



AUSTRALIAN WATER SAFETY STRATEGY 2030

Towards a nation free from drowning

MIDPOINT UPDATE



**Australian
Water Safety
Council**

The Australian Water Safety Council (AWSC) is deeply committed to drowning prevention in Australia and is a collective voice for Australia's leading water safety organisations.

The Council acts as a consultative forum comprising leading water safety organisations and focuses on the presentation of key water safety issues to governments, industry and the community.

The Australian Water Safety Council is committed to improving water safety in Australia as demonstrated through the production and implementation of five National Water Safety Plans/Strategies. These documents have generated bipartisan support for water safety in Australia and resulted in improved water safety throughout the country.

The Australian Water Safety Council member bodies continue to demonstrate their commitment to water safety by directing resources of their respective organisations towards the development and implementation of the Australian Water Safety Strategy.

Members

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia (RLSSA)
Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)
Australasian Council for the Teaching of Swimming and Water Safety (AUSTSWIM)
Australian Leisure Facilities Association (ALFA)
Australian National Sports Fishing Association (ANSFA)
Australia New Zealand Safe Boating Education Group (ANZSBEG)
Australian Swimming Coaches & Teachers Association (ASCTA)
Australasian Diving Safety Foundation (ADSF)
Farmsafe Australia
Surfing Australia
Swimming Australia
The Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia (Kidsafe)
Government Observers: Department of Health and Bureau of Meteorology

Contact

Justin Scarr
Convenor, Australian Water Safety Council
C/- Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
PO Box 558, Broadway NSW 2007
Phone: (02) 8217 3111 Fax: (02) 8217 3199
watersafety.com.au

© AWSC 2025 ISBN: 978-0-909689-01-8
Suggested Citation: Australian Water Safety Council (2025) Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 - Midpoint Update. Australian Water Safety Council, Sydney.
<https://doi.org/10.62977/230111>

Spending time in and by the water is synonymous with the classic Australian weekend. For visitors, it's synonymous with the classic Australian holiday.

Whether it be by swimming, fishing, scuba diving or white-water rafting, being in or by water defines recreation in Australia.

What is becoming less synonymous with our love for the water is a safety-first approach to enjoying a great Australian pastime.

In 2021, the Australian Water Safety Council set a goal of halving drowning deaths by the end of the decade.

It was a bold, aspirational target and we must all do more to reach it.

In 2024-25, across Australia, we saw a 27 per cent increase in drowning deaths.

Increases in drowning are attributable to three factors:

- a decline in swimming skills, especially in multicultural, regional and disadvantaged communities
- a desire to explore new and less crowded places to enjoy the water, with Australians venturing further into national parks and regional areas
- an ageing population, with more than a third of drowning deaths now occurring in people over 65 years of age.

Clearly, it's more important than ever to make water safety a priority.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) highlights three national imperatives to reverse the record drowning in our country:

- Strengthening the swimming abilities of all Australians and renewing our focus on water safety.
- Localising water safety efforts through empowered grassroots initiatives.
- Aligning policies and partnerships, at all levels of government, and across all sectors, whether it be education, tourism or health.

This updated Australian Water Safety Strategy will strengthen our collective resolve and renew our focus.

Australia is an island nation. Deeply rooted within us is our love of, and connection to, our seas, rivers and waterways. It's part of our culture, and our lifestyle. We are blessed with the most stunning beaches and waterways on the planet.

Let's enjoy them safely.

Let's enrol our kids — and ourselves if we need to — in swimming and water safety programs. Let's call out risky behaviour, understand and respect local knowledge and conditions, refresh our lifesaving skills, and work together to ensure no-one misses out on water safety education.

I welcome the updated Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, and thank the Council for their tireless work toward a safer future in and around water.

The Hon Anika Wells MP
Minister for Communications
Minister for Sport

Australia's connection to water is deep and enduring. From our vast coastline and inland rivers to backyard pools and community swimming pools, water plays an extraordinary role in shaping who we are.

Yet each year, drowning causes heartbreak in families and communities across the country. For every drowning death, many people are left with lifelong health consequences of non-fatal drowning incident.

While our drowning rates are low in a global context and our prevention efforts are world-leading, the years since the pandemic show an alarming increase.

These increases, combined with population growth, changing recreational patterns and the impacts of a harsher, hotter and more volatile climate, mean that we must renew our focus.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy has been central to our efforts to eliminate drowning since 1998. This edition represents a mid-term update to the 2030 Strategy.

With each new iteration, we bring fresh science, policy and evidence-informed practice to co-develop priorities with the diverse range of groups who share our commitment to ensuring all Australian's, irrespective of background or postcode have the skills, resilience and systems to stay safe around the water.

The process has been as exhaustive, as the drowning challenge is pressing.

Perhaps the most important change, is the introduction of three national imperatives to guide the next phase of action.

The national imperatives are:

- swimming and water safety skills for all
- localising water safety efforts, and
- aligning policies and partnerships for change.

The Australian Water Safety Council, and the many who have contributed to this Strategy, remain deeply committed to working together realise the aspiration implicit in a 50% reduction in drowning by 2030.

I express my gratitude to the Australian Government, and Governments across the country for long-term support for the Australian Water Safety Strategy.

I thank all who contributed to this Strategy, especially the project manager, Dr Will Koon, the teams at Royal Life Saving Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia for convening workshops, and everyone who engaged so fully in the process to refine our priorities.

Together, we can continue to reduce drowning and ensure that our national and community connection to water remains deep, enduring and free of drowning.

Dr Justin Scarr

Convenor

Australian Water Safety Council

Background

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

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

Scope of the Strategy

This document sets the national direction for drowning prevention and water safety. It is a strategic framework, not an operational plan. It outlines shared priorities and guiding principles rather than prescribing specific programs, funding models, or delivery roles. Implementation of the AWSS 2030 is determined by partners at national, state, and local levels, ensuring flexibility to adapt actions to context while maintaining alignment with this shared strategy.

Commitment to research and evidence

The AWSS 2030 is grounded in an evidence-informed, collaborative approach that prioritises learning and continuous evaluation of our efforts. The Strategy and stakeholders who support its objectives recognise the crucial role that data and research have in guiding action, assessing impact, and informing decisions.

Midpoint of the AWSS 2030

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

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

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

Convening the sector

In 2023, 2024, and 2025, experts convened across the country in a series of high-level workshops and meetings focused on specific parts of the AWSS 2030. Some workshops were held in-person over multiple days, others online for a few hours, and others were embedded into existing forums. A full list of AWSS Midpoint convenings is available on [page 28](#) of this document, and selected outputs including workshop statements are available [here](#).

A key objective of these convenings was to assess the AWSS 2030 Key Activities and Focus Areas with forward-looking emphasis on defining what is needed most to meet the Strategy's target of reducing drowning by 50%. Insights from these meetings, supported by current research and additional targeted consultation resulted in some updates to the Strategy's framing and direction. These changes were presented for consultation with over 200 experts from across Australia at the July 2025 National Water Safety Summit, and then released publicly with an open call for comment and additional feedback. The views and comments shared throughout this process have been carefully synthesised and are reflected throughout this updated version of the Strategy.

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

SUMMARY OF MIDPOINT ADJUSTMENTS

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

National Imperatives

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

Streamlined Priority Areas

- The 'Risk Taking' Priority Area has been removed from the AWSS wheel, with these focus areas incorporated in other parts of the Strategy.

Refined Focus Areas

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

Three things that matter most

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

Evaluating progress towards a 50% reduction

AWSS 2030 committed to an aspirational target of halving the unintentional fatal drowning rate by 2030, compared to a baseline average drowning rate from the three years prior to the Strategy’s publication (2017/18 to 2019/20). As annual drowning numbers fluctuate each year due to many factors, emphasis is on identifying long-term trends over short-term spikes and drops.

Progress at the midpoint of the Strategy is assessed by comparing fatal drowning rates per 100,000 persons to the target rates required to reach a 50% reduction by June 2030, shown visually below and on each Focus Area page. For timely and clear interpretation of how we are tracking towards the 2030 target, average rates from the most recent three years (2022/23 - 2024/25) have been classified into the following groups:

Green	Rates decreasing on track The most recent three-year average is at or below the target needed to meet a 50% reduction by June 2030.
Orange	Rates decreasing, but not fast enough The most recent three-year average is below the baseline, but still higher than the target needed to meet a 50% reduction by June 2030.
Red	Rates increasing, urgent attention is required The most recent three-year average is higher than the baseline, significant reversal of recent trends will be required to achieve a 50% reduction by June 2030.

Additional information with pre-AWSS 2030 historical drowning rates, and progress towards a 50% reduction from baseline by June 2030 is available on page 27.

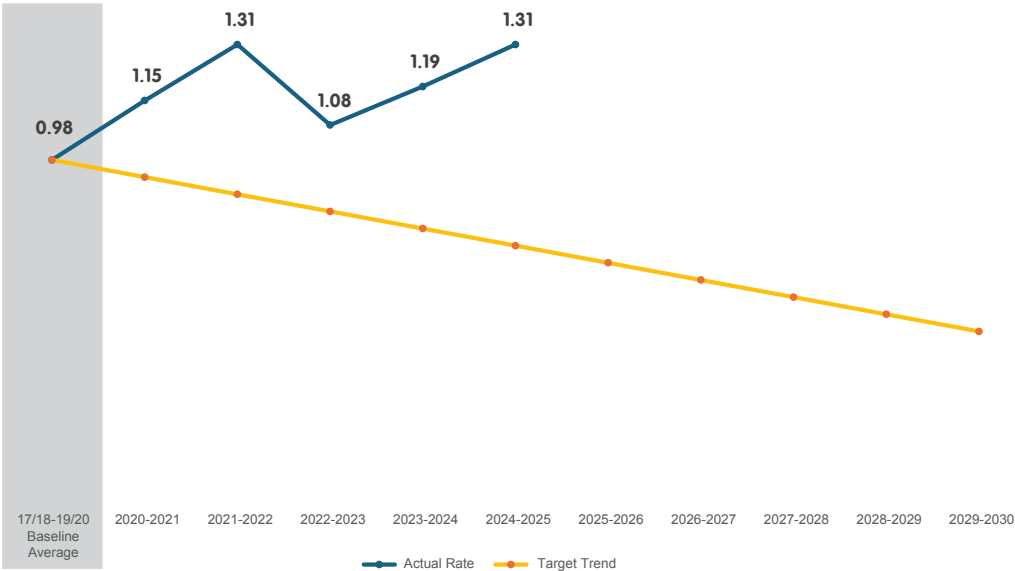
MIDPOINT METRICS

Overall drowning rates are increasing, urgent attention required

318
Average deaths per year for most recent three years (22/23-24/25), compared to AWSS 2030 Baseline average of **244** deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

1.19 per 100,000
Average fatal drowning rate for most recent three years (22/23-24/25), compared to AWSS 2030 Baseline average of **0.98 per 100,000** (17/18-19/20)

Comparing fatal drowning rates per 100,000 population from the first five years of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 to the target trend required for a 50% reduction by 2030.





NATIONAL IMPERATIVES: HIGHLIGHTING THE URGENT NEED FOR ACTION

NATIONAL IMPERATIVES: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

Swimming and water safety skills for all

Strengthen government programs
Ensure no one misses out
Retention beyond age 7
Infrastructure and workforce

Localising water safety efforts

Empower local action
Bring together groups
Create coalitions
Develop plans

Aligning policies and partnership for change

Whole of government approaches
Whole of society approaches
Scaled resources for impact
Generate and celebrate success

FOCUS AREAS: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

PEOPLE

Children (0-4 years)

Pool fencing legislation
Parent and caregiver education
Interventions for two-year-olds

Young males (15-29 years)

High-school programs
Peer-driven messages
Segmented strategies

Older people (65+ years)

Partnering into the healthy ageing agenda
Engagement for lifelong aquatic activity
Strategies for managing medical conditions

PLACES

Beaches

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

Rivers and lakes

Inland waterway systems-level prevention
Land manager leadership
Disaster resilience

Aquatic facilities

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

POPULATIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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

Multicultural communities

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

Regional and remote communities

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

ACTIVITIES

Boating and watercraft

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

Rock fishing

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

Diving and snorkelling

Safety systems and standards
Education for tourists and occasional participants
Address risk among vulnerable groups

Why National Imperatives?

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

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

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



NATIONAL IMPERATIVE: **SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY SKILLS FOR ALL**

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

Supporting government programs

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

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

Ensuring no one misses out

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

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

Increase retention beyond age seven

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

- Promote the importance of kids achieving national benchmarks.
- Support pathways for youth to progress from learn to swim to aquatic sport and recreation activities.
- Boost swimming and lifesaving programs for teenagers.

Solving the infrastructure and workforce crises

Improve access to aquatic facilities and strengthen workforce development.

- Establish pool infrastructure planning and investment programs with dedicated funding, with support for low-resource communities.
- Increase access to, and strengthen accreditation and professional development systems for instructors.
- Develop and maintain national frameworks for workforce development and pool infrastructure provisioning.

NATIONAL IMPERATIVE: LOCALISING WATER SAFETY EFFORTS

Why is this a National Imperative?

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

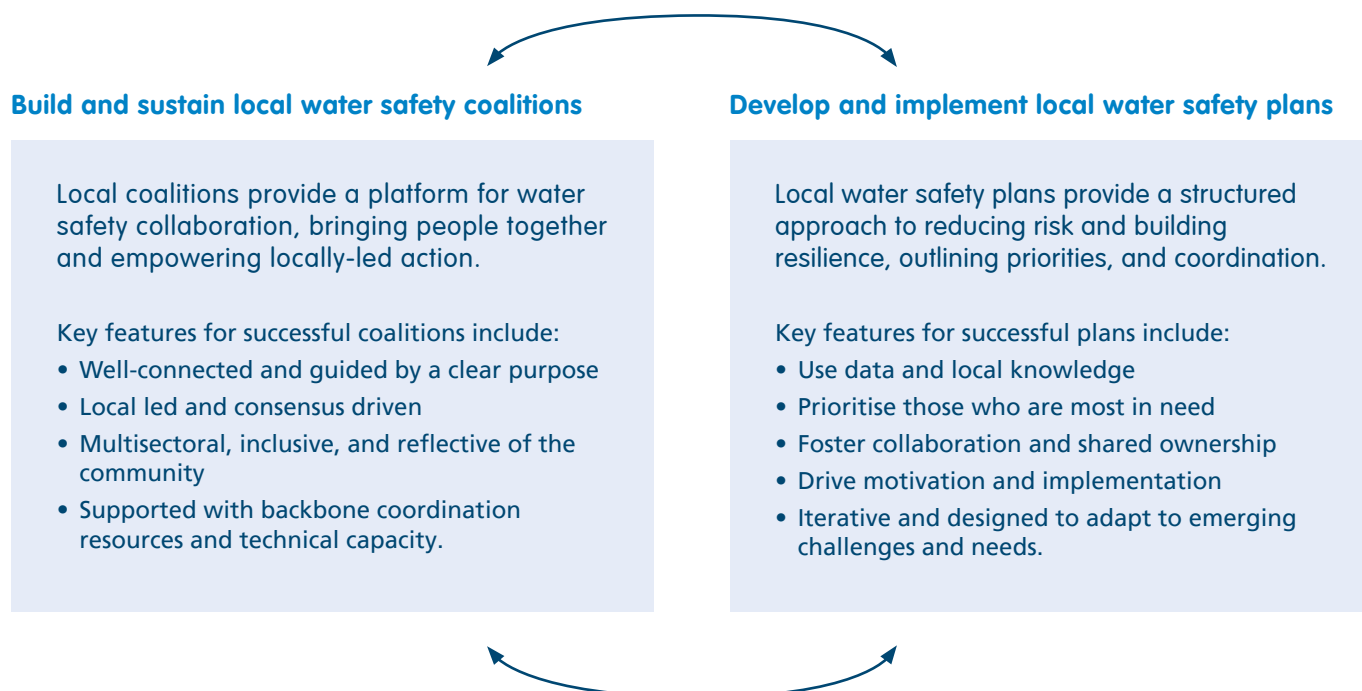
While not everywhere across Australia is equally affected by drowning, every community can and must strengthen efforts to instil a robust water safety culture that responds to and addresses local needs and conditions. Context is critical, and those with local knowledge are best placed to lead. A deep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

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

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

The things that matter most for local water safety efforts

Two interlinked foundations are essential to sustainable local water safety efforts: a strong coalition of partners and a clear, evidence-informed plan for action. Often, developing a local plan provides the convening power and purpose for a coalition. Together, these elements enable communities to understand their unique hazards and vulnerabilities, coordinate action across sectors, and act collectively to prevent drowning. A national approach to local action ensures that each community can learn from what works in other settings, adapting to its specific context rather than having to reinvent systems or start from scratch.



Why is this a National Imperative?

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

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

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

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

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

Strategic alignment across government(s)

Federal, state, and local governments must align around shared goals, clear responsibilities, and consistent support. Strengthen a system that recognises the importance of local government across all areas of the AWSS 2030.

Key actions include:

- Embedding drowning prevention into national, state, and local planning, public health, and emergency response agendas.
- Equipping local government and land managers with the resources to lead and respond to local needs.
- Fostering intergovernmental collaboration that maximises the benefits of an integrated, cohesive whole of government approaches.

Scaled resources for impact

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

Key actions include:

- Strengthening alignment between all stakeholders and the National Imperatives and Focus Areas of the AWSS 2030.
- Establishing funding mechanisms that reward collaboration, alignment, accountability, and reach into affected communities.
- Generate and celebrate sustained delivery, monitoring, and adaptation of evidence-informed interventions.

Priority and Focus Areas at the Midpoint of the AWSS 2030

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

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

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

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

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS: Children (0-4 years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

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

Research shows that there are eight non-fatal drowning incidents for every death among children aged 0-4 years, the highest fatal to non-fatal drowning ratio of any age group.

Toddlers are curious and increasingly mobile but lack an understanding of water-related hazards, increasing their vulnerability to drowning around the home, particularly in backyard swimming pools and in dams on rural properties. Parent and carer supervision is considered critical to preventing drowning, so educating each new generation is a high priority. Barriers to water (e.g., pool fencing) are a well-accepted and effective approach. Preventing drowning in children aged 0-4 years is a priority because high rates of young children drowning persist, with lives continuing to be cut short at the very beginning, despite clear and effective prevention measures.

Midpoint Metrics

14

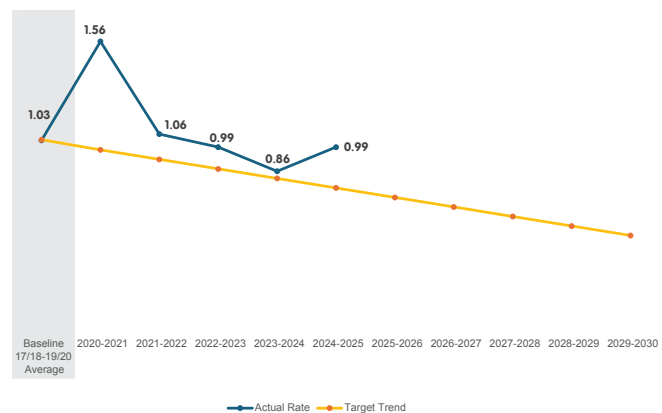
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
16 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.95 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
1.03 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Pool fencing legislation

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

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

Parent and caregiver education

Coordinate education and campaigns for parents and caregivers, including grandparents and siblings, of young children, specifically on the importance of restricting access to water, active supervision of children while around water, and learning lifesaving skills, including:

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

Interventions for two-year-olds

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

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS: Young males (15-29 years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

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

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

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

Midpoint Metrics

46

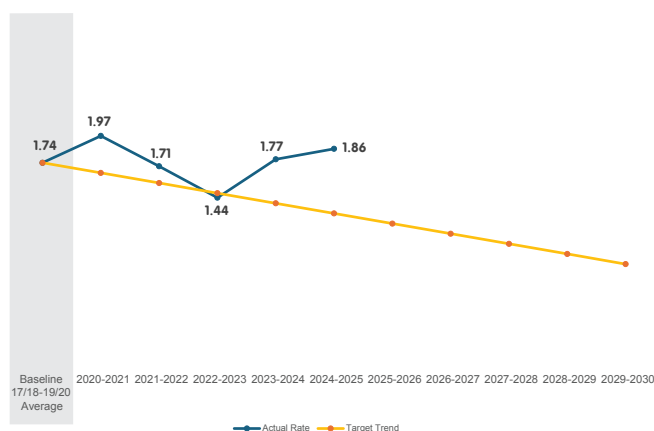
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
45 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

1.69 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
1.74 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

High-school programs

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

- Supporting teachers to deliver age-appropriate water safety education and programs
- Delivering peer-led education
- Addressing alcohol use, risk perception, and consequences of risk-taking behaviour
- Teaching practical strategies to navigate peer pressure and avoid harm.

Peer-driven messages

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

Segmented strategies

Tailor prevention efforts within the 15–29 age group by focusing on those connected by lifestyle, location, culture, or lived experience. Strategies should take into account how demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors shape identity, and focus on people with limited access to safe swimming spaces and water-safety education.

PRIORITY AREA: PEOPLE

FOCUS: Older people (65+ years)

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PEOPLE

Why is this an area of focus?

Australia has an ageing population, with older people living longer and healthier lives than those of previous generations. The low impact nature of aquatic activity makes it an ideal form of physical activity and recreation for older people. However, reduced physical ability, pre-existing medical conditions, alcohol consumption, and the tendency to participate in aquatic activities alone contribute to the drowning risk in this demographic. Reducing drowning among older people is a complex issue, and drowning rates have increased in recent years.

At the same time, many older Australians are enthusiastic aquatic participants, volunteers, and instructors in swimming and lifesaving programs who contribute experience and leadership to their communities. Ensuring older adults have safe age- and skill-appropriate aquatic opportunities will ensure continued fun, fitness, community, and recreation in and around the water.

Preventing drowning in older people (65+ years) is a priority because Australians are remaining more active into their later years and are well placed to realise the health and social benefits of aquatic activities later in life.

Midpoint Metrics

95

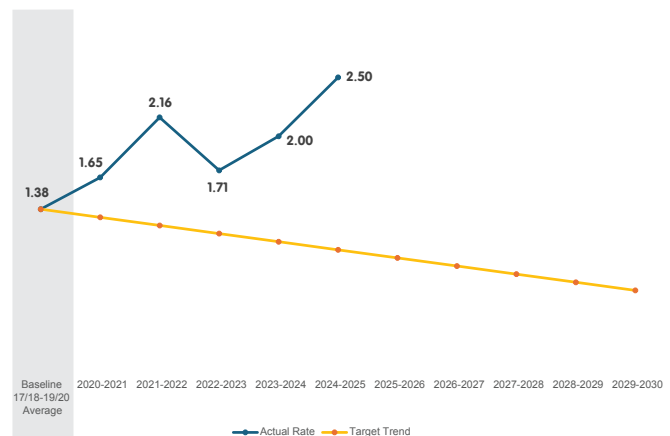
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
54 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

2.07 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
1.38 per 100,000 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Partnering into the healthy ageing agenda

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

Engagement for lifelong aquatic activity

Encourage ongoing participation in aquatic activities in later life stages by promoting safe, supervised opportunities that increase or maintain aquatic familiarity and competence. Support active aquatic lifestyles with thoughtful campaigns and educational initiatives that raise awareness of drowning risks specific to older people, while promoting the benefits of aquatic activity for physical, social, and mental well-being.

Strategies for managing medical conditions

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

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

FOCUS: Beaches

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PLACES

Why is this an area of focus?

Beaches are central to Australia's national identity and lifestyle with nearly 12,000 beaches spanning the coastline. Millions of Australians and international tourists visit beaches each year, and 87% of the population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast. Yet with this popularity comes risk. Beaches are dynamic places where often, people do not recognise or underestimate the associated risks and hazards, exposing themselves and others to dangers unnecessarily. While Australia's lifesaving services are world leading, they are concentrated: only 6% of beaches are patrolled during peak season, and just 1% year-round. This leaves vast stretches of coastline without formal supervision, making safety management complex and site-specific. In addition to drowning, coastal environments also record high numbers of non-drowning fatalities, including medical incidents, traumatic injuries, and wildlife interactions, further underscoring the need for a coordinated and consistent national focus on beach safety.

Midpoint Metrics

80

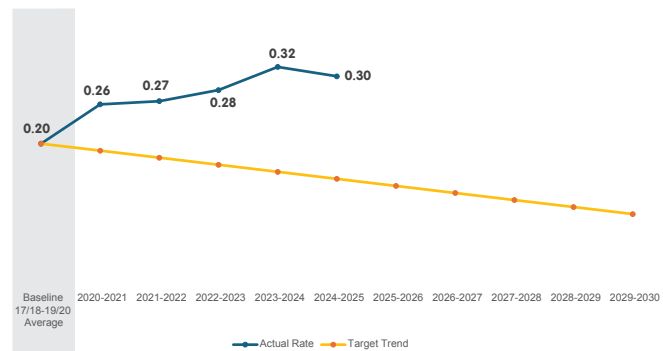
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
52 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.30 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.20 per 100,000 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Coordinated and collaborative lifesaving systems

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

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

Beach safety skill-building and awareness

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

Managing risk at unpatrolled beaches

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

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

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

PLACES

FOCUS:

Rivers and lakes

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

Why is this an area of focus?

Rivers and lakes continue to be a leading location for drowning. Rapidly changing conditions and hidden dangers, such as strong currents, submerged objects, slippery or crumbling banks and cold water, can lead to people getting into difficulty. During flood events, these waterways become even more dangerous and can change rapidly: swollen rivers, debris and cold, fast-moving flood water create hidden risks that can lead to tragedy.

Unlike other aquatic locations, inland waterways are not regularly patrolled by lifesaving or maritime services. In an emergency, timely rescue and medical assistance may be impacted by geographic isolation and a lack of telecommunication.

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

Midpoint Metrics

111

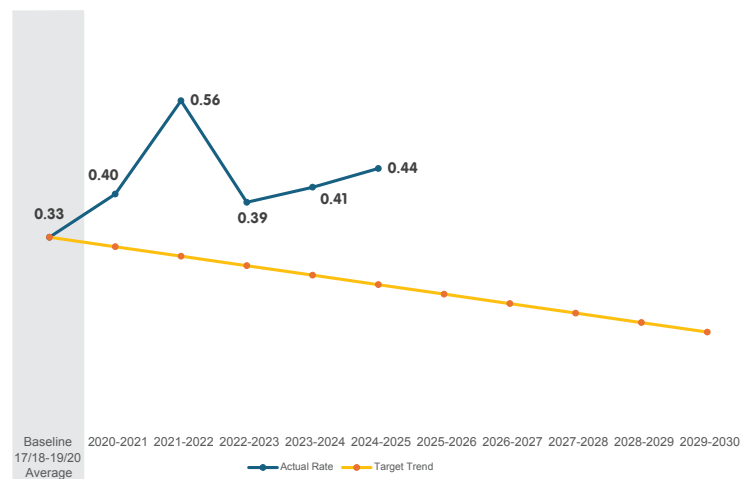
**Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)**

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
83 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.41 per 100,000

**Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)**

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.33 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Inland waterway systems-level prevention

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

Land manager leadership

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

Disaster resilience

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

PRIORITY AREA: PLACES

FOCUS:

Aquatic facilities

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

PLACES

Why is this an area of focus?

Aquatic facilities have long been central to the Australian approach to drowning prevention, by providing safe places to swim and learn water safety. Drowning incidents at public aquatic facilities are rare due to sophisticated management systems, safety guidelines, construction codes and widespread professional lifeguard supervision systems. Supporting the increased availability and sustainability of aquatic facilities, while ensuring they are operated safely, is central to reducing drowning across all populations, age groups and environments. Despite their benefits, significant access gaps exist and Australian aquatic facilities face substantial contemporary challenges including ageing infrastructure, workforce challenges and ensuring consistent application of industry safety standards and guidelines.

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

Midpoint Metrics

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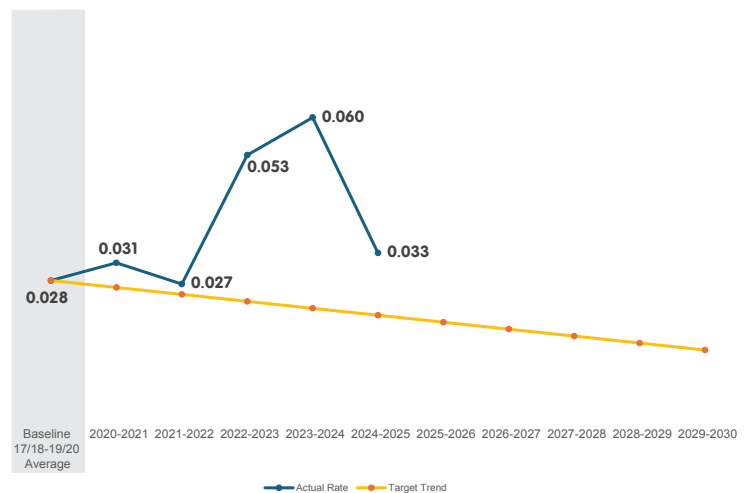
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
7 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.049 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.028 per 100,000 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Strengthen industry safety standards

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

Address infrastructure and workforce fragilities

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

Safety standards for Communal pools at hotels, caravan parks and apartments

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

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

FOCUS: Boating and watercraft

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

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

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

Midpoint Metrics

42

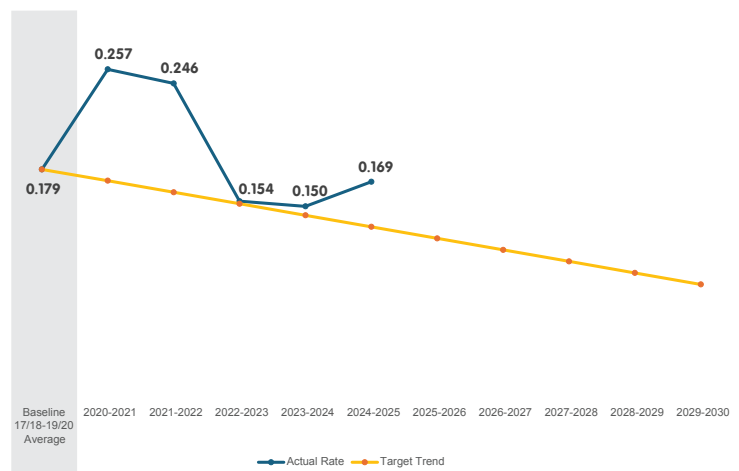
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
45 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.16 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.18 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Regulations and waterway management

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

Unified education efforts

Strengthen national boating and recreational-fishing safety campaigns with aligned messaging across jurisdictions and delivery partners. Embed safety education into licensing processes, retail points of sale (for both boating and fishing gear), community boating/fishing hubs and other high-use locations.

High-risk craft (PWC) and user groups

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

- Promote clear messages
- Strengthen regulation
- Collaborate with industry and rental outfits
- Monitoring incidents in known risk areas
- Increase enforcement in key locations

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

FOCUS: Rock fishing

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing on track

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

Recreational fishing is a popular outdoor activity and one of the few forms of nature-based recreation that can generally be enjoyed through all life stages. Rock fishing, however, has been dubbed Australia's most dangerous sport and is responsible for most fishing-related drowning deaths in addition to other types of fatal and non-fatal injuries from wave impacts, slips, trips and falls. Rock platforms are unpatrolled and often difficult to access. This, combined with the dynamic nature of ocean conditions and often remote, rugged locations, makes rescue difficult and prevention efforts essential. Many rock fishing deaths occur because individuals are caught unaware by large waves, are not wearing lifejackets, or are unable to self-rescue due to poor swimming ability or hazardous terrain with poor or no exit points.

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

Midpoint Metrics

9

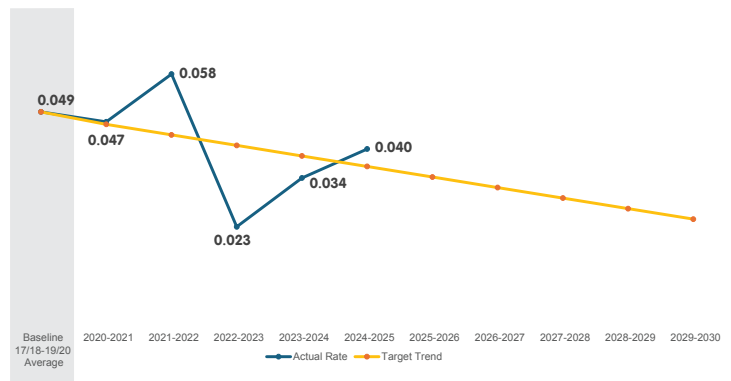
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
12 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.032 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.49 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



Data note: While resident population-based drowning rates for rock fishing are low compared to other Focus Areas of the AWSS 2030, [research](#) shows that participant-based fatality rates are among the highest of any coastal activity, meaning those who do take part face disproportionate risk.

The three things that matter most

Consistent policy and risk management systems

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

Education paired with skills and equipment

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

Blackspot rock platforms

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

PRIORITY AREA: ACTIVITIES

FOCUS:

Diving and snorkelling

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

ACTIVITIES

Why is this an area of focus?

Compressed gas diving and snorkelling are popular recreational pursuits and are deeply integrated within the Australian tourism and commercial sectors. Compressed gas diving mainly involves scuba diving using a self contained underwater breathing apparatus but also includes diving using a surface supplied system such as a hookah. Snorkelling involves swimming with the aid of a mask and snorkel and, ideally, fins and often includes some breath-hold diving. Breath-hold diving has become increasingly popular in itself but is often associated with spearfishing or the collection of other seafood. All these activities take place in a potentially hostile environment and have both general and specific safety considerations.

Generally, the safety requirements for snorkelling reflect many of those for diving, including adequate physical and medical fitness, sufficient skills, and comfort in the water. More snorkellers die nationally than divers, in part due to higher participation, but also because it is associated with much lower cost and requires less aquatic training and experience.

Midpoint Metrics

20

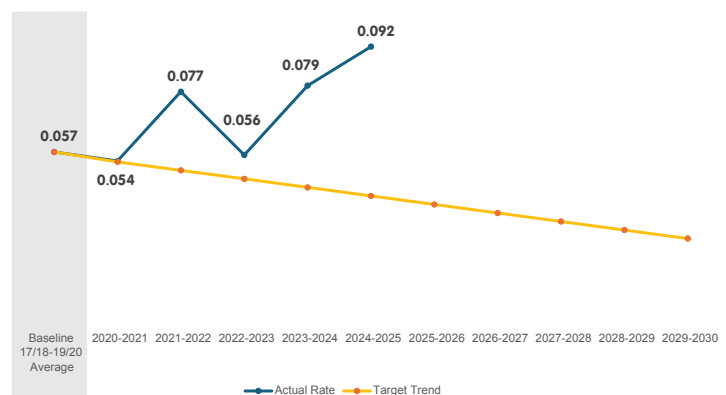
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
14 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.076 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.057 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



Data note: While resident population-based drowning rates for scuba diving and snorkelling are low compared to other Focus Areas of the AWSS 2030, [research](#) shows that participant-based fatality rates are among the highest of any coastal activity, meaning those who do take part face disproportionate risk.

The three things that matter most

Safety systems and standards

Support the adoption of voluntary dive and snorkel Codes of Practice (where none exist), with consistent policies for medical screening, first aid oxygen and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) access, and trained responders. Strengthen policies requiring medical assessments for participants over 45 or with known potentially contraindicated conditions, while ensuring practical implementation across diverse settings.

Education for tourists and occasional recreational divers and snorkellers

Improve safety knowledge among tourists and infrequent participants through thorough briefings, booking systems, and point-of-sale education. Pair key messages with skills-based content on medical risk, hazard recognition, good planning and emergency response, while supporting tools like buddy systems and health declarations to reduce preventable harm.

Address risk among vulnerable groups

Prioritise education and safety efforts for higher-risk individuals, specifically older adults and people with unmanaged and/or potentially contraindicated medical conditions. Strengthen the role of tour operators, trainers, and health professionals in identifying and addressing vulnerability. Support efforts to increase access to diving-related health checks by facilitating access to diving medical education for doctors, so increasing availability and decreasing costs.

PRIORITY AREA: POPULATIONS

FOCUS:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

**Rates are increasing,
urgent attention required**

POPULATIONS

Why is this an area of focus?

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

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

Midpoint Metrics

10

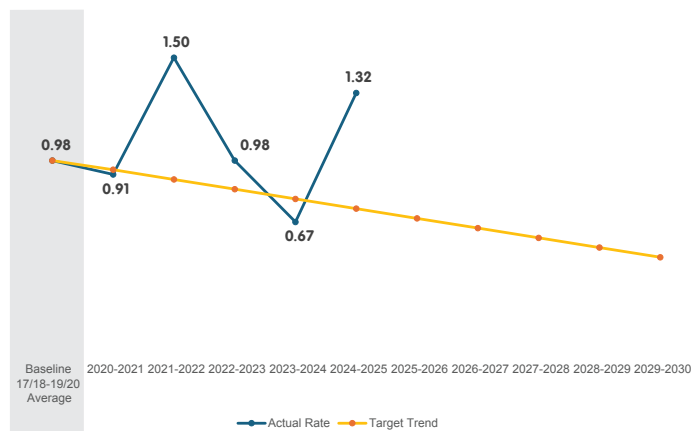
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
9 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.99 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
0.98 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



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

The three things that matter most

Alignment of agendas

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

Equitable access to aquatic programs and facilities

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

Embedding First Nations knowledge and leadership

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

PRIORITY AREA: POPULATIONS

FOCUS:

Multicultural communities

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing on track

POPULATIONS

Why is this an area of focus?

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

Three main groups are identified in this area: migrants, international students and overseas visitors. Risk factors differ slightly across each group. Adult migrants often have limited experience and understanding of water and water safety in the Australian context. International students and overseas visitors are often attracted by Australia's aquatic lifestyle, although many come with limited exposure to water in a recreational context. A Water Safety Workshop focused on Multicultural communities was hosted in July, 2024. The convening focused on the importance of partnerships, culturally sensitive and diverse community safety programs, and the significance of inclusivity, see more from the workshop [here](#).

Midpoint Metrics

76

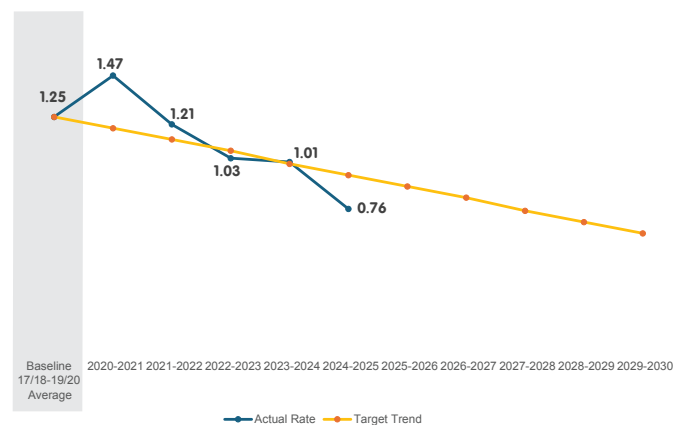
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
92 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

0.93 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
1.25 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



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

The three things that matter most

Cross-sectoral partnerships and collaboration

Foster structured, cross-sector partnerships that embed multicultural leadership across policy, research, program design, and service delivery. Shift institutional practices by pro-actively seeking, supporting and elevating people from non-dominant communities as co-designers, decision-makers and advocates, ensuring meaningful community-led change that promotes the value of swimming and water safety in Australia.

Skills and community capacity

Expand and fund a broad range of skills-based programs that led by and/or co-designed with community members. Prioritise the delivery of culturally relevant, language-appropriate initiatives that address the specific needs of different communities and local contexts, and promote the role of cultural ambassadors/champions for water safety.

Integration into migrant pathways

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

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

PRIORITY AREA: POPULATIONS

FOCUS:

Regional and remote communities

AWSS MIDPOINT STATUS

Rates are decreasing,
but not fast enough

POPULATIONS

Why is this an area of focus?

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

Communities in regional and remote areas often face disadvantage through limited access to services and infrastructure. Many regional and remote communities cannot access the swim schools, aquatic facilities and patrols available in major cities. Children grow up around rivers, dams and lakes, often spending more time outdoors, yet have fewer opportunities to learn formal water-safety skills. Drowning prevention approaches that work in urban environments may not translate to these contexts. Effective strategies must be locally designed and reflect the unique circumstances of regional and remote families.

Midpoint Metrics

101

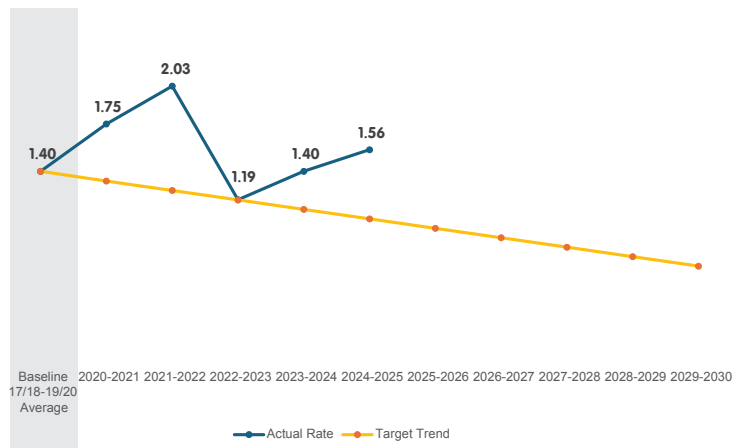
Average deaths per year
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
97 deaths per year (17/18-19/20)

1.38 per 100,000

Average fatal drowning rate
(22/23-24/25)

AWSS 2030 Baseline average:
1.40 per 100,00 (17/18-19/20)



The three things that matter most

Support regional networks

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

Equitable access to education opportunities

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

Local planning for high-risk sites

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

Why does research and evidence matter?

A strong evidence base underpins every successful drowning prevention strategy. Accurate and timely data, rigorous research, and ongoing evaluation is critical evidence that informs our understanding of who is at risk, what interventions work, and where to direct our efforts. Without reliable information on fatal and non fatal incidents, exposure and program outcomes, well intentioned initiatives can miss their mark or leave vulnerable communities behind. To meet the 2030 target, we must be informed wherever possible by the best available evidence, and commit to continuous learning across research, policy, and practice.

Continuing to build research capacity and capability across the drowning prevention and water safety sector in Australia requires more than collecting numbers. Partnership and close collaboration among Australia's drowning prevention researchers, and between academia and non-university partners (including practitioners and community members) is critical to ensuring we are researching the right questions, building an evidence base that informs practice and policy, and advocating for evidence-informed action.

Co-designed and participatory research ensures that the knowledge we generate reflects lived experiences and community priorities. Partnerships and improved collaboration between governments, researchers, practitioners and communities can close critical knowledge gaps and foster momentum for translating research findings into action. By focusing on research that directly informs prevention and by strengthening capacity to implement and evaluate interventions, we can make sure our work is grounded in what matters most and improves outcomes for all.

Data

Strengthen drowning surveillance systems and exposure metrics for improved insights that inform prevention, including:

- Advance surveillance systems for non fatal drowning and other aquatic injuries
- Develop standardised definitions for factors contributing to drowning
- Improve access to reliable, validated drowning data and insights with dashboards and other public-facing tools
- Expand meaningful data linkage efforts connecting existing databases and systems for improved information across multiple indicators of vulnerability
- Explore emerging technologies including artificial intelligence and other machine learning tools to enhance analysis and insights

Realistic evaluation

Embed evaluation into drowning prevention and water safety efforts and interventions as a strategic and iterative process focused on learning and improvement, not just reporting. Focus on practical methods appropriate for the initiative and cohort, employing quantitative and qualitative data to understand what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. Include community voices to ensure drowning prevention efforts are relevant for the intended audience, and prioritise sharing results and learning to advance the sector as a whole.

Implementation science and knowledge translation

Support implementation and translation research that drives intentional application and systematic uptake of research findings into policy and practice. Build capacity across the drowning prevention and water safety community to put evidence into action by focusing on community participatory methods and co-design, sense making, science communication with clear lay-person interpretation of research, and advocacy as critical components of the research process.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

Data source

The fatal drowning data presented in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 Midpoint Update are drawn from the Royal Life Saving Australia National Fatal Drowning Database, which contains details on every fatal drowning event occurring in Australia since 1 July 2002. Information on each case is primarily sourced via ethical access to the Australian National Coronial Information System (NCIS), with data supplemented through State and Territory Coronial Offices, media reports, police reports, data collaboration with Surf Life Saving Australia, and the Queensland Family and Child Commission. Ethical access to the NCIS is approved by the Victoria Department of Justice and Community Safety Research Ethics Committee (JHREC) (CF/19/25/126). All care is taken to ensure that the information in this report is accurate as possible, however, figures may change depending on the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations. Data from recent years is more likely to be affected as these investigations are ongoing. Please see royallifesaving.com.au/data for additional information on fatal drowning data and the National Fatal Drowning Database.

Methods and presentation

Drowning rates per 100,000 people are calculated using population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Averages are shown rounded to the whole number for presentation purposes; rates are rounded to the second decimal place except for those related to Aquatic facilities, Rock fishing, and Diving and snorkelling, where a third decimal place shows relevant changes over time. The table below shows how overall drowning rates, and rates for each Focus Area of the AWSS 2030, have changed over time. It compares the most recent three-year average (2022/23–2024/25) at the Strategy's midpoint with both the AWSS 2030 Baseline (2017/18–2019/20 average) and the average target rate needed to achieve a 50% reduction by June 2030. The target rate was calculated by estimating the three-year average for 2022/23–2024/25 based on a hypothetical steady annual decline from the baseline toward the 2030 goal.

Midpoint status for each Focus Area was determined by comparing the 17/18–19/20 baseline, and 22/23–24/25 target and actual drowning rates. Actual rates below the target were considered to be **decreasing on track**; actual rates below the baseline but higher than the target were considered to be **decreasing, but not fast enough**; actual rates above the baseline were considered to be **increasing where urgent attention is required**.

	AWSS 2030 BASELINE			AWSS MIDPOINT
AVERAGE	11/12–13/14	14/15 –16/17	17/18 - 19/20	22/23–24/25
Overall	1.23	1.19	0.98	Target: 0.78 Actual: 1.19
Children (0–4 years)	1.6	1.64	1.03	Target: 0.82 Actual: 0.95
Young males (15–29 years)	2.11	1.88	1.74	Target: 1.39 Actual: 1.69
Older adults (65+ years)	1.79	1.77	1.38	Target: 1.10 Actual: 2.07
Beaches	0.22	0.25	0.2	Target: 0.16 Actual: 0.30
Rivers and lakes	0.43	0.37	0.33	Target: 0.26 Actual: 0.41
Aquatic facilities	0.03	0.04	0.028	Target: 0.022 Actual: 0.049
Boating and watercraft	0.22	0.23	0.18	Target: 0.14 Actual: 0.16
Rock fishing	0.064	0.047	0.049	Target: 0.039 Actual: 0.032
Diving and snorkelling	0.077	0.085	0.057	Target: 0.045 Actual: 0.076
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons	2.13	1.48	0.98	Target: 0.79 Actual: 0.99
Multicultural communities	1.54	1.48	1.25	Target: 1.00 Actual: 0.93
Regional and remote communities	1.95	1.84	1.40	Target: 1.12 Actual: 1.38

AWSS 2030 MIDPOINT CONVENINGS

- Young males drowning prevention workshop. October, 2023. Melbourne.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water safety forum. July 2024. Sydney.
- Multicultural communities water safety workshop. July, 2024. Melbourne.
- Boating and watercraft AWSS evaluation workshop. Australia New Zealand Boating Safety Education Group Meeting. August, 2024. Sydney
- Scuba diving and snorkelling AWSS midpoint evaluation and Australasian Diving Safety Foundation educational webinar. August, 2024. Online
- Regional and remote communities AWSS evaluation workshop. October, 2024. Online.
- Inland rivers and lakes AWSS workshop. October, 2024. Online.
- Alcohol and Risk Taking drowning prevention workshop. October, 2024. Melbourne.
- Beaches, Ocean & Rocks AWSS workshop, Surf Life Saving Australia National Lifesaving Committee Meeting. October, 2024. Gold Coast.
- Swimming and Aquatic facilities AWSS midpoint review. National Aquatic Industry Committee Meeting. November 2024. Adelaide.
- AWSS review workshop for local government. Coastal Safety Group Meeting. May, 2025. Sydney
- 2025 Australian Water Safety Summit. July, 2025. Sydney.





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