

RiverWatch™ Swim Site Activation

RiverWatch™ is Sydney Water’s environmental monitoring and reporting program, established to support safe swimming in urban waterways. The RiverWatch program assesses how environmental factors impact water quality. This is an important component of opening and managing new sites for swimming (primary contact) or kayaking (secondary contact).

RiverWatch

Sydney Water has developed a program of environmental assessments that inform whether a site is suitable for swimming or other water-based recreation. These include:

- Water quality meets the requirements for primary or secondary contact.
- Physical hazards at the site are identified and addressed.
- Toxic cyanobacteria is not present and algae outbreaks are not a nuisance.
- Possible hazardous organisms are identified, and the risk is addressed.
- Chemicals of concern are identified in the water and sediment, and do not breach established threshold levels.

The combined assessments inform whether proposed swimming sites can be activated for recreation, what types of activities will be possible (e.g. swimming, boating) and the conditions under which this can occur.

The program also helps to prioritise actions and investment to improve waterway health across catchments. Once a site is established, ongoing monitoring is required to ensure that the site remains suitable for swimming.

Approach to monitoring

The RiverWatch monitoring program follows the National Health and Medical Research Council



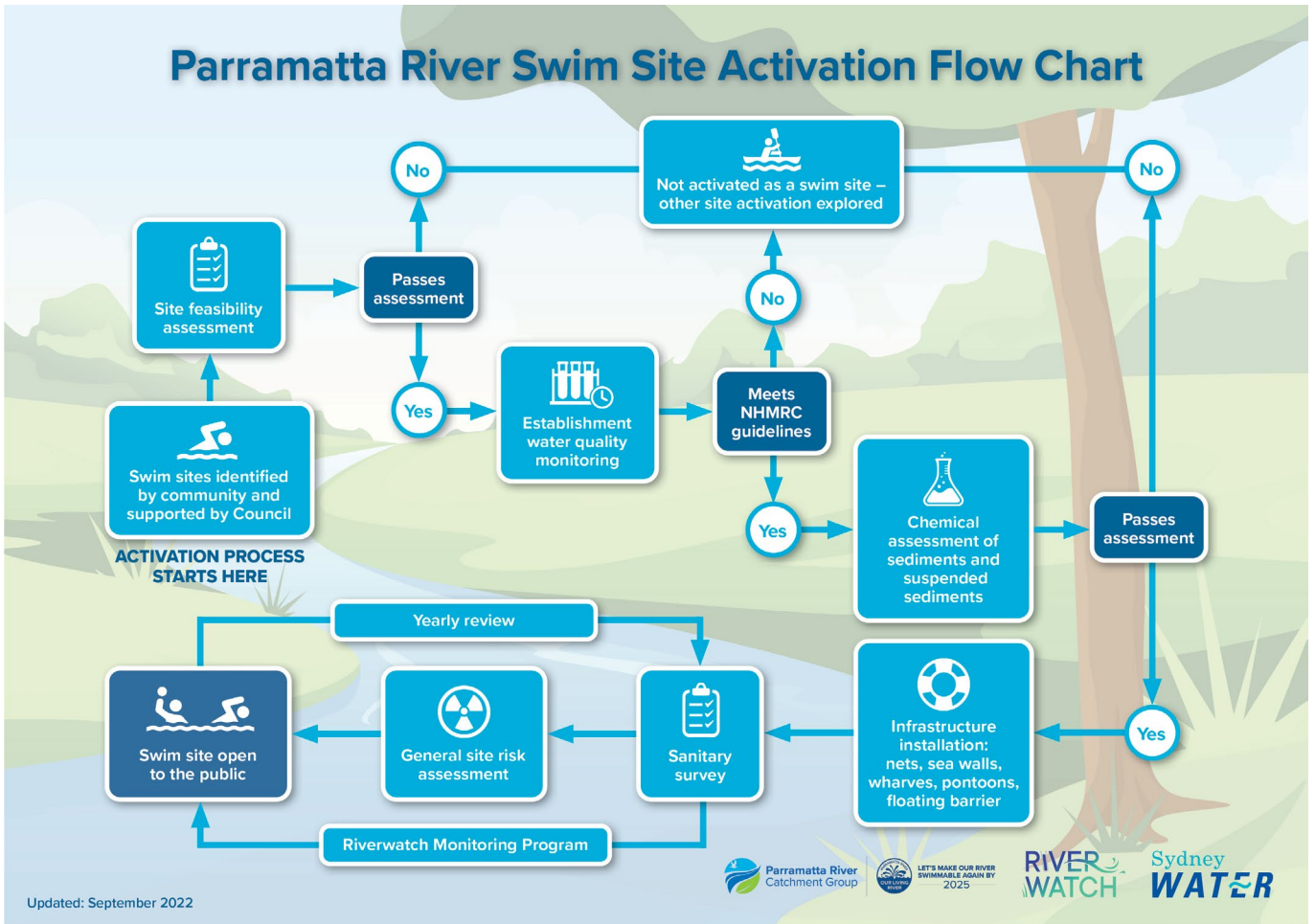
(NHMRC) [Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Waters](#) and the [NSW Water Quality Objectives](#). It is aligned with similar recreational water quality monitoring programs such as [Beachwatch](#) to maintain a consistent approach across Sydney.

Site suitability grading

Suitability grades for recreational waters are an assessment based on a combination of:

- **sanitary inspections**, identifying sources of pollution.
- **microbial assessments**, where 95% of data collected falls into categories associated with faecal indicator bacteria levels and corresponding risk of illness.

Sites are then classified into grades ranging from Very Good to Very Poor.



Swim site activation process

The activation process begins with considering the site’s feasibility as a swim site, what can be done to improve its desirability, and the vulnerability, including cultural sensitivities.

Once the site passes the initial feasibility assessments, we begin water quality monitoring. This is to understand ambient water quality to make sure it meets primary contact water quality objectives.

In line with the NHMRC guidelines, some sites may need to undertake an assessment of the chemicals in the sediment (and suspended in the water) to understand if there is a human health risk.

Once the site passes its environmental assessment phase, any necessary planning approvals and other site risk assessments will

contribute to determining the final design and installation of infrastructure. Consideration of physical hazards, potential risks from dangerous animals, measures to prevent drowning, and improving access and personal safety will influence the facilities that are required at each swim site.

Once a site is open to the public, monitoring continues. Annual sanitary inspections, combined with the year’s worth of monitoring data, form the annual suitability rating for the site. Site risk assessments are undertaken as part of ongoing site management and water quality monitoring data continues to inform our RiverWatch predictive model.

Like more information?

To learn more, visit www.urbanplunge.com.au or email riverwatch@sydneywater.com.au.