

Crossroads

An Open Letter from Dave Wilkin, Past President, Masters Swimming Canada

June 10, 2019

The May 29th [Swimming Canada \(SC\) & Swim Ontario letter](#) has landed like a bombshell, catching masters swimmers and MSC alike by complete surprise. [MSC's response was sobering](#), clearly indicating their members have arrived at a crossroads, facing a difficult choice – turn onto a new masters-centered road, operating under a yet-to-be defined new national structure, or onto a road under the sole control and operation of SC, with MSC vanishing. The choice couldn't be starker - the latter likely permanent, as the road back to a democratic structure would be long, difficult and costly.

To assist with this critical choice, I pose three key questions for which you should have answers:

1. Why did you join Masters Swimming?
2. Why do you have a choice today?
3. Why does SC want to take over and operate Masters Swimming, and related, why do it like this?

Question 1 is personal, and only you can answer it.

In challenging times like these, I hear some masters swimmers say, enough with the politics, “I just want to swim”. Understandable. However, to them I would say this - think about the answer to **Question 2**. Something of personal high value is worth fighting for. The choices we enjoy today only exist because masters swimming was successful. The many leaders coming before took risks, worked hard, and fought and won the necessary battles. Almost 50 years ago, visionaries like Hud Stewart and Al Waites did just that, launching masters swimming in Canada. Over the years, the efforts of countless dedicated volunteers and coaches gave their time and energy, weathering many storms and battles, slowly building the sport they loved into what we enjoy today. They would all tell you it certainly wasn't for the money, power or glory.

Their success is reflected in a history that speaks for itself – MSC topped 10,000 members in over 250 clubs, ranging in club sizes from 2 to over 200 swimmers, from small towns to vast urban centers across the country. It's a testament to the soundness of our founding values and core principles. All of it underpinned by a democratic principle, ensuring you, the masters swimmers, ultimately had the final say on matters of importance.

Finally, to **Question 3**. It is SC's to answer, but to my knowledge, they have yet to do so. Their May 29th letter states: [“Although the governance of swimming has always been with Swimming Canada and to designated provincial sections, several years ago a special interest group – Masters Swimming Canada \(MSC\) – was formed”](#). It's perfectly clear they believe that they govern swimming in Canada. Their claim is not only wrong, it is offensive. Local community, school, YMCA, Red-Cross, National Life Guard, Open Water and Triathlon organizations, representing & serving millions of swimmers would also likely take issue. Carelessly chosen words, perhaps, but the elitism and arrogance emanating from their words shines through nonetheless. Yet, this doesn't answer the question.

By most measures, Masters Swimming is different from SC's core business – *age-group and elite competitive swimming*. It's almost like we're from a different planet. SC's 2018 [Annual report](#) clearly demonstrates the low priority placed on masters swimming. In it, we garnered only a few mentions, lacking in detail, other than counting MSC members, a brief reference to a masters coaching module (10+ years in the making, that masters authored), and the 2016 MSC/SNC MOU (partnership agreement) on which they just unilaterally pulled the plug. Even our swimmer and club profiles are a poor

fit in their core business model. Nationally, roughly 80% of masters swimmers come from masters-operated clubs, under 20% of all masters choose to compete, and under 15% take in nationals or international competitions, where SC and FINA dominate. Our sport should be growing, given population growth and aging demographics, so who better to re-establish growth than masters swimmers themselves? For more history & detail behind the issues, please refer to an [open letter posted on Facebook January 8, 2018](#) and a recent [open letter from MSO](#). Should SC eventually answer Question 3, they should expect significant scrutiny and skepticism from masters swimmers.

If you care about the future of masters swimming, please stay informed, speak up and get engaged.

Dave Wilkin, a past MSC president