

Royal Life Saving Summer Drowning Report 2025/26

An investigation into drowning across
Australia between 1 December 2025
and 28 February 2026



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

SUPPORTED BY



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ABOUT ROYAL LIFE SAVING

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia (RLSSA) is focused on reducing drowning and promoting healthy, active and skilled communities through innovative, reliable, evidence based advocacy; strong and effective partnerships; quality programs, products and services; underpinned by a cohesive and sustainable national organisation.

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

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NATIONAL SUMMER

DROWNING **TOLL**

> OUR VISION

A water-loving nation free from drowning.

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Printed copies of this document are available upon request. Please contact:

PO Box 558 Broadway
NSW 2007 Australia
Phone: 02 8217 3111
Email: info@rlssa.org.au

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



Australian Government

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Acknowledgements

Royal Life Saving Australia acknowledges and thanks the research teams at Royal Life Saving - Western Australia, Surf Life Saving Australia, Life Saving Victoria, and Surf Life Saving - New South Wales for their collaboration on tracking drowning incidents over the 2025/26 summer period.

Acknowledgement of Country

Royal Life Saving Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of our national office in Ultimo, Sydney are the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to Australia's First Nations cultural and spiritual connections to water, and acknowledge the land where we work, live, and play always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

BACKGROUND

Royal Life Saving (RLS) has tracked and reported drowning deaths over summer since the 2018/19 summer season.

Motivated to provide a clear summary of the drowning situation over summer, in December of 2018, RLS started tracking and reporting drowning deaths captured in media sources. In part as a response to various outlets collating their own inconsistent records of people drowning over summer, the core purpose of the RLS Summer Drowning Toll is to inform the public and media of drowning deaths in real time using a systematic and consistent approach.

The Summer Drowning Toll is publicly accessible on the Royal Life Saving website and updated daily from the 1st of December to the 28th February. The numbers provided represent a record of all drowning deaths reported in the media during the summer months. This information is also informed by the Victorian Coroners Prevention Unit through Life Saving Victoria, and Surf Life Saving Australia incident reports.

Importantly, the deaths reported in the Summer Drowning Toll are not yet under investigation from the coroner. This information should therefore be considered interim and will be different to the confirmed drowning deaths published in the National Drowning Report released later in the year.

Ultimately, the Summer Drowning Toll is a helpful tool for timely tracking of drowning deaths, but RLS cautions against relying only on data from one summer to make important decisions regarding drowning prevention policy, funding, or programmes. While interim summer numbers will shift from year to year, drowning prevention strategy and action should be guided by long-term trends and patterns.

Aims

- Record and report summer drowning deaths that were reported in the media between 1 December 2025 and 28 February 2026
- Compare summer trends of drowning deaths reported in the media from the previous five years (2020/21 up to 2024/25)

Summer Drowning Toll Dashboard

This summer RLS was pleased to deploy the Summer Drowning Toll on an interactive data dashboard. The new system allowed users to compare this summer's numbers to last summer and the previous 5-year average, as well as select variables to evaluate on the national level or filtered by state. The dashboard improved the ability for media and drowning prevention organisations to quickly access information in a visual format.

2025/26 Summer Drowning Toll Dashboard



Scan the QR code to visit the Summer Drowning Toll section of the RLS website and view the Dashboard.



**NATIONAL SUMMER
DROWNING TOLL**

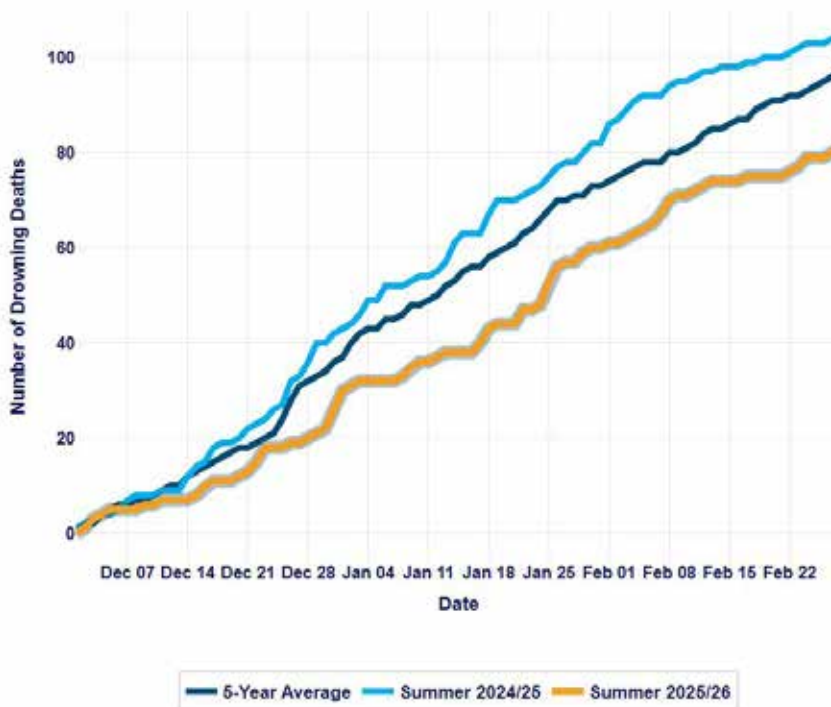
SUMMER DROWNING REPORT 2025/26 SNAPSHOT



Summer Drowning Toll key details 2025/26



Number of 2025/26 summer drowning deaths reported in the media compared to last summer and the five-year average



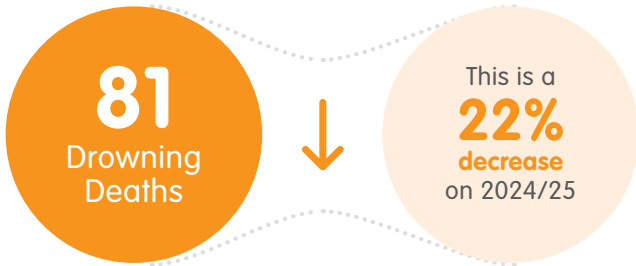
SUMMER DROWNING REPORT 2025/26 SNAPSHOT

SUMMER 2025/26

1 December 2025 to 28 February 2026

SUMMER 2024/25

1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025



Month



Month



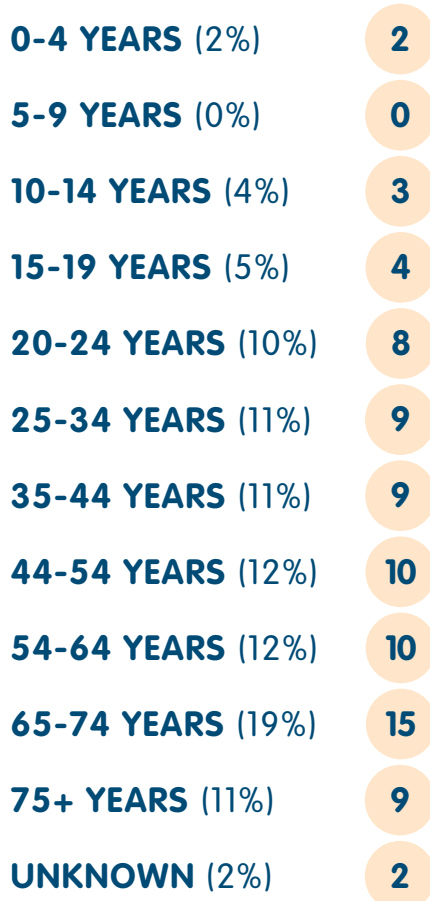
Sex



Sex



Age



Age



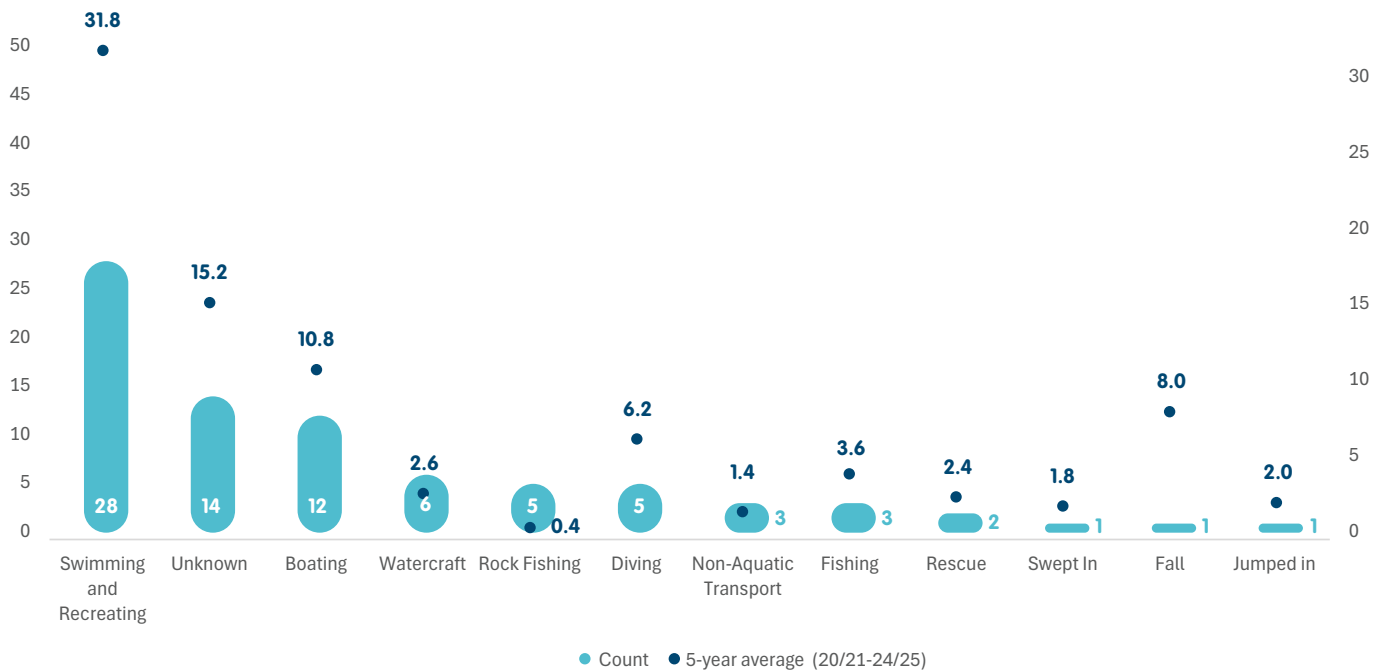
SUMMER 2025/26
1 December 2025 to 28 February 2026

SUMMER 2024/25
1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

Count	Activity	Percentage	Icon
28	Swimming and recreating	35%	
14	Unknown	17%	
12	Boating	15%	
6	Watercraft	7%	
5	Diving	6%	
5	Rock fishing	10%	
3	Non-aquatic transport	4%	
8	Other	10%	







Count	Activity	Percentage	Icon
38	Swimming and recreating	37%	
18	Rescue	17%	
13	Boating and Watercraft	13%	
7	Diving	7%	
6	Unknown	6%	
5	Fall	5%	
5	Non-aquatic transport	5%	
10	Other	10%	








2025/26 Summer Drowning Deaths by Activity



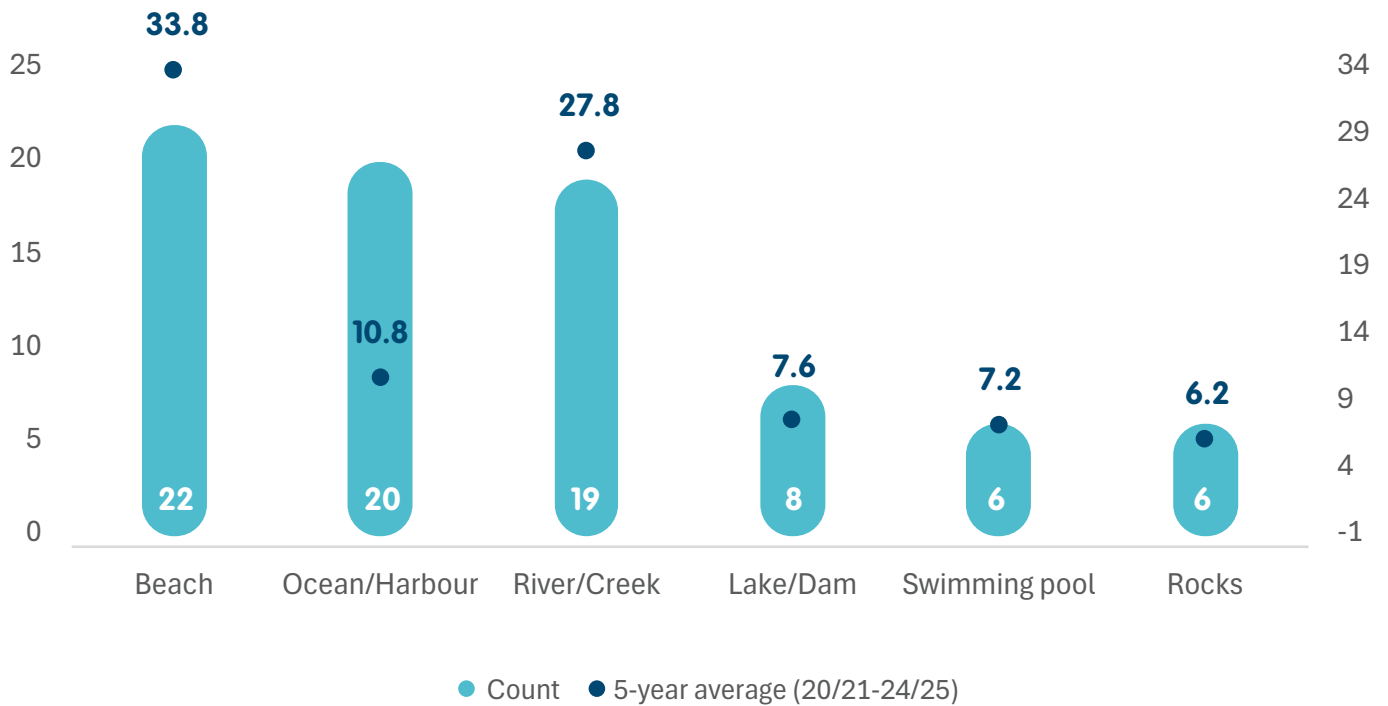
SUMMER 2025/26
1 December 2025 to 28 February 2026

SUMMER 2024/25
1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

Location	
22 Beach (27%)	
20 Ocean / Harbour (25%)	
19 River / Creek (23%)	
8 Lake / Dam (10%)	
6 Swimming Pool (7%)	
6 Rocks (7%)	

Location	
33 Beach (32%)	
31 River / Creek (30%)	
16 Ocean / Harbour (15%)	
11 Swimming Pool (11%)	
6 Lake / Dam (6%)	
4 Rocks (4%)	
3 Other (3%)	

2025/26 Summer Drowning Deaths by Body of Water



HOLIDAY PERIOD INSIGHTS: PEAK DROWNING PERIOD

Between 25 December 2025 and 1 January 2026

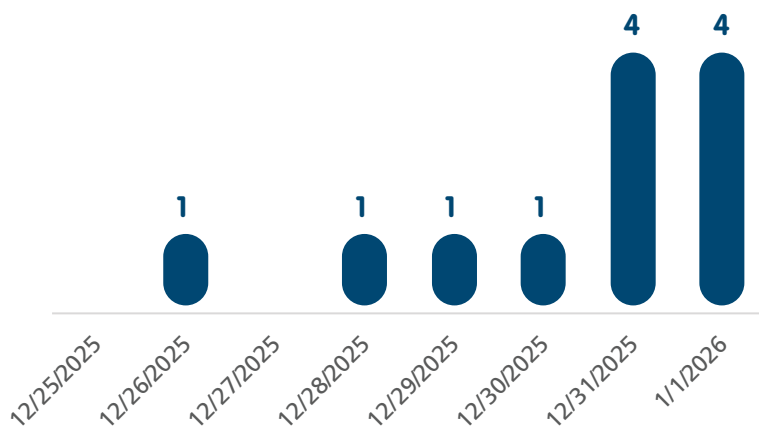


Drowning during the Holiday period represented 15% of total drowning over the summer. The highest number of drowning deaths occurred on the 31st of December (n=4) and on the 1st of January (n=4). Males represented 83% of drowning deaths during the holiday period.

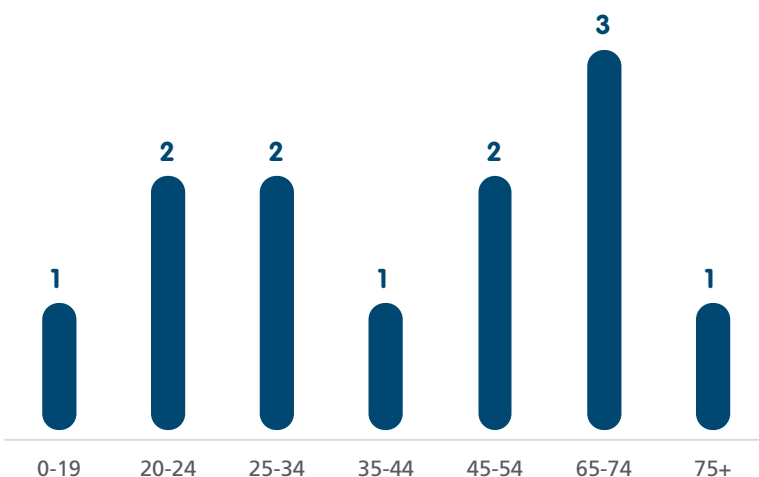
The highest age group that drowned during the summer Christmas period was the 65–74-year (n=3) age group representing 25% of drowning deaths. Males accounted for most of these incidents, highlighting the ongoing trend of higher drowning risk among men, potentially due to risk taking behaviours.

Most drowning deaths occurred in New South Wales (NSW) (n=6) and Queensland (QLD) (n=3). Top activities prior to drowning was boating (n=3), followed by an attempted rescue (n=2) and swimming (n=2). Beaches (n=4) and ocean/harbours (n=4) were the highest location for drowning during the Christmas period (n=8), followed by rivers/creeks (n=3).

Number of drowning deaths each day of the 2025/26 holiday period

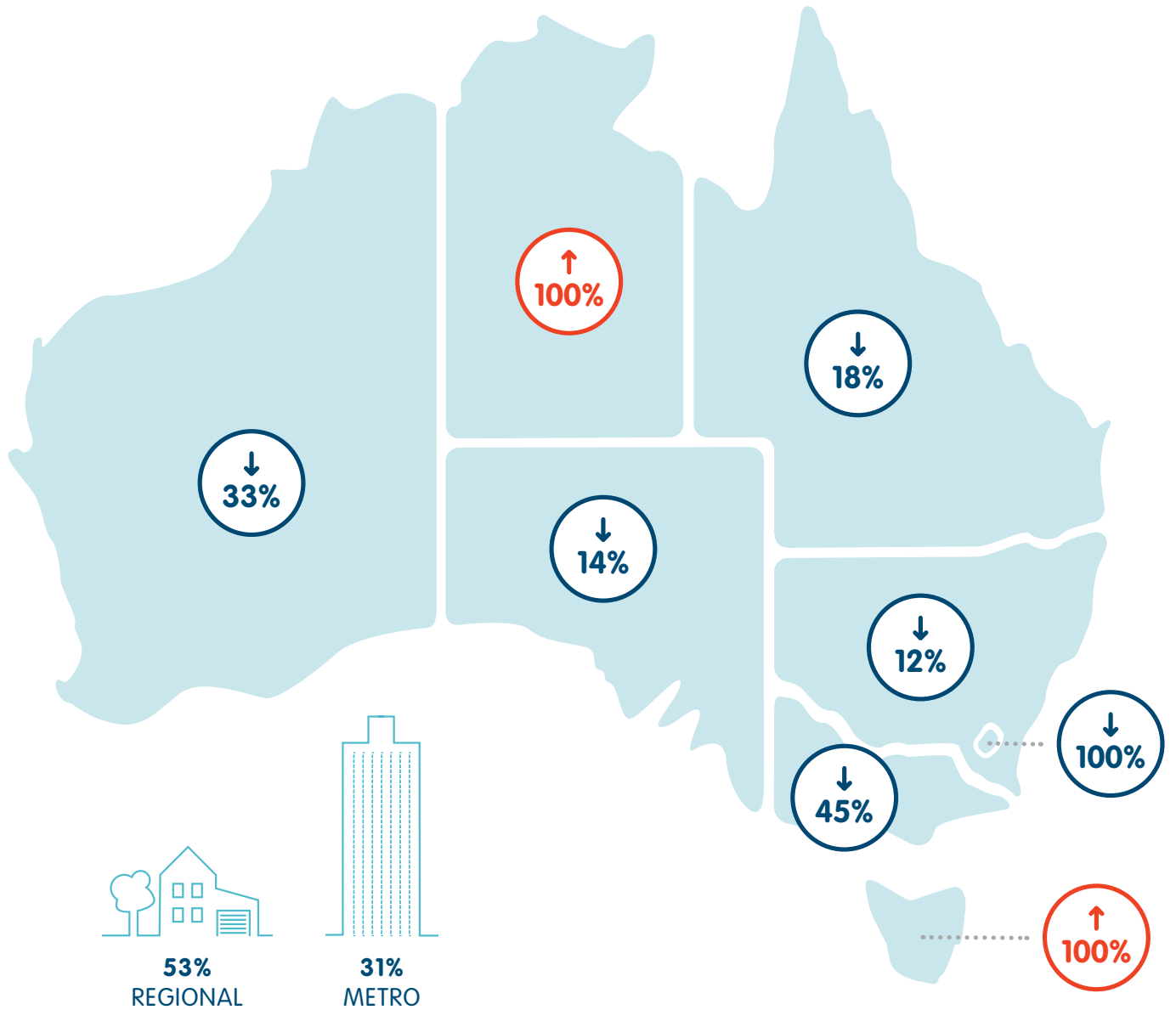


Number of drowning by age group in the 2025/26 holiday period



STATE AND TERRITORY INSIGHTS: SUMMER DROWNING DEATHS 2025/26

State and Territory breakdown with percentage change from last year



SUMMER 2025/26
1 December 2025 to 28 February 2026

SUMMER 2024/25
1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

State or Territory

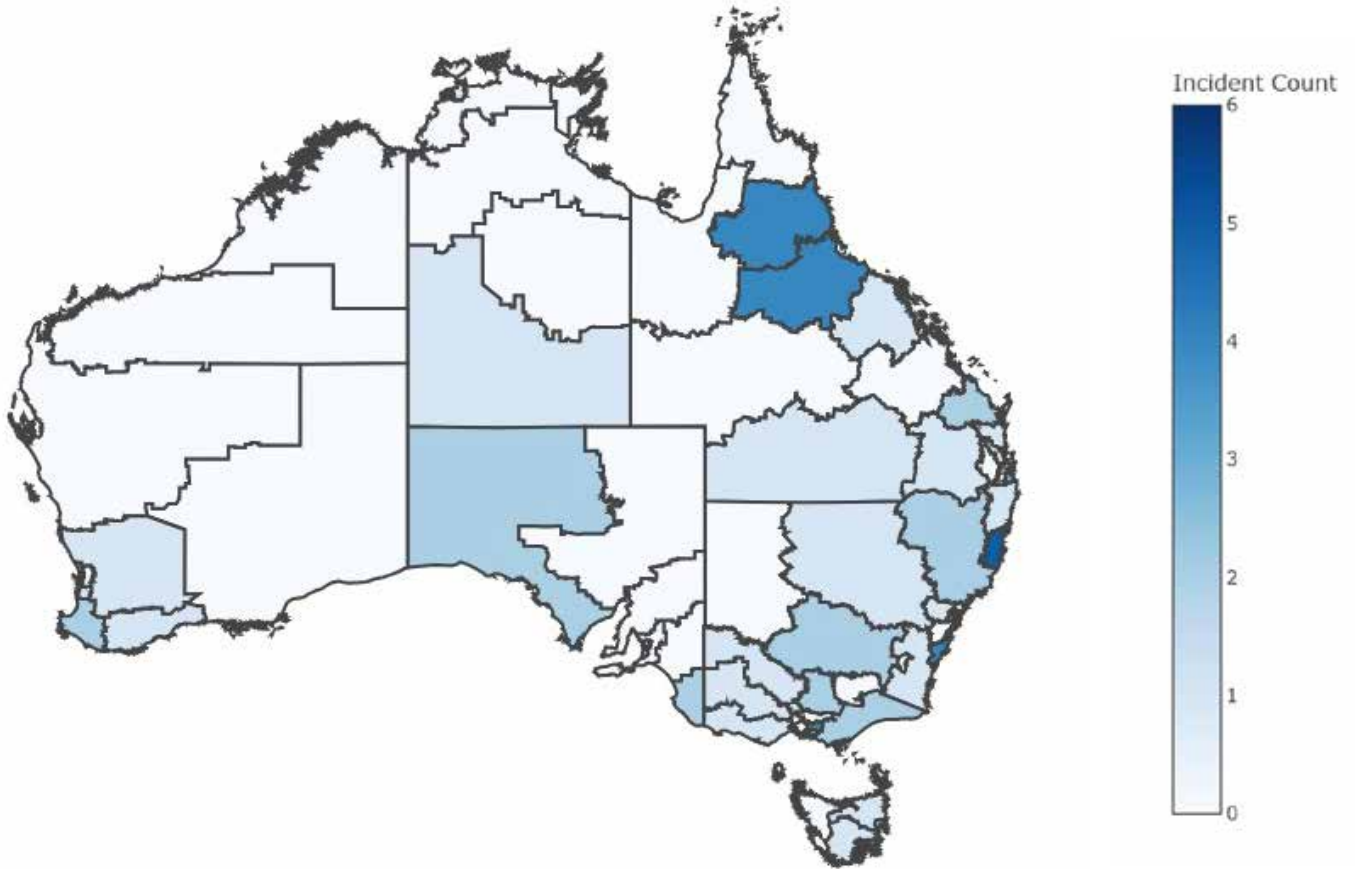
State or Territory

0 ACT (0%)	6 SA (7%)
29 NSW (36%)	4 TAS (5%)
2 NT (2%)	12 VIC (15%)
18 QLD (22%)	10 WA (12%)

1 ACT (1%)	7 SA (7%)
33 NSW (32%)	2 TAS (2%)
1 NT (1%)	22 VIC (21%)
22 QLD (21%)	15 WA (14%)

REGIONAL INSIGHTS: SUMMER DROWNING DEATHS 2025/26

Regional breakdown



TOP REGIONAL LOCATIONS

6 Northern Sydney (7%)

4 Illawarra Shoalhaven (5%)

5 Mid North Coast NSW (6%)

4 South East Melbourne (5%)

4 Townsville (5%)

4 South Eastern Sydney (5%)

4 Cairns and Hinterland (5%)

METHODS

Collation of summer drowning cases

The data collated for this report are derived primarily from media reports of drowning deaths that occurred between 1 December 2025 and 28 February 2026.

As such, these numbers should be considered interim, pending the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations.

Drowning data for Victoria are drawn from a combination of media reports and data from the Coroners Prevention Unit. Historical drowning numbers used for this report have been derived from previous years Summer Drowning Tolls for comparative purposes, which are also from media monitoring, therefore numbers will not be the same as that reported in National Drowning Reports.

Consistent with all Royal Life Saving drowning reports, where deaths were known to be a result of suicide or homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attack were excluded. The data included in this report are accurate to the best of the authors knowledge and as per the information available at the time. At the time of completing this report, 90 per cent of cases were under coronial investigation.

Definitions

The circumstances of the drowning incident were coded into defined variables for analysis related to age, sex, location of the incident, activity being undertaken and local health region.

Activity - Other includes jumped in, fishing, unintentional fall, attempted rescue, swept away and swept in.

Location - Other includes pond, storm drain, bathtub/spa bath.

LIMITATIONS

As indicated throughout the report, the figures regarding drowning deaths over summer 2025/26 should be regarded as interim until ongoing coronial investigations have been finalised. Following the conclusion of formal investigations, relevant documentation will be assessed, including autopsy reports, toxicology reports and coroner's findings.

It is possible that the formal investigation of some cases may result in a change in the assigned cause of death. For example, a case may be determined to be due to natural causes, rather than drowning. This is why the final number of drowning deaths that occurred in summer reported in the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report (released in September) will differ.

Risk factors commonly reported in Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report, such as the presence of alcohol and drugs, lifejackets, swimming ability were unknown at the time of writing and unlikely to be known until the coronial investigation has been conducted.

Disclaimer – Media Analysis Only

2025/26 figures shown are derived from media reports only. As such, they should be considered interim, pending the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations.

These numbers are likely to be different when final drowning deaths are reported in the National Drowning Report released in September.

2024/25 figures are derived from media reports from last summer and may be different from final numbers published in the 2025 National Drowning Report that were finalised from coronial statistics.



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