



Murraylands & Lakes Water Safety Strategy

December 2025

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across the Murraylands and Lakes region, including the River Murray, the Coorong, and Lower Lakes. We honour their deep and continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in and visiting the region.

About this document

This draft strategy incorporates the outcomes of the May 2025 workshops, adapting the four strategic priorities of the Riverland Water Safety Strategy to reflect the distinct geography, communities, risks and activities of the Murraylands & Lakes region. It is designed to sit alongside the Riverland Water Safety Strategy and will continue to evolve with stakeholder feedback.

About Royal Life Saving

Royal Life Saving is a public benevolent institution (PBI) dedicated to reducing drowning and turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. This is achieved through: advocacy, education, training, health promotion, aquatic risk management, community development, research, sport, leadership and participation in international networks.

The drowning prevention research of the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia is proudly supported by the Australian Government.



Australian Government

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The Murraylands & Lakes Water Safety Strategy working group consists of: Brooke Cherfils, Dr. William Koon, Sgt. Alex Davis, SS1C Mark Howie, and RJ Houston.

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WHY A WATER SAFETY STRATEGY FOR THE MURRAYLANDS AND LAKES?

Background

Australia has had a National Water Safety Strategy ([Australian Water Safety Strategy](#)) since 1998 and the most recent mid-point update to the AWSS 20230 has identified localising water safety as a national imperative.

The local effort builds on two years of collaborative work in the neighbouring region of the Riverland and exists as the next iteration of localised water safety planning in the region with direct links to national and state drowning prevention action.

The Murraylands & Lakes Region

The Murraylands & Lakes region of South Australia encompasses the River Murray, the Lower Lakes, the Coorong, and the Murray Mouth including extensive holiday home and shack areas that become particularly busy during peak holiday periods. These are all high use environments that attract residents, workers, and tourists year-round. The region is unique and dynamic, shaped by increasing pressure from heavy influxes of visitors, the growing use of faster personal water craft (PWC such as jet skis, etc.), more powerful and larger vessels, and constantly changing environmental conditions.

Co-designing a local water safety strategy

The Murraylands & Lakes draft strategy reflects contributions from South Australia Police (SAPOL),

Marine Safety SA, Royal Life Saving, Surf Life Saving SA, SA Ambulance, Department for Education, local councils (Mid Murray, Rural City of Murray Bridge, Coorong, Alexandrina), industry stakeholders and community representatives.

The Murraylands & Lakes Water Safety Strategy

In May 2025, the River Murray Safety Working Group – Riverland reconvened in Loxton to review the [Riverland Water Safety Strategy](#) priorities, discuss progress, and identify barriers. Because of its success, the River Murray Safety Working Group, welcomed the establishment of the River Murray Safety Working Group - Murraylands & Lakes.

The Riverland and the Murraylands & Lakes share similar water safety priorities, workshop participants emphasised that the region's risks include high-volume tourist locations, a large migrant worker population, extensive houseboating activity, and fast-growing PWC and water skiing.

Key differences the drowning data highlighted were an over representation of older adults (65+ years) and adult males (45-54 years), a greater number of tourists vs locals and a greater representation of females.

This strategy adopts the same four goals as the Riverland Water Safety Strategy and tailors these goals to a local context.



Murraylands & Lakes drowning prevention priorities & focus areas



Murraylands & Lakes drowning prevention goals

1. Ongoing collaboration

Strengthen and expand the River Murray Safety Working Group through collaboration with external stakeholders and emergency services to build consistent backbone support for coordination.

2. State policy engagement

Advocate for increased marine compliance resources and stronger safety infrastructure at high-use tourist location and the establishment of safe swimmer zones along the river.

3. Joint campaigns and messaging

Partner to design and distribute educational material and safety messages, speaking with one voice to maximise impact.

4. Swimming & water safety skills

Strengthen and support programs that teach skills and knowledge, prioritising equity to ensure no one misses out.

STRATEGY GOALS

1. Ongoing collaboration

Collaboration remains the backbone of this strategy. The River Murray Safety Working Group – Murraylands & Lakes provides a forum for where emergency services, government agencies, local councils, water safety organisations and community partners can share information, identify risks and coordinate action. The formal launch of the Murraylands & Lakes group was an important milestone and should be celebrated as such.

For Murraylands & Lakes, stakeholders emphasised the need for deeper engagement with culturally diverse groups and long-term river users such as boaters, PWC and houseboat operators.

Success includes:

- Joint operations, education days and cross-agency river presence.
- Structured engagement pathways with migrant worker communities and multicultural groups.
- Integration of seasoned boaters, houseboat industry representatives and regular river users into planning and messaging.
- Consistent backbone support for coordination



2. State policy engagement

State-level policy, legislation, resourcing and infrastructure decisions have a direct impact on safety outcomes along the river and must reflect the unique environments of the Murraylands & Lakes—particularly the Lower Lakes, Coorong, Murray Mouth and high-volume tourist corridors. This goal is about bringing local evidence and local stories into those state conversations in a coordinated way.

In their advocacy for measures that make it easier for people to do the right thing on the water – and harder to do the wrong thing, The Murraylands & Lakes group continue to build on existing work between SAPOL and Marine Safety SA toward safer waterways in alignment with the South Australian Water Safety Plan.

Key focus areas:

- Advocating for designated safe swimmer locations on the river, particularly near town foreshores and high-use tourist locations.
- Enhanced compliance around PWC, wake boats, towing craft and emerging high-powered recreation.
- Policy development for inflatable aquatic toys, increasingly common across lakes and rivers.
- Improved safety infrastructure in high-risk tourism zones, tailor signage.



3. Joint campaigns and messaging

Stakeholders reaffirmed the need for simple, unified messaging strengthened with local relevance. New messages must reflect Murraylands-specific activities such as houseboating, water skiing, PWC use, and inflatable toys.

Emerging campaign themes:

- Respect the River, Make the Right Call
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, using PWC or inflatables.
- Safe boating requires respect as wake boats, PWC and houseboats and their activities each carry different risks.
- Multicultural and migrant-worker-specific messaging delivered in multiple languages.
- Education about safe swimming zones and avoiding swimming near high-use vessel areas.

Over time, this united voice should become a recognisable feature of life along the river: when conditions change or high-risk periods approach, communities know they will hear a clear, credible message from a partnership that is visibly working together.



4. Swimming and water safety skills

Skills and confidence in, on and around the water are a powerful protective factor. The Murraylands & Lakes region is already seeing positive momentum: growth in learn to swim participation, the establishment of the Murray Bridge River Lifesaving Club, and increased engagement with multicultural communities through programs like Rippers and targeted education sessions.

Building on this momentum, there is opportunity to further expand access to swimming and water safety skills and education regionally. High demand at both seasonal and indoor aquatic facilities highlight the community's appetite for learning with a growing interest in adult programs. Continued culturally responsive engagement will help migrant workers and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds build familiarity, confidence and capability in local waterways.

Workshops reinforced that swimming and water safety skills must include river-specific learning, not just pool-based programs.

To address these challenges, this goal will focus on:

- Expand multicultural and migrant worker education programs, co-designed with community leaders.
- Increase teacher training and resources to strengthen delivery of water safety content.
- Integrate boating and river safety elements into all program messaging.
- Promote water safety skills including reading currents, navigating changing condition within the waterways, understanding high-use vessel zones, and using lifejackets.



APPENDIX 1: RIVER MURRAY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA DROWNING PROFILE

The following drowning statistics encompass (2002-June 2024). The Murraylands & Lakes Strategic Framework is guided by these statistics.

	Murraylands & Lakes	Riverland	Other Parts of SA
Fatal drowning	17	17	
Sex	Males - 88% Females - 12%	Males - 100%	Males - 79% Females - 21%
Age Group – Life Stage	65+ years - 41% 45-54 years - 29% 25-34 years - 18%	55+ years - 29% 25-44 - 24% 18-24 years - 18%	55+ years - 24% 45-45 years - 29% 0-17 years - 15%
Location of Drowning	River/Creek - 82% Lake/Dam - 18%	River/Creek - 95% Swimming pool - 5%	River/Creek - 26% Beach - 19% Ocean/Harbour - 16%
Activity prior to drowning	Boating - 35% Non-aquatic transport - 18% Swimming & Recreating - 18%	Boating - 35% Swimming & Recreating - 29% Jumped In - 12%	Swimming & Recreating - 24% Fall - 18% Boating - 13%
When does the drowning occur?	Summer - 30% Autumn - 18% Winter - 35%	Spring - 28% Summer - 41% Winter - 35%	Spring - 23% Summer - 30% Winter - 35%
Recorded presence of alcohol	No - 29% Yes - 30% Unknown - 41%	No - 18% Yes - 41% Unknown - 41%	No - 48% Yes - 25% Unknown - 27%

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The following organisations chose to contribute to the creation of this document:

Organisation Name

Coorong District Council

Department for Education

Department for Infrastructure and Transport –
Marine Safety SA

Mid Murray Council

Rural City of Murray Bridge

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

Royal Life Saving South Australia

SA Ambulance Service

SA State Emergency Service

SAPOL

South Australian Water Corporation

Surf Life Saving South Australia



**River Murray Safety
Working Group**

