

SWIMMERS CROSS TASMAN FOR TOP COMPETITION

Southland's high performance swimmers head out to Australia tomorrow (December 10) to compete in the Queensland State championships.

Natalie Wiegersma, Lisa Pankhurst, Adam McDonald, Michael Findlay and Richard Harris will all be taking part in the five-day meet which is a crucial event for those swimmers chasing national selection this year.

The Southland contingency will be part of the 58-strong kiwi team which, as well as competing, will also be getting all-important international competition.

Swim Southland executive officer David Prattley said the Southlanders were also taking part in the New South Wales championships in February before the Auckland championships in March.

The Auckland meet will see the swimmers up for selection for six different teams – one of those being the New Zealand swimming team to attend the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India, in October next year.

“They've got to be at these events to ensure they get top competition as well as experience at competing at a high-pressured elite level,” Prattley said.

The ILT Foundation and Invercargill Licensing Trust recently granted \$80,000 and \$20,000 respectively, towards the high performance programme, as well as funding for the roles of executive officer, development coach and to retain the services of head coach Jeremy Duncan.

It is also hoped the money will go towards bringing an internationally-recognised coach to Southland in the New Year to mentor the swimmers, he said.

Southland's major prospect striving for Commonwealth Games selection is Wiegersma who has made a deliberate effort to qualify for the team while still remaining in Southland.

“Without this funding she wouldn't be able to stay in her own community and still reach such an elite level.

“Without it we wouldn't be able to offer high performance athletes what we do.

Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation chairman Alan Dennis said it was great that children learning to swim could be inspired by the likes of the high performance athletes getting to train alongside them and see their achievements.

“We are excited by Swim Southland's effort to create an environment in this city where everybody is able to access high-level coaching. It means this sport will continue to grow and develop encouraging more to participate.”