Coasts and ports 2011: Diverse and developing: Proceedings of the 20th Australasian Coastal and Ocean Engineering Conference and the 13th Australasian Port and Harbour Conference, 340–345. Barton, ACT, Australia: Engineers Australia.Google Scholar. Knight, C.K. 2008. Public art: Theory, practice and populism. London: Wiley.Google Scholar. Lewi, H., and C. Phillips. 2013. Immersed at the water's edge: Modern British and Australian seaside pools as sites of 'good living'. *Wet, wild and convivial: Past, present and future contributions of Australia's ocean pools to surf, beach, pool and body cultures and recreational coasts*. Doctoral thesis, Edith Cowan University.Google Scholar. Metusela, C., and G. Waitt. Surfing is deeply rooted in Australian culture, and the country is home to some of the world's best surfers and waves. Every surfer has heard of Byron Bay, Bondi Beach, and Bells Beach, but there are many more worth adding to your bucket list. On Australia's south coast, the Great Ocean Road is one of the world's most scenic coastal drives, covering 400 km (249 mi) from Torquay to Nelson, passing by world-renowned landmarks and surf spots. The spiritual and historical home of surfing in Australia, Bells Beach is a surfing pilgrimage site in its own right, and the proud host Australia's oldest and most prestigious surfing event, the Rip Curl Pro Surf and Music Festival, which has been held each year since 1962. Depending on definitions, the coast of New South Wales, Australia, has about 70 ocean pools, with most located between Newcastle and Wollongong. South Africa has a comparable number, but the rest of the world has only a handful. Why are ocean pools not more widespread? It isn't the cost – our research suggests the public benefits of NSW ocean pools greatly outweigh the investment in building and maintaining them. And these pools do hold a special place in the hearts of the communities that use them. Read more: [Community pool projects show how citizens are helping to build cities](#). Architect and