



AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2030

2025 UPDATE

CONSULTATION DRAFT

| Towards a nation free
from drowning



**Australian
Water Safety
Council**

24th July 2025

Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 - 2025 Update

This document is a **consultation draft** of core content that will be included in the 2025 Update of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. This draft was released for review and feedback at the 2025 National Water Safety Summit in Sydney on July 24th and 25th, 2025.

The Summit program was designed as an engagement mechanism for further consultation on the content of this document, and some adjustments may be made based on the discussions, learnings and outcomes from the Summit.

Additional feedback on this draft may be provided online by scanning or clicking the QR code below.



[Click or Scan](#)

The comment period for online consultation will open on July 24th and close on August 17th, 2025.

This midpoint update document will be finalised and launched before the end of Summer 2025/2026.

Background

The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) sets out a shared agenda for the broader multidisciplinary network dedicated to preventing drowning and promoting safe use of the nation's waterways and swimming pools.

Since the publication of Australia's first National Water Safety Plan in 1998, national-level water safety plans and strategies have played an essential role in national, state and territory, and community approaches to addressing drowning. The [Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030](#) (AWSS 2030) is the sixth iteration of this work and reflects major progress in our understanding of the issue and solutions, approaches to prevention, and commitment to coordinated action.

Midpoint of the AWSS 2030

July 2025 marks the halfway point of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. This provides an opportunity to critically assess progress to date, examine whether the Strategy continues to reflect the right priorities, and identify where greater focus and attention are needed.

In this 2025 update, progress has been assessed in two key ways:

- By convening the Australian water safety sector in meaningful consultation around the Strategy's Priority and Focus Areas, culminating in the 2025 National Water Safety Summit; and
- By evaluating changes in drowning rates per 100,000 population.

Convening the sector

In 2023 and 2024, experts convened across the country in a series of high-level workshops focused on specific parts of the AWSS 2030 – some workshops were held in-person over multiple days, others were online for a few hours, and others were embedded into existing forums such as the National Aquatic Industry Committee and the Australia New Zealand Safe Boating Education Group. Selected outputs including workshop statements from these events are available by [clicking here](#).

A key objective of these convenings was to assess the AWSS 2030 Key Activities and Focus Areas with forward-looking emphasis on defining what is needed most to meet the Strategy's target of reducing drowning by 50%. Insights from these meetings, supported by current research and additional targeted consultation resulted in some updates to the Strategy's framing and direction. These changes are reflected in this midpoint review and update, presented first at the July 2025 National Water Safety Summit, followed by an open comment period to solicit feedback. The document will be finalised and published later in 2025.

This document is intended to supplement the full Strategy, not replace it, and to sharpen the focus on what matters most as we continue towards the 2030 target.

Evaluating progress towards a 50% reduction

AWSS 2030 committed to an aspirational target of halving the unintentional fatal drowning rate by 2030, compared to a baseline average drowning rate from the three prior years (2017/18 to 2019/20). As annual drowning numbers naturally fluctuate each year due to many factors, emphasis is on identifying long-term trends over short-term spikes and drops. In this Midpoint Review, progress towards the 50% reduction target is assessed using the average annual change in drowning rate per 100,000 population for the financial years 2020/2021 – 2023/24*.

For overall drowning rates, and for drowning rates specific to each Focus Area of the Strategy, the observed trend (average change in rates) is compared against the target annual change required to reach a 50% reduction by June 2030. Status is classified into three groups:

- **Green** – Rates are decreasing on target
- **Orange** – Rates are decreasing, but below target
- **Red** – No change or rates are increasing.

The table and figure on the next page provide a snapshot on how drowning rates are tracking against the 2030 targets; the figure is replicated in each Focus Area.*

SUMMARY OF MIDPOINT ADJUSTMENTS

This document supplements the full [AWSS 2030](#). These adjustments are the product of extensive consultation underscoring the need to identify and prioritise the things that matter most for reducing drowning by 50% by 2030.

National Imperatives

- Three cross cutting national-level priorities have been identified as major focus points that are critical to achieving long-term reductions in drowning.

Streamlined Priority Areas

- The 'Risk Taking' Priority Area has been removed from the AWSS wheel. Water safety and swimming skills is now reflected in National Imperatives. Alcohol and other drugs and risk taking behaviours remain key components of the strategy and now reflected in other Priority and Focus Areas. Outcomes from the 2024 Alcohol and Risk Taking workshop focused are available [here](#).

Refined Focus Areas

- The Focus Area formerly labelled 'Beaches, Ocean, and Rocks' has been refined to 'Beaches'.
- The Focus Area formerly labelled as 'Fishing and Rock Fishing' has been refined to 'Rock Fishing'.

Three things that matter most

- The three most important opportunities for action in each Focus Area have been identified and described. This reflects prioritisation, synthesis, and updates to the original 2021-2025 Key Activities.

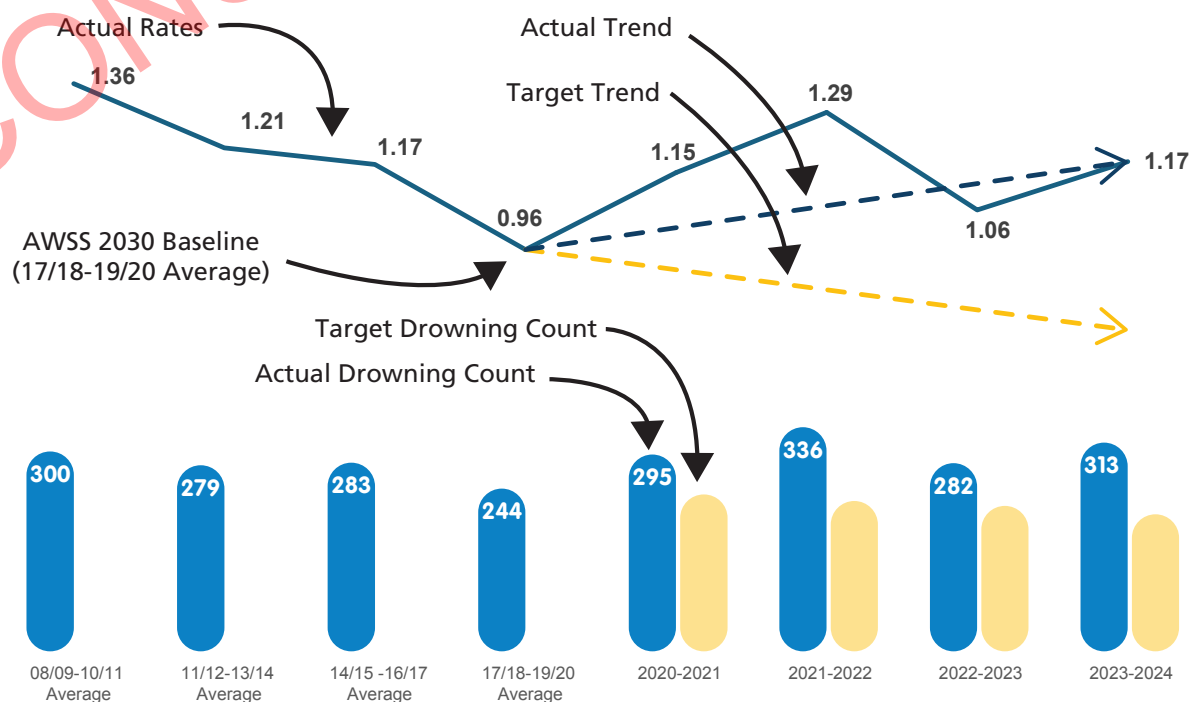
AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

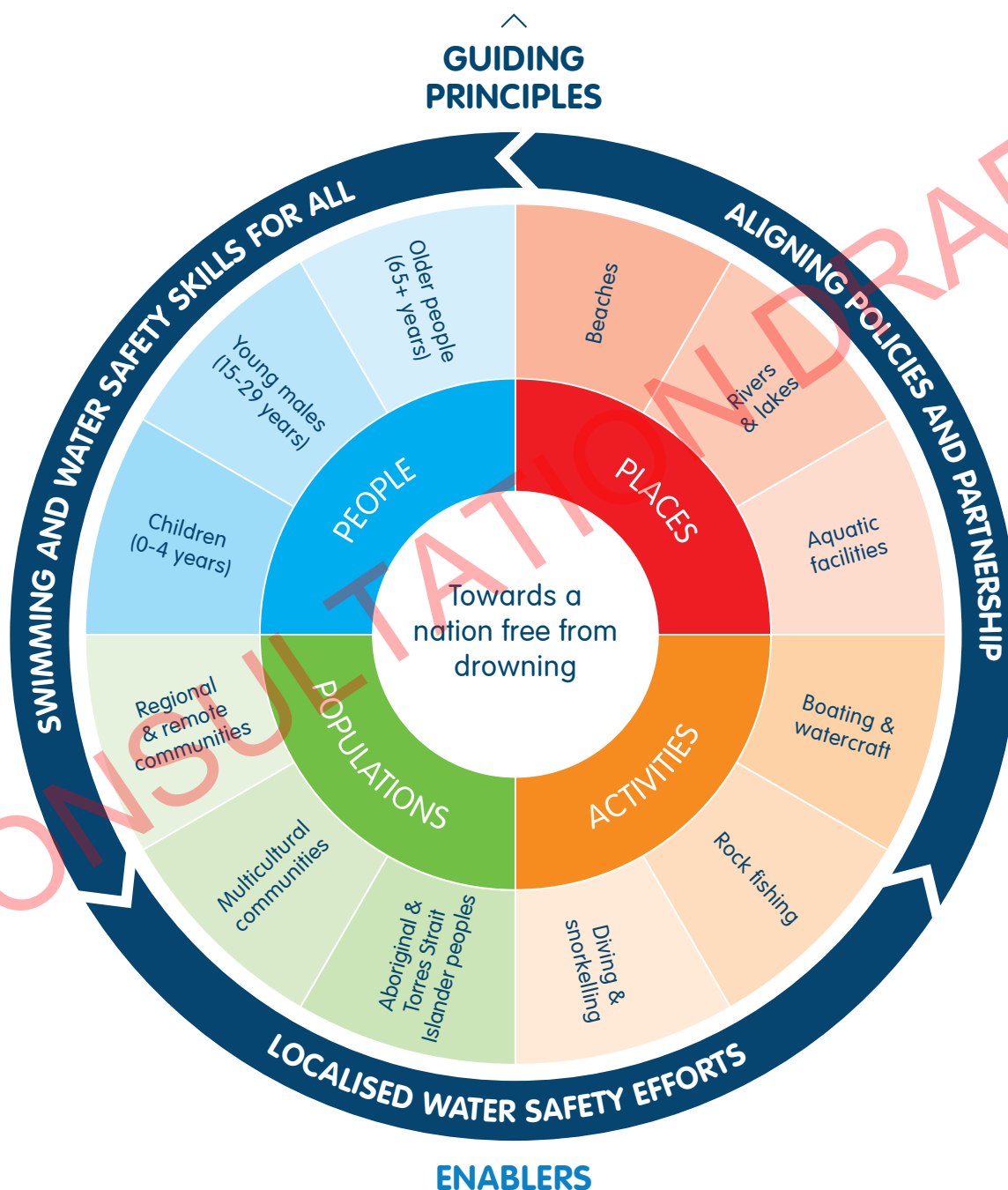
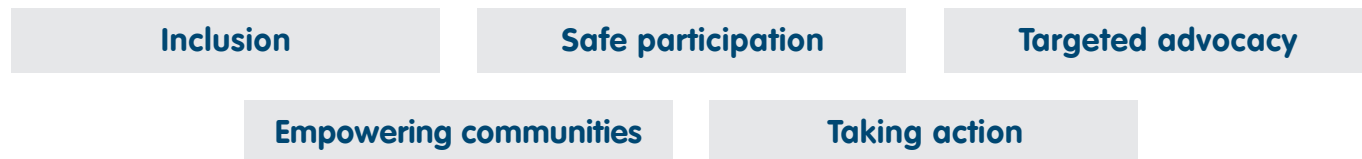
Overall rates are increasing, urgent attention required

Overall and AWSS 2030 Focus Area-specific baseline rates, 2030 target rates and midpoint status.

	Baseline Rate	2030 Target Rate	Midpoint status: Progress towards AWSS 2030 target rate based on 20/21 - 23/24 trend
Overall drowning rates	0.96	0.48	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Children (0–4 years)	1.03	0.56	Rates decreasing, but not fast enough
Young males (15–29 years)	1.74	0.87	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Older adults (65+ years)	1.38	0.69	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Beaches	0.20	0.10	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Rivers & lakes	0.33	0.17	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Aquatic facilities	0.043	0.022	Rates increasing, urgent attention required
Boating & watercraft	0.179	0.090	Rates decreasing, but not fast enough
Rock fishing	0.049	0.025	Rates decreasing on track
Diving and snorkelling	0.057	0.029	Rates are increasing, urgent attention required
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander persons	0.98	0.49	Rates decreasing on track
Multicultural communities	1.23	0.62	Rates decreasing on track
Regional & remote communities	1.38	0.69	Rates not changing, urgent attention required

Annotated AWSS 2030 overall fatal drowning midpoint status: Comparing actual trends, rates per 100,000 population, and counts to target trends and counts needed for a 50% reduction by 2030.





NATIONAL IMPERATIVES

Swimming and water safety skills for all

Strengthen government programs
Ensure no one misses out
Infrastructure and workforce

Localising water safety efforts

Local water safety coalitions
Local water safety plans

Aligning policies and partnership for change

Strategic government alignment
Scaled resources for impact

PRIORITIES AND FOCUS AREAS

PEOPLE

Children (0-4 years)

Pool fencing legislation
Parent and caregiver education
Second year of life interventions

Young males (15-29 years)

High-school programs
Peer-driven messages
Segmented strategies

Older people (65+ years)

Healthy ageing agenda
Engagement for lifelong aquatic activity
Strategies for managing medical conditions

PLACES

Beaches

Coordinated and collaborative lifesaving systems
Beach safety skill-building and awareness
Managing risk at unfamiliar beaches

Rivers and lakes

Systems-level prevention
Land manager leadership
Disaster resilience

Aquatic facilities

Strengthen industry standards
Address infrastructure and workforce fragilities
Safety standards for communal pools

POPULATIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Alignment of agendas
Equitable access to programs and facilities
Embedding First Nations knowledge and leadership

Multicultural communities

Cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration
Skills and community capacity
Integration into migrant pathways

Regional and remote communities

Support regional networks
Equitable access to education opportunities
Local planning for high-risk sites

ACTIVITIES

Boating and watercraft

Regulations and waterway management
Unified education efforts
High-risk craft and user groups (PWC)

Rock fishing

Consistent policy and risk management systems
Education paired with skills and equipment
Blackspot rock platforms

Diving and snorkelling

Safety systems and standards
Education for recreational divers and snorkellers
Address risk among vulnerable groups

Why National Imperatives?

At the midpoint of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, we are not on track and drowning rates are trending in the wrong direction. While there are some areas of success, and the picture might look different at a State or community level, it is clear from a national perspective that urgent action is required.

Preventing drowning requires clarity of purpose and concentrated action. In this midpoint refocus of the AWSS 2030, three National Imperatives identify critical areas where bold, sustained action is needed to drive systemic change and reverse the fatal drowning trend from the last five years.

The National Imperatives signal where we must focus our collective will to create lasting, transformative impact. Embraced collectively, they provide a unifying agenda that everyone in the water safety ecosystem, from policymakers and practitioners to communities and individuals, can rally behind to reduce drowning by 50% by 2030.

NATIONAL IMPERATIVE: SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY SKILLS FOR ALL

Why is this a National Imperative?

While swimming and water safety skills are widely recognised as fundamental in preventing drowning, a lack of these abilities, particularly among children and youth, remains a critical vulnerability that increases individual and community drowning risk. The presence of specific hazards, such as unpredictable currents, deep or open water, and unfamiliar aquatic environments, further compounds these risks, especially for those with limited knowledge and experience.

Despite the known importance of swimming and water safety education, access remains highly uneven. National benchmarks are not being consistently met; up to 48% of children are unable to swim 50 metres or float for two minutes by the end of primary school, significantly heightening their vulnerability to drowning. Research highlights that participation in learn-to-swim programs drops sharply before age eight, leaving substantial skill gaps during adolescence and early adulthood. These gaps are further compounded by entrenched inequities: people living in rural and remote areas, lower socioeconomic communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and multicultural populations are less likely to participate in swimming and water safety programs.

Closing these gaps cannot be left to families alone. A coordinated, national effort is required, one that embeds swimming and water safety education across systems, schools, and communities. This effort must be supported with targeted investment, strategic coordination, and a strong focus on removing barriers to access. To reduce drowning rates in a meaningful and lasting way, we must treat swimming and water safety not just as personal skills to survive the water, but as foundational life skills that open a lifetime of opportunity and benefits. Addressing this imperative will require systemic reform to ensure every person, regardless of background, geography, or ability, has access to quality swimming and water safety education from childhood through adulthood.

The things that matter most to ensure swimming and water safety skills for all

Support government programs

Strengthen government funded swimming and water safety programs, including school, vacation and voucher programs.

- Re-map government funded programs and advocate for strengthening of these initiatives.
- Ensure program and policy design enables equitable access and supports people who otherwise are likely to miss out.
- Define roles and responsibilities of governments, community and industry groups and strengthen clarity of purpose.

Ensuring no one misses out

Devise strategies to increase access and participation for those who miss out.

- Strengthen programs and incentives which enable full participation for disadvantaged community members.
- Increase funding to support greater scale and reach of effective community programs targeting those missing out or not achieving benchmarks.
- Support research and advocacy, such as benchmark reporting, to enable intelligence on who is missing out, where, why and what's required.

Early exit, youth and the COVID generation

Increase the swimming and lifesaving skills of primary and secondary school students.

- Promote the importance of kids achieving national benchmarks prior to exiting learn to swim.
- Support learn to swim graduates and youth by promoting aquatic pathway opportunities.
- Catch up the kids who missed out over COVID with a curriculum-aligned secondary school program.

Solving the infrastructure and workforce crises

Improve access to aquatic facilities and strengthen workforce development.

- Establish pool infrastructure planning and investment programs with support for low-resource communities.
- Strengthen accreditation and professional development systems for instructors.
- Develop and maintain national frameworks for workforce development and pool infrastructure provisioning.

NATIONAL IMPERATIVE: LOCALISING WATER SAFETY EFFORTS

Why is this a National Imperative?

Drowning is fundamentally local. Its impacts are immediate and deeply felt by families, friends, neighbours, first responders, and others within the community. Local environments and their physical, social, cultural, civic, and economic characteristics shape vulnerability and strongly influence a community's capacity to build and maintain resilience to drowning.

While not everywhere across Australia is equally affected by drowning, every community can and must strengthen efforts to instil a robust water safety culture that responds to and addresses local needs and conditions. Context is critical, and those with local knowledge are best placed to lead. A deep understanding of place including who uses the water, how, and under what circumstances, and what hazards and conditions drive outsized risk are essential to determining the right actions for the right people in the right places.

Action led by those who live, work and recreate in the area of focus is essential. Grassroots coalitions and networks, locally driven programs, and strong community partnerships bring energy, commitment, and insight that cannot be replicated from the top down. When this groundswell is supported with robust data, technical expertise, and sustained coordination resources, local leaders can drive change that is targeted and lasting. Critically, these efforts must go beyond surface-level solutions to address upstream causes of vulnerability.

To reduce drowning nationally, we must focus locally. That means identifying where drowning risk and impact is greatest, empowering local communities to lead, and providing the systems, support, and coordination needed to turn knowledge into action. Local water safety efforts are not just part of the solution; they are the foundation.

The things that matter most for local water safety efforts

Two interlinked foundations are essential to sustainable local water safety efforts: a strong coalition of partners and a clear, evidence-informed plan for action. Often, developing a local plan provides the convening power and purpose for a coalition. Together, these elements enable communities to understand their unique hazards and vulnerabilities, coordinate action across sectors, and act collectively to prevent drowning.

Build and sustain local water safety coalitions

Local coalitions provide a platform for water safety collaboration, bringing people together and empowering local-led action.

Key features for successful coalitions include:

- Well-connected and guided by a clear purpose
- Local led and consensus driven
- Multisectoral, inclusive, and reflective of the community
- Supported with backbone coordination resources and technical capacity.

Develop and implement local water safety plans

Local water safety plans provide a structured approach to reducing risk and building resilience, outlining priorities, and coordination.

Key features for successful plans include:

- Use data and local knowledge
- Prioritise those who are most in need
- Foster collaboration and shared ownership
- Drive motivation and implementation
- Iterative and designed to adapt to emerging challenges and needs.

Why is this a National Imperative?

Preventing drowning requires more than isolated interventions, it demands a united, whole-of-society effort encompassing all levels of government and every sector. From national policy in Canberra to actions at the pool, beach, or riverbank, water safety must be embraced as a shared responsibility embedded in all systems.

Drowning risk arises from a complex interplay of environmental, social, economic, and policy factors. To achieve meaningful, sustained reductions, Australia must strengthen capacity to rescue those in distress, while tackling upstream determinants that increase individual and community vulnerabilities. This means fixing unequal access to swimming and water safety education, improving facilities for safe swimming, and overcoming fragmentation in services, programs, and approaches across the country.

True progress relies on bold systemic change. Coordinated, multi-sector partnerships, grounded in strategic alignment between federal, state, and local government, are crucial for delivering the aspiration target of reducing drowning by 50% by 2030. We must place a greater emphasis on aligning resources, policy, and implementation across all jurisdictions.

Harnessing diverse expertise and prioritising evidence-informed action will ensure efforts are effective and sustained. By focusing on long-term, structural solutions, we can build momentum for a national movement to eliminate drowning. Lasting change begins with collective resolve: only by working together, across systems and communities, can we protect lives and create a safer future for all.

The things that matter most for aligned agendas and partnerships for prevention

Strategic government alignment

Federal, state, and local governments must align around shared goals, clear responsibilities, and consistent support. Local government should be empowered to lead action on the ground.

Key actions include:

- Embedding drowning prevention into national, state, and local planning, public health, and emergency response agendas.
- Equipping local government with the resources to lead and respond to local needs.
- Fostering intergovernmental collaboration that reduces duplication, closes gaps, and supports a cohesive national approach.

Scaled resources for impact

Preventing drowning requires strategic investment in proven, community-driven strategies that address upstream vulnerabilities, are responsive to local contexts, and designed in partnership across sectors and with community.

Key actions include:

- Increasing funding and support for effective, locally led prevention initiatives aligned with national goals.
- Establishing funding mechanisms that reward collaboration, evidence use, accountability, and reach into affected communities.
- Supporting sustained delivery, monitoring, and adaptation of interventions.

Priority and Focus Areas at the Midpoint of the AWSS 2030

For meaningful progress towards reaching the goal of reducing drowning by 50%, we must be clear about where to focus our efforts. The AWSS 2030 Focus Areas represent key domains where action is most needed to reduce drowning and strengthen water safety outcomes across Australia.

The original [AWSS 2030](#) includes important context, information on risk factors, example actions, and a list of Key Activities for each Focus Area. That information is useful and still applicable for a broad and comprehensive strategy to reduce drowning.

As a supplement to the AWSS 2030, this 2025 Update document includes a single page dedicated to each Focus Area. This section provides a concise overview of why the area matters, the challenges it presents, and the opportunities for impact. Key data shows progress towards a 50% reduction in drowning rate and identifies the drowning trend as rates decreasing on track, rates decreasing but not fast enough, or rates increasing with urgent attention required.

Each Focus Area outlines three things that matter most. These are prioritised and streamlined, identifying where attention is needed and most likely to have the greatest impact. While the nature of drowning varies across locations and communities, these Focus Areas provide a shared framework for prioritisation, coordination, and investment.

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS: Children (0-4 years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

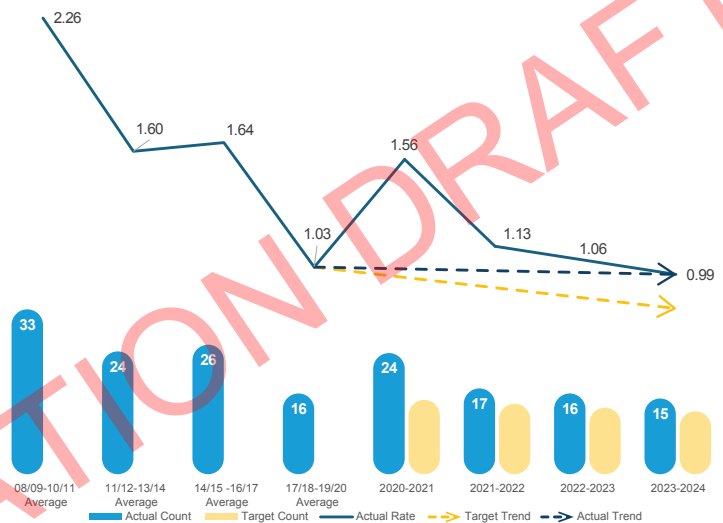
Although significant progress has been made in reducing drowning in children aged 0-4 years, deaths among children remain high relative to other age groups, particularly in the second year of life as children become more mobile.

Research shows that there are eight non-fatal drowning incidents for every death among children aged 0-4 years, the highest fatal to non-fatal drowning ratio of any age group (8). Toddlers are curious and increasingly mobile but lack an understanding of water-related hazards, increasing their vulnerability to drowning around the home, particularly in backyard swimming pools and in dams on rural properties. Parental and carer supervision is considered critical to preventing drowning, so educating each new generation is a high priority. Barriers to water, usually in the form of swimming pool fencing, are a well-accepted and effective approach. Preventing drowning in children aged 0-4 years is a priority because young children continue to experience high rates of drowning, despite there being clear and effective prevention measures.

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

18
Average deaths per year

1.19 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Pool fencing legislation

Elevate regulatory standards across all States and Territories to address current gaps:

- Adopt the current Australian Standard for all new backyard pools
- Require pool registration, regular inspections, and safety signage
- Mandate compliance checks when selling, upgrading, or leasing properties with pools.

Parent and caregiver education

Coordinate education and campaigns for parents and caregivers of young children, specifically on the importance of active supervision of children around the water, including:

- Embedding content into existing parental and caregiver education programs
- Promoting age- and context-specific supervision strategies highlighting the importance of sober supervision and ensuring tailored content for caregivers responsible for multiple children at the same time, rural families, and caregivers responsible for children with medical conditions
- Aligning adult supervision messaging at public pools
- Improving access to first aid and CPR training for families.

Second year of life interventions

Enhance strategies that address drowning among children aged 12-24 months, prioritising those most vulnerable to drowning such as children who reside on rural properties and/or are members of multi-child families frequently under the care of one parent or caregiver. Raise awareness of the changes that come with increased mobility and the importance of barriers and supervision.

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS: Young males (15-29 years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

Males continue to be over-represented in drowning statistics. This trend is especially apparent during adolescence and early adulthood, a time of increasing independence. Drowning is often attributed to higher exposure due to increased participation rates, inflated confidence levels that may not reflect abilities, the influence of peer pressure and an increased likelihood to engage in risk-taking behaviours.

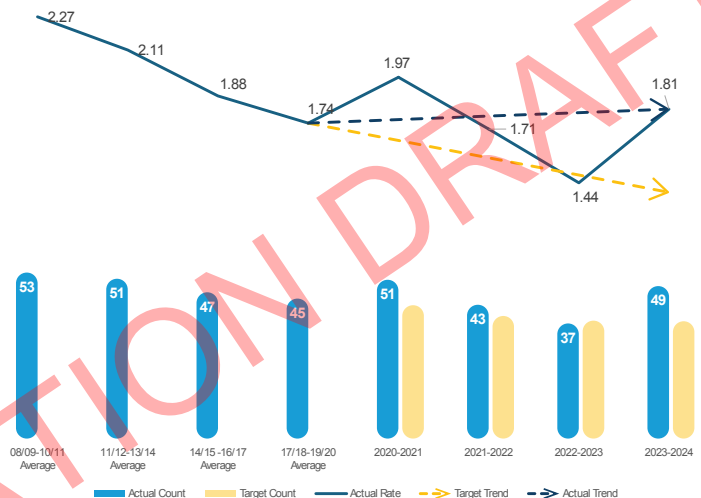
Preventing drowning in young males (15-29 years) is a priority based on the rationale that early adoption of safe behaviours may have flow-on benefits through adulthood. Secondary schools, universities and sport and recreation clubs may represent a good entry point for skill and awareness development.

The Australian Water Safety Council hosted a workshop on young males in October 2023, bringing together experts in the drowning prevention and men's health field to advance approaches focused on this cohort. Major learning from the workshop is reflected in three priorities below; see more [here](#).

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

45
Average deaths per year

1.73 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

High-school programs

Increase delivery of swimming, lifesaving, and water safety education in secondary schools, in partnership with youth and community groups. Focused efforts should include:

- Supporting teachers
- Delivering peer-led education
- Addressing alcohol use and consequences of risk-taking behaviour
- Teaching practical strategies to navigate peer pressure and avoid harm.

Peer-driven messages

Deliver youth-led campaigns that reflect how young people connect, communicate, and influence each other. Emphasise the power of peer influence, lean into social marketing principles focused on behaviour change over simple awareness. Ensure water safety messages appear on the platforms where young people already are, and engage creators and influencers in delivery.

Segmented strategies

Tailor prevention efforts within the 15–29 age group by focusing on those connected by lifestyle, location, culture, or lived experience. Recognising how demographic, socio-economic, and cultural factors intersect to shape identity, strategies should prioritise those with limited access to safe places to swim or water safety education.

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS:

Older people (65+ years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

Australia has an ageing population, with older people living longer and having healthier lives than those of previous generations. The low impact nature of aquatic activity makes it an ideal form of physical activity and recreation for older people. However, reduced physical ability and pre-existing medical conditions contribute to the drowning risk in this demographic. Reducing drowning among older people is a complex issue and limited progress has been made.

In the past decade, over half of older people who drowned had a pre-existing medical condition (n=364, 54%), the majority of which were cardiovascular diseases (n=232, 64%).

Preventing drowning in older people (65+ years) is a priority because Australians are remaining more active into their later years and are well placed to realise the benefits of fun, fitness and recreation in and around the water but need appropriate water safety education to stay safe.

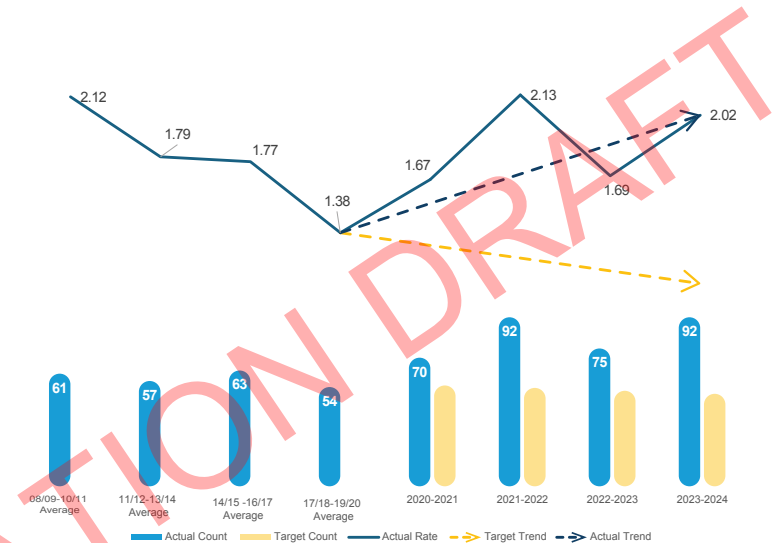
Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

82

Average deaths per year

1.88 per 100,000

Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Healthy ageing agenda

Position water safety and drowning prevention for over 65's as a core element of Australia's healthy ageing agenda. Embed water safety into ageing and falls prevention frameworks by partnering with groups that represent and work with older adults. Support pathways for engaging with aquatic activity later in life and ensure aquatic facility design welcomes older adults with considerations for accessibility and comfort.

Engagement for lifelong aquatic activity

Encourage ongoing participation in aquatic activities across different life stages by promoting safe, supervised opportunities for older adults. Support active aquatic lifestyles with thoughtful campaigns and educational initiatives that raise awareness of drowning risks specific to older people and promote the benefits of aquatic activity for physical and mental well-being.

Strategies for managing medical conditions

Promote awareness and early identification of medical conditions and physical limitations that may increase vulnerabilities to drowning among older adults. Encourage regular medical check-ups prior that consider aquatic activity and changing abilities in later life. Deliver respectful, age-appropriate messaging to informed decision-making, especially related to swimming alone, alcohol use, and recognising personal limits.

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

FOCUS: Beaches

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PLACES

Why is this an area of focus?

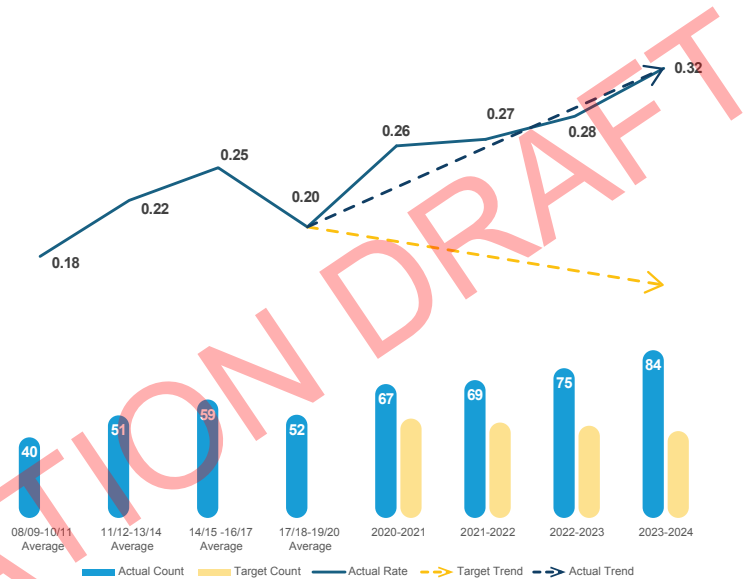
Beaches are central to Australia's national identity and lifestyle with nearly 12,000 beaches spanning the coastline. Millions of Australians and international tourists visit beaches each year, and 87% of the population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast.

Yet with this popularity comes risk. Beaches are dynamic places where often, people do not recognise or underestimate the associated risks and hazards, exposing themselves and others to dangers unnecessarily. While Australia's lifesaving services are world leading, they are concentrated: only 6% of beaches are patrolled during peak season, and just 1% year-round. This leaves vast stretches of coastline without formal supervision, making safety management complex and site-specific. In addition to drowning, coastal environments also record high numbers of non-drowning fatalities, including medical incidents, traumatic injuries, and wildlife encounters—further underscoring the need for a coordinated and consistent national focus on beach safety.

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

74
Average deaths per year

0.28 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Coordinated and collaborative lifesaving systems

Strengthen beach lifeguard systems to deliver integrated, agile, and fit-for-purpose services that adapt to evolving community needs by:

- Strategically expanding service times and locations
- Establishing consistent, best practice operational policies, standards and procedures for all service delivery
- Building and supporting a robust and sustainable workforce through initial and ongoing training, mental health and well-being initiatives, and clear leadership pathways
- Carefully evaluating and implementing new technologies and equipment to enhance surveillance and rescue capacity.

Beach safety skill-building and awareness

Expand and support education and community programs that strengthen individual risk assessment capacity and build the skills to cope with conditions and allow for safe participation in beach sports and activities. Prioritise skill-building for younger groups and for communities that have not historically participated in Australia's beach culture. Complement practical risk identification skill-building efforts with coordinated, evidence-based campaigns and messaging that communicate site-specific hazards, beach conditions, and practical strategies for safer decision-making.

Managing risk at unfamiliar beaches

Modernise beach risk management approaches to align with evolving visitation and exposure patterns, encouraging community-led strategies that better reflect where, when, and how people use the beach by:

- Promoting innovation for personalised risk and site-specific environmental modelling
- Enabling broader bystander CPR and rescue training familiarisation opportunities for coastal communities
- Improving integration of technology-based safety for customisable use and risk identification.

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

PLACES

FOCUS:

Rivers and lakes

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

Why is this an area of focus?

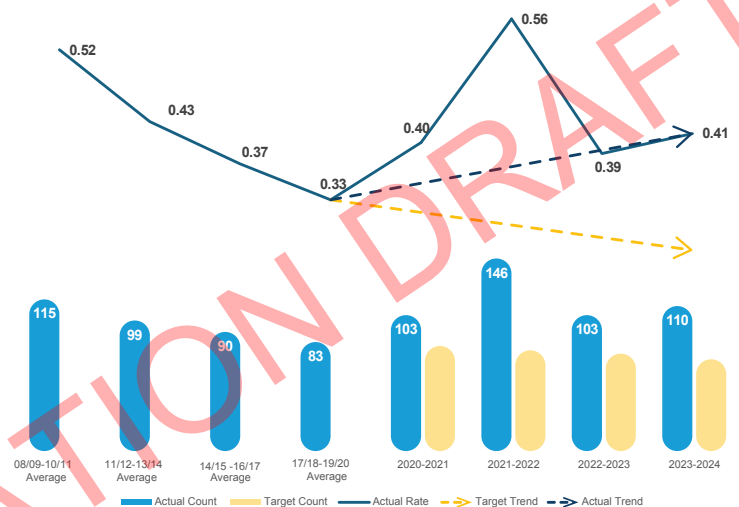
Rivers and lakes continue to be a leading location for drowning. Rapidly changing conditions and hidden dangers, such as strong currents, submerged objects, slippery or crumbling banks and cold water, can lead to people getting into difficulty. Unlike other aquatic locations, inland waterways are not regularly patrolled by a lifesaving or maritime services. In the case of an emergency, timely medical assistance may be impacted by geographic isolation and a lack of telecommunication facilities.

Preventing drowning in rivers and lakes is a priority as inland waterways account for more than a third of location-based drowning. A diverse range of activities and exposure to hazards, as well as drowning risk factors, such as alcohol, being male and residing in rural and remote communities, makes drowning prevention in rivers and lakes challenging.

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

116
Average deaths per year

0.44 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Systems-level prevention

Integrate risk assessment, water condition monitoring and communications systems, incorporating drowning prevention and water safety into planning, environmental, and natural resource plans and strategies. Scale surveillance and rescue systems, underpinned by robust standards and audits for recreational swimming areas. Lean into opportunities for partnership, emphasising collaboration between local and state governments, National Parks and Wildlife Services, water management authorities, and tourism and agricultural sectors.

Land manager leadership

Support local land managers and communities to lead the delivery of inland waterway safety initiatives. Promote community-driven programs, risk assessments, and water safety plans tailored to the specific hazards, exposures and vulnerabilities of users of local rivers and lakes. With the expansion of inland waterway swim sites, carefully consider the need for strengthened lifesaving systems and upstream community prevention initiatives.

Disaster resilience

Collaborate with disaster management agencies to embed drowning prevention into flood and disaster resilience planning, aligning efforts with national, state and local approaches to disaster risk reduction. Support hazard assessments, early warning systems, and community education initiatives to ensure drowning risks are recognised and addressed. Build capacity across agencies and communities to integrate water safety into preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

FOCUS:

Aquatic facilities

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PLACES

Why is this an area of focus?

Aquatic facilities have long been central to the Australian approach to drowning prevention, by providing safe places to swim and learn water safety. Drowning incidents at public aquatic facilities are rare due to sophisticated management systems, safety guidelines, construction codes and widespread professional lifeguard supervision systems. Supporting the increased availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities, while ensuring they are operated safely, is central to reducing drowning across all populations, age groups and environments.

Despite their benefits, significant access gaps exist and Australian aquatic facilities face substantial contemporary challenges including ageing infrastructure, workforce challenges and ensuring consistent application of industry safety standards and guidelines.

Communal swimming facilities such as pools at hotels, motels and caravan parks do not share the same level of rigorous risk management as public aquatic facilities. Determining how to best address safety needs in these locations must be addressed, as drowning incidents at these sites occur much more frequently than at public aquatic facilities.

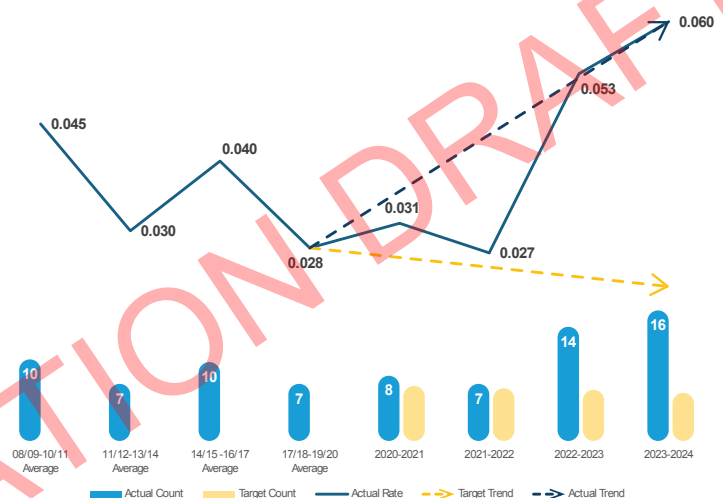
Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

11

Average deaths per year

0.043 per 100,000

Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Industry safety standards

Support aquatic industry capability to deliver high-quality, safe services. Invest in building a robust and skilled workforce through strengthened national training and accreditation standards, professional development and career pathways. Support the development and adoption of safety guidelines, comprehensive safety procedures, and industry-wide approaches to incident reporting, data collection, and benchmarking to drive evidence-informed improvements to industry standards.

Address infrastructure and workforce fragilities

Streamline and coordinate approaches to public pool investment, ensuring alignment with community needs, access equity, and sustainability targets to enhance the efficiency and impact of public spending in this sector. Implement industry-wide strategies to attract, train, and retain talent alongside stronger workplace protections and accreditation systems for aquatic workers.

Safety standards for pools at hotels, caravan parks and apartments

Strengthen safety at communal and tourism-linked aquatic facilities by leveraging the success and experience from public aquatic facilities. Develop and maintain safety standards and codes of practice for communal and tourism-linked pools, including at hotels, motels, caravan parks and body corporates. Expand partnerships with the tourism and hospitality sector towards lifting safety standards at communal pools.

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

FOCUS: Boating and watercraft

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

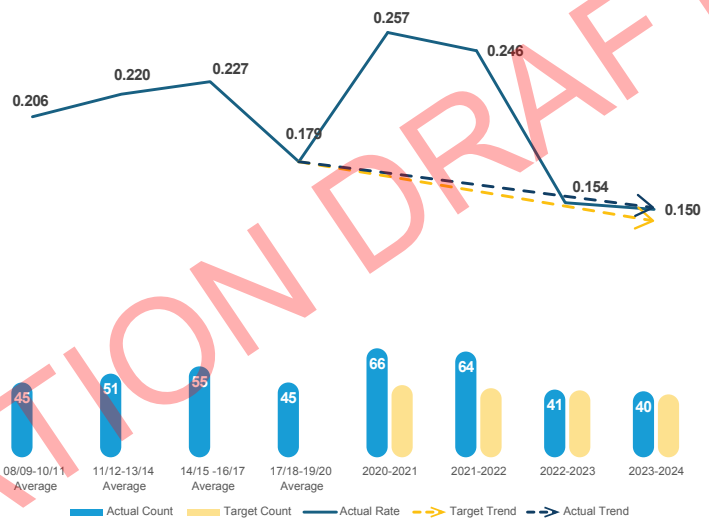
Boating and watercraft activities are increasingly popular across Australia. An estimated 20% of the population participate in boating and watercraft-based activities annually, with recreational fishing from boats a particularly common and high-risk activity. Drowning is the leading cause of boating-related fatalities, and while drowning deaths have steadily decreased over time, more work is required to address factors such as lifejacket use and boating under the influence of alcohol, and safety among those fishing from small vessels. Boating makes significant social and economic contributions, promoting well-being and supporting jobs in manufacturing, tourism and leisure sectors.

Boating includes registered vessels that are powered by wind or motors, including motorboats, sailboats, catamarans and personal watercraft (PWC, also known as jet skis). Watercraft includes non-powered recreational equipment that require physical input from a person (e.g., surf boards, stand-up paddle boards, body/boogie boards, wind surfers, kayaks, canoes, rowboats, inflatable rafts and inflatable boats without motors).

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

53
Average deaths per year

0.02 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Regulations and waterway management

Enhance the effectiveness of recreational boating safety through stronger legislation and smart enforcement. Prioritise mandatory lifejacket wear regulations, alcohol restrictions, and education-based licensing and registration systems. Invest in cross-agency collaboration to lift regulatory standards nationally, and explore new technologies such as speed monitoring, on-water compliance tools, and real-time data sharing.

Unified education efforts

Strengthen national boating and watercraft safety education campaigns to raise awareness including:

- Aligned messaging across jurisdictions and delivery partners
- Embed safety education into licensing processes, retail points of sale, community boating hubs, and high-use locations.

High-risk craft and user groups

Prioritise robust safety interventions for personal watercraft (PWC) operators with evidence-informed strategies tailored to user behaviours and local conditions, including:

- Enforcement
- Strengthen regulation
- Promote clear messages
- Incident monitoring in known risk areas
- Partnership with industry and rental outfits.

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

FOCUS: Rock Fishing

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing on track

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

Recreational fishing is a popular outdoor activity and one of the few forms of nature-based recreation that can generally be enjoyed through all life stages. Rock fishing, however, has been dubbed Australia's most dangerous sport and is responsible for most fishing-related drowning deaths in addition to other types of fatal and non-fatal injuries from wave impacts, slips, trips and falls.

Rock platforms are unpatrolled and often difficult to access. This, combined with the unpredictability of ocean conditions and often remote, rugged locations, makes rescue difficult and prevention efforts essential. Many rock fishing deaths occur because individuals are caught unaware by large waves, are not wearing lifejackets, or are unable to self-rescue due to poor swimming ability or hazardous terrain.

Rock fishing fatalities disproportionately affect men, particularly those from multicultural backgrounds, including individuals born overseas and those who speak languages other than English at home. Research highlights that while many rock fishers have high confidence in their abilities and knowledge, actual safety practices—such as wearing lifejackets or checking conditions—are inconsistent.

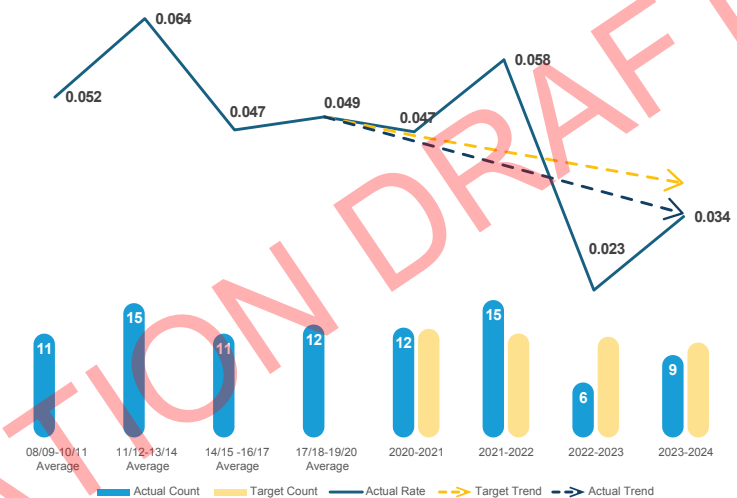
Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

11

Average deaths per year

0.04 per 100,000

Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Consistent policy and risk management systems

Align rock fishing risk management systems across jurisdictions through consistent requirements for lifejackets and other equipment, legislation enforcement, and risk frameworks for identifying, assessing and declaring high-risk rock platforms. Strengthen coordination between land managers, fishing groups, water safety bodies, and local authorities to improve implementation and oversight.

Education paired with skills and equipment

Shift from awareness campaigns to education programs that build practical knowledge and safety skills among rock fishers. Prioritise peer-led and community-based initiatives that are culturally relevant and delivered in-situ and in-language where appropriate. Pair education efforts with the provision of lifejackets, cleats, and swimming skill development opportunities, as well as broader training in hazard recognition, emergency response, and safe decision-making under dynamic ocean conditions.

Blackspot rock platforms

Identify and prioritise high-risk rock fishing locations for tailored, fisher-led, site-specific interventions. Support local risk assessments, signage upgrades, installation of appropriate public rescue equipment, and public education tools that reflect the unique hazards of each site. Explore use of wave modelling, warning systems, and hazard rating frameworks to complement community knowledge and improve decision-making at specific blackspot locations.

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

FOCUS:

Diving and snorkelling

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

Diving and snorkelling are popular activities, both recreationally and commercially. They are significantly integrated within the Australian tourism and commercial sectors. Typically, scuba diving involves using an underwater breathing apparatus that is usually self-contained but can be from a source at the surface (e.g., hookah). Snorkelling is swimming with the aid of a mask and snorkel and, often, fins.

Generally, the safety requirements for snorkelling reflect many of those for diving, including adequate physical and medical fitness, sufficient skills, and comfort in the water. More snorkellers die nationally than divers, in part due to higher participation, but also because it requires less aquatic training and experience. Due to increases in related drowning deaths, diving and snorkelling have also become a national focus for water safety.

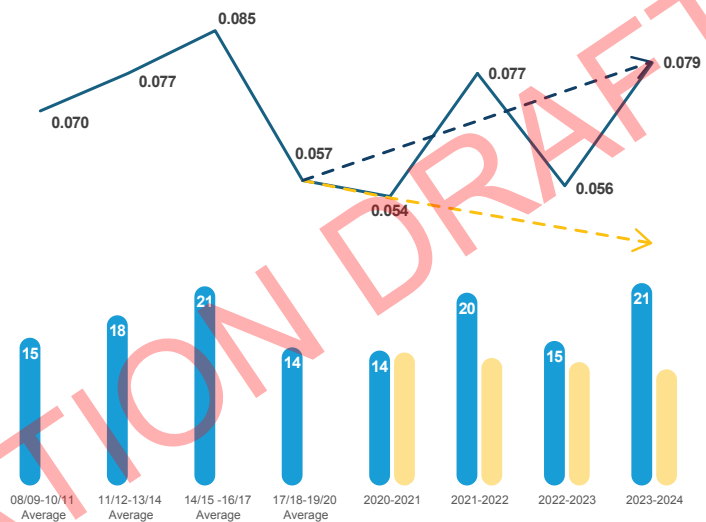
Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

18

Average deaths per year

0.07 per 100,000

Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Safety systems and standards

Support the adoption of dive and snorkel Codes of Practice, with consistent policies for medical screening, oxygen and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) access, and trained responders. Strengthen policies requiring medical assessments for participants over 45 or with known potentially contraindicated conditions, while ensuring practical implementation across diverse settings.

Education for recreational divers and snorkellers

Improve safety knowledge among tourists and infrequent participants through briefings, booking systems, and point-of-sale education. Pair key messages with skills-based content on medical risk, hazard recognition, and emergency response.

Address risk among vulnerable groups

Prioritise education and safety efforts for higher-risk individuals, specifically older adults and people with unmanaged and/or potentially contraindicated medical conditions, and tourists and occasional participants. Strengthen the role of tour operators, trainers, and health professionals in identifying vulnerability, and support tools like buddy systems and health declarations to reduce preventable harm.

PRIORITY AREA: POPULATIONS

FOCUS:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing on track

POPULATIONS

Why is this an area of focus?

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a close cultural connection with country (land and water), which includes waterways. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also experience higher rates of drowning and injury-related mortality and morbidity. Aboriginal children are known to have a higher rate of fatal and non-fatal drowning compared with non-Aboriginal children, and many lack access to swimming and water safety programs.

Concerted effort has been made to address drowning in remote Aboriginal communities. Swimming pools in remote locations and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities provide an opportunity to improve overall health and social outcomes among people of all ages. Extending the reach of these programs and evaluating their effects presents both an opportunity and a key challenge.

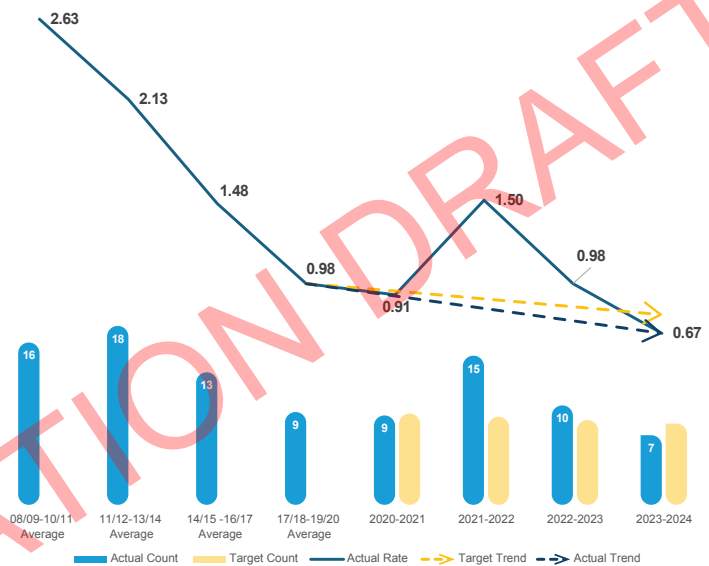
Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

10

Average deaths per year

1.02 per 100,000

Fatal unintentional drowning rate



Data note: Information on 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status' is routinely delayed, and thus real-time tracking is difficult. Caution is warranted when interpreting rates and drowning numbers from recent years, numbers may be underestimated.

The three things that matter most

Alignment of agendas

Integrate drowning prevention and water safety into health, education, employment, and community well-being strategies that shape the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, aligning efforts with Closing the Gap targets and broader initiatives to support social and economic participation. Position water safety programs as a platform for engagement, confidence-building, and access to learning, training, and employment pathways.

Equitable access to aquatic programs and facilities

Expand equitable access to swimming and water safety programs by aligning initiatives with the cultural, social, and economic priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Invest in safe and welcoming aquatic facilities, particularly in under-served regional and remote areas where access barriers remain high. Strengthen and adapt existing programs to reflect local priorities, using cultural connection to engage children, youth, and families.

Embedding First Nations knowledge and leadership

Recognise seas and waterways as an inseparable part of Country and embed First Nations knowledge into the design and delivery of water safety approaches. Strengthen cultural well-being, inclusion, and community skills by grounding programs in local knowledge and values. Acknowledge that the drowning prevention sector must grow its understanding of how to do this well, and commit to long-term partnerships that centre community-defined approaches and First Nations leadership.

Why is this an area of focus?

Australia's population is diverse, with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data showing that 49% of the population were either born overseas or had at least one parent who was born overseas, and 21% speak a language other than English at home. This diversity is reflected in drowning statistics, with differences in cultural associations and lower participation in learn to swim and other water safety activities thought to be a factor.

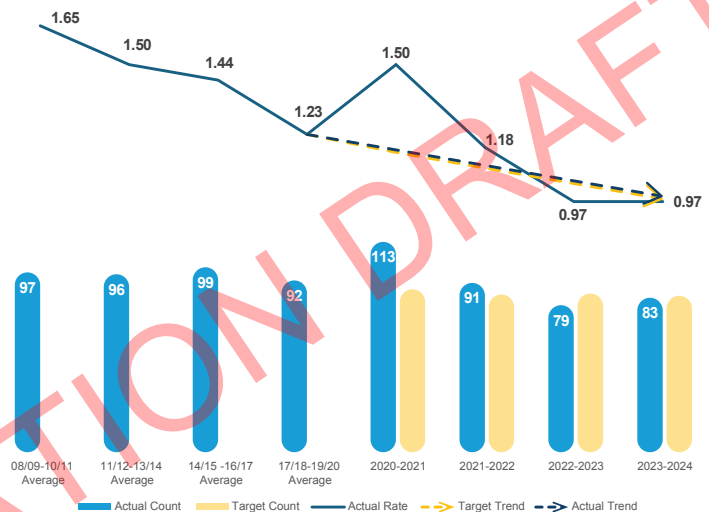
Three main groups are identified in this area: migrants, international students and overseas visitors. Risk factors differ slightly across each group. Adult migrants often have limited experience and understanding of water and water safety in the Australian context. International students and overseas visitors are often attracted by Australia's aquatic lifestyle, although many come with limited exposure to water in a recreational context.

A Water Safety Workshop focused on Multicultural communities was hosted in July, 2024. The convening focused on the importance of partnerships, culturally sensitive and diverse community safety programs, and the significance of inclusivity, see more from the workshop [here](#).

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

92
Average deaths per year

1.15 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



Data note: Information on 'Country of birth' is routinely delayed, and thus real-time tracking is difficult. Caution is warranted when interpreting rates and drowning numbers from recent years, numbers may be underestimated.

The three things that matter most

Cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration

Foster structured, cross-sectoral partnerships that embed multicultural leadership across drowning prevention and water safety efforts, including policy, research, program design, and service delivery. Shift institutional practices by positioning multicultural communities as co-designers, decision-makers, and advocates for meaningful, community-led change.

Skills and community capacity

Expand and fund a broad range of skills-based programs that are co-designed with and led by community members. Prioritise the delivery of culturally relevant, language-appropriate initiatives that address the specific needs of different communities and local contexts.

Integration into migrant pathways

Secure sustained and expanded investment to integrate drowning prevention and water safety into the systems that determine the migrant experience in Australia, from pre-arrival through settlement and beyond including:

- Refugee intake processes
- International student programs
- English language education programs and services
- Community level settlement support initiatives.

PRIORITY AREA: POPULATIONS

FOCUS:

Regional and remote communities

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are not changing,
urgent attention required**

POPULATIONS

Why is this an area of focus?

One-third of the Australian population live in regional and remote communities, outside the major cities. Regional and remote communities are diverse and pose unique challenges for drowning prevention. These areas are known to have low levels of population density, which means that lifesaving services are limited, emergency response times are longer, and program availability is lower. This coupled with extensive river systems that flow out into coastal waters provide for a complex range of risks.

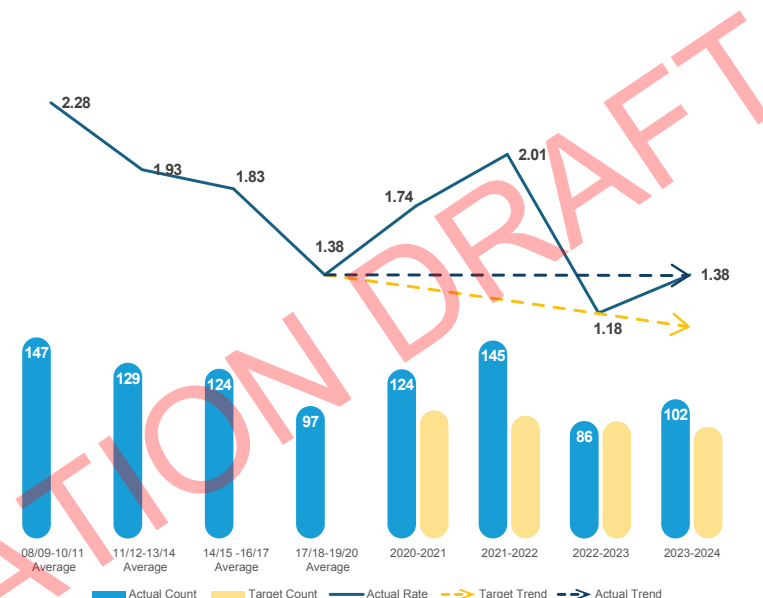
Communities in regional and remote areas are often considered to be somewhat disadvantaged due to limited access to services and lower socioeconomic status. Regional and remote children spend more time outdoors but also experience lower developmental outcomes which has been linked to supporting risk reduction. Water safety strategies, including drowning prevention, designed for major cities are not necessarily relevant for regional and remote communities.

Appropriate strategies require community-specific approaches to engage stakeholders.

Midpoint Metrics (2020/21 - 2023/24)

104
Average deaths per year

1.58 per 100,000
Fatal unintentional drowning rate



The three things that matter most

Support regional networks

Implement and scale initiatives that strengthen the viability, safety, and sustainability of safe places to swim, including aquatic facilities and patrolled beaches, in regional and remote communities. Ensure standards and guidelines are adapted and fit-for-purpose in these contexts. Prioritise support for communities experiencing systemic disadvantage, where access to safe aquatic infrastructure, programs and services is limited.

Equitable access to education opportunities

Expand access to swimming and water safety education in regional and remote areas with programs that reflect local needs. Prioritise place-based models that reduce geographic, financial, and cultural barriers to participation and build capacity for ongoing delivery.

Local planning for high-risk sites

Support the development and implementation of local water safety plans and strengthen the role of councils, Aboriginal organisations, land managers, and community groups in identifying risks and leading tailored interventions at high-hazard locations. Prioritise co-design, shared ownership, and ongoing support over top-down delivery.