



Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy 2030

NTwater safety
Advisory Council





NORTHERN TERRITORY WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2030

Development of the Strategy

The Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy 2030 builds upon previous Water Safety Plans and Strategies. The strategy aligns to the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 and is developed and reviewed by the NT Water Safety Advisory Council (NTWSAC).

The NTWSAC was established in 2002 as part of the Northern Territory Government’s 5 point Water Safety Plan. One of the major requirements of the Council was to ‘develop and implement a Northern Territory Water Safety Plan that focuses on water safety education, research and data collection and standards.

This strategy is designed to build on work that has already been done, while continuing to minimise the rate of drowning, non-fatal drowning and water related injuries in the Northern Territory.

The following actions detail the development and review process:

- The NTWSAC discussed and reviewed the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 and the NT Water Safety Strategy 2023 on 6 December 2022, 1 February 2023 and 27 June 2023.
- The Minister endorsed the NT Water Safety Strategy 2030, for release in Water Safety Week September 2023.

Communication Strategy

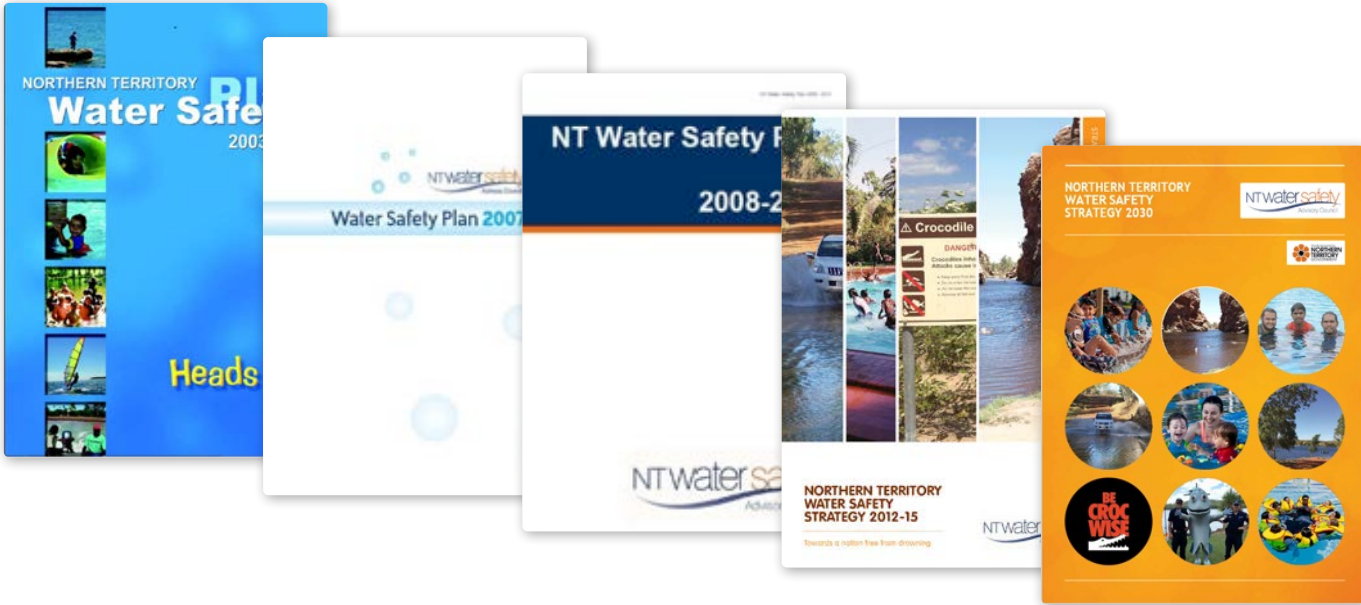
Members of the NTWSAC meet quarterly and report six monthly to review the current action plan that underpins the strategy. The minutes of the meetings and bi-annual reports are sent to the Minister for consideration. The Chairperson will meet with the Minister as required or requested to ensure the highest standards of water safety are implemented in the Northern Territory.

The Chairperson is the designated spokesperson of the NTWSAC for media and community forums and will reinforce approved NTWSAC messages.

The strategy and action plan are reviewed as an ongoing continuous improvement model and updated versions are created as required and approved by the NTWSAC.

Suggested Citation:

NT Water Safety Advisory Council Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy 2030.



FOREWORD BY MINISTER

Water safety is a priority for the Northern Territory Government and I welcome the release of the Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy 2030.

From casting for barra on the river to jumping in the backyard pool, Territorians love spending time in, on or by the water. Our spectacular environment and outdoor lifestyle draws locals and visitors alike to our pristine coastline, unique river systems and waterfalls.

But for all the enjoyment and relaxation water provides us, it is important to remember that it also carries a range of risks. Statistics show Territorians are three times more likely to drown than other Australians, with more than half of these fatalities occurring in rivers, creeks, waterholes, or dams. We can change these statistics.

Water safety starts from a young age and teaching your child to swim will set them up for a lifetime of enjoyment by the water. The Northern Territory Government has a number of initiatives to support this, including our Water Safety Awareness Program and the Learn to Swim Voucher Scheme, which offers \$100 vouchers per semester per child under five to help cover the cost of swimming lessons.

The Northern Territory Government invests over \$1 million each year in water safety through our partnership with Royal Life Saving Society and Learn to Swim Voucher program. We also have strong partnerships with, and make additional investment in other peak organisations like Surf Life Saving Northern Territory and Swimming NT.

The Northern Territory is also home to an additional risk around the water – crocodiles. While crocs are a Territory icon that we all love to catch a glimpse of, we should never be complacent or take unnecessary risks around our waterways. I encourage everyone to familiarise themselves with the Northern Territory Government’s ‘Be Crocwise’ resources before next hitting the water.

No matter how familiar you are around water, water safety is a shared responsibility and I encourage all Territorians to be smart, stay safe and have fun around water. Remember, most drownings and non-fatal drownings are preventable if we all take a moment to consider the risks and look out for each other.

I thank the Northern Territory Water Safety Advisory Council for their valuable contribution to help reduce drowning related injuries and deaths and building water safe communities. I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that Territorians and visitors can continue to enjoy our stunning waterways safely and responsibly.

Kate.

The Hon Kate Worden, MLA
Minister for Sport



A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE NT WATER SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL

The NT Water Safety Strategy 2030 provides a strategic framework and clear direction for the Members to remain committed to the vision of a Territory free from drowning. The strategy is dependent on community engagement, consistent messages and a commitment from Territorians, NT Government and the community for drowning prevention.

The collaborative approach from the NTWSAC membership organisations in raising water safety awareness in the community and delivering consistent messages helps to build water safe communities. Reflections of the previous NT Water Safety Strategy 2017-2021 include;

- over 30,000 families accessing the NT Water Safety Awareness Program.
- the Pipes and Drains campaign delivered every wet season to over 5,000 students.
- community engagement with over 30,000 Territorians during Water Safety Week.
- the annual release of the NT Drowning Report in September, raising awareness of water safety for Territorians.

Despite this measure of community engagement, Territorians are three times more likely to drown than other Australians.

The impact of fatal and non-fatal drowning on families and community is front and foremost in our approaches to help Territorians be safe in, on and around water.

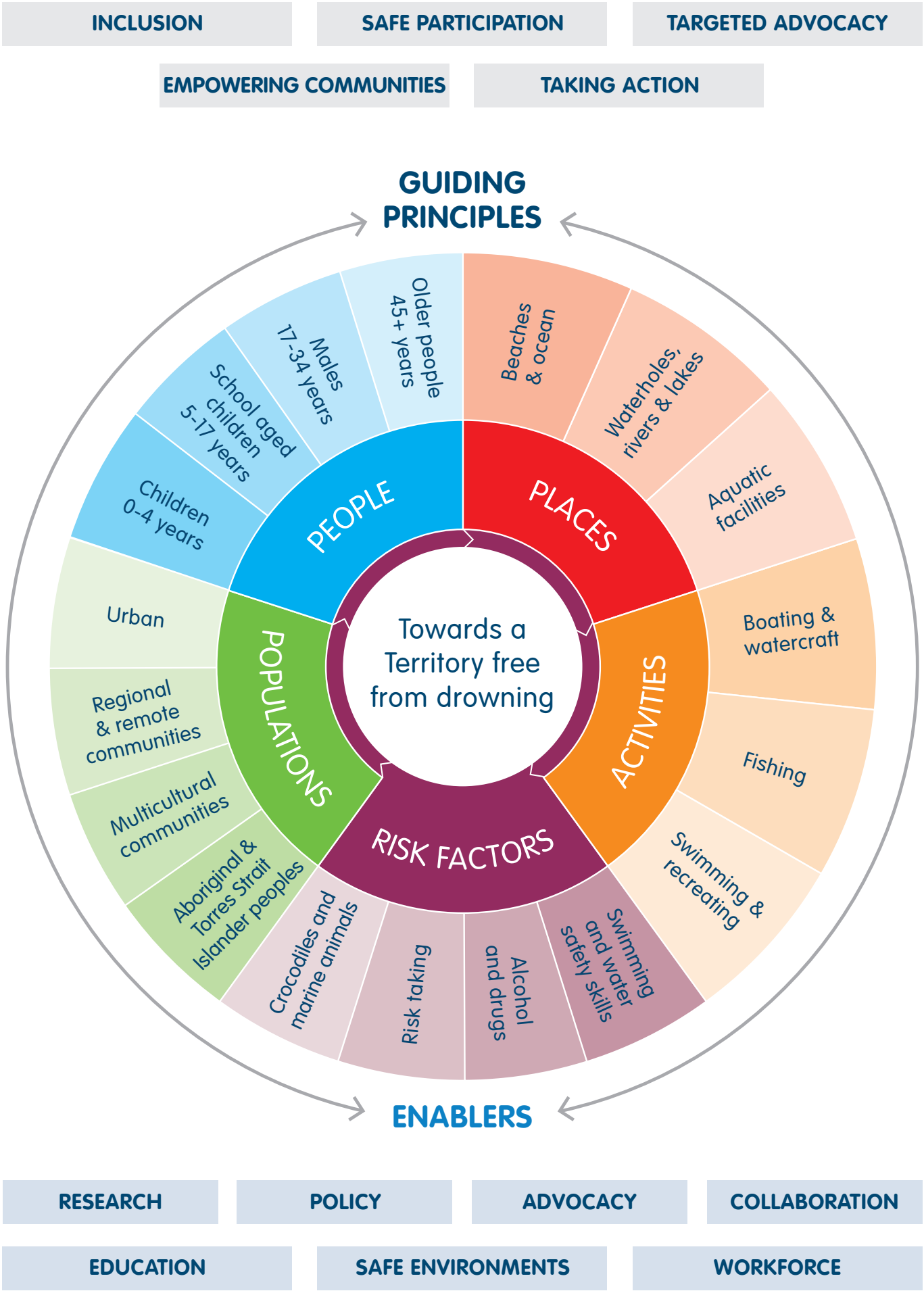
The challenge for the Council over the next seven years will be to:

- reduce the number of children under the age of five years drowning with the aim of zero.
- ensure swimming and water safety programs are in schools and students achieve the benchmarks set in the National Water Safety and Education Competency framework.
- implement strategies to combat drowning amongst all Territorians, with a focus on males.
- encourage the importance of safe boating practices.
- promote river safety.
- maintain ongoing commitment to increasing community awareness of the dangers of crocs, stingers and marine animals through education programs and signage.

The underpinning Action Plan clearly reinstates the collaborative approach to water safety within the community which has proven invaluable. We will provide evidence based research to government, for them to make informed decisions on legislation, policy reviews and developments relating to water safety for Territorians.

Justine Glover
Chairperson and Members of the NT Water Safety Advisory Council





VISION
Towards a nation free from drowning.

GOAL
To reduce drowning and build water safe communities.

- GUIDING PRINCIPLES**
- All efforts to reduce drowning and promote water safety should be guided by the following principles:
- Inclusion**
Create opportunities for all, including people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, by ensuring equitable access.
 - Safe participation**
Encourage participation, focusing on safe skills and behaviours.
 - Targeted advocacy**
Highlight key issues, build solutions and create change.
 - Empowering communities**
Foster local approaches and co-design strategies by building capacity and providing support.
 - Taking action**
Ensure policies and programs are informed by best available evidence.

- PRIORITY AREAS**
- The NT Water Safety Strategy has five Priority Areas; People, Populations, Places, Activities and Risk Factors.
- In each Priority Area, the strategy focuses on issues based on:
- Where the burden is proportionally highest.
 - Where the issue is emerging and/or drowning is most preventable.
 - Whether the issue is sufficiently defined, so that actions can be targeted.

ENABLERS	DESCRIPTION
Research	Research should be relevant in terms of policy and practice; in turn, policy and practice must be evidence-informed. This is facilitated by building capacity across the research sector and establishing strong partnerships between researchers, policymakers and practitioners.
Policy	Evidence-informed policy can generate positive change. Attention needs to be given to all levels of Government in developing, implementing and evaluating public policy.
Advocacy	Increasing awareness is fundamental to reducing drowning. Advocacy efforts should be directed towards Government and policymakers, as well as the general public.
Collaboration	Collaboration with purpose will enable alignment and coordination both within and outside of the water safety sector. Advocacy efforts can be strengthened by a united voice and consistent safety messages.
Education	Community education and capacity building are vital to create water safe communities. Given the opportunity, people of all ages and backgrounds can learn swimming and lifesaving skills.
Safe environments	Creating safer aquatic environments will benefit all Australians. Alongside reducing drowning, there is a need to promote skill development and a lifelong love of the water.
Workforce	The water safety sector depends on a diverse, skilled and proactive workforce. This includes volunteer surf lifesavers, lifeguards, swimming teachers and health workers. Central to this are opportunities for professional development and meaningful engagement.

- PRIORITY AREAS AND FOCUS AREAS**
- People**
Focusing on the issue of drowning in:
- Children 0-4 years
 - School aged children 5-17 years
 - Males 17-34 years
 - Older people 45+ years
- Populations**
Focusing on the issue of drowning in:
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - Multicultural communities
 - Regional and remote communities
 - Urban
- Places**
Focusing on the issue of drowning at:
- Beaches, ocean & coastal
 - Waterholes, rivers & lakes
 - Aquatic facilities
- Activities**
Focusing on the issue of drowning during:
- Boating and watercraft
 - Fishing
 - Swimming & recreating
- Risk factors**
Focusing on the issue of drowning related to:
- Swimming and water safety skills
 - Alcohol and drugs
 - Risk taking
 - Crocodiles and marine animals

NORTHERN TERRITORY WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2030 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Taking a life stages approach to reduce drowning deaths and non-fatal drowning incidents in the NT

Inclusion	Safe Participation	Targeted Advocacy	Empowering Communities	Taking Action
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KEY PRIORITY AREAS

People, Populations, Places, Activities and Risk Factors

Improving community awareness of water safety	Targeting high risk groups, activities and locations, including regional and remote waterways	Focussing on key drowning challenges
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STRATEGIC GOALS

1. Increase community awareness and participation in water safety skills and events	5. Reduce drowning deaths in inland waterways including regional and remote locations	9. Reduce Alcohol and Drug related drowning deaths
2. Reduce drowning deaths in children aged 0-17 years	6. Identify and target high risk groups and activities to promote safer aquatic behaviours	10. Reduce drowning deaths attributed to watercraft and recreational aquatic activities
3. Reduce drowning deaths in males aged 18-34 years	7. Increase and strengthen the capacity for the Aquatic Industry to prevent drowning and promote water safety	11. Reduce drowning deaths and aquatic injuries in males
4. Reduce drowning deaths in older people aged 45+ years	8. Reduce beach drowning deaths and injuries	12. Develop and align water safety messages to key risks including the seasonal challenges of wet season and dry season

DROWNING PREVENTION PILLARS

1. Advocacy	2. Research	3. Collaboration	4. Safe Venues	5. Workforce	6. Policy	7. Education
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KEY NORTHERN TERRITORY DROWNING FACTS

The Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy 2030 has benefited substantially from the strengthening of research and data capabilities of water safety organisations. Evidence-informed decision making is critical to successfully identifying issues, planning prevention strategies and introducing outcome measures. These are some of the issues that are top of mind in presenting this strategy, in considering the past 20 years of data.

Drowning Data has been provided by the Surf Life Saving Australia & Royal Life Saving Society – Australia from their respective National Fatal Drowning Databases. This data covers the 20-year period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2022 and presents statistics on drowning deaths that have occurred in the Northern Territory over this 20-year period.

For every **fatal drowning**,
there are three non-fatal
drowning incidents

One-year-old toddlers
record the highest drowning
rate of any age

48%
of drownings occurred in very **remote locations**

52%
drowned in a
river, creek, waterhole
or dam

12%
of drowning deaths
occurred at coastal
locations

Territorians
are **3 times
more likely
to drown
than other
Australians**

A **pre-existing medical
condition** was present in 38%
of drowning deaths

36%
of drowning deaths occur while
swimming and recreating

Males
drown at a rate
4 times that of females

58%
of drownings occurred in the wet season

38%
of drowning deaths recorded a **Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) $\geq 0.05\%$**



NON-FATAL DROWNING: Acknowledging the full burden of drowning

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 encourages a continued focus on the full impacts of drowning, including non-fatal drowning and water-related injury and death. We know people who survive a drowning incident often experience lifelong health issues, which in some cases, may lead to premature death. The emotional toll this has on families and loved ones is immense.

What is non-fatal drowning?

Non-fatal drowning describes a drowning incident where the individual survives. It is sometimes incorrectly referred to as ‘near-drowning’ – this term has been replaced by the World Health Organization and should not be used.

Drowning is often thought of as fatal but, in fact, drowning can have one of three possible outcomes:

- death.
- morbidity (injury).
- no morbidity (no injury).

In some cases, an individual may not suffer any serious health complications following a non-fatal drowning. However, in other cases, non-fatal drowning can significantly impact an individual’s long-term health outcomes and quality of life. This may result in brain or other organ damage, the effects of which might be mild to severe. This is also known as hypoxic brain injury (brain damage due to lack of oxygen).

Research by Royal Life Saving Society and other partners over the past five years has increased our knowledge of the burden of non-fatal drowning, including the highest risk populations, locations and activities. Further research is required to investigate the long-term health, social and economic impacts of non-fatal drowning.

Research has found that nationally:

- for every fatal drowning, there are three non-fatal drowning incidents.
- on average, 550 people experience a non-fatal drowning each year.
- 42% of all non-fatal drowning incidents occur in children aged 0-4 years.
- 66% of all non-fatal drowning incidents are males.
- the incidence of hospitalisations due to a non-fatal drowning incidents increased by 50% between 2002/03 and 2016/17.
- children 0-4 years spend 1.5 days on average in hospital after a non-fatal drowning incident.
- swimming pools account for the leading location of non-fatal drowning incidents, especially among young children.
- people hospitalised following a non-fatal drowning incident in natural water stay an average of 3.0 days, compared to 1.9 days for swimming pool incidents and 1.7 for bathtub incidents.
- teenagers and adults are more likely to get into difficulty in natural bodies of water such as in rivers, lakes and at beaches.

Children aged 0–4 years record the highest fatal to non-fatal drowning ratio of any age group

- 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.

Drowning in the NT

On average, 9 people drown each year in the NT. Using the non-fatal estimates, this equates to around 27 people who may experience a non-fatal drowning incident each year.

How are we addressing non-fatal drowning?

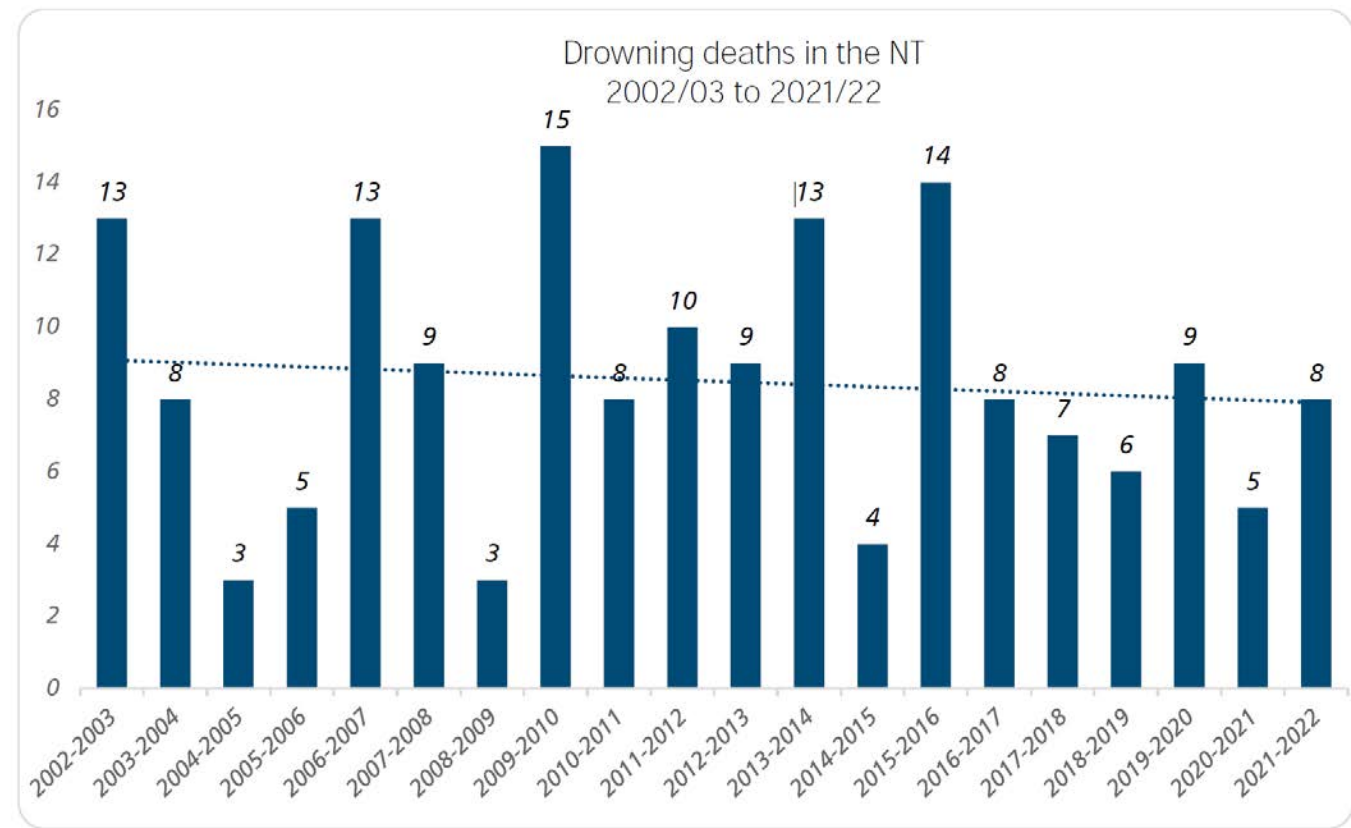
The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 has identified several key activities focusing on raising awareness of non-fatal drowning among young children and further increasing our knowledge of non-fatal drowning in an effort to reduce non-fatal drowning.

- Investigate fatal and non-fatal drowning to identify trends and emerging issues.
- Strengthen non-fatal data collection, including the investigation of additional data sources.
- Specific populations have been found to be at higher risk of drowning, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children - Aboriginal children are known to have a higher rate of fatal and non-fatal drowning compared with non-Aboriginal children.

FATAL DROWNINGS

The Northern Territory drowning report is released annually in September. Figure below details the fatal drownings from 2002-2022.

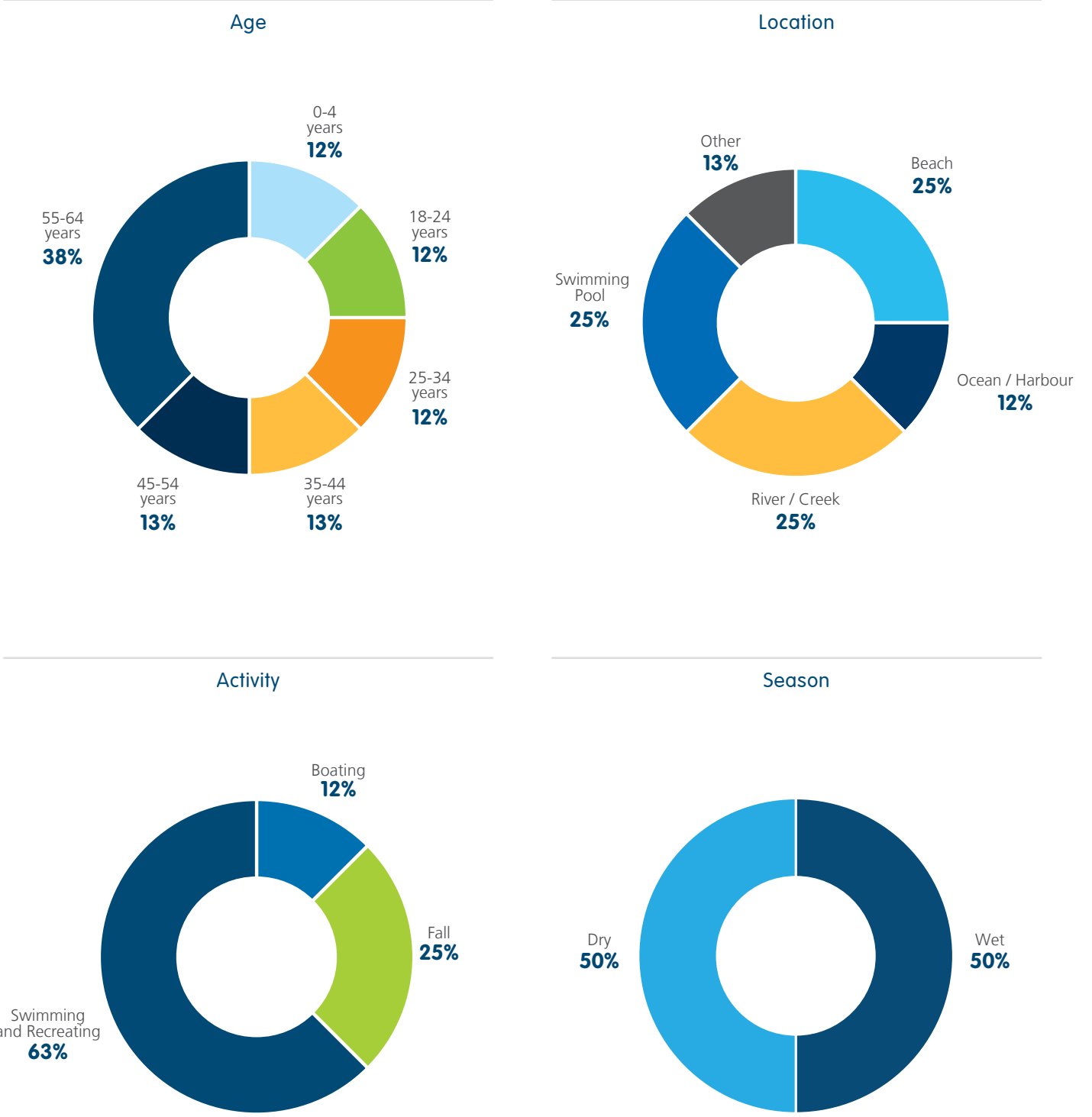
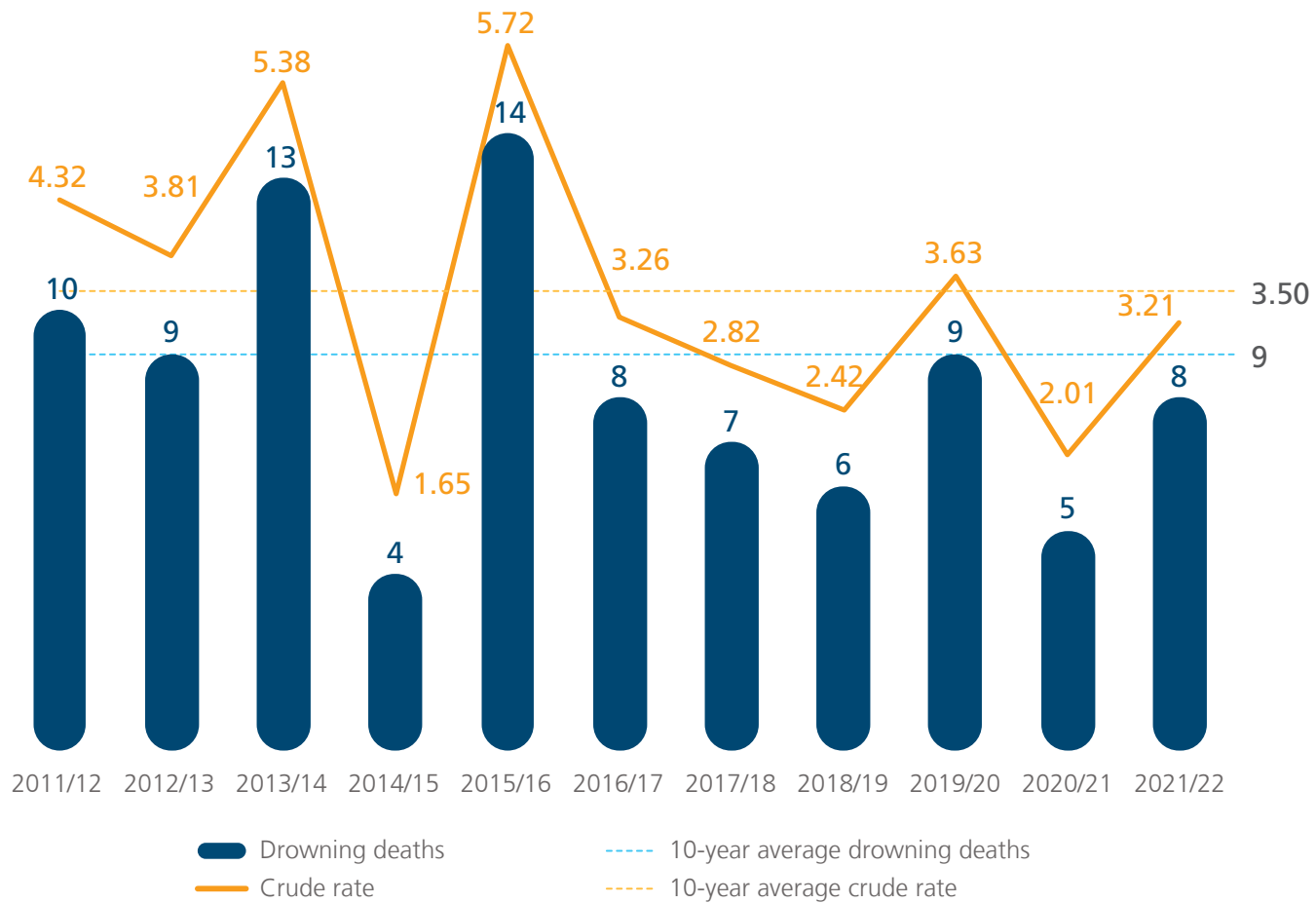
Drowning deaths in Northern Territory 2002/03 to 2021/22
170 people drowned in the Northern Territory



NT Drowning Report is released annually in September. The 2022 snapshot highlights the issues at this point of time in the Northern Territory.



Drowning deaths and death rates in the Northern Territory from 2011/12 to 2021/22 and the 10-year average



NATIONAL WATER SAFETY EDUCATION COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

The NTWSAC is committed to the National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety as agreed by the Australian Water Safety Council. Ensuring that school aged children have access to these vital skills are a priority for the NTWSAC.

The Australian Water Safety Council has established three National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety Education as the desired competency standards every Australian should have the opportunity to acquire and maintain.

The National Benchmarks provide a clear description of student learning and are therefore, a useful starting point or driver for the development of teaching and learning programs. The benchmarks allow teachers to monitor student learning and to make judgements about student progress and achievement.

These National Benchmarks for Swimming and Water Safety Education can be achieved by progressing through the development milestones of the National Swimming and Water Safety Framework.

Every Australian at the age of 12 years should be able to:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Understand and respect safety rules for a range of aquatic environments |  | Surface dive, swim underwater and search to recover an object from deep water |
|  | Enter and exit the water for a range of environments |  | Respond to an emergency and perform a primary assessment |
|  | Float, scull or tread water for 2 minutes and signal for help |  | Rescue a person using a non-swimming rescue technique with non-rigid aids |
|  | Swim continuously for 50 metres |  | Perform a survival sequence wearing light clothing |

Every Australian at the age of 6 years should be able to:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | Identify rules for safe behaviour at aquatic environments at or near the home |  | Submerge the body and move through an obstacle |
|  | Enter and exit shallow water unassisted |  | Identify people and actions to help in an aquatic emergency |
|  | Float and recover to a standing or secure position |  | Perform a survival sequence to simulate an accidental entry |
|  | Move continuously for 5 metres | | |

50% of all Australians at the age of 17 years should be able to:

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | Understand behaviours that affect personal safety in aquatic environments and activities |  | Search in a deep water environment and recover a person |
|  | Assist others to exit deep water using bystanders |  | Respond to an emergency and provide first aid |
|  | Float, scull or tread water for 5 minutes and signal for help |  | Rescue an unconscious person in deep water |
|  | Swim continuously for 400 metres |  | Perform a survival sequence wearing heavy clothing |

MEMBERS OF THE NT WATER SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Member organisations are appointed to the NTWSAC as a Ministerial appointment and are governed by an approved Terms of Reference.

- The Role of the NTWSAC is to:
- provide advice to the Minister for Sport on water safety related matters.
 - identify gaps in existing provisions of water safety initiatives in relation to the services necessary for the prevention of drowning deaths and non-fatal drowning incidents in the Northern Territory.
 - proactively develop and recommend solutions to emerging and ongoing issues.
 - develop and implement a Northern Territory Water Safety Strategy that focuses on the drowning prevention pillars.

Organisation	Abbreviation
Amateur Fisherman’s Association of the NT	AFANT
Department of Education	DOE
NT HEALTH	NTH
Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics	DIPL
Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (Sport & Recreation)	DTFHC
Kidsafe NT	KSNT
Local Government Association of the NT	LGANT
Northern Territory Water Police	NTPFES
Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security - Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory	DEPWS - PWCNT
Royal Life Saving Society NT Branch	RLSSANT
Somerville Community Service	SCS
Surf Life Saving NT	SLSNT
Tourism NT	DTC - TNT
Local Government Remote appointment	LGANT
Water Safety Unit administered by RLSSANT	WSU

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

NTWSAC: NT Water Safety Advisory Council

Photos

Front Cover
Top: Students at Tennant Creek Swimming Pool
Middle: Ellery Creek Big Hole
Bottom: Fishing Buffalo Creek
Page 1: Bitter Springs
Page 9: Boof the Barra and Water Police at Splashfest – Water Safety Week
Page 11: Croc Trap Nitmiluk

Key documents

Australian Water Safety Council (2030) Australian Water Safety Strategy - Australian Water Safety Council (2021) Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030. Australian Water Safety Council, Sydney.
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https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/40846/RLSNT_WaterSafetyStrategy2017-2021.pdf

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https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/56008/RLS_NonFatalDrowning_Part2.pdf

TFHC Strategic Plan: https://territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/986879/TFHC0001-I08-strategic-plan.pdf

Sport & Rec Strategic Plan: NT Sport and Active Recreation Strategic Plan 2021-25

Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer. (2014) World Health Organization, Geneva.
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/global-report-on-drowning-preventing-a-leading-killer>

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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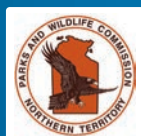
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