Council slammed for ‘secret’ plan to outsource city pools, putting jobs at risk

Gold Coast City Council has moved to outsource its aquatic centres, putting 400 jobs at risk and prompting The Services Union to demand an immediate halt to the process.

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The union says 400 jobs are at risk if Gold Coast City Council outsources aquatic centres to commercial providers, and is calling on the organisation to put an end to the privatisation of community assets.

Last month the Bulletin exclusively revealed council was considering private operators to run its aquatic centres.

Four of the city’s pools at Southport, Palm Beach, Pimpama and Upper Coomera are managed by council, while another four are managed privately.

Councillors had agreed to review pool management after they met in a closed session last month.

Gold Coast City Council is reviewing the operation of its aquatic centres, with a view to consider more private management of the community facilities.

The cost of providing the community centres including swimming lessons and aquatic classes is more than $31.1m annually.

The Services Union leaders say they are furious after only being notified of the proposal late on June 22 — less than 24 hours before council began briefing affected employees.

TSU secretary Neil Henderson is accusing council of breaching its consultation obligations under the current certified agreement. The City strongly rejects this claim.

Mr Henderson said hundreds of jobs at the city’s second biggest workforce were at risk.

“Council advised the union that the meeting was simply to inform us of the recommended outsourcing proposal,” Mr Henderson said.

“It is deeply concerning that workers were effectively notified only after the recommendation had already been developed.

“Ironically, the consultation clause at the centre of this dispute is one council is currently seeking to remove from the certified agreement during enterprise bargaining.”

The Refurbished Palm Beach Aquatic Centre opens its doors. Picture Glenn Campbell.

Since the announcement, the union has met with 60 staff from the Pimpama Sports Hub, Southport Aquatic Centre and Palm Beach Aquatic Centre.

“We’ve received reports that a single operator is expected to take over the remaining council aquatic centres,” Mr Henderson said.

“Those concerns are based on reports that company representatives have visited sites, measured office spaces and allegedly told staff they would soon be operating the centres.”

The main swimming pool at the Pimpama Sports Hub.

Union leaders say the City is putting profit ahead of community services.

The TSU has called on council to immediately pause the outsourcing proposal and publicly release the business case.

“These aquatic centres belong to the Gold Coast community,” Mr Henderson said.

“They were built with public money and should remain publicly managed in the public interest — not operated for private profit.”

A City spokesperson said council rejected the suggestion that employees had not been consulted or kept informed.

“Staff have been kept updated throughout the 18-month review, and the City has met its obligations under the certified agreement,” the spokesperson said.

“No decision has been made. The current consultation process is genuine, and feedback from employees will be considered before a final recommendation is presented to council.

“Council will make its decision only after considering all relevant information, including employee feedback, service outcomes, community expectations and value for ratepayers.”