

At 93, Margaret Clougher is making a splash at masters swimming titles

By [Meg Whitfield](#) Posted Thu 20 Apr 2023



At 93, Margaret Clougher is the oldest Tasmanian contestant at this week's Masters Swimming Australia event in Hobart. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

Anyone who knows Margaret Clougher knows she loves the water.

Key points:

- Margaret Clougher is the oldest Tasmanian competitor at this week's masters championships, taking on the 50m freestyle event
- Her club, the Hobart Dolphins, has played an integral role in keeping her in the sport
- Masters Swimming Australia says their events are for people just like Mrs Clougher to get involved in, with enthusiasm the only requirement

It's why her neighbours no longer greet her with a standard "hello" when they bump into her — instead, they ask a simple question: "Are you still swimming?". The answer, she says, is always a resounding yes.

At 93 years of age, Mrs Clougher is the oldest Tasmanian taking part in the Masters Swimming National Championships underway in Hobart.

In her heat of the 50-metre freestyle on Saturday she will battle it out against the others in the 90-94 age bracket.

"I don't expect to place," she said. "I'm just here for my enjoyment. I just love it. I love to swim."



Margaret Clougher has been competing for more than three decades. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

Mrs Clougher's love for the water began as a child, spending hours in the creek near her home in New South Wales and it has remained a key part of her routine ever since.

To this day she still regularly takes a morning dip in the ocean, and in previous years pushed herself in long-distance swimming. She estimates she's been participating in events for more than three decades. However, she knows she couldn't have kept it up on her own — crediting her family and her local swimming club with keeping her in the water, by supporting her out of it.

"They've been amazing," Ms Clougher said. "I recently lost my licence and I told the president, 'you know, I'll be coming by taxi, I won't be coming every week'. "And they went 'no no, we'll arrange it.'"



Margaret Clougher is a regular at the Hobart Dolphins swim club. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

The club, the Hobart Dolphins, set up a roster ensuring that every week there was a friendly face ready to pick up Mrs Clougher in the morning, and drop her home. "They're lovely," she said. "And it's not just [for] me. It's everybody. It makes you feel good."

Hobart Dolphins vice president Annaliese Cousins said it had been a no-brainer to step in and assist when they heard Mrs Clougher was facing hurdles getting her sessions.

"The ethos of our club is friendship," she said. "There's a lot of levels in there — there's recreational swimmers, there's competitive swimmers but at the end of it, we are all just one big, really happy team looking out for each other."



Annaliese Cousins (left) says the club provides friendship as well as fitness. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

"[Margie] is our inspiration in the club. When we look at her, she's exactly where we all want to be when we're her age."

Mrs Cousins said it was also a clear demonstration of the importance of staying fit and socially connected.

"For all of us, swimming — and turning up for training and being with our friends — is critical to our physical and mental health," she said. "We're conditioned to compete, we love to train — and we have that huge friendship base in the club as well."

Fun, fitness and friendship the motto



Phil Tyrell says the club helps people to keep doing what they love. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

Meet director Philip Tyrell echoed Ms Cousins' sentiments, describing the Masters Swimming Australia motto of "fitness, friendship and fun" as more than just words. He said about 10 people competed in the 90-94 age bracket. That factor and there being no qualifying heats were what made the event so special. "The biggest cheers that go up at an event like this is for those competitors because everyone recognises everything they've put into their career as a swimmer, and celebrates it," Mr Tyrell said. He said occasionally, the goal could even be setting a world record. "When a 94-year-old jumps in the pool and sets a world record ... the level of pride just goes through the roof."

Years of swimming ahead



Mrs Clougher says she hopes to have an edge over her competitors next year when she moves to the next category. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

While Mrs Clougher might not have any world record ambitions, she does have a goal of swimming for years to come, the memory from a national competition years ago a constant motivator. "We were all together at [a world championship] in Brisbane, and there was a woman of 100, and her daughter — she was probably in her 80s — walking alongside her and going 'come one mum, come on mum!'. "We were only in our 60s and saying, 'we're going to do that'. And here I am."

Next year will come with the chance to get an edge on her competitors, with her birthday bumping her up into the next age category. "I'll be young in my age group, I'll be in 95 to 100," Mrs Clougher said with a grin. "It's the only sport where you look forward to your birthday."



Margaret Clougher says she is looking forward to the next masters meet. (ABC News: Luke Bowden)

