

271

PEOPLE DROWNED IN AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS

ROYAL LIFE SAVING National Drowning Report 2015



 216 55

2015 SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

OVERALL

- **271 people drowned in Australian waterways between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015**
- This year's figure of 271 drowning deaths is an increase of 5 drowning deaths (or 1.9%) on the 266 drowning deaths recorded in 2013/14
- This is a reduction of 17 deaths (or 5.9%) on the 10 year average of 288 drowning deaths.

SEX AND AGE GROUP

- **80% of all drowning deaths were male (216 drowning deaths)**
- 20% of all drowning deaths were female (55 drowning deaths)
- 26 (10%) drowning deaths occurred in children aged 0-4 years
- 9 (3%) drowning deaths occurred in children aged 5-14 years
- 23 (9%) drowning deaths occurred in young people aged 15-24 years
- 89 (33%) drowning deaths occurred in people aged 55 years and over

STATE AND TERRITORY

- **100 (37%) drowning deaths occurred in New South Wales**
- 62 (23%) drowning deaths occurred in Queensland
- 39 (14%) drowning deaths occurred in Victoria
- 39 (14%) drowning deaths occurred in Western Australia

LOCATION AND ACTIVITY

- **99 (37%) drowning deaths occurred in inland waterways**
- 55 (20%) drowning deaths occurred at beaches
- 36 (13%) drowning deaths occurred in ocean / harbour locations
- 63 people (23%) were swimming and recreating immediately prior to drowning
- 53 people (20%) were using watercraft immediately prior to drowning
- 43 people (16%) drowned as a result of falls into water

271

PEOPLE DROWNED IN AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS



Watch our videos & share to save a life:
youtube.com/RoyallifeSavingAust

FOREWARD

We are pleased to present the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2015. In urging you to study this report and to take action to reduce drowning, we wish to reinforce the following seven points:

1. Real people and families not statistics

Each and every case contained within this National Drowning Report represents a very personal story that will have caused great sorrow for family, friends and communities of the person lost to drowning. Although it can't be the same, we share their anguish and commit the organisation to using their story in order to prevent drowning in others.

2. Non-fatal drowning

It is important to note that drowning has two outcomes, fatal and non-fatal. Those who survive a drowning incident, often do so while suffering from an array of lifelong health impacts. In some cases these impacts lead to premature death.

Our awareness and understanding of the burden of non-fatal drowning is increasing through research and the work of several child drowning advocates. In future years we aspire to provide a more complete picture of experiences of those who live with the impacts of non-fatal drowning.

3. Inland Waterways

Many Australians are surprised to hear that drowning in inland waterways (including rivers, creeks and streams) are a leading location. This report again reinforces the need to increase the focus on prevention in regional areas, along our major rivers and in remote Australia.

4. Swimming and Water Safety Skills of Australian Children

Australian communities are rich in opportunities for recreation in, on and around water. With waterways such as rivers, pools and beaches easily accessible, skills in survival swimming, water safety and basic rescue are vital. Whilst this report shows a promising reduction in drowning in secondary school aged children, we know that too many children leave school without these important lifesaving skills.

5. Increasing rigour, contributing to the knowledge base

This year's Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report is the 21st iteration. It is our most rigorous and comprehensive analysis to date. It adds 271 cases to the National Fatal Drowning Database which now stretches back 13 years, and almost 4,000 cases. Over the past 12 months this database has been used to provide advice to Coroners, Federal, State and Local Governments, by institutions and in the formulation of the Consultative Draft of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2016-2020.

6. Responsibility and Partnership not blame

The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Report on Drowning, published in November 2014, reinforces the multi-sectoral nature of drowning; meaning that unlike many other causes of mortality, the solution to reducing drowning is unlikely to rest with one organisation, one stratagem, any particular Government Department or jurisdiction.

7. Australian Water Safety Strategy 2016-2020

Although highlighted in The WHO Global Report, the Australian Water Safety Strategy has little chance of succeeding without the collective efforts of organisations like Royal Life Saving, our coastal safety partners Surf Life Saving, Governments across the country, and practitioners including water safety instructors, lifesavers and lifeguards. The Australian Water Safety Council expects to release an updated strategy following consultation and feedback to the draft in coming months.

This report serves as an important reminder to all Australians of the risks associated with exposure to our beautiful waterways, rivers, beaches, and community and backyard swimming pools. I urge you to share the messages of the report, infographics, prevention tips and support resources provided by Royal Life Saving to help us reduce drowning in Australia.

Justin Scarr

Chief Executive Officer, Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

“Each and every case contained within this National Drowning Report represents a very personal story that will have caused great sorrow for family, friends and communities...”

DROWNING DEATHS IN 2014/15

There were 271 drowning deaths in Australian waterways between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015. The number of people drowning in Australia has increased this year, but remains the second lowest on average since 2002/03. This figure of 271 deaths was recorded in both 2011/12 and 2014/15.

This year's figure of 271 drowning deaths is an increase of 5 drowning deaths (or 1.9%) on the 266 drowning deaths recorded in 2013/14. This is however, a reduction of 17 deaths (or 5.9%) on the 10 year average of 288 drowning deaths.

The crude drowning rate in 2014/15 is 1.15 per 100,000 people. This compares favourably to the 10 year average drowning rate of 1.32 drowning deaths per 100,000 people (Figure 1).

Trends over time: Fatal drowning in Australia

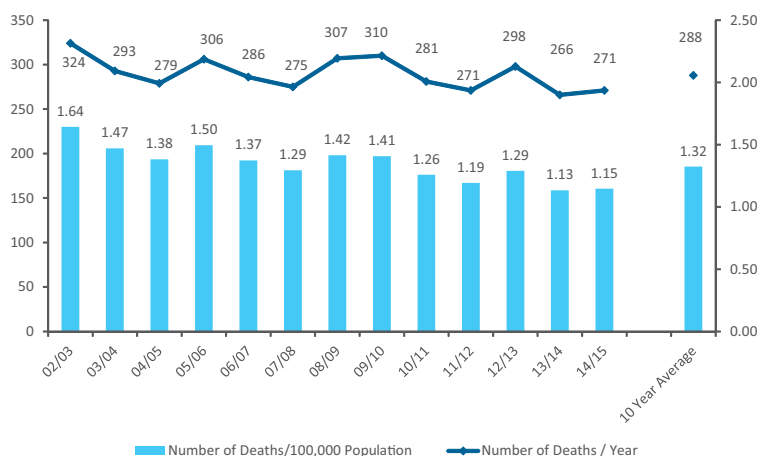


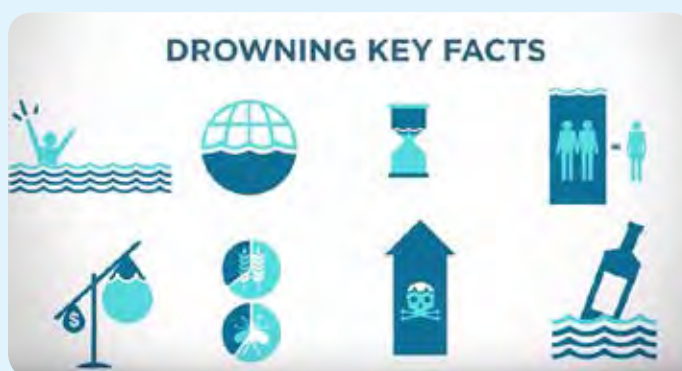
Figure 1: Unintentional Drowning Deaths and Death Rates, Australia 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

CASE STUDY

THE GLOBAL REPORT ON DROWNING: PREVENTING A LEADING KILLER

The World Health Organization (WHO) released the 'Global Report on Drowning: Preventing a Leading Killer' (The Report) on November 17, 2014. The Report, the first of its kind, highlights drowning is among the 10 leading causes of death for children and young people. It reveals that drowning claims the lives of 372,000 people worldwide every year. Every hour of every day, more than 40 people lose their lives to drowning.

The Report identifies ten actions to prevent drowning that span community based action, effective policies and legislation and further research.



Watch our video on the
WHO Global Report on Drowning:
[youtube.com/RoyalLifeSavingAust](https://www.youtube.com/RoyalLifeSavingAust)

CASE STUDY

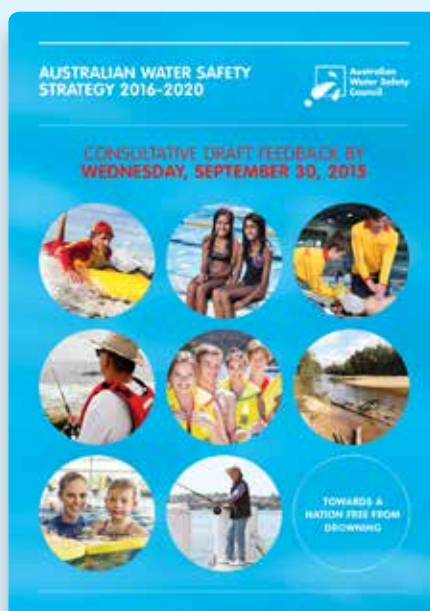
PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TARGETS OF THE AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2012-15

In its last year, the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 (AWSS 2012-15) continues to focus drowning prevention efforts towards the achievement of a 50% reduction in drowning by the year 2020. With the 2016-20 Strategy set to be released in early 2016, this is the last progress report against the goals of the 2012-15 document.

AWSS 2012-15 Goal Areas	Drowning Deaths in 2014/15		AWSS 2012-15 Target by 2020	Progress
1. Reduce drowning deaths in children aged 0-14 years	Children 0-4 years	26	17	Of High Concern
	Children 5-14 years	9	8	Of Some Concern
2. Reduce drowning deaths in young people aged 15-24		23	18	Of Some Concern
3. Reduce drowning deaths in people aged 55+		89	51	Of High Concern
4. Reduce drowning deaths in inland waterways		99	54	Of High Concern
5. Reduce surf beach drowning deaths		55	21	Of High Concern

Please note: A drowning death could be included in more than one goal area in the table above.

Figure 2: Progress of AWSS 2012-15 Goals and Target Reductions



The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 and the Consultative Draft of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2016-20 can be downloaded from www.watersafety.com.au

WHO DROWNS?

Of the 271 drowning deaths that occurred in Australian waterways in 2014/15, 216 (80%) were male. New South Wales recorded the largest number of drowning deaths with 100 (or 37% of all drowning deaths in 2014/15). This was followed by Queensland with 62 drowning deaths (23%) and Victoria and Western Australia with 39 (14%) drowning deaths respectively.

When calculated as rates per 100,000 people, Tasmania recorded the highest rate of drowning in Australia at 1.75 per 100,000 people. The Northern Territory (NT) recorded the second highest rate of drowning at 1.64 per 100,000 people. The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has the lowest rate of drowning in Australia at 0.26 per 100,000 people (Figure 3).

The average age of those who drowned was 43.0 years, with females being on average younger than males (38.3 years for females, compared to 44.2 years for males).

The 45-54 years age group was the age group that recorded the largest number of drowning deaths with 48 drowning deaths (18% of all drowning deaths in 2014/15), followed by the 25-34 years age group with 40 drowning deaths (15%).

The 45-54 years age group was one of three age groups to record an increase against the 10 year average. The 45-54 years age group experienced a 26% increase on the 10 year average of 38 drowning deaths.

The 65-74 years and 75+ years age groups also recorded increases against the 10 year average of 11% (65-74 years) and 8% (75+ years) respectively (Figure 4).

Tasmania records the highest drowning rate in Australia at 1.75 drownings per 100,000 people

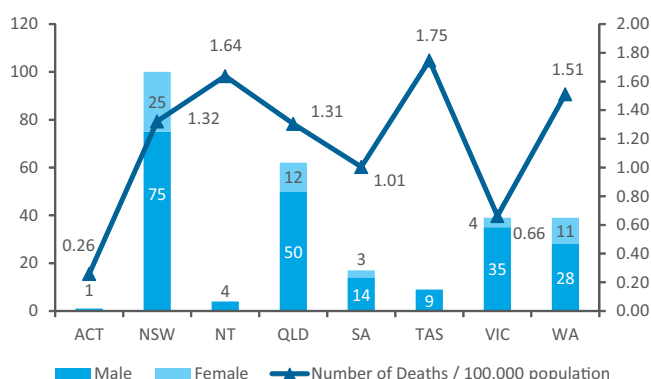


Figure 3: Drowning Deaths by Sex and State / Territory, Drowning Death Rates, 2014/15

The 45-54 years age group records a 26% increase on the 10 year average

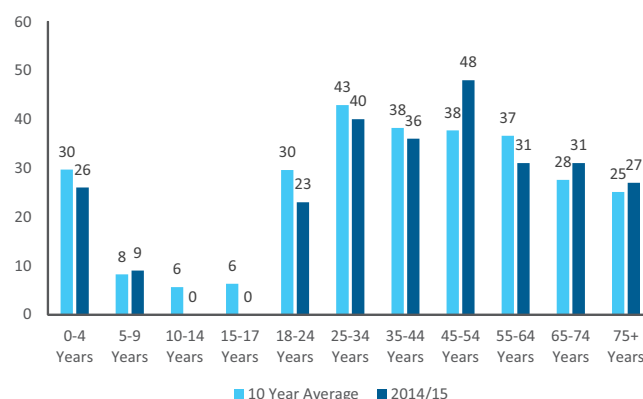
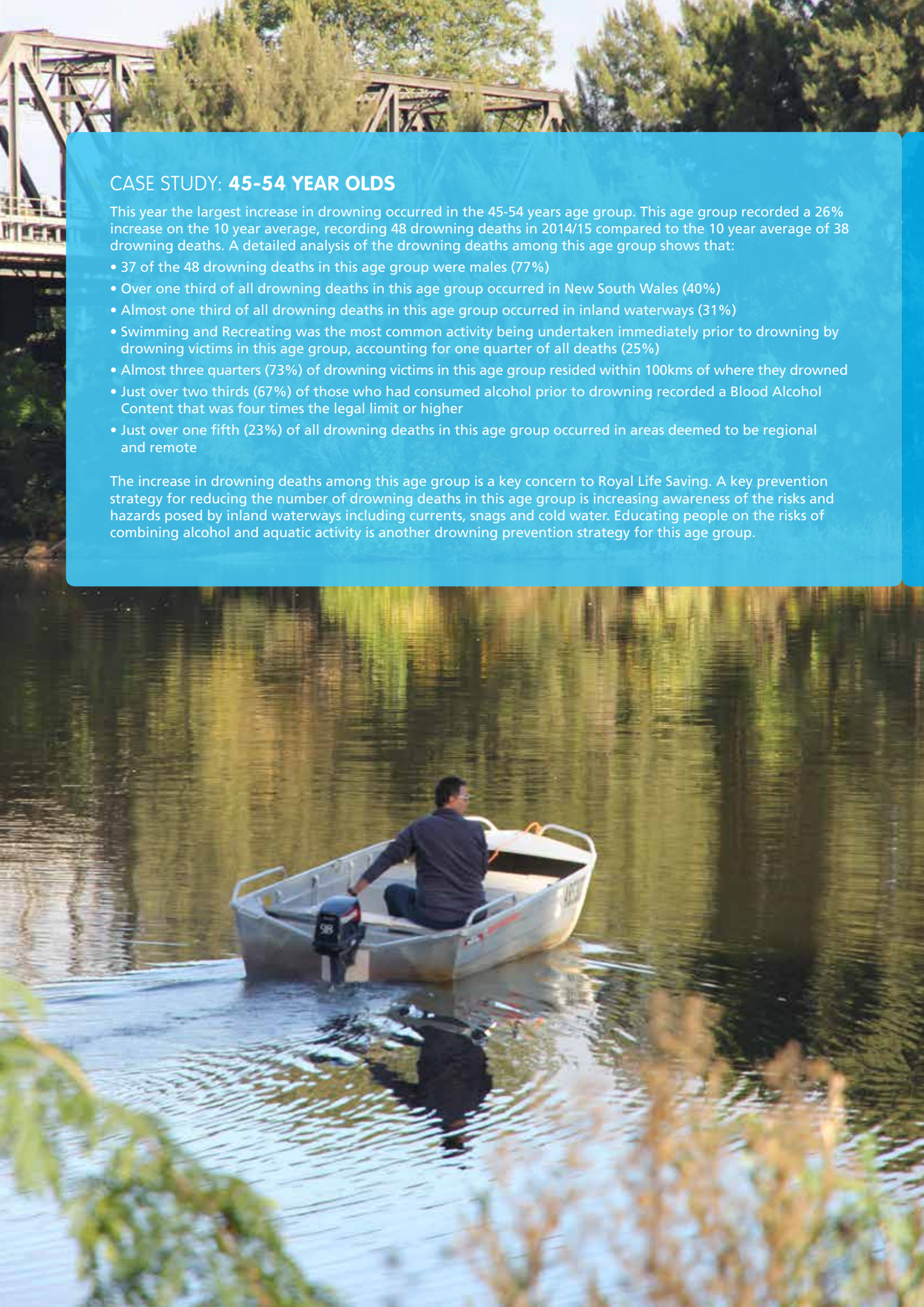


Figure 4: Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

18%

**OF ALL DROWNING
VICTIMS IN 2014/15 WERE
AGED 45-54 YEARS**

The background image shows a person in a small motorboat on a river. The person is wearing a dark jacket and is seen from the side, steering the boat. The boat is a small, light-colored aluminum motorboat with a black outboard motor. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and the bridge in the background. The bridge is a steel truss bridge with a wooden deck. The trees are lush and green, suggesting a summer or early autumn setting. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

CASE STUDY: **45-54 YEAR OLDS**

This year the largest increase in drowning occurred in the 45-54 years age group. This age group recorded a 26% increase on the 10 year average, recording 48 drowning deaths in 2014/15 compared to the 10 year average of 38 drowning deaths. A detailed analysis of the drowning deaths among this age group shows that:

- 37 of the 48 drowning deaths in this age group were males (77%)
- Over one third of all drowning deaths in this age group occurred in New South Wales (40%)
- Almost one third of all drowning deaths in this age group occurred in inland waterways (31%)
- Swimming and Recreating was the most common activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning by drowning victims in this age group, accounting for one quarter of all deaths (25%)
- Almost three quarters (73%) of drowning victims in this age group resided within 100kms of where they drowned
- Just over two thirds (67%) of those who had consumed alcohol prior to drowning recorded a Blood Alcohol Content that was four times the legal limit or higher
- Just over one fifth (23%) of all drowning deaths in this age group occurred in areas deemed to be regional and remote

The increase in drowning deaths among this age group is a key concern to Royal Life Saving. A key prevention strategy for reducing the number of drowning deaths in this age group is increasing awareness of the risks and hazards posed by inland waterways including currents, snags and cold water. Educating people on the risks of combining alcohol and aquatic activity is another drowning prevention strategy for this age group.



CASE STUDY: **DROWNING DEATHS IN WINTER**

One fifth of all drowning deaths in this year's Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report took place in the winter months, a time not often associated with aquatic activity. A detailed analysis of these cases found that:

- 56 people died as a result of drowning in the winter months
- Almost half (45%) of all drowning deaths in winter occurred in people aged 55 years and over
- Just over half (55%) of all drowning deaths in winter took place in NSW and Queensland
- One quarter (25%) of all drowning deaths in winter took place at beaches
- Drowning deaths at beaches during winter commonly occurred in NSW (43%) and Victoria (29%)
- Twenty five percent of all winter drowning deaths occurred as a result of watercraft accidents compared to 20% of summer drowning deaths
- One in 10 drowning deaths during winter was known to involve alcohol

The prevention of drowning deaths all year round is key to reducing overall drowning figures. Those recreating in, on, or around the water in the cooler months must always wear lifejackets when boating, swim at patrolled beaches between the flags and avoid alcohol.

WHEN DO THESE DROWNING DEATHS OCCUR?

Drowning deaths occur throughout the year, with the largest number occurring in Summer (89 deaths), followed by Autumn (66 deaths), Spring (60 deaths) and Winter (56 deaths).

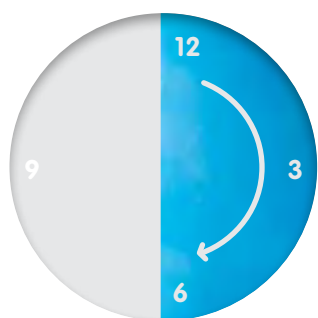
January was the month with the largest number of drowning deaths (36) (Figure 5).

The largest number of drowning deaths occurred on Saturdays with 58 drowning deaths or 21% of all drowning deaths in 2014/15. Monday was the day of the week that recorded the lowest number of drowning deaths with 32 deaths (Figure 6).

The most common time of incident for drowning deaths was the Afternoon (between 12:01pm and 6pm) with 110 drowning deaths or 41% of all drowning deaths. This was followed by Morning (6:01am to 12pm) with 79 deaths or 29% of all drowning deaths. The time of incident was unknown in 15 cases (21%) (Figure 7).

33%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS IN 2014/15 OCCURRED IN SUMMER



41% OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS IN 2014/15 OCCURRED BETWEEN 12:01PM AND 6PM

Drowning deaths in Australia occur year round but peak in January

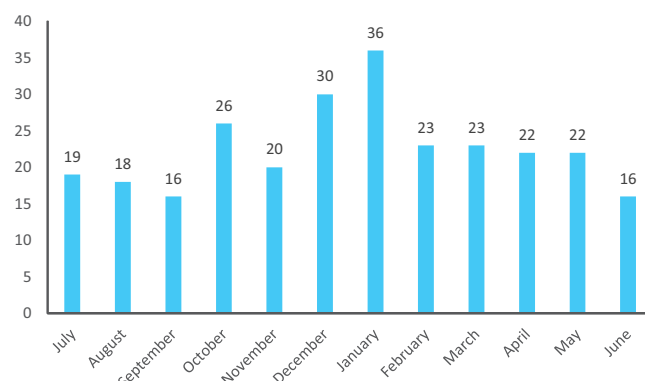


Figure 5: Drowning Deaths by Month of Incident, 2014/15

Saturdays were the most common day for drowning deaths in 2014/15

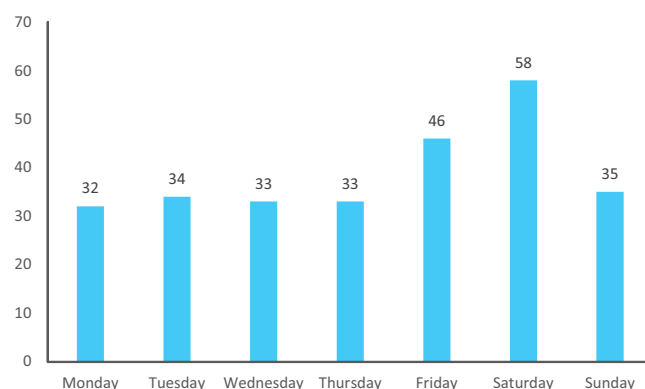


Figure 6: Drowning Deaths by Day of the Week of Incident, 2014/15

Almost half of all drowning deaths in 2014/15 occurred in the Afternoon

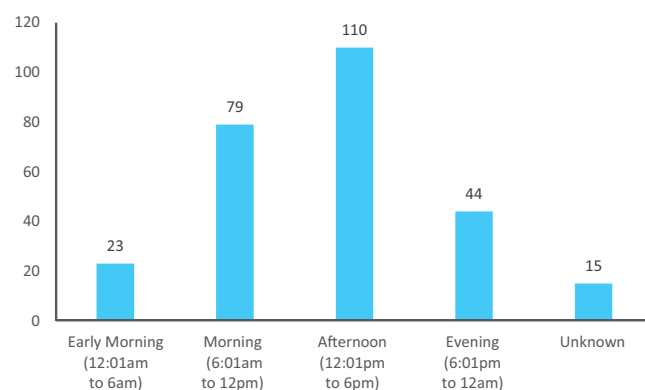


Figure 7: Drowning Deaths by Time of Incident Categories, 2014/15

WHERE AND HOW DO THESE DROWNING DEATHS OCCUR?

Rivers, creeks and streams were the locations with the highest number of drowning deaths in 2014/15 with 72 deaths, a reduction of six deaths (or 8%) on the 10 year average.

Beaches were the location with the second highest number of drowning deaths (55 deaths), recording a 15% increase against the 10 year average of 48 deaths. There were 7 drowning deaths in locations coded as 'Other', including fishponds, drains and troughs (Figure 8).

Just over one fifth (23%) of all drowning deaths occurred as a result of swimming and recreating immediately prior to drowning (63 deaths). Accidents involving watercraft accounted for a further one fifth of all drowning deaths (53 deaths), followed by falls into water at 16% (43 deaths).

Activity prior to drowning was unknown in 13% of cases (35 deaths) indicating there were a number of people who were alone when they drowned and therefore the activity prior to drowning was not witnessed (Figure 9).

Rivers, Creeks and Streams continue to be the leading location for drowning in Australia

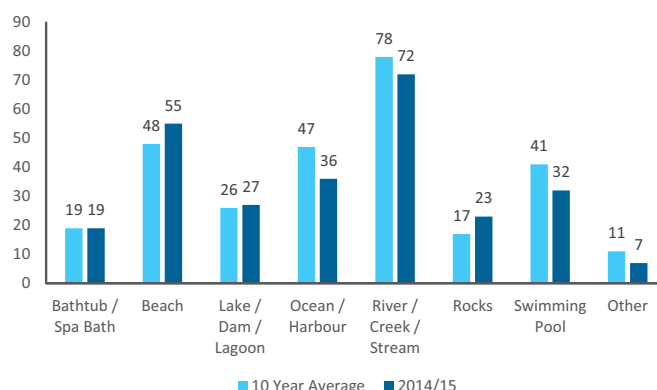


Figure 8: Drowning Deaths by Location, 2014/15

Swimming and Recreating leading a diverse range of activities prior to drowning in Australia

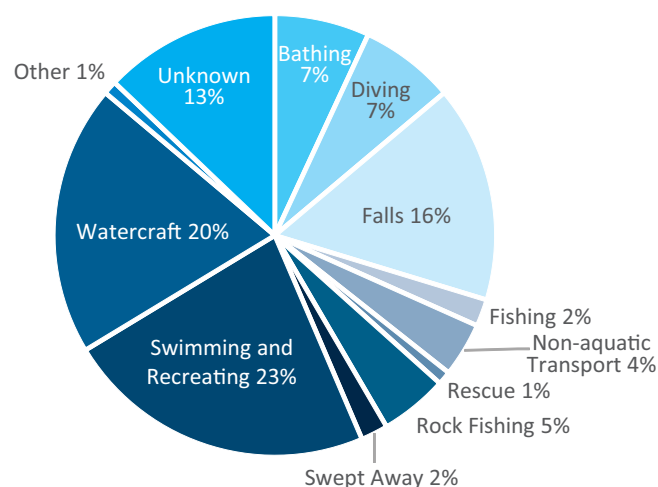


Figure 9: Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior to Drowning, 2014/15

37%

OF ALL DROWNING DEATHS IN 2014/15 OCCURRED IN INLAND WATERWAYS (RIVERS, CREEKS, STREAMS, LAKES, DAMS AND LAGOONS)



CASE STUDY: **FLOODING**

There were 13 cases known to involve flooding in this year's report. A detailed analysis of cases known to involve flooding shows that:

- Males account for 69% of all drowning deaths in flood waters
- People aged 65 years and over were most likely to be involved in flood related drowning incidents, accounting for 46% of all flood related deaths
- Over half (54%) of the drowning deaths involving flooding occurred in Queensland
- The use of non-aquatic transport, overwhelmingly cars, was the leading activity prior to drowning in flood waters, accounting for 46% of all drowning deaths
- All 13 victims were locals residing within 100kms of the location where they drowned

Royal Life Saving, in partnership with Griffith University, is undertaking a collaborative study looking at the reasons why people drive their vehicles through potentially dangerous flood water. In the 10 year period from 2002 to 2012, Royal Life Saving calculates that there have been over 130 drowning deaths as a result of flooding, and over half of these were due to cars being driven through flood waters.

Aided by funding from Royal Life Saving through the Inland Waterways Drowning Prevention Fund supported by the Australian Government, the collaborative study will interview 20 participants who have made the decision at some point to drive their vehicle through a deep stretch of flood water.

The results of the study will be used to positively influence public education and advocacy work undertaken by Royal Life Saving around drowning prevention during times of flood. It is also hoped to address a key area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy which aims to reduce drowning as a result of flooding and extreme weather.

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DROWNING DEATHS IN INLAND WATERWAYS

The number 55 is rendered in a large, bold, sans-serif font. It features a vertical gradient from light blue at the top to white at the bottom, with a soft drop shadow behind it.

DROWNING DEATHS AT BEACHES

The number 36 is rendered in a large, bold, sans-serif font. It features a vertical gradient from light blue at the top to white at the bottom, with a soft drop shadow behind it.

DROWNING DEATHS IN OCEAN/HARBOUR LOCATIONS

There were 99 drowning deaths in inland waterways (rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, dams and lagoons) in 2014/15. Of these, 72 deaths occurred in rivers, creeks or streams and 27 occurred in lakes, dams or lagoons.

The 99 drowning deaths in 2014/15 is a reduction of four drowning deaths (or 4%) on the 10 year average of 103 drowning deaths (Figure 10). Males accounted for 81% of all drowning deaths in inland waterways in 2014/15.

The 25-34 years age group recorded a significant reduction against the 10 year average, dropping 25% on the 10 year average of 16 drowning deaths. Many other age groups recorded increases against the 10 year average, most notably the 0-4 years age group which saw a 33% increase against the 10 year average of 6 drowning deaths (Figure 11).

When examining inland waterway drowning deaths by State and Territory, New South Wales and Western Australia both experienced increases against the 10 year average. New South Wales recorded an increase of 14% against the 10 year average of 37 drowning deaths, while Western Australia recorded an increase of 38% against the 10 year average of 8 drowning deaths (Figure 12).

Falls into water was the most common activity being undertaken prior to drowning in inland waterways in 2014/15, accounting for 19% of all drowning deaths. Accidents involving watercraft and unknown activities both recorded increases against the 10 year average of 19% and 35% respectively (Figure 13).

Inland waterways continue to be the leading locations for drowning in Australia. Through support from the Federal Government, Royal Life Saving, through the Inland Waterways Drowning Prevention Fund, is working to reduce these figures through community driven drowning prevention initiatives at Australia's river drowning black spots.

Drowning deaths in inland waterways record a 4% reduction against the 10 year average

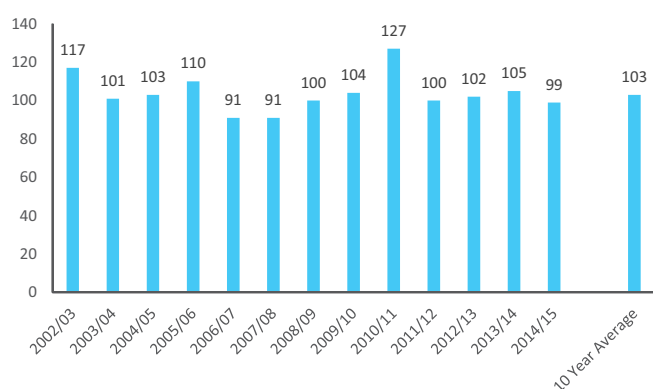


Figure 10: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Thirty percent increase in drowning in inland waterways in 65-74 years age group

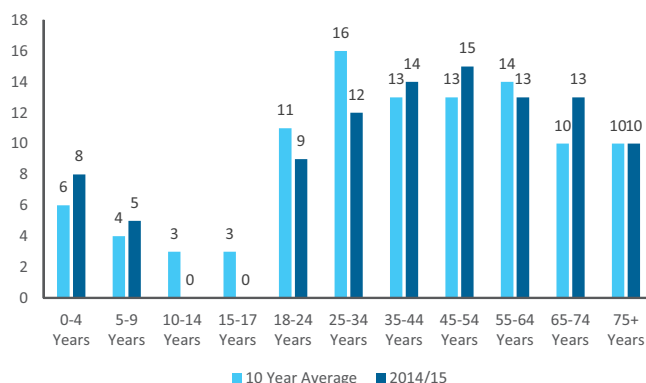


Figure 11: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

New South Wales and Western Australia the only States to experience increases against the 10 year average



Figure 12: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by State / Territory, 10 Year Average

Sharp increase in watercraft and unknown activities prior to drowning in inland waterways

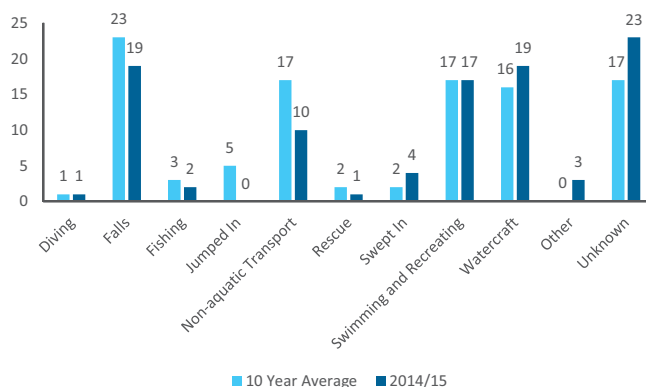


Figure 13: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

There were 55 drowning deaths at beaches in 2014/15. This figure is an increase of 15% against the 10 year average of 48 drowning deaths per annum. This figure is an increase of 62% on the previous year's low of 34 drowning deaths (Figure 14).

Males accounted for 81% of all drowning deaths at beaches. With respect to age group of beach drowning victims, there were sharp increases in the 45-54 years and 65-74 years age groups, at 67% and 133% respectively against the 10 year average (Figure 15).

Almost half (49%) of all drowning deaths at Australian beaches in 2014/15 occurred when the victim was Swimming and Recreating. Accidents involving watercraft accounted for a further one fifth (20%) of all beach drowning deaths. Activity prior to drowning was unknown in 13% of cases meaning almost one in seven beach drowning victims were recreating alone when they drowned (Figure 16).

New South Wales recorded the highest number of drowning deaths at beaches, accounting for 38% of all beach drowning deaths in 2014/15. This was followed by Queensland which recorded a 56% increase in beach drowning deaths against the 10 year average. Western Australia recorded the third highest number of beach drowning deaths, recording a 50% increase on the 10 year average (Figure 17).

Royal Life Saving continues to encourage people to swim at patrolled beaches during patrol times and between the red and yellow flags. Be aware of conditions and the limitations of your own skills and fitness. Given the spike in beach drowning deaths in the 65+ age group, it is important that older people are aware of any pre-existing medical conditions that may have an impact on their drowning risk.

Beach drowning deaths record an increase of 15% against the 10 year average

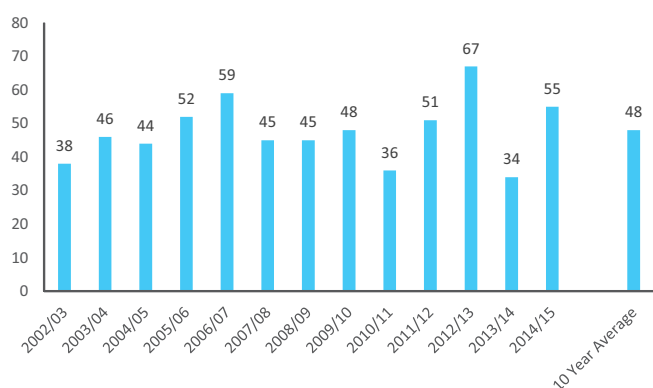


Figure 14: Beach Drowning Deaths 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Sharp increases against the 10 year average in 45-54 year olds and 65-74 year olds

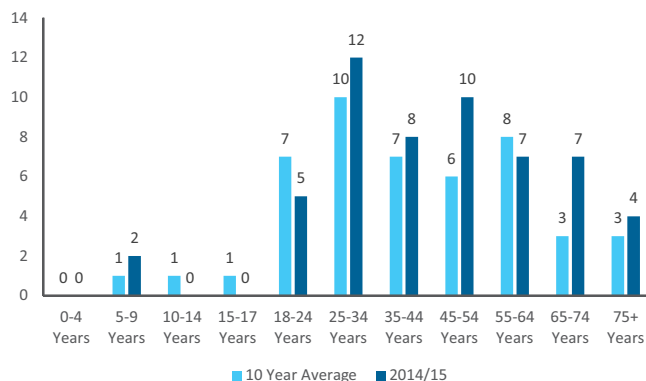


Figure 15: Beach Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

Swimming and Recreating accounts for almost half of all beach drowning deaths

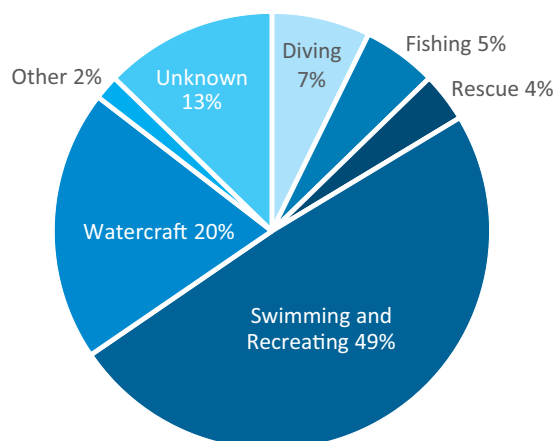


Figure 16: Beach Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 2014/15

Queensland and Western Australia the only States to record increases against the 10 year average

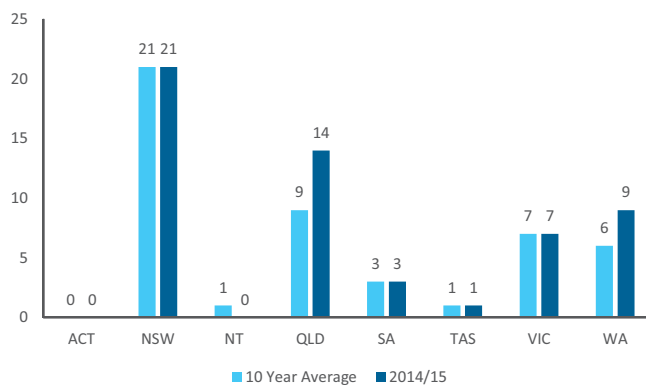


Figure 17: Beach Drowning Deaths by State / Territory, 10 Year Average, 2014/15



CASE STUDY: **BEACH DROWNING DEATHS AMONG 25 TO 44 YEAR OLD MALES**

With one third (33%) of all beach drowning deaths in 2014/15 occurring in males aged between 25 and 44 years of age, an in-depth analysis found:

- Almost two thirds (64%) of all drowning deaths in males at beaches due to watercraft incidents, occurred in the 25-44 years age group
- Just over one third (39%) of all drowning deaths as a result of swimming and recreating in males at beaches occurred in this age group
- Half of all beach drowning deaths known to involve alcohol occurred in victims in this age group
- 17% of cases in this age group were known to involve rip currents, 6% occurred outside patrol hours
- Over one third (39%) of all drowning deaths in 25-44 year old males at beaches occurred in the traditionally cooler months of Autumn and Winter
- All but one drowning death occurred between the hours of 6am and 6pm, with over half (56%) taking place in the afternoon hours of 12pm to 6pm
- Half of all drowning deaths as a result of rescues at beaches took place in this age group

Drowning prevention messages for this age group must focus on the risks of swimming at unpatrolled beaches. Several drowning deaths in this age group occurred as a result of people swimming in rip currents outside the flags or outside patrol hours. The safest place to swim at the beach is between the red and yellow flags.

LOCATION IN FOCUS: OCEAN / HARBOUR

There were 36 drowning deaths in ocean / harbour locations in Australia in 2014/15. This is a reduction of 23% on the 10 year average of 47 drowning deaths. Against the 32 deaths recorded in the previous year, the 2014/15 result is an increase of 13% (Figure 18). Males accounted for 89% of all drowning deaths in ocean / harbour locations.

The 45-54 years age group recorded the largest number of drowning deaths with 9 drowning deaths, or 25% of all ocean / harbour drowning deaths in 2014/15. The 75+ years age group was the only age group to record an increase in drowning deaths against the 10 year average, recording four drowning deaths, double that of the 10 year average (Figure 19).

Accidents involving watercraft was the leading activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning in ocean / harbour locations, accounting for 64% of all drowning deaths. Diving accidents, such as scuba diving, snorkelling and free diving, were the next most common activity being undertaken prior to drowning in ocean / harbour locations accounting for just over one quarter of all deaths (28%) (Figure 20).

With respect to the geographical location of the incident, South Australia and Victoria are the only two States to record increases against the 10 year average, recording increases of 25% and 14% respectively. Tasmania achieved a 75% reduction in ocean / harbour deaths in 2014/15, compared to the 10 year average (Figure 21).

Ensuring the safe use of watercraft will go a long way to reducing the number of drowning deaths that occur in ocean / harbour locations. Royal Life Saving urges people to ensure they always wear a lifejacket, carry safety equipment such as an EPIRB, avoid alcohol and check weather conditions before heading out.

Ocean / Harbour drowning deaths record a 23% reduction on the 10 year average

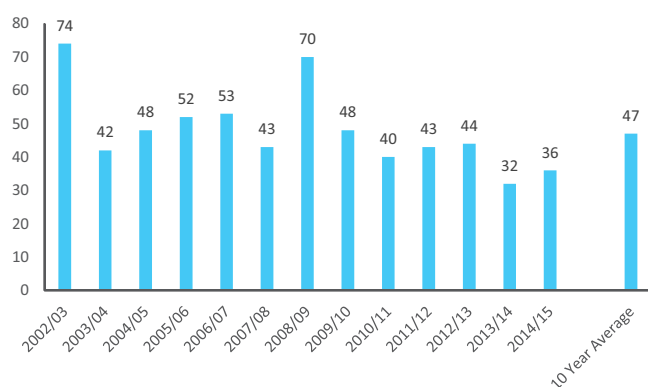


Figure 18: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths, 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

The 75+ years age group the only age group to record an increase against the 10 year average

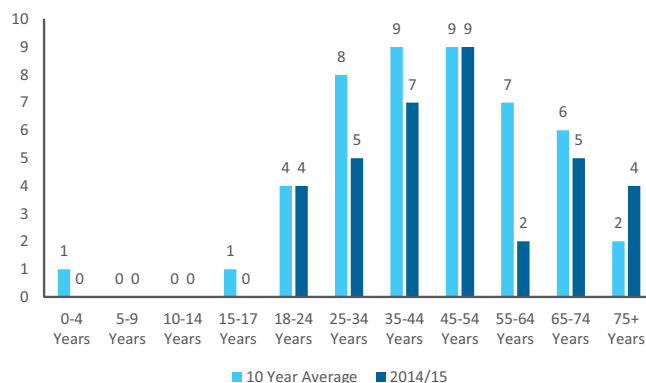


Figure 19: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

Accidents involving watercraft account for almost two thirds of all drowning deaths

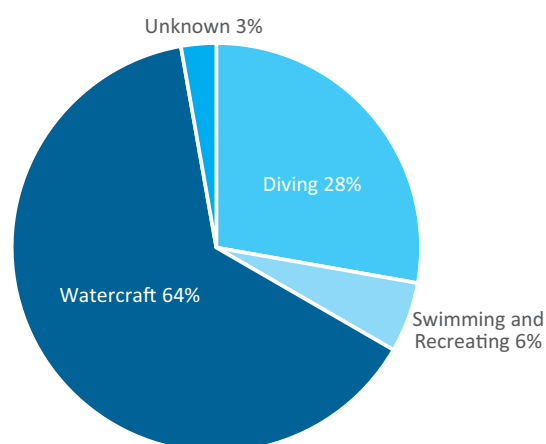


Figure 20: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 2014/15

South Australia and Victoria the only States to record increases against the 10 year average



Figure 21: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by State / Territory, 10 Year Average, 2014/15



CASE STUDY: **MULTIPLE FATALITY EVENTS**

There were seven multiple fatality events (MFEs) in 2014/15 that claimed the lives of 15 people. A detailed analysis of the MFEs in 2014/15 found that:

- Males accounted for 87% of drowning victims as a result of MFEs
- The largest number of drowning deaths occurred in the 35-44 years age group, accounting for 40% of all deaths as a result of MFEs
- New South Wales and Victoria each experienced five deaths as a result of MFEs
- 40% of drowning victims as a result of MFEs lost their lives in rivers, creeks and streams
- One third of all victims who drowned as a result of an MFE drowned in an ocean / harbour location
- Four victims lost their lives due to MFE events whilst rock fishing
- One third of all MFE drowning victims died as a result of watercraft accidents
- Two MFEs, that claimed the lives of five people, occurred due to flooding
- Over half (53%) of all people who drowned as a result of MFEs drowned in areas deemed major cities, with a further third occurring in inner regional areas

Multiple Fatality Events are incredibly tragic with far reaching effects on the victim's families, communities and rescue personnel. In order to reduce the number of MFEs every year, as well as reduce the number of lives lost, a number of drowning prevention strategies can be undertaken. These include ensuring lifejackets are worn when boating or rock fishing and to avoid driving, walking or wading through flood waters.

CHILDREN AGED 0-4 YEARS

There were 26 children between the ages of 0 and 4 years who drowned in Australia between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015. This is an increase of 6 drowning deaths (or 30%) on last year's total of 20 drowning deaths. It is however a reduction of 4 deaths (or 13%) on the 10 year average of 30 drowning deaths (Figure 22).

Males accounted for 58% of drowning deaths in children under five in 2014/15. Swimming pools were the leading location for drowning in this age group, accounting for over half (54%), almost three times that of the next most common location. The category of lake / dam / lagoon was the only location to record an increase against the 10 year average (Figure 23).

Falls into water accounted for the vast majority of drowning deaths in this age group (81%). This was followed by bathing which claimed the lives of three children in 2014/15.

Drowning deaths in children under five increase by 30% on last year

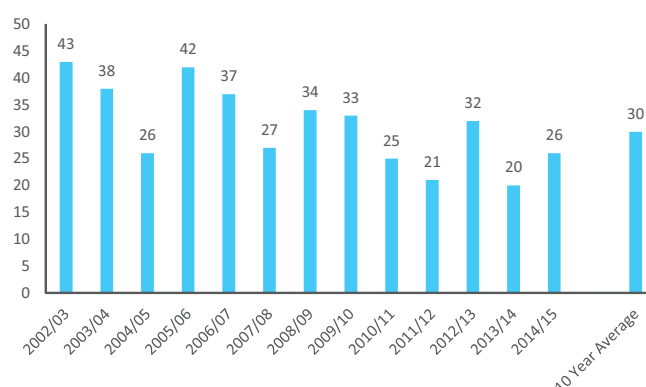


Figure 22: Drowning Deaths of Children 0-4 Years, 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Thirteen percent decrease in drowning deaths in Swimming Pools in 2014/15

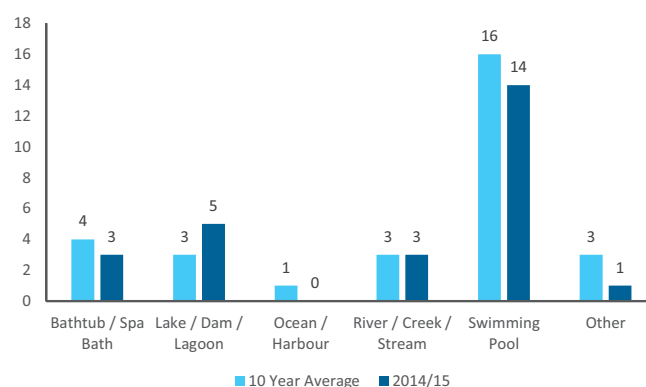


Figure 23: Drowning Deaths of Children 0-4 Years by Location, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

81%

OF DROWNINGS IN 0-4 YEAR OLDS OCCURRED DUE TO FALLS INTO WATER

CASE STUDY: ACTIVE SUPERVISION

Active adult supervision is essential in protecting your child from drowning. In all cases of drowning in children under five, supervision was either intermittent or lacking altogether. Active supervision means that a child is being constantly watched by an adult who is within arms' reach at all times. All of your attention should be on the child and you should never leave a child alone, or in the care of an older child, when they are in, on, or around the water.

The key elements of Active Supervision are:

Be Prepared, Be Within Arms' Reach, All of Your Attention, and All of the Time.

Supervision is one of four key strategies to prevent child drowning that are promoted by Royal Life Saving's Keep Watch program. The other actions are restricting access to water, water awareness and resuscitation.

For more information on the Keep Watch program please visit www.keepwatch.com.au

CHILDREN AGED 5-14 YEARS

There were nine drowning deaths of children aged 5 to 14 years in 2014/15. This year's result is the equal lowest on record since 2002/03, a result that was also achieved in 2012/13. Drowning deaths of children in this age group are also down by 40% against the 10 year average of 15 drowning deaths (Figure 24). Males accounted for 78% of all drowning deaths in this age group.

Inland waterways claimed the largest number of lives in this age group in 2014/15, accounting for 55% of all deaths. The proportion of children drowning in swimming pools differs greatly between the 0-4 years age group and the 5-14 years age group, with swimming pools accounting for 54% of drowning deaths in under-fives, compared to 11% in this age group (Figure 25).

Swimming and recreating was the activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning in over two thirds of all drowning cases in this age group (67%). This highlights the importance of a basic level of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge in this age group.

Drowning deaths in children aged 5-14 years reports a 40% reduction against the 10 year average

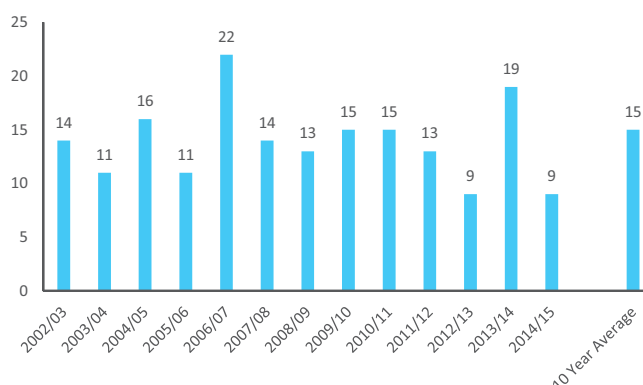


Figure 24: Drowning Deaths of Children 5-14 Years, 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Inland waterways account for 55% of all drowning deaths in 5-14 year olds

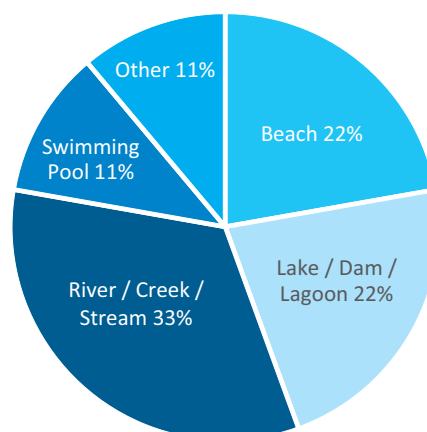


Figure 25: Drowning Deaths of Children 5-14 Years by Location, 2014/15

67%

OF DROWNINGS IN 5-14 YEAR OLDS OCCURRED WHILST SWIMMING & RECREATING

CASE STUDY: DROWNING DEATHS OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN DAMS

The 2014/15 National Drowning Report has seen an increase in the number of young children drowning in dams. Between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015, 6 children under the age of 7 drowned in dams. In all cases, adult supervision was intermittent or absent. For rural properties, or areas where it is not practical to fence the dam, consider installing a Child Safe Play Area.

For more information on Child Safe Play Areas or the Keep Watch @ The Farm program please visit www.royallifesaving.com.au

Some Child Safe Play Area Tips include:

- Ensure the area is securely fenced
- Ensure the fence and gate are regularly maintained
- Never prop the gate to the Child Safe Play Area open
- The Child Safe Play Area should be close to the home
- Children must be easily supervised when in the Child Safe Play Area
- The gate and fence must not be easily climbable
- The Child Safe Play Area should have a self-closing and self-latching gate
- There should be no gaps under or through the fence

There were 23 drowning deaths of young people aged 15 to 24 years in 2014/15. This is a 36% reduction against the 10 year average of 36 drowning deaths. This year's result is also a reduction of 43% on the 40 drowning deaths this age group recorded in 2013/14 (Figure 26). Males accounted for 83% of all drowning deaths in this age group.

Rivers, creeks and streams were the location with the largest number of drowning deaths in 2014/15, with 8 drowning deaths or 35% of all drowning deaths in this age group. Swimming pools achieved a 75% reduction in drowning deaths in this age group when compared to the 10 year average. Beaches and rivers, creeks and streams also recorded reductions of 38% and 33% respectively (Figure 27).

When analysing activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning in this age group, swimming and recreating is the category of activity that claims the largest number of lives (8 drowning deaths), followed by falls into water (4 deaths) and diving and accidents involving watercraft (3 deaths respectively) (Figure 28).

Drowning deaths in young people 15-24 years record a 36% reduction against the 10 year average

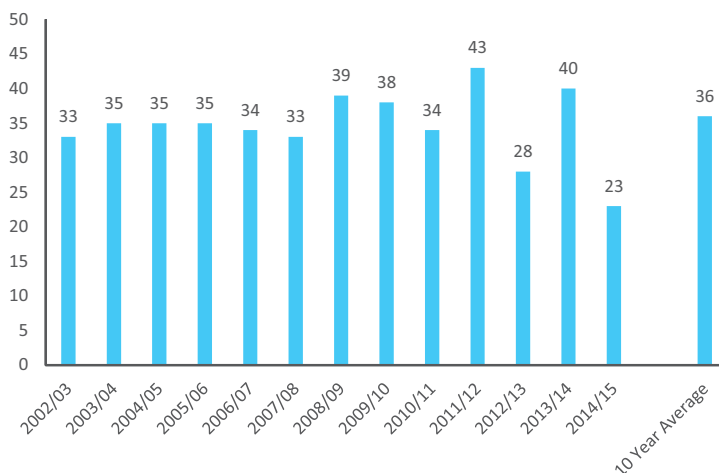


Figure 26: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years, 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Beaches record 38% reduction against 10 year average in 15-24 years age group

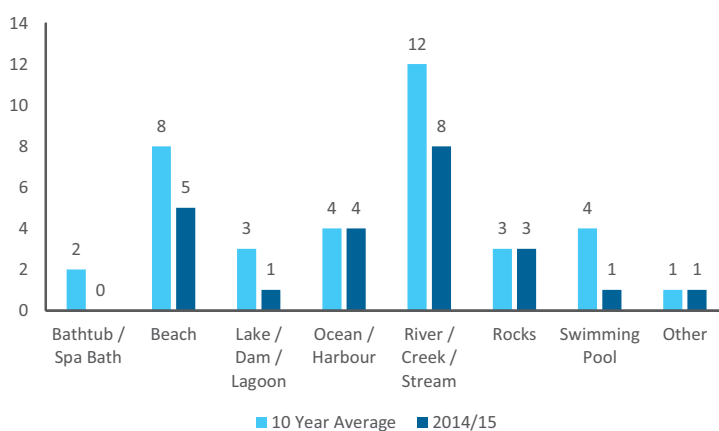


Figure 27: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by Location, 10 Year Average, 2014/15

With respect to the State or Territory where the drowning occurred, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) were the only locations to record increases against the 10 year average. The largest reductions occurred in New South Wales (6 deaths compared to the 10 year average of 13) and Queensland (7 deaths compared to the 10 year average of 11) (Figure 29).

“Whilst the relatively low number of drowning deaths in this age group this year is pleasing, Royal Life Saving cautions that achieving long term reductions in drowning in this age group remains an ongoing challenge.”

The burden of males drowning and combining the use of alcohol and illegal drugs with aquatic activity, particularly around our rivers, lakes and dams are ongoing challenges for those working in drowning prevention initiatives aimed at this age group.

Swimming and Recreating the leading activity prior to drowning in young people

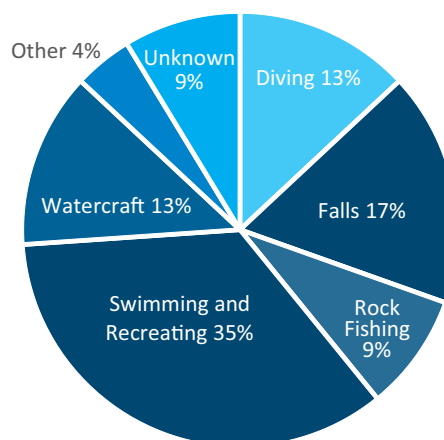


Figure 28: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by Activity Immediately Prior, 2014/15

South Australia and the ACT the only locations to record increases against the 10 year average

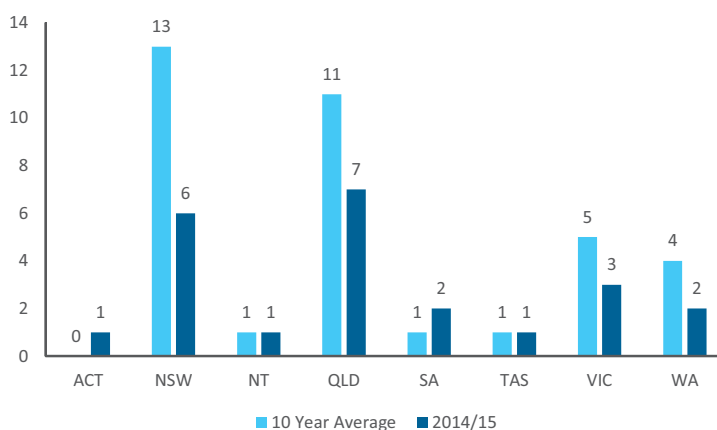
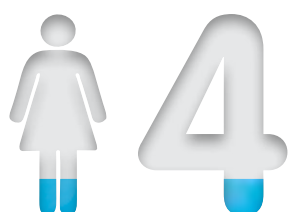


Figure 29: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by State / Territory, 10 Year Average, 2014/15



**FEMALES AGED
15-24 YEARS DROWNED**

There were 89 drowning deaths in people aged 55 years and over in Australian waterways between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015. This represents an increase of 2 deaths (or 2%) on the 2013/14 figure of 87 deaths. It represents a result that is on par with the 10 year average of 89 drowning deaths per year (Figure 30).

Rivers, creeks and streams continue to be the leading location for drowning in older people with 26 deaths or 29% of all drowning deaths in this age group. Beaches were the second leading location for drowning with 18 deaths (20%) followed by bathtubs / spa baths; and ocean / harbour locations with 11 deaths (12%) respectively (Figure 31).

Accidents involving watercraft claimed the largest number of lives in this age group, accounting for one fifth of all drowning. Swimming and recreating was the second most common activity prior to drowning in this age group accounting for the deaths of 15 people. A large number of people (17) were recreating alone when they drowned, meaning their activity was categorised as unknown as there were no witnesses to the activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning (Figure 32).

Drowning deaths in people aged 55 years and over remain level with the 10 year average

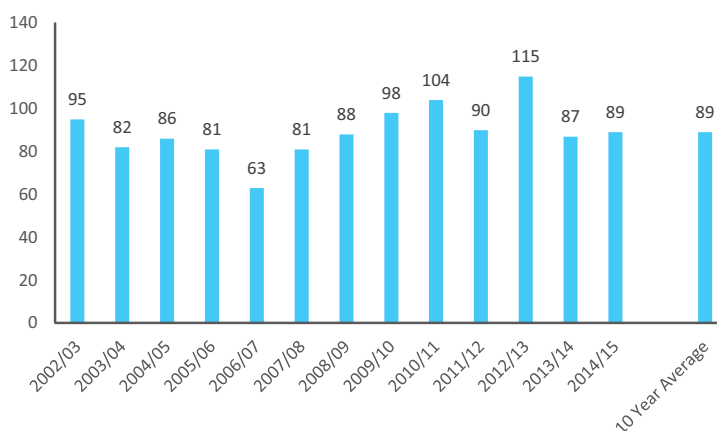


Figure 30: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years, 2002/03 to 2014/15, 10 Year Average

Rivers, creeks and streams the leading location for drowning in people aged 55 plus

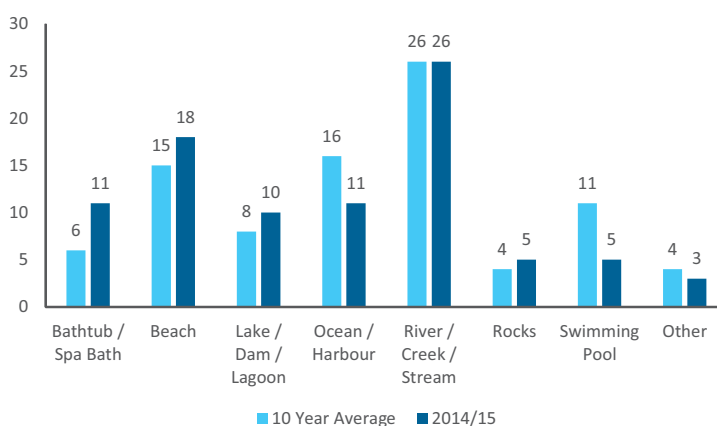


Figure 31: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by Location, 10 Year Average, 2014/15



MALES AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED

On a State and Territory basis, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia were the only States to record increases against the 10 year average in this age group. Queensland recorded a reduction against the 10 year average of 16%, with 16 drowning deaths in this age group in 2014/15 compared to the 10 year average of 19 drowning deaths (Figure 33).

“Older Australians are reminded of simple drowning prevention tips they can follow to reduce their risk of drowning. Being aware of changes in fitness and skills in older years can save lives, particularly if people haven’t regularly been in the water for a period of time.”

Older people are encouraged to test their skills and fitness in the controlled environment of a public swimming pool prior to recreating in open water. Participation in a Royal Life Saving Grey Medallion course or Adult Learn to Swim course are also great ways to ease back into aquatic activity.

Watercraft accidents the leading activity prior to drowning in people aged 55 years and over

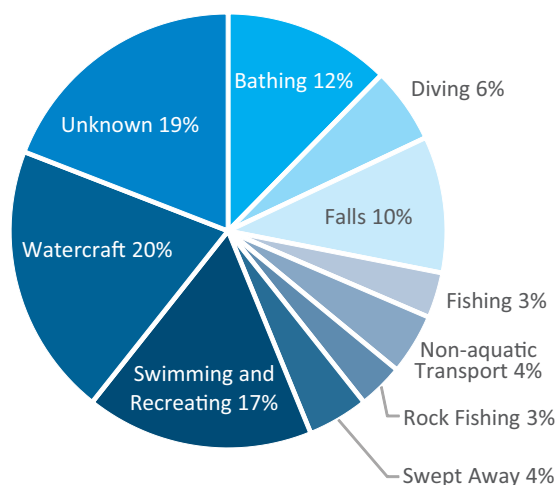


Figure 32: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by Activity Immediately Prior, 2014/15

New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia record increases against the 10 year average

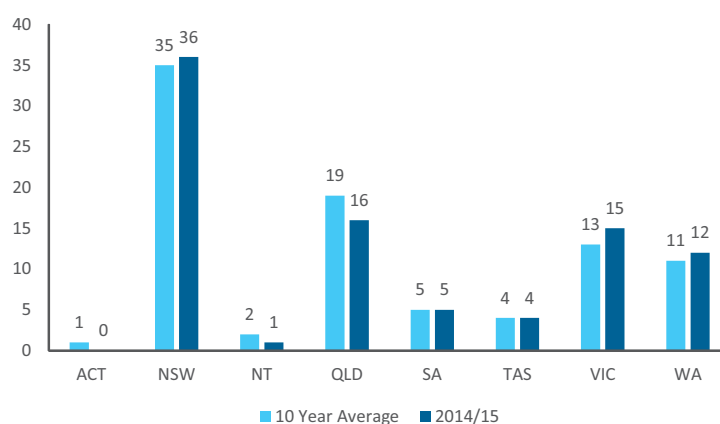


Figure 33: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by State / Territory, 10 Year Average, 2014/15



FEMALES AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED

CASE STUDY: **THE TALK – REDUCING DROWNING IN PEOPLE AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER**

People aged 55 years and over are at an increased risk of drowning due to a number of factors. In a bid to reduce the number of older people drowning each and every year in Australia, Royal Life Saving developed 'The Talk', a public awareness campaign aimed at highlighting the drowning risk in older people and communicating some simple drowning prevention tips.

1. Know Your Limitations

Some people get into trouble around water and don't have the physical fitness to get themselves out of it. Regularly keeping track of and knowing your fitness levels are crucial ways to prevent drowning.

2. Be Aware of Medical Conditions

Medical conditions (Including cardiac, dementia and seizures) and medications you are taking can affect your abilities in the water. It's important to be conscious of these conditions, before going near the water.

3. No Alcohol Around Water

Alcohol and water don't mix, particularly when other medications are also being consumed.

4. Wear a Lifejacket

Far too many drownings occur in people aged over 55 while boating or fishing. A large number of these drowning deaths could have been prevented if the boaters and fishers had worn a lifejacket. You wouldn't drive without a seatbelt, so why would you go out on the water without a lifejacket when boating or fishing.

5. Learn life saving skills

– Grey Medallion and CPR

Being empowered with the skills to handle a range of water emergencies is a great way to prevent drowning. Royal Life Saving have a number of programs for people over 55 to enjoy including the Grey Medallion and First Aid and CPR.

For more information visit
www.royallifesaving.com.au/thetalk





DROWNING RISK FACTORS

Risk factors that increase a person's chance of drowning can include age, gender, socio-economic status, presence of pre-existing medical conditions, skill level and agent factors such as the consumption of drugs and alcohol. The following are case studies investigating the frequency of several risk factors in the drowning deaths that occurred in 2014/15.

PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS

There were 51 people who drowned in 2014/15 who were known to have a pre-existing medical condition. This represents 19% of all drowning deaths in this year's National Drowning Report. Of these 86% were male and almost half (49%) were aged 55 years and over.

The most common conditions were cardiac conditions such as hypertension, ischaemic heart disease and coronary artery atherosclerosis, recorded in 61% of cases where a pre-existing medical condition was known to be present. Other commonly occurring underlying medical conditions included diabetes (6%), dementia (6%) and epilepsy (4%).

A pre-existing medical condition was deemed to have been contributory to the chain of events that led to the drowning in 71% of cases where a pre-existing medical condition was known to be present.

Royal Life Saving recommends that people aged 55 years and over undergo regular medical check-ups, as well as anyone participating in activities such as scuba diving. Children or adults with a history of epilepsy should always be supervised when in, on, or around the water.



**PEOPLE DROWNED
WHO HAD UNDERLYING
MEDICAL CONDITIONS**

VISITOR STATUS

In 69 cases (25% of all drowning deaths in 2014/15) the person who drowned was known to be a visitor to the location where they drowned. Of these, 39 people drowned within their own State or Territory in a postcode that was 100kms or further from their residential postcode. A further 15 people were visiting a different State or Territory when they drowned.

Fifteen people who drowned in 2014/15 were overseas tourists, predominately from Asian countries (47%) and European countries (27%). Overseas tourists in 2014/15 commonly drowned at the beach (40%) or ocean / harbour locations (33%). Common activities prior to drowning in overseas tourists were diving (40%) and swimming and recreating (33%).

Regardless of how far you live from the aquatic environment you recreate in, particularly with inland waterways, conditions can change regularly and without warning. Where possible you should check with a local resident regarding the conditions prior to entering the water. International tourists to Australia should ensure they take care when diving in the ocean, to always swim at patrolled beaches and to take care when recreating in and around our rivers, creeks and streams.

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

There were 38 people who drowned who were known to have recorded positive readings for alcohol in their bloodstream at the time of drowning. Almost all (83%) recorded a blood alcohol reading that was equal to or greater than the legal limit for operating watercraft and vehicles in most States and Territories (0.05mg/L). Of those, 26% recorded a blood alcohol content reading that was four times the legal limit (0.2mg/L) or higher.

There were 31 people who drowned who were known to have some kind of drug in their system when they drowned. In over one quarter (26%) of cases, the drugs consumed were known to be illegal or an abuse of legal drugs. Commonly occurring illegal drugs were methamphetamine (63% of all victims who drowned as a result of illegal drugs) and Cannabis (38%).

The ingestion of illegal drugs and/or alcohol prior to undertaking aquatic activity is known to increase the risk of drowning as they can impair judgement, slow reaction times, impair coordination and can result in greater risk taking behaviour. Some medications may also increase the risk of drowning as they may make people unsteady on their feet or slow reaction times. Mixing prescription medication with alcohol can also increase a person's risk of drowning. Royal Life Saving strongly urges people to refrain from consuming alcohol or taking illicit drugs and to consider the possible side effects of prescription medication when interacting with water.



**PEOPLE DROWNED WHO
WERE VISITORS TO THE
INCIDENT LOCATION**



**PEOPLE DROWNED WHO
RECORDED POSITIVE
READINGS FOR ALCOHOL**



CASE STUDY: **DROWNING DEATHS BY REMOTENESS**

By collecting data on the postcode of the drowning incident location, it is possible to determine the remoteness classification of the location of the drowning incident. Sixty six percent of drowning deaths in 2014/15 took place in areas deemed to be Major Cities or Inner Regional (Figure 34).

Just over one third (33%) of all drowning deaths in Major Cities and Inner Regional areas occurred in inland waterways (rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, dams and lagoons). This was followed by beaches (21%). Inland waterways accounted for almost half of all drowning deaths in areas deemed Outer Regional, accounting for 42% of all deaths in this remoteness classification. Drowning deaths in Outer Regional areas commonly occurred as a result of watercraft accidents (31%) and swimming and recreating (17%).

Ten percent of all drowning deaths in 2014/15 occurred in areas deemed Remote or Very Remote. Drowning deaths in these locations commonly took place in inland waterways (33%) and beaches (30%). Drowning deaths in Remote and Very Remote locations occurred predominately as a result of swimming and recreating (30%) and accidents involving watercraft (22%).

Access to timely medical assistance in Remote and Very Remote areas is made all the more difficult due to isolation from major services. Therefore promoting an increased awareness of the risk of undertaking aquatic recreation alone in isolated areas, and the importance of first aid and CPR skills for first responders is extremely important for reducing drowning deaths in these locations.

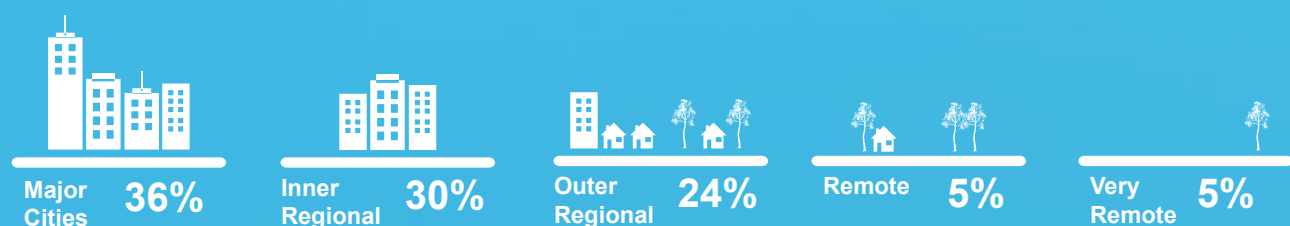


Figure 34: Drowning Deaths by Remoteness Classification of Incident Postcode, 2014/15

METHODS

Information presented in the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2015 has been collated from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS), State and Territory Coronial offices and year round media monitoring. Cases are collated in partnership with Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations and analysed by Royal Life Saving Society – Australia.

Royal Life Saving uses a media monitoring service (both broadcast and print) all year round to identify drowning deaths reported in the media. This information is then corroborated with information from the NCIS, police reports and Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs) before being included in the National Drowning Report.

All care is taken to ensure that the information in this report is as accurate as possible. However, these figures should be considered interim until the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) releases its 'causes of death' figures for 2014 and 2015. Figures may change depending upon the ongoing coronial investigations and findings as 69% of cases were still under investigation (i.e. open) at the time of the production of this report.

This report contains information on 2014/15 drowning deaths known as of 17th August 2015. All other data is correct as of 1 July 2015, in accordance with Royal Life Saving's ongoing data quality assurance policy. All cases in the Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database are checked against the NCIS on a regular basis and figures are updated in annual National Drowning Reports as cases close. The 10 year averages in this report were calculated from drowning death data from 2004/05 to 2013/14 inclusive.

Drowning rates per 100,000 people are calculated using population data from the ABS publication 'Australian Demographic Statistics' (Cat 3101.0). Percentages and averages are presented as whole numbers and have been rounded up or down accordingly.

Exclusions from this report include: drowning deaths as a result of suicide or homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attacks, or hypothermia. All information presented is about drowning deaths or deaths where drowning is known to be a factor (e.g. a car rolled into the water and a person drowned).

The category of 'Non-aquatic Transport' related to drowning deaths involving means of transport not primarily designed or intended for aquatic use such as cars, motorbikes, bicycles and aeroplanes among others. Means of transport primarily used for aquatic purposes are captured in the 'Watercraft' category (e.g. boats, jet skis, canoes, kayaks etc).

The category of 'Swimming Pool' includes home swimming pools, public swimming pools, hotel and motel pools and portable swimming pools among others.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Royal Life Saving would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2015:

- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- The National Coronial Information System (NCIS)
- The Queensland Family and Child Commission
- Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)
- Barbara Brighton (SLSA)
- Leanne Daking (NCIS)
- Stephanie Muller (QLD Family and Child Commission)
- Rick Carter (Jimmy Too Design)

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This report was compiled and written by Amy Peden, National Manager – Research and Policy, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia.

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ABOUT ROYAL LIFE SAVING AND THE NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT

Every year, Royal Life Saving produces a National Drowning Report. This report examines the factors that contribute to drowning deaths in Australia by examining who, where, when and how people have drowned in Australian waterways during the previous year.

The Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report for 2015 marks the 21st report Royal Life Saving has produced. Since the first report in 1995, we have seen the number of drowning deaths in Australia reduce from a high of 342 to a record low of 266 achieved in 2014.

Huge achievements have been made in child drowning prevention with 68 children under five drowning in 1995 compared to 26 drowning deaths this year. However, since the first National Drowning Report in 1995, we have consistently seen high numbers of drowning deaths in males and in rivers, creeks and streams.

Reducing the number of drownings in Australian inland waterways and addressing the high number of preventable drownings in men are key concerns over the next 20 years where action is urgently needed.



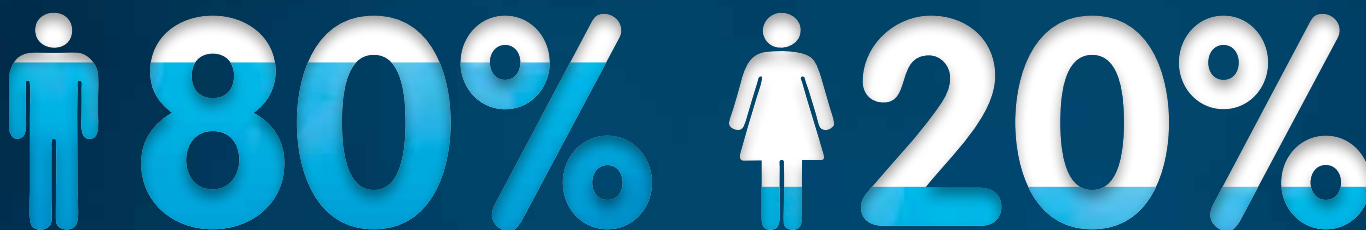
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**PEOPLE DROWNED IN
AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS**
1 JULY 2014 TO 30 JUNE 2015



TOP 3 DROWNING LOCATIONS

1. RIVER/CREEK/STREAM
2. BEACHES
3. OCEAN / HARBOUR



TOP 3 ACTIVITIES



23%
SWIMMING &
RECREATING



20%
WATERCRAFT
INCIDENTS



16%
FALLS INTO
WATER

HELP MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY FREE FROM DROWNING



**WEAR A
LIFEJACKET**



**SUPERVISE
CHILDREN**



**LEARN CPR
AND FIRST AID**



**NO ALCOHOL
AROUND WATER**



**LEARN
LIFESAVING SKILLS**

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#RLSDrowningReport2015

