

# Owners cast unwanted pools adrift

By KARINA BARRYMORE

AS people throughout the country lounge beside their pools a growing number of home owners are paying big money to have them dug up and filled in.

In Melbourne in particular, this one time status symbol is being banished from backyards with unwanted pools being removed at a rate of more than one a week.

The traditional pool is no longer a value-adding extra in many residential markets around the country, but in the cooler Victorian capital property valuers say they often now discount the property's price.

Buyers have become wary of homes with pools, while sellers are increasingly swapping them for landscaped lawn and garden beds to help raise the sale price.

But even owners who are not intending to relocate are getting rid of their backyard billabongs, citing maintenance, cost, poor weather and fencing laws as the reasons.

The trend appears to be concentrated in Melbourne, although home owners in other States are also having pools filled in, according to Mr Peter Burns, who is filling in more than 60 pools a year in Melbourne.

Mr Burns, who runs a business called Reverse Pools, said the time and cost of maintaining a clean pool was the main reason pool owners wanted them filled in.

Elderly people found the regular maintenance too physically demanding while working people could not find the time, he said.

"The main trouble is, once the water in the pool turns green or it gets clogged with rotten leaves you can't use any of the outdoor entertaining areas because they usually always look straight at the dirty green water," Mr Burns said.

Parents of young children also steered clear of home pools because of safety concerns, he said.

Melburnians are paying between \$2,000 and \$4,000 to have their pools demolished and filled in, although additional landscaping and planting can add thousands of dollars more to the overall bill.



**BLOOMING NUISANCE:** Pools are no longer an essential extra, particularly in Melbourne

Picture: LEAR

The main job takes about four or five days to break down the concrete shell and level the hole with the surrounding area.

The time and cost was roughly the same as it took to having a new pool fence installed, Mr Burns said.

Home owner, Mrs Billie Thong, of the Melbourne suburb of Balwyn said she put up with a wasted backyard for 10 years before she could convince her family to have the pool removed.

"It's just not an asset in Melbourne to have a pool.

"For one the weather's too bad

and it takes up more than half the garden," she said.

"I know lots of people who are also having their pool removed and I also know people buying homes who, as soon as they see a house has a pool, don't even bother to continue considering it," Mrs Thong said.

"In two cases in our area the pool has stopped the sale from going ahead," she said.

Mr Grant Jackson, a director of valuing firm Landmark White, said in price range under \$500,000, a pool was often seen as a significant disadvantage.

"From a personal or lifestyle view, a pool in Melbourne is a waste of time anyway, you just don't get to use it. In Sydney it is a whole different ball game.

"From a valuers view, pools in Melbourne don't add a lot of money, even good landscaped spa combinations don't add very much. The market here is just not prepared to pay anything for them," Mr Jackson said.

"I've certainly seen situations where it has put buyers off the property. Buyers with young families especially won't buy the property," he said.

However, what is unwanted by one party is keenly sought by others and Mr Jackson said.

Home buyers in the \$300,000 to \$500,000 were often younger families and therefore more keen on having the option to extend the house rather than have the backyard taken up with a swimming pool.

However, in the more expensive \$1 million price range, the swimming pool appears to be here to stay, with a north-south tennis court and large inground pool still high on the list for million dollar home buyers, he said.