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## Mount Barker Awards Aquatic Centre Contract

Mount Barker District Council has advanced its plans for a new state-of-the-art Regional Aquatic and Leisure Centre, awarding the construction contract to Adelaide-based Kennett Pty Ltd following a competitive tender process.

The \$51.8 million project, a key development for the state's fastest growing region, will be undertaken by award-winning South Australian company Kennett, renowned for its expertise in similar community-focused sport and recreation projects, including the Fleurieu Aquatic Centre.

Acting Mayor Simon Westwood expressed excitement about the partnership with Kennett, emphasising the project's significance for regional growth and community well-being. The centre's funding includes significant contributions from the Australian Government (\$15 million) and State Government (\$7.3 million), totalling \$22.3 million.

"This is a vital project for our region and we are delighted to now have Kennett on board," Acting Mayor Westwood said.

"The highly experienced company, named the Master Builders 'Commercial Builder of the Year' in 2021, has a proven record of successfully working with local communities to deliver sport and recreation projects of this scale."

South Australian Treasurer Stephen Mullighan welcomed the selection of a South Australian company for the transformative project.

"This is a large project that once complete will greatly benefit the Hills community and beyond," Mr Mullighan said.

The state-of-the-art facility will feature a 25m x 10 lane competition capable pool, a leisure pool, a warm water therapy pool, an expansive gym, fitness rooms, a crèche, and a kiosk/café. It is designed to accommodate the region's growing population and diverse needs, complementing the Summit Sport and Recreation Park, linear trail, and heritage barns. The development is expected to drive further leisure and tourism investments, with Mount Barker on track to become the state's second-largest city in the next decade. Acting Mayor Westwood said the new centre would promote health, well-being, and aquatic education, aligning with the community's aspiration for sustainable and accessible facilities.

“This new centre promises a range of activities, from swimming lessons and gym workouts to warm water exercises and recreational swimming,” he said.

The facility's design, shaped by extensive community and stakeholder consultations, has been praised by Aaron Newman, president of the Mountain Pool Swimming Club.

Mr Newman anticipates the complex will greatly serve the community, offering year-round access and catering to an increasing population with specialised pools for different activities.

“This is an exciting new complex for the community and we are looking forward to using such a modern facility which will provide year-round access for all swimmers and cater for our growing population with dedicated learn to swim, leisure and water play pools,” he said.

In 2018, a preliminary cost estimate for the project was set at \$30 million. However, this early projection almost six years ago did not anticipate a post-COVID economic landscape, where construction costs have seen an industry-wide increase of up to 40%. This substantial shift in the economic environment, which has also seen inflation at an all-time high, has naturally affected the project's budget.

Acting Mayor Westwood said the revised budget endorsed by Council was not a reflection of overspending, miscalculations or mismanagement, but rather an adjustment to the realities of the current construction market and economic conditions.

Council remains committed to responsibly managing the project's finances, integrating these updated costs into the Long-Term Financial Plan, and working collaboratively with developers. This approach aims to fairly distribute the financial responsibility and reduce the impact on ratepayers, ensuring the project's successful completion in this new economic context.

Council looks forward to working with Kennett to complete the design to enable construction to commence on site in January 2024. Completion of the centre is anticipated by mid to late 2025.

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