



New Zealand Water Safety Sector Strategy 2020





The Need for a Sector Strategy

Welcome to the New Zealand Water Safety Sector Strategy 2020, New Zealand's first truly collaborative approach to addressing the issue of drowning in this country.

New Zealand has long had a committed and active water safety sector, but with its unenviable position as the nation with the 8th highest drowning toll (per 100,000) in the OECD, and almost double the Australian drowning rate, the time has come for a significant change in the way the sector works.

This strategy sets out the water safety sector's plan to work collectively over the next five years to achieve greater impact – working towards its vision of no one drowning.

The strategy is a joint effort, a partnership by water safety organisations including Accident Compensation Corporation, Coastguard New Zealand, Coastguard Boating Education, Maritime New Zealand, New Zealand Recreational Association, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Swimming New Zealand, Water Safe Auckland and Water Safety New Zealand. Input from other sector members – both large and small – has also contributed significantly to this new approach.

The joint goals the sector has agreed on are ambitious - seeking to halve the male drowning toll and bring the pre-school drowning toll down to zero by 2020.

To achieve these goals, and to create a culture where all New Zealanders will enjoy the water safely, the sector will work together to deliver new and innovative programmes and drive attitudinal and behavioural change through communications and other campaigning. It will engage in research, set a policy agenda and resource drowning prevention initiatives according to what will have the greatest impact.

The sector will also stand accountable for its results.



Message from the Minister

As New Zealanders, we enjoy some of the most magnificent waterways in the world. The opportunities to swim, dive, surf, and boat are a fundamental part of Kiwi life.

However, we know that our waterways are not without risk and every year far too many people lose their lives, or are injured, in, on or around the water. The tragedy is that most of these drownings and injuries are preventable.

I welcome the Water Safety Sector Strategy 2020 as an important step towards reducing the drowning toll. The major water safety agencies have presented a plan for collective action that has the ambitious task of changing our culture so that all New Zealanders enjoy water safely.

I also congratulate the water safety sector for its leadership and commitment to collaborative action. No single organisation can significantly reduce drownings without the support of the broader sector.

I believe that this strategy will help to create a safer and more responsible approach to water for all New Zealanders.

Hon Dr Jonathan Coleman
Minister for Sport and Recreation





New Zealand's Drowning Problem

A Snapshot

New Zealanders love the water. Each year, three million people visit beaches, 1.5 million go boating, over 1.1 million participate in swimming and more than 630,000 go fishing. There are also over 20 million visits to public swimming pools.

On average*, **103 people** die by drowning in New Zealand waters each year, but up to **80** of these deaths are preventable**. A further **172** people are hospitalised as a result of water-based incidents. **1200** deaths are avoided each year through rescues.

Drowning is the **fourth highest** cause of accidental death in New Zealand – after motor vehicle accidents, falls and poisoning.

New Zealand ranks **8th** worst of the OECD countries for preventable drownings and has **double the Australian drowning rate** (per 100,000) and five times that of the UK.

Males are **four times more likely** to drown in New Zealand, making up 84% of total drownings. This is **twice the global average**.

Tragically, pre-schoolers are still drowning. Six infants under five years old drown (on average) each year and a further 34 are hospitalised. 87% of these deaths are attributed to **inadequate adult supervision** with just over half of pre-schooler drownings occurring in the home (52%).

Maori continue to be over represented in New Zealand's drowning figures at just 14% of the population, but making up 23% of those who drown. 90% of Maori who drown are men.

New Zealand's changing demographic is having an impact on water safety. Between 2001 and 2013 the population increased 14%, with the Asian population rising by 98% and Pacifica by 28%.

Socioeconomic status and **ethnicity** also have an impact on drownings, with higher drowning rates occurring in lower socioeconomic groups, in ethnic minorities and in rural populations.

Beaches (at 22%) and **rivers** (20%) closely followed by **offshore** (19%) are where the greatest number of drowning deaths occur. The largest number of drownings are **immersion incidents** (33%) where the victims had no intention of being in the water.

Boating (at 22% of preventable deaths) claims the second greatest number of lives and almost three quarters (73%) of those that drown in a boating incident are **not wearing lifejackets**. **Swimming** makes up 21% of preventable drownings and a further 39 hospitalisations per year. The majority of swimming deaths (39%) occur at beaches.

* Statistics are based on the five year average of preventable drowning fatalities 2010-2014

** Preventable drownings are defined as all drowning deaths other than those that result from suicides, homicides and vehicle accidents.

New Zealand's Drowning Problem

The Challenge

Drowning is a complex issue, with three key factors influencing New Zealand's high drowning toll.

- **People** – New Zealanders have varying degrees of knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards water.
- **Activities** – A high number of New Zealanders enjoy participation in water based leisure, adventure and commercial activities.
- **Environment** - New Zealand's environment and weather patterns are unpredictable, increasing the risks for those without adequate water safety skills.

The problem that this strategy seeks to address can be broadly attributed to the tendency for New Zealanders (in particular men) to underestimate the risks and overestimate their abilities in, on and around the water. But at a deeper level, there is only a limited understanding of the root causes of drowning or the effectiveness of current water safety initiatives.

More research and investigation is required.

Adding to the challenge, drowning and water related injuries do not have as high a profile as they should both at a community level and within government. The water safety sector is also funded on a year-to-year basis, limiting the development of longer-term strategies.

The Water Safety Sector Strategy 2020 seeks to address these challenges.

Towards a Lower Drowning Toll – Together

As this sector strategy shows, there is much work to be done. But water safety organisations are united in the commitment to work together towards these goals and the ultimate, long-term vision that no one drowns. We are focused on ensuring that all New Zealanders have the skills and knowledge needed to enjoy this country's beautiful waters safely.





The New Zealand Water Safety Sector Strategy 2020

Vision

No one drowns.

Mission

To work collectively to reduce drowning and injuries so that all New Zealanders enjoy the water safely.

Outcomes

- 1. A changed culture in which every New Zealander:
 - understands the risks associated with water and
 - has the ability to survive in, on or around water.
- 2. Minimised social and economic costs from preventable drowning and injury.
- 3. A world leading water safety sector.

2020 Goals

- a. Every New Zealander has the opportunity to develop water safety knowledge and survival skills.
- b. New Zealand communities take the lead to promote the safe enjoyment of local water.
- c. Males improve their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour to take personal responsibility for water safety.
- d. Parents improve their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour to take personal responsibility for supervising preschool children around water.
- a. Drowning deaths are reduced from 77¹ to 50 or less (- 35%).
- b. Drowning hospitalisations are reduced from 172 to 100 or less (- 42%).
- c. Male drowning deaths are halved from 66 to 33 or less.
- d. Preschool drowning deaths are reduced from six to zero.
- a. The sector works together to maximise its collective impact.
- b. The sector's influence secures public and political support for water safety outcomes.
- c. The sector has the capability and capacity to achieve its mission.
- d. Research and evidence drives investment decisions and continuous improvement.

¹ Preventable drownings are defined as all drowning deaths other than those that result from suicides, homicides and vehicle accidents. Statistics are expressed as a five year average



Challenges

1. One hundred drowning deaths a year is not yet seen as a crisis by New Zealand society in the way that demands the scale of response received by road and workplace deaths.
2. Business as usual is important to maintain and improve but it will **not** achieve the water safety sector outcomes. These require a significant step change.
3. Achieving the outcomes will require new initiatives, with the sector working together for collective impact.
4. A better understanding is needed of the underlying causes of the drowning problem, the impact of current interventions and how to use resources more effectively.



Strategic Actions

1. Implement a sector policy agenda:
 - a. a sector capability plan identifies key assets, strengths and development needs to improve sector effectiveness.
 - b. a data and research plan helps understand the drowning problem, informs decisions and is used to improve sector performance.
 - c. agreed positions for key issues underpin consistent policies and communications.
2. Implement a national engagement and communications strategy:
 - a. the sector is connected by sharing information, leveraging collaborative action and encouraging thought leadership.
 - b. new partnerships are established within the sector and new stakeholders are enrolled.
 - c. sector media, advocacy and communications plans build public and political support for water safety.
 - d. advocacy targets priority national water safety policies and supports consistent regulations and compliance enforcement.
3. Implement a plan to ensure the development of water safety knowledge and survival skills for every New Zealander and the development of national standards.
4. Implement prevention, education and awareness programmes that target males and parents focussed on achieving attitudinal and behavioural change.
5. Resource and allocate existing preventative and rescue assets and training according to their greatest impact.
6. Obtain additional resources and allocate them to initiatives of greatest impact.





With thanks to:



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For a more detailed breakdown of drownings statistics see the **Drowning Prevention Report** or visit **Drownbase** at watersafety.org.nz