

## AUSTRALIAN DROWNINGS

Water Related Deaths and Death Rates 1995 - 2000/01

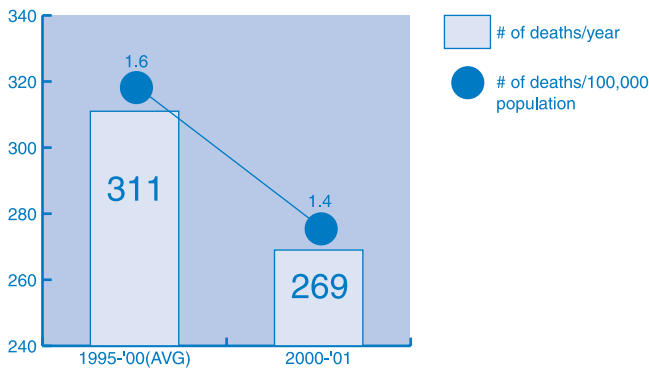


Chart 1

## INLAND WATERWAYS REMAIN OUR GREATEST CONCERN

2000 - 2001 again revealed lake, river and dam drownings as a major area of concern. The flat, still appearance of lakes and rivers often gives a false impression of tranquillity and safety. These locations remain the most dangerous when it comes to drowning. 99 deaths were recorded at these locations during the period, a 25% decrease on the figure of last year and a slight decrease on the 1995 - 99 year average (See Chart #2).

The number of beach drownings has increased from the previous year's figures. Beach drownings returned to the levels of 1999. Last year there were 60 beach drownings, a 42% increase on the 1995 - 99 year average.

Backyard swimming pools and bathtubs also showed high proportions of drowning with 31 and 15 recorded respectively. Although 2000 - 01 revealed a downward trend in both, these two locations remain the largest threat to children aged between 0 - 5 years.

# THE NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT 2001

## 269 PEOPLE DROWNED LAST YEAR!



## AUSTRALIAN DROWNINGS SLIDE DOWNWARDS!

### BUT, IT'S NO TIME TO RELAX

National trends suggest that 269 people drowned in preventable water related activities during the financial year 2000 - 2001. This figure represents a reduction of 9% from the previous year and is significantly below the average of the previous five years. Taking the Australian population growth into consideration, the preventable water-related death rate is below the 1995-1999 year average, at 1.4 deaths per 100,000 population (See Chart #1).

With the 2000 - 2001 summer approaching, continued public awareness is essential to maintain this excellent result and avoid further preventable water related deaths. Remember, whenever you or your family are in, on or near water, 'take care' and help prevent further lives from being lost.

## INLAND WATERWAYS DOMINATE DROWNINGS

Water Related Deaths by Location

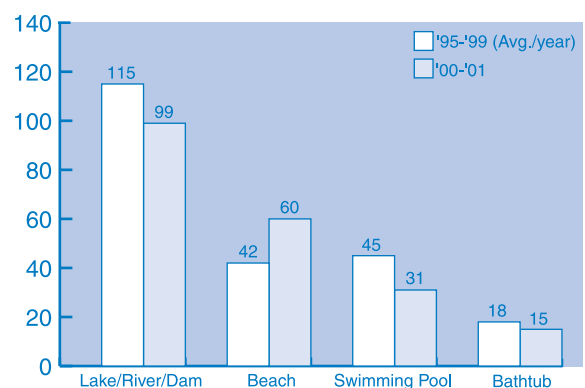


Chart 2

# THE 0 - 5 YEAR AGE GROUP. OUR NATIONAL DISGRACE!

## OUR BABIES CONTINUE TO DROWN

Early indications for 2000 - 01 suggest that 35 Australian children under 5 years of age died as a result of drowning (See Chart #3). The good news is this figure represents a 40% decrease on the five year average. However, 35 are still far too many children losing their lives in preventable water related accidents. Whilst pleased with this reduction, the message from Royal Life Saving is that it is no time for complacency.

## THE HOME CONTINUES TO CLAIM MOST TODDLERS

Backyard swimming pools and bathtubs continue to pose the greatest threat to young lives under five. Based on research patterns since 1994, swimming pools and bathtubs account for 54% of drowning in this age group (See Chart #4). Research also indicates that the most likely method of entry is direct access due to there being no pool fence or an obstructed or faulty gate.

## DANGERS ON RURAL PROPERTIES SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED

The 0 -5 figures indicate that 43% of drowning occurs in dams, lakes and rivers with 15 such cases recorded in the past year. The importance of supervision and the creation of child safe areas should not be underestimated (See Chart #4). With the downward trend emerging in swimming pool drownings, we are now seeing a disturbing increase in toddler drownings in inland waterways. In all cases, supervision is the difference between life and death.

### TODDLER DROWNINGS

0-5 Age Group Water-Related Deaths 1995-2000/01

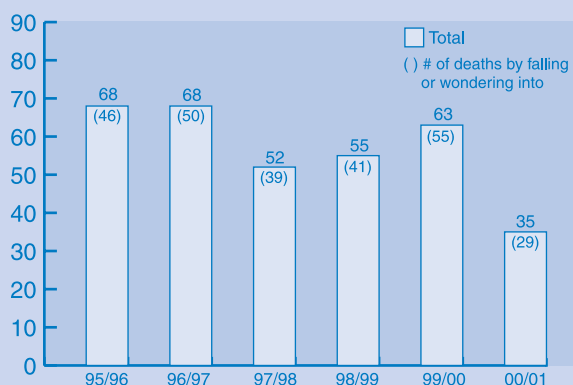


Chart 3



For every drowning death there were approximately three children admitted to hospital as a result of an immersion incident. In Australia, this equates to about 105 "near-drowned" children. Every one of these immersion incidents is a potential death. Studies have shown that between 5 % and 20 % of children who are admitted to hospital have suffered some form of brain damage, ranging from mild to severe.

Despite widespread public education programs throughout the media, child care centres and in hospitals, too many children are being lost in preventable water related accidents. Evidence suggests that the more targeted approach employed by the Royal Life Saving Pfizer Keep Watch program has been successful in effecting behavioural change of parents and carers. Keep watch and keep them alive.

### TODDLER DROWNINGS BY LOCATION 1999/00 - 2000/01

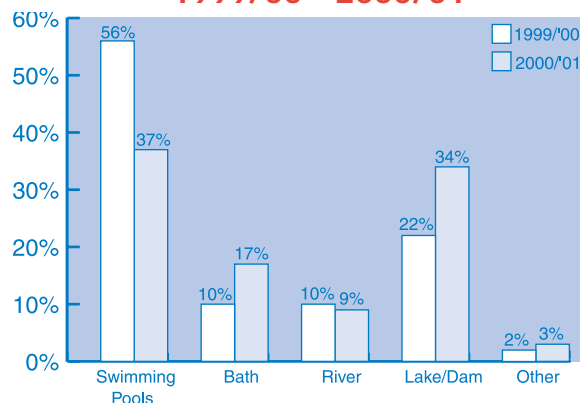


Chart 4

## WHO DROWNS IN AUSTRALIA?

(See Chart #5) The 2000 - 2001 figures suggest some positive trends across all age brackets.

Positive trends continue to emerge in the 6 - 14 and 15 - 24 year age groups, both achieving a significant reduction against the 1995 - 1999 year average, although there was a slight increase in the number of 6-14 year olds when compared to last year's figures. Positive trends in the five year average can be attributed to increased levels of participation in swimming and water safety programs such as Swim and Survive.

The 0 - 5 figures have decreased significantly, but remain unacceptably high. The five year average continues to indicate that 1 child between the ages of 0 - 5 drowns every week in this country.

Positive results have been recorded in the 25 - 34 and 35 - 44 age brackets with slight decreases against the five-year average. The knowledge and skills learned in the school aged years, combined with continued public education campaigns targeting this group appear to be having an effect as this figure represents a decrease for the third consecutive year.

## THE NATIONAL FORECAST

This is the seventh annual National Drowning Report produced by Royal Life Saving, and despite increased education and public awareness campaigns, many Australians underestimate or remain unaware of the dangers associated with recreational water participation. Disturbingly, the national trends remain inappropriately high (See Chart #6).

With a growing, ageing population, and long term trends forecasting warmer weather, strong ongoing drowning prevention education is needed to significantly reduce the national toll.

Royal Life Saving continues to educate Australians about how to modify their high-risk behaviour and assume greater responsibility for themselves and others while in or around water. It is tragic, for example, that so many Australian children drown each year in backyard swimming pools and baths, and that older Australians are still none the wiser by either not wearing a life-jacket when aboard watercraft or by combining alcohol with aquatic participation. It is estimated that 30 % of adult drowning can be attributed to alcohol consumption.

## WHO DROWNS IN AUSTRALIA?

Preventable Water Related Deaths by Age Group 1995-2000/01

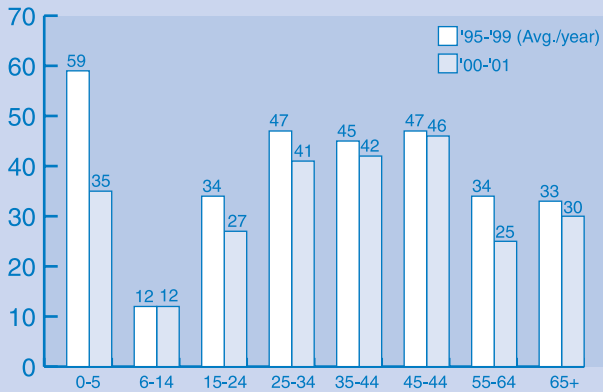


Chart 5



80 % of all drownings identified are males. Young males in particular continue to participate in risk taking activities that can often end disastrously. Drowning represents the fourth most common "accidental" cause of death in Australia following motor vehicle / traffic accidents, accidental falls and poisoning.

**KEEP WATCH  
AND KEEP  
THEM ALIVE!**

## THE NATIONAL FORECAST

State Figures with Gender Breakdown

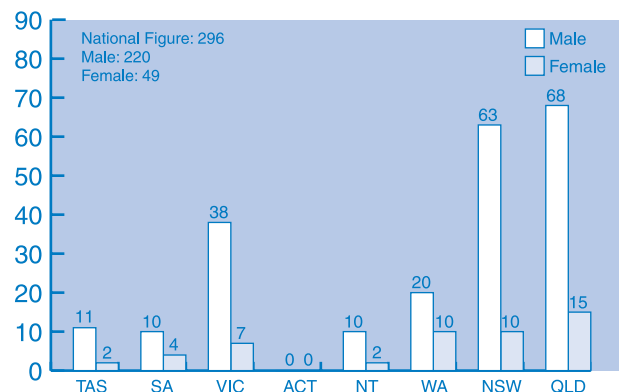


Chart 6

## 0 - 5 FIGURES MAKE UP OVER 13% OF THE TOTAL DROWNING FIGURE

Over the recorded period, the 0 - 5 figures make up over 13% of the total drowning figure. The 0 - 5 figures have long been described as a national disgrace, and although slight decreases have emerged, it is far too early to declare victory. 82% of 0 - 5 drownings result from a child wandering off and falling into the water resulting in a submersion incident. This reinforces the message of "Keep Watch" whenever children are in, on or around water environments.

### ACTIVITY

Drowning resulting from "swimming" activities increased slightly over the past year. Whilst, once again "watercraft" related drownings were significantly high, with 46. Recreational boaters need to ensure that their craft is seaworthy, weather conditions are safe and that they have sufficient personal floatation devices (PFD's) for all those on board. Royal Life Saving applauds the recent Tasmanian Government legislation that makes the wearing of PFD's compulsory for all recreational boaters and their children.

Drowning by "falls" had a significant decrease for 2000 - 2001. Falls are usually associated with children falling into swimming pools, lakes, river and dams. (See Chart #7).

"Fishing" and "Diving" related drownings both rose slightly against the five-year average. Fishing accidents often involve individuals not taking the appropriate precautions when fishing from rock ledges.

### DROWNING BY ACTIVITY

Water Related Deaths by Activity 1995-2000/01

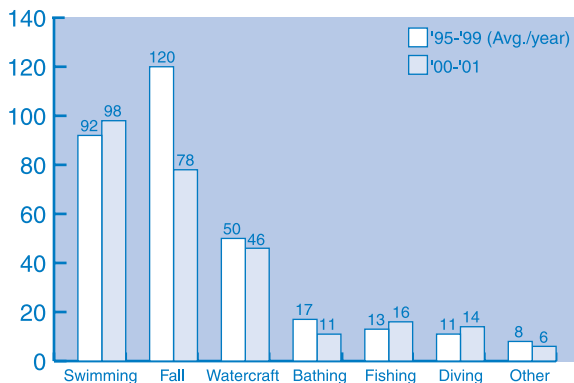


Chart 7

Royal Life Saving (RLSSA) acknowledges the following organisations for their assistance:

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, National and State Injury Surveillance Units, the National Coronal Information System and other sources.

The RLSSA is in the business of lifesaving and is a National volunteer-based organisation that continually strives to prevent aquatic related injury and death through its training programs, public education, research, consulting and international liaisons.

For more information contact: RLSSA National Branch on 02 9181 5444 or RLSSA Website: [www.rlssa.org.au](http://www.rlssa.org.au)

## WATER SAFETY EDUCATION ONLINE

The RLSSA is urging parents to take a greater role in the water safety education of their children. [www.wetnwise.com](http://www.wetnwise.com) and [www.swimandsurvive.com](http://www.swimandsurvive.com), are two ways that parents can get involved. Why not visit these sites with your children and learn a little about water safety together.



### KEEP WATCH

Sadly every week in Australia a child under 5 years of age drowns.

Royal Life Saving and Pfizer are working together to change these figures.

To do this, Royal Life Saving has produced the Parent Water Safety Cassette to educate parents and carers of children.



# Royal Life Saving

THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

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