

EMBARGOED UNTIL – 5AM, Friday 18th September

Men most at risk of drowning

Males accounted for 80% of all drowning deaths last season in figures published today by Australia's two peak water safety bodies Royal Life Saving Society – Australia and Surf Life Saving Australia, with risk-taking behaviours around water a key issue.

Despite a decrease of 8% in overall drowning deaths compared to the previous year, tragically 248 people drowned across Australia from July 2019-June 2020, with men aged 25-34 years the most at risk demographic.

There were 125 coastal drowning deaths, 82 drowning deaths in inland waterways, and 28 in swimming pools. A further breakdown of coastal waters found 45 drowning deaths on beaches, 41 offshore and 26 at rock/cliff locations.

As published in the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2020 and Surf Life Saving National Coastal Safety Report 2020, the research findings also highlight:

- Males accounted for 80% of all drowning deaths (93% for the 25-34 age group)
- Research shows that risk taking, use of alcohol and drugs, and the absence of appropriate safety precautions including lifejackets are key factors in male drowning.

Royal Life Saving CEO, Justin Scarr, said "The Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2020 is a sobering reminder that while Australians love the water, too many lives are lost, and families impacted by drowning each year.

"Men taking risks and overestimating abilities continues to be our greatest challenge. We urge men to look out for your mates, while holidaying, camping and boating on rivers and lakes.

"The 52% decrease in drowning of children under five is real progress, however we caution parents against complacency. Check your pool fence and gate, and always keep watch."

Surf Life Saving Australia CEO, Adam Weir, said "The Surf Life Saving National Coastal Safety Report 2020 highlights the importance of being aware of your actions and decisions around water.

"Swimming at unpatrolled locations, alcohol and drugs, and not wearing a lifejacket, are key contributors to why we continue to see men over-represented in our drowning statistics.

"For those boating, rock fishing and on watercraft the message is simple – please wear a lifejacket – it could save your life."

With the support of the Australian Government, Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving work with the Australian Water Safety Council, State and Territory organisations, and local communities to prevent drowning across the country and increase water safety awareness.

Federal Minister for Sport Richard Colbeck said the Morrison Government was determined to support organisations like Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving Australia to raise water safety awareness and to make our pools, waterways and beaches safer.

"The emotional toll of a single drowning death can be felt acutely by families, friends and local communities," Minister Colbeck said.

Overwhelmingly, he said the latest reports showed young men remained in the highest category of risk.

“Please look out for each other and follow any safety warnings around water as the warmer months approach.”

The Government continues to support drowning prevention initiatives delivered by organisations which include the peak bodies Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving Australia.

“An investment of \$36 million helps with activities including awareness-raising and education, surf patrols, swimming and water safety education and new rescue technologies,” Mr Colbeck said.

To stay safe around water, Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving urge all Australians to:

- Supervise children at all times in, on and around water
- Learn swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, rock fishing or paddling
- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags
- Avoid alcohol and drugs around water

Notes to the editor

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia National Drowning Report 2020. Available in full at www.royallifesaving.com.au.

Surf Life Saving National Coastal Safety Report 2020. Available in full at www.sls.com.au.

NATIONAL Key findings – Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report 2020

- 248 drowning deaths in Australia across all aquatic locations, an 8% decrease on 2018/19 and a 12% decrease compared with the 10-year average
- Males accounted for 80% of all drowning deaths
- Drowning deaths among children 0-4 years (12) decreased by 52%, compared with the 10-year average, but remain tragically high
- Among young people aged 15-24 years, 48% drowned while swimming, highlighting the importance of swimming and lifesaving lessons in the secondary school years
- Swimming was the leading activity being undertaken prior to drowning, accounting for a quarter of deaths (25%), followed by boating (18%) and falls (15%)
- Drowning deaths in rivers decreased by 32% compared with the 10-year average, while deaths in lakes increased by 19%

NATIONAL Key findings – Surf Life Saving National Coastal Safety Report 2020

- 125 coastal drowning fatalities, a 2.5% increase compared to 2018/19 and above the 16-year average of 115.
- For the first time since collecting coastal drowning data, boating/PWC (31%) was the highest activity being undertaken at the time of drowning, followed by swimming/wading (20%) and rock fishing (14%)
- Males continue to be significantly over-represented in coastal drowning data with 86% for 2019/20
- The highest number of coastal drowning deaths for 2019/20 were aged 20-24 years and 25-29 years
- Rip currents have contributed to 25% of coastal drowning deaths since 2004
- Only 4% of fatal rock fishing incidents were wearing a lifejacket since 2004