



ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY – AUSTRALIA
**NATIONAL DROWNING
REPORT 2012**

284
PEOPLE DROWNED IN
AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS

EVERYONE CAN BE A LIFESAVER



Royal Life Saving
ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY - AUSTRALIA

What you should know about the 284 people who drowned in Australia in 2011/12



0-4 YEARS

21 DROWNING DEATHS
67% MALE
38% IN SWIMMING POOLS
33% IN BATHTUBS OR SPA BATHS
62% FALLS INTO WATER

Active adult supervision when children are in, on, or around water

Restrict access to water by correctly installed and maintained pool fencing

Uniform pool fencing legislation is required

5-14 YEARS



15-24 YEARS

45 DROWNING DEATHS
89% MALE
40% IN INLAND WATERWAYS
18% AT BEACHES
24% SWIMMING AND RECREATING
20% WATERCRAFT

Protection provided by lifeguards and peers

Swimming and water safety skills learnt at school can provide protection

Increased education of impact of alcohol and drugs on drowning risk

25-34 YEARS



35-44 YEARS

38 DROWNING DEATHS
79% MALE
37% IN INLAND WATERWAYS
32% WATERCRAFT
16% SWIMMING
13% DIVING

Avoid alcohol and risk taking behaviour around water

Ensure health and fitness prior to undertaking diving related activities

Avoid driving through flooded waterways

45-54 YEARS



55+ YEARS

97 DROWNING DEATHS
74% MALE
43% INLAND WATERWAYS
18% AT BEACHES
22% FALLS INTO WATER
13% WATERCRAFT

Never undertake aquatic activity alone

Get a medical check before participating in aquatic activity

Enrol in a Grey Medallion course to improve your skills

DROWNING DEATHS IN 2011/12

There were 284 drowning deaths in Australian waterways between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. The number of people drowning in Australia has declined this year, reversing the upward trend of the past four years.

This figure is a reduction of 26 (8%) drowning deaths on the 310 drowning deaths in 2010/11, and a reduction of 3 (1%) drowning deaths on the five year average of 287.

The crude drowning rate in 2011/12 is 1.27 per 100,000 people, compared to the five year average of 1.33 per 100,000 people (Figure 1).

10 years of drowning in Australia: Trends over time

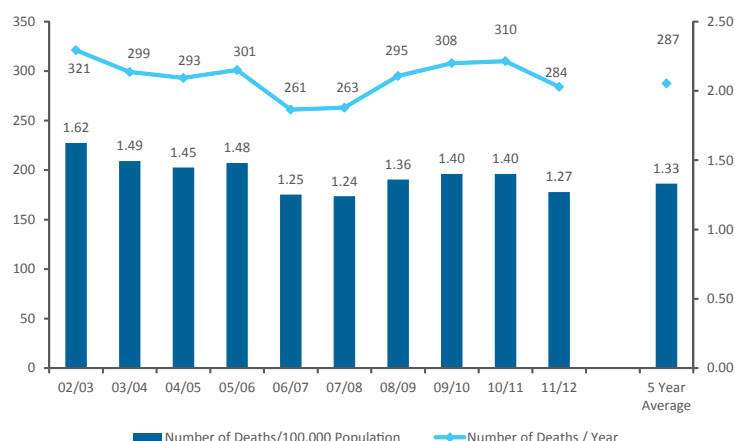


Figure 1: Unintentional Drowning Deaths and Death Rates, Australia 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

CASE STUDY: Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15: Towards a nation free from drowning

Released on June 4th 2012, the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 aims to reduce drowning deaths across Australia by 50% by the year 2020, with the ultimate aim of achieving a nation free from drowning. Over 150 water safety and drowning prevention experts from across Australia and around the world, gathered in Sydney at the Australian Water Safety Conference 2012 (AWSC 2012) to witness the launch of the new Strategy and collaborate on drowning prevention.

Rob Bradley, Australian Water Safety Council (AWSC) Convenor said "Since 2008 Australia has experienced a concerning increase in the number of drowning deaths across a range of demographics, locations and activities. The 2012-15 Strategy focuses on prevention strategies to reduce drowning deaths in inland waterways, to reduce the number of people aged over 55 who are drowning and minimise the impact of disasters and extreme weather."

- In the 2008-11 Australian Water Safety Strategy, the AWSC introduced an overarching goal of reducing drowning deaths by 50% by the year 2020
- This would bring drowning deaths down to no more than 153 in 2020
- The table calculates the reduction needed to achieve the 2020 target against this year's figures (Figure 2)

AWSS 2012-15 Goal Areas	Drowning Deaths in 2011/12		Target Reduction	No More Than
1. Reduce drowning deaths in children aged 0-14 years	Children 0-4 years	21	19%	17
	Children 5-14 years	13	38%	8
2. Reduce drowning deaths in young people aged 15-24		45	60%	18
3. Reduce drowning deaths in people aged 55+		97	47%	51
4. Reduce drowning deaths in inland waterways		104	48%	54
5. Reduce surf beach drowning deaths		55	62%	21

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 Revised Goals and Estimated Required Reduction



The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 (AWSS 2012-15) can be downloaded from www.watersafety.com.au

CASE STUDY: Drowning Deaths in Females

Although males outnumber females in drowning statistics four to one, females are also at risk of drowning. Analysis has been conducted to examine trends in drowning deaths in females in 2011/12:

- There were 52 females who drowned
- Almost half (48%) of all females who drowned were aged 55 years and over, compared to 31% of males
- One quarter of all drowning deaths in females occurred in River / Creek / Stream locations and females account for 50% of all drowning deaths in Bathtubs / Spa Baths
- Falls into water were the most common activity, accounting for 35% of activity prior to drowning in females, compared to 12% of males
- Conversely, Swimming and Recreating accounted for 21% of male drowning deaths compared to 10% of all drowning deaths in females
- Falls into water were more likely to occur in very young girls (under five) and older women (aged 75+) than any other age groups
- Falls into water were most common in inland waterways such as rivers and lakes, and swimming pools

Supervision around water is a key drowning prevention strategy for all children, male or female. As women age they should take care around inland waterways which may have slippery or steep banks. Females should ensure they maintain their fitness and keep swimming and water safety skills and knowledge at safe levels.

52

DROWNING CASES
WERE FEMALES

WHO DROWNS?

Of the 284 drowning deaths that occurred in Australian waterways in 2011/12, 232 (82%) were male and 52 (18%) were female. The proportion of men drowning when compared to women continues to increase with men 4.5 times more likely to drown in Australia than women.

The States with larger populations continued to have higher numbers of drowning deaths, with 105 (37%) drowning deaths occurring in New South Wales, 75 (26%) in Queensland and 37 (13%) in Victoria. Conversely, the Australian Capital Territory experienced one drowning death in the 2011/12 period. When calculated as rates per 100,000 population, the Northern Territory has the highest rate of drowning at 4.40 followed by Tasmania (2.54) (Figure 3).

The average age of those who drown was 41.7 years, with females on average being older than males (46.4 years compared to 40.7 years for males). The 25-34 years age group had the highest number of drowning deaths. Drowning deaths in the 0-4 years and 45-54 years age groups showed pleasing reductions against the 5 year average with almost all other age groups increasing against the 5 year average (Figure 4).

No State or Territory is immune from drowning

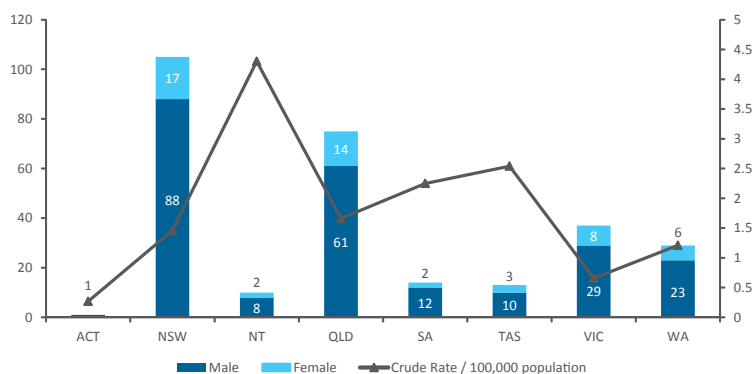


Figure 3: Drowning Deaths by Sex and State/Territory, Death Rates, 2011/12

Drowning is an issue throughout adulthood

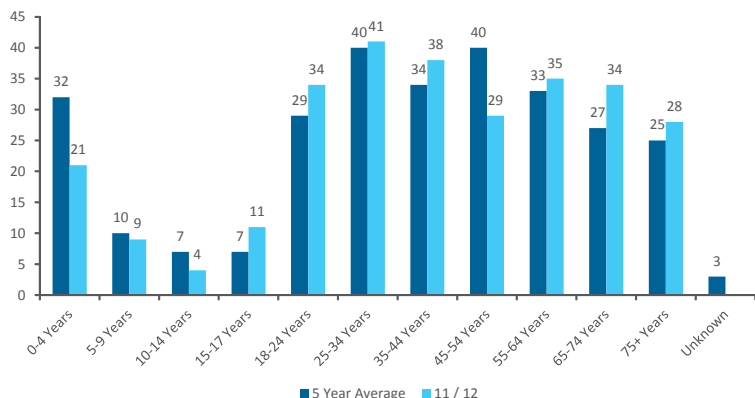


Figure 4: Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 5 Year Average, 2011/12

WHEN DO THESE DROWNING DEATHS OCCUR?

Drowning deaths in Australia occur all year, however the largest number occur in Summer (89) followed by Autumn (74) and Spring (66). The lowest number of drowning deaths occurred in Winter with 55 drowning deaths (Figure 5).

January and March were the two months with the highest number of drowning deaths (each with 32 deaths). May recorded the lowest number of drowning deaths with 14 (Figure 6).

Drowning doesn't only occur in Summer

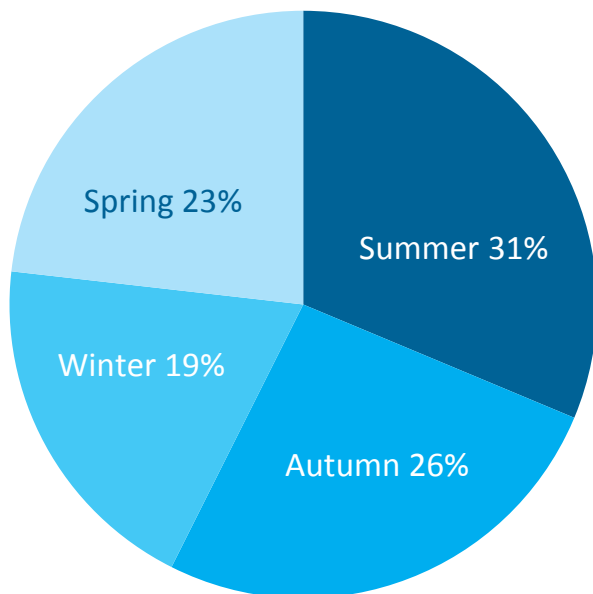


Figure 5: Drowning Deaths by Season, 2011/12

Drowning: a year round issue in Australia

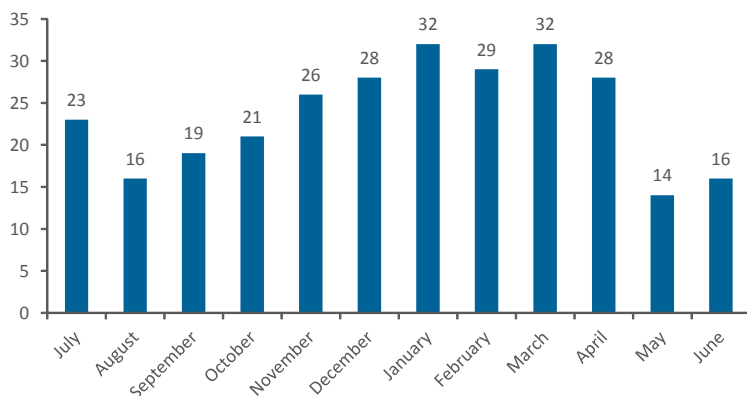


Figure 6: Drowning Deaths by Month of Incident, 2011/12

CASE STUDY: Who drowns in Winter?

Drowning deaths are not restricted to the Summer months and occur throughout the year. Although States and Territories such as Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia do not experience significantly cooler weather, it is worth examining the drowning deaths that occur during the Winter months in more detail.

- Almost one fifth (19%) of all drowning deaths took place in June, July and August
- Of the people who drowned in Winter, 78% were male
- Almost half (49%) of drowning deaths in Winter occur in the 18-44 years age groups
- Another 27% occur in people aged 55 years and over
- The most common locations for Winter drowning deaths are River / Creek / Stream locations (26%) and Rocks (18%)
- Forty nine percent of all drowning deaths in Winter occur as a result of interacting with Watercraft or Falls whilst walking or playing near water

Drowning is very much still an issue in Winter and Royal Life Saving urges people to remain aware of the drowning risk even as the weather cools. Always abide by safety standards when using watercraft and take care when in, on, or around inland waterways. Never exceed your level of skill and fitness and be wary of unfamiliar waterways as conditions can change with the seasons.

55

DROWNING DEATHS
OCCURRED IN WINTER

WHERE AND HOW DO THESE DROWNING DEATHS OCCUR?

The River / Creek / Stream location was the location with the highest number of drowning deaths, with 75 (26%) in 2011/12, followed by Beach (19%) and Ocean / Harbour (15%) locations (Figure 7). There were 16 drowning deaths where the location of drowning has been classified as Other. Locations within the Other category in 2011/12 included swamps, tanks, canals, irrigation channels, storm water drains and ponds.

Rivers and creeks continue to record the highest number of drowning deaths

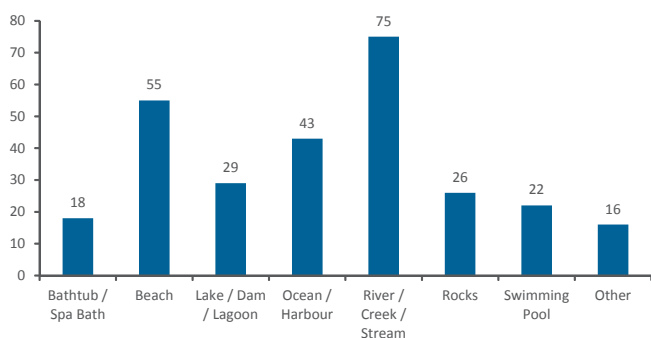


Figure 7: Drowning Deaths by Location, 2011/12

Using Watercraft (55) and Swimming and Recreating (53) were the two most common activities being undertaken immediately prior to drowning, followed by Falls into water (46) and Diving (23). Activity immediately prior to drowning was unknown in 38 (13%) cases indicating there are a number of people who are undertaking aquatic activities alone or the activity immediately prior to drowning was not witnessed (Figure 8).

Swimming and watercraft result in largest number of drownings in Australia

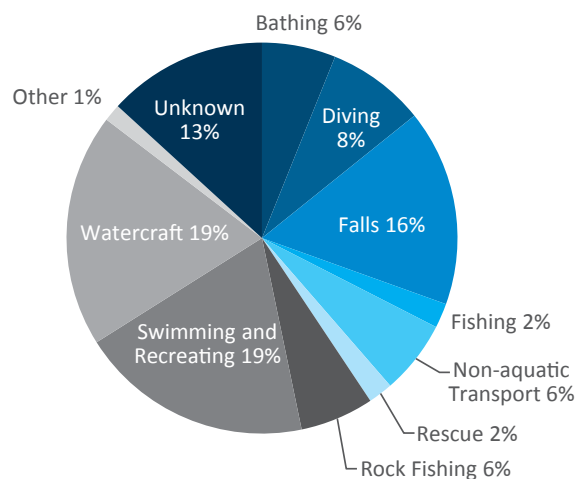


Figure 8: Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

CASE STUDY:

Northern Territory 9 Year Drowning Report A Call for Change

Royal Life Saving in the Northern Territory (NT) has recently completed a nine year analysis of drowning deaths in the Territory. Despite reductions, the NT continues to record the highest rate of drowning per 100,000 people in Australia, which is over 1.5 times higher than the next closest State or Territory.

The report found:

- 74 people lost their lives due to drowning between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2011
- 84% were male
- Half drowned in rivers and creeks, with 15% directly related to flooding
- Almost one-quarter were aged 25-34 years and all were males
- 80% were from regional and remote locations
- 38% were Indigenous
- Alcohol was present in 51% of drowning deaths of people aged 15 and over

The report makes several recommendations to reduce the number of lives lost to drowning in the NT. These include the urgent need to:

- Continue the Water Safety Awareness program across the Northern Territory and include funding for remote community access
- Implement and monitor a NT school-based water safety and swimming program
- Develop, foster and respect a culture of water safety in the NT, including making small adaptations to the NT lifestyle in order to save lives



The full report can be downloaded from www.royallifesaving.com.au



LOCATION IN FOCUS: INLAND WATERWAYS

There were 104 (37%) drowning deaths in inland waterways (rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, dams and lagoons) in 2011/12. Of these, 75 drowning deaths occurred in River / Creek / Stream locations and 29 in Lake / Dam / Lagoon locations.

The 2011/12 figure of 104 drowning deaths is an increase of 12 (13%) on the five year average of 92 (Figure 9). Men account for 82% of all drowning deaths in inland waterways.

People aged 75+ years were the age group with the largest number of drowning deaths in inland waterways (19) which is an increase of 171% on the five year average. Drowning deaths in the 0-4, 10-14 and 45-54 years age groups show pleasing reductions against the five year average (Figure 10). New South Wales is the State with the highest number of drowning deaths in inland waterways (44%), followed by Queensland (22%) and Victoria (17%) (Figure 11).

Falls into water (19%), Swimming and Recreating (17%) and using Watercraft (16%) were the most common activities being undertaken immediately prior to drowning in inland waterways (Figure 12).

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 identifies inland waterways as a priority location with Goal 4 of the Strategy devoted to reducing drowning deaths in inland waterways. Key objectives include:

- Implementing and monitoring a National rural and remote water safety strategy
- Increasing access to inland waterway safety programs, with an increased emphasis on river water safety skills and awareness
- Address infrastructure requirements and human resources shortages in rural and remote areas to ensure adequate coverage of aquatic instructors and safety risk management

Inland waterway drowning deaths: Number up against 5 year average

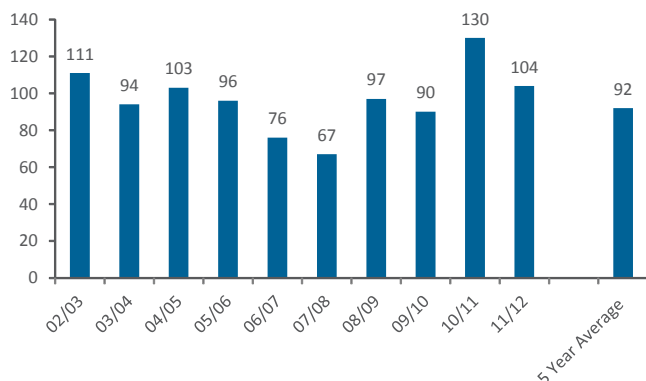


Figure 9: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

River conditions pose drowning prevention challenge across all age groups

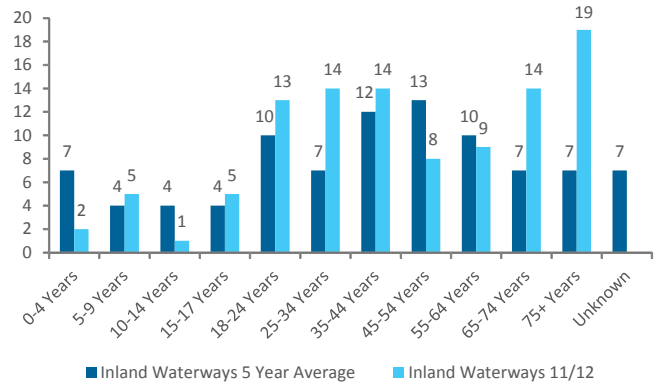


Figure 10: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by Age Group, 5 Year Average, 2011/12

NSW and QLD experience highest inland waterway drownings

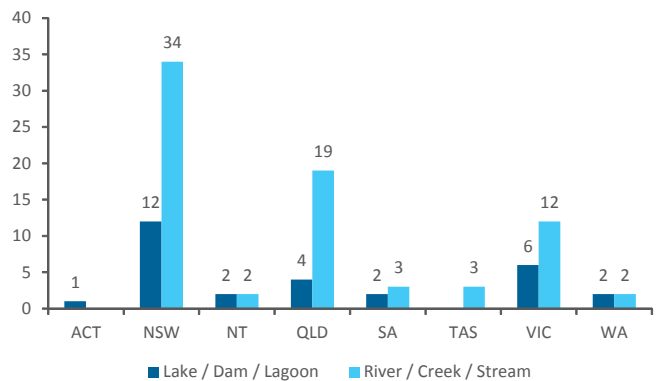


Figure 11: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by State / Territory and Location Type, 2011/12

Falls, swimming and watercraft most common activities in inland drowning deaths

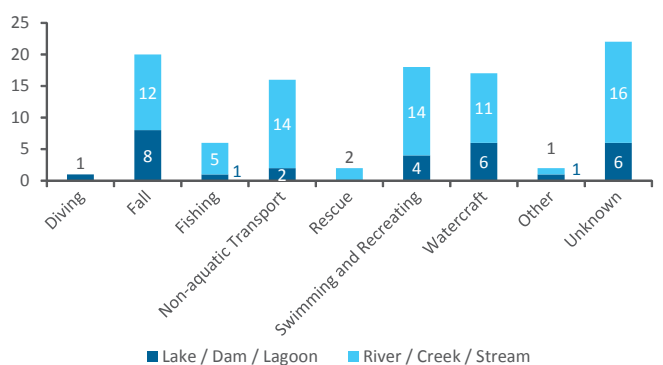


Figure 12: Inland Waterway Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior and Location Type, 2011/12



LOCATION IN FOCUS: BEACHES

There were 55 drowning deaths at Australian beaches in 2011/12. This figure is an increase of 11 (25%) on the 5 year average of 44 drowning deaths (Figure 13). Men account for 89% of all people who drown at beaches. The largest number of drowning deaths occurred in the 25-34 years (20%) and 55-64 years (20%) age groups (Figure 14).

Swimming and Recreating (26) was the most common activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning at beaches. This was followed by using Watercraft (12) and attempting a Rescue (4). Activity immediately prior to drowning was unknown in 8 cases (Figure 15).

36% of all beach drowning deaths occurred in New South Wales, followed by 31% in Queensland and 13% in Victoria (Figure 16).

The Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15 has identified reducing surf beach drowning deaths as a high priority. Key objectives include:

- Identifying non-patrolled surf beaches with high drowning rates and implement risk reduction strategies
- Developing and implementing a National rip awareness program
- Implementing and evaluating interventions targeted at populations at high risk of surf beach drowning

Men overrepresented in drowning deaths at beaches

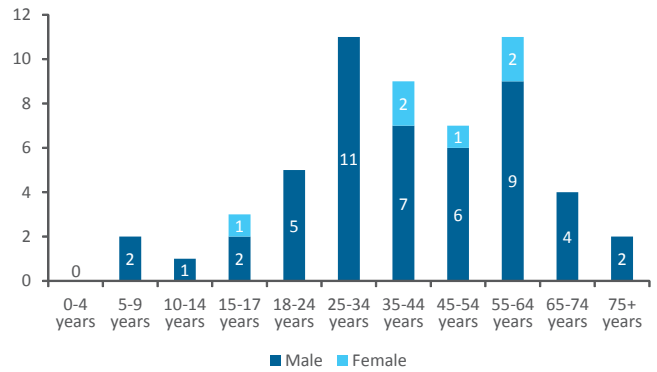


Figure 14: Beach Drowning Deaths by Age Group and Sex, 2011/12

More than 50% of those who drowned at beaches intended to be in the water

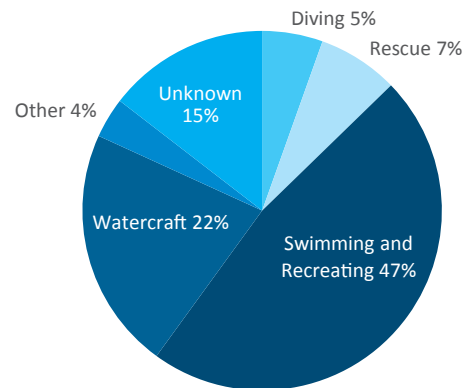


Figure 15: Beach Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

Beach drowning deaths increase against the five year average

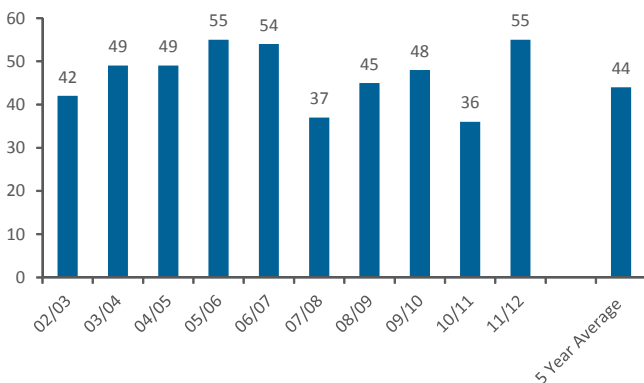


Figure 13: Beach Drowning Deaths 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Highest number of beach drowning deaths in NSW and QLD

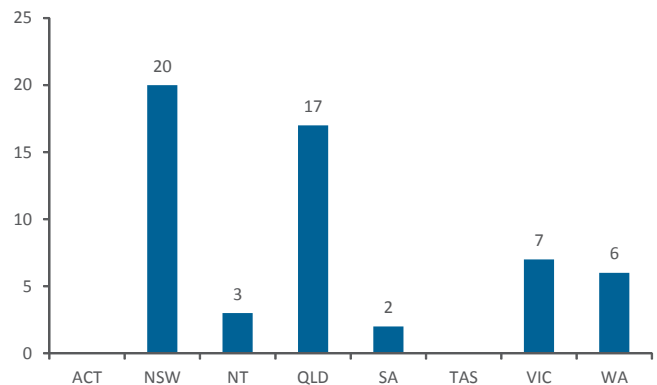


Figure 16: Beach Drowning Deaths by State / Territory, 2011/12

LOCATION IN FOCUS: OCEAN / HARBOUR

There were 43 drowning deaths at Ocean / Harbour locations in Australia in 2011/12. This is a reduction of 8 (16%) drowning deaths on the five year average of 51 (Figure 17). Men account for 86% of all drowning deaths at Ocean / Harbour locations. The largest number of drowning deaths occurred in the 25-34 years age group (20%) (Figure 18).

Using Watercraft was the most common activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning (24), followed by Diving (16) (Figure 19). Queensland had the highest number of drowning deaths in Ocean / Harbour locations (33%), followed by New South Wales (19%) and Western Australia (16%) (Figure 20).

As Ocean / Harbour locations saw the third largest number of drowning deaths in 2011/12, further work needs to be focused on the prevention of drowning deaths and the education of the broader community with respect to safe behaviours. These include the wearing of PFDs when boating and medical checks prior to participating in activities such as scuba diving.

Women account for less than 15% of all ocean drowning deaths in Australia in 2011/12

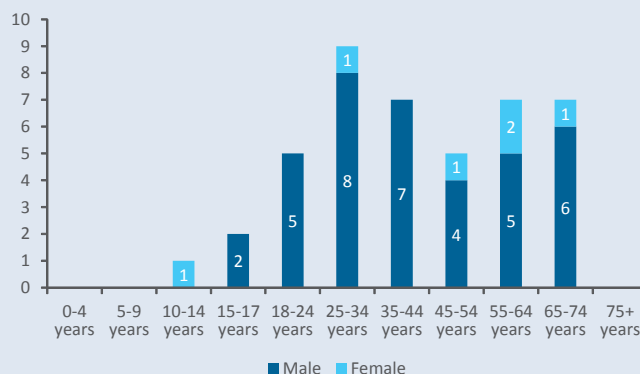


Figure 18: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by Age Group and Sex, 2011/12

93% of all ocean drowning deaths result from using watercraft or diving in 2011/12

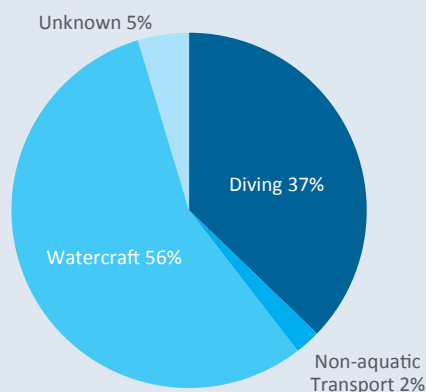


Figure 19: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

Ocean drowning deaths - a downward trend?

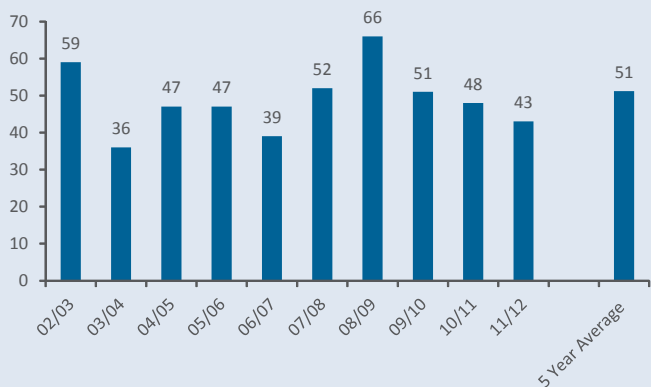


Figure 17: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths, 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Over 30% of all ocean drowning deaths occurred in Queensland

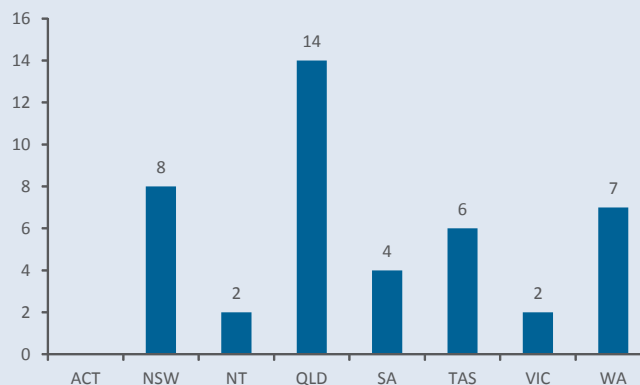


Figure 20: Ocean / Harbour Drowning Deaths by State / Territory of Incident, 2011/12



LIFE STAGE IN FOCUS: CHILDREN AGED 0-14 YEARS

Children aged 0-4 years

There were 21 children between the ages of 0 and 4 years who drowned in Australia between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. This is a reduction of 11 (34%) on the five year average of 32 (Figure 21). Although the 2011/12 result builds on the reductions achieved in 2010/11, ongoing reductions must be maintained to achieve the target of a 50% reduction in child drowning deaths by the year 2020.

Males account for 67% of drowning deaths in the 0-4 years age group. Swimming Pools continue to be the location with the highest number of drowning deaths, although these show a pleasing reduction against the five year average. Of concern, there has been a 75% increase in the number of drowning deaths occurring in Bathtub / Spa Bath locations, accounting for one-third of all deaths in this age group (Figure 22). Falls whilst walking or playing near water account for 62% of all activity immediately prior to drowning, followed by Bathing (33%) (Figure 23).

Children under 5 drowning deaths in decline since 2006 report

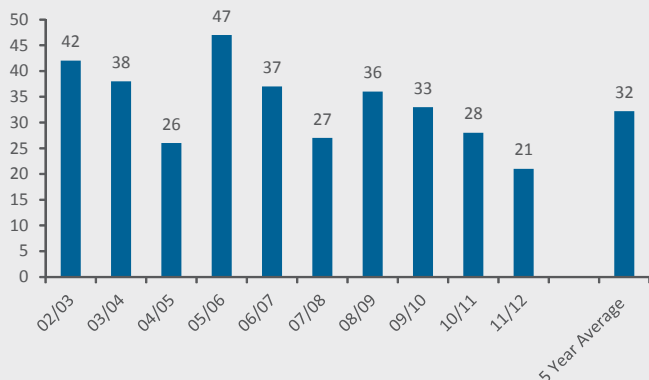


Figure 21: Drowning Deaths of Children 0-4 Years, 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Swimming pool drowning deaths reduce by over 50% on five year average in children under five

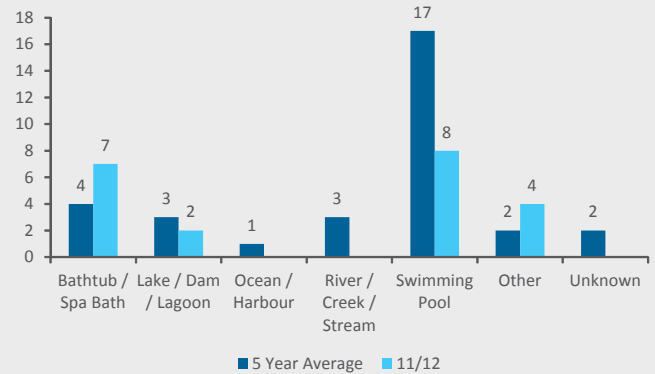


Figure 22: Drowning Deaths of Children 0-4 Years by Location, 5 Year Average, 2011/12

Falls into water the most common cause of drowning deaths in children under five

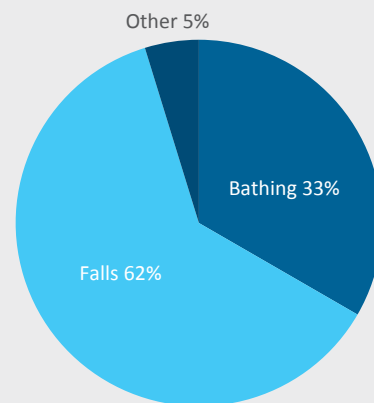


Figure 23: Drowning Deaths of Children 0-4 Years by Activity, 2011/12

CASE STUDY: Keep Watch @ Bath Time

Keep Watch @ Bath Time aims to prevent bathtub drowning deaths of children under five years of age. The program promotes Active Supervision @ Bath Time as one of its key drowning prevention strategies.

Active Supervision @ Bath Time involves being prepared, being within arms' reach of the child at all times and giving the child all of your attention, all of the time.

The Keep Watch @ Bath Time program's other key drowning prevention strategies are restricting access to water, water awareness and ensuring parents and carers are equipped with the life saving skill of resuscitation.

For more information visit www.keepwatch.com.au



Children aged 5-14 years

There were 13 drowning deaths of children aged 5-14 years in Australian waterways between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. This is a reduction of 3 (19%) on the five year average of 16 drowning deaths (Figure 24). Males account for 92% of those who drown within this age group.

River / Creek / Stream, Beach and Lake / Dam / Lagoon locations had the highest number of drowning deaths with 3 drowning deaths respectively. Swimming Pool drowning deaths in this age group reduced by 75% on the five year average of 4 (Figure 25).

Swimming and Recreating (46%) was the most common activity being undertaken immediately prior to drowning, followed by Watercraft (23%) and Falls into water (15%). Activity immediately prior to drowning was unknown in 8% of cases (Figure 26).

Drowning in children 5-14 years down on previous years

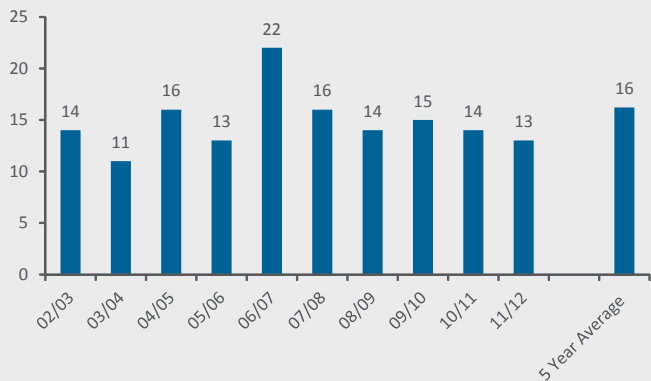


Figure 24: Drowning Deaths of Children 5-14 Years, 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Lake and beach drowning deaths up against average

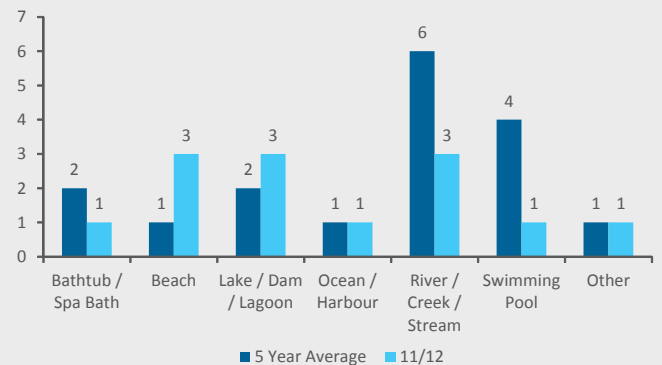


Figure 25: Drowning Deaths of Children 5-14 Years by Location, 5 Year Average, 2011/12

Swimming and Recreating account for almost 50% of drowning deaths in children aged 5-14 years

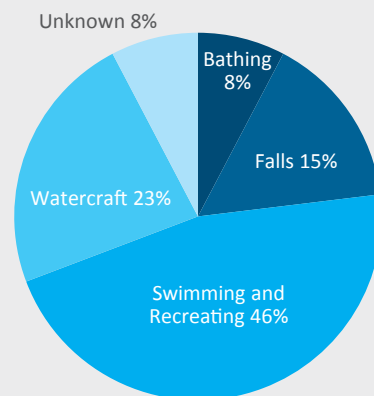


Figure 26: Drowning Deaths of Children 5-14 Years by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

CASE STUDY: Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15

Reducing drowning deaths in children aged 0-14 years is the first goal of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15. This goal has been expanded from the 2008-2011 Strategy which focused on children aged 0-4 years to include children 5-14 years.

In order to achieve a 50% reduction in drowning deaths in this age group by the year 2020, the Strategy outlines a number of key objectives.

These include implementing systems to ensure that all school aged children receive compulsory swimming and water safety education, promoting community wide rescue and resuscitation skills and strengthening programs that raise awareness and build skills in supervision.





LIFE STAGE IN FOCUS: YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-24 YEARS

There were 45 drowning deaths of young people aged 15-24 years in Australian waterways between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. This represents an increase of 9 (25%) on the five year average of 36 drowning deaths (Figure 27).

The River / Creek / Stream location was the location with the highest number of drowning deaths (14), followed by Beach (8) and Rocks (8). Swimming Pools and Bathtub / Spa Bath are the only locations to have decreased this year when compared to the five year average (Figure 28).

There were a diverse range of activities being undertaken immediately prior to drowning. Swimming and Recreating (24%) and using Watercraft (20%) are the two most common activities immediately prior to drowning. Activity was unknown in 13% of cases, suggesting the person was alone when they drowned (Figure 29).

Males account for 89% of all drowning deaths within this age group. New South Wales had the highest number of drowning deaths with 21 (47%) followed by Queensland with 10 drowning deaths (22%) (Figure 30).

Reducing drowning deaths in young people aged 15-24 years is the second goal of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15. Objectives include undertaking research to determine underlying factors leading to drowning and implementing strategies to address risk taking behaviour and the impact of alcohol.

Drowning in 15-24 year olds at highest level in 10 years

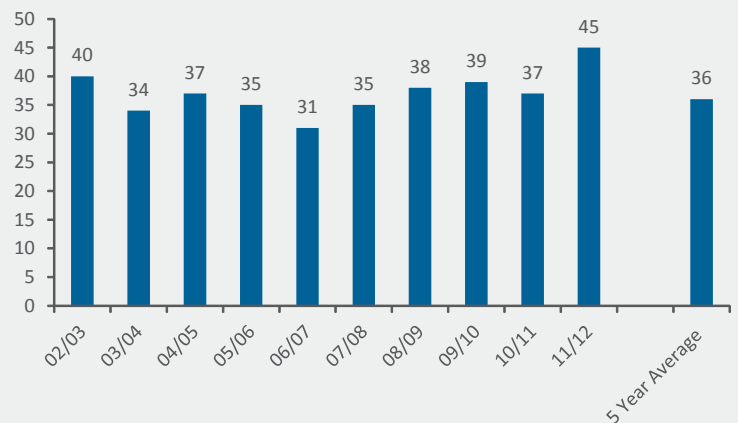


Figure 27: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years, 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Baths and pools only locations to record reductions against average

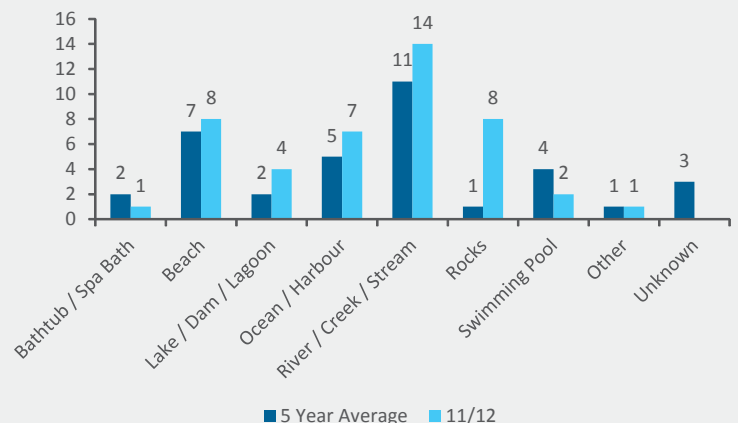


Figure 28: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by Location, 5 Year Average, 2011/12



MALES AGED
15-24 YEARS
DROWNED

Diversity of activities prior to drowning poses prevention challenge

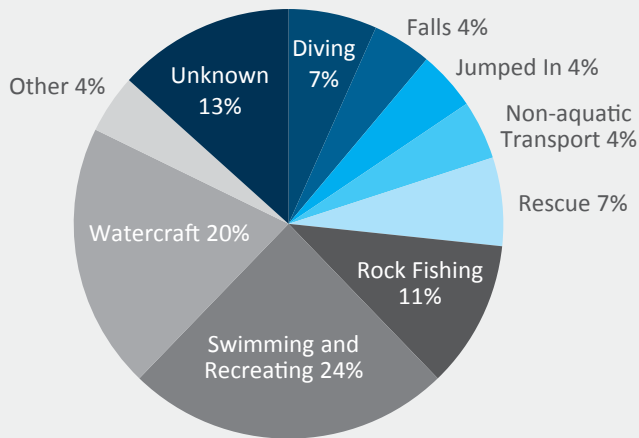


Figure 29: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

Males account for 89% of 15-24 years drowning deaths

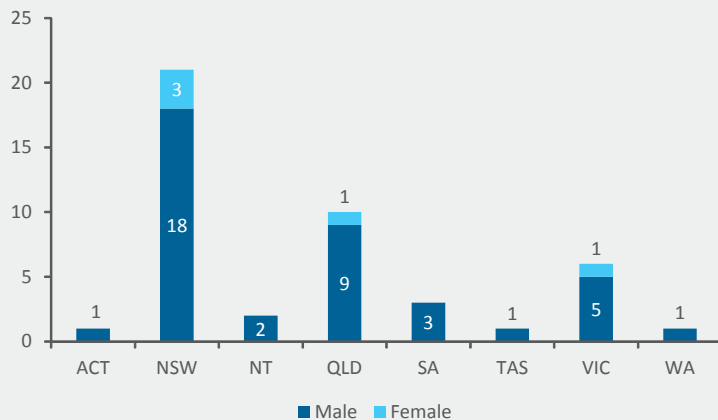
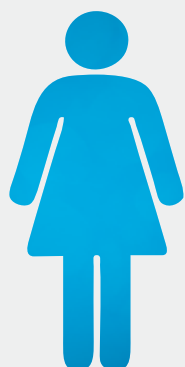


Figure 30: Drowning Deaths of Young People 15-24 Years by Sex and State - Territory, 2011-12



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FEMALES AGED 15-24 YEARS DROWNED

CASE STUDY:

The Forgotten 50%:

A Nine Year Analysis of Drowning in Children and Adolescents aged 5-19 years in Australia

Royal Life Saving has recently conducted a nine year analysis (1 July 2002 to 30 June 2011) of drowning deaths in children and adolescents 5 to 19 years in Australia. The research found that:

- 589 children aged between 0 and 19 years drowned in Australia in the past nine years
- 318 drowning deaths in children aged 0-4 years
- Drowning decreases markedly in the 5-9 (87 deaths) and 10-14 (52 deaths) years age groups
- 132 adolescents between the ages of 15-19 years drowned in the past nine years
- Males are significantly more likely to drown than females. 69% of those who drowned between the ages of 0-19 years were male, rising to 87% male in the 15-19 years age group
- Alcohol played a significant factor in drowning deaths in the 15-19 years age group with 20% of all cases known to involve alcohol
- Twenty four percent of those who drowned in the 15-19 years age group resided over 100kms from where they drowned. New hazards in unfamiliar locations may increase the drowning risk for adolescents as they gain independence and venture further away from their immediate surroundings
- Drowning deaths are preventable and the increase in drowning deaths in late adolescence points to the importance of swimming and water safety education during the school years. This education can then offer the skills and confidence to enjoy the water safely throughout their lifetime, and potentially provide protection for peers as well.



The full report can be downloaded from www.royallifesaving.com.au



LIFE STAGE IN FOCUS: PEOPLE AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER

There were 97 drowning deaths of people aged 55 years and over in Australian waterways between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012. This is an increase of 11 (13%) on the five year average of 86 drowning deaths (Figure 31). Males account for 74% of all drowning deaths in this age group.

River / Creek / Stream locations had the highest number of drowning deaths (30), followed by Beach locations (17). Ocean / Harbour and Swimming Pool drowning deaths in 2011/12 are down on the five year average (Figure 32).

There are a diverse range of activities being undertaken immediately prior to drowning. Falls into water (22%) and Watercraft (13%) are the two most common activities being conducted immediately prior to drowning. Activity was unknown in 18% of cases (Figure 33). When activity is examined by age groups within this broad life stage, more active pursuits such as Watercraft and Rock Fishing decrease as people age. Activities such as Falls and driving or being a passenger in Non-aquatic Transport increase markedly (Figure 34).

Reducing drowning deaths in people aged 55 years and over is the third goal of the life stages priority area of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15.

This goal aims to achieve a 50% reduction in drowning deaths in people aged 55+ by conducting further research through greater segmentation of data, creating and implementing a national public awareness campaign targeting drowning prevention strategies for people aged 55 years and over and implementing strategies that foster more inclusive aquatic venues and associated workforces to meet the needs of people aged 55+.

Drowning in people aged 55 and over remains a concern

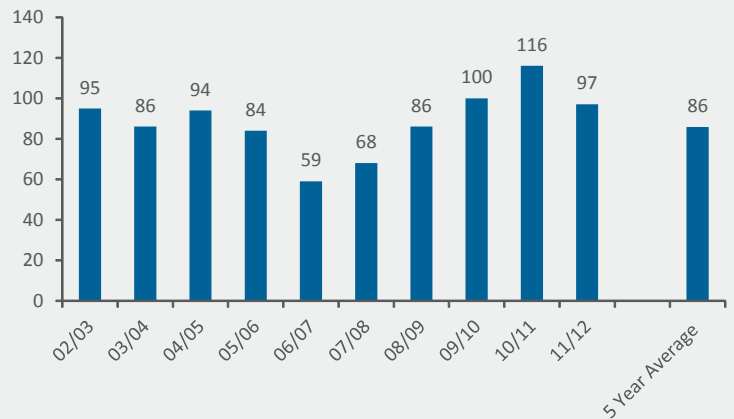


Figure 31: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years, 2002/03 to 2011/12, 5 Year Average

Concerning increase in river drowning deaths against average

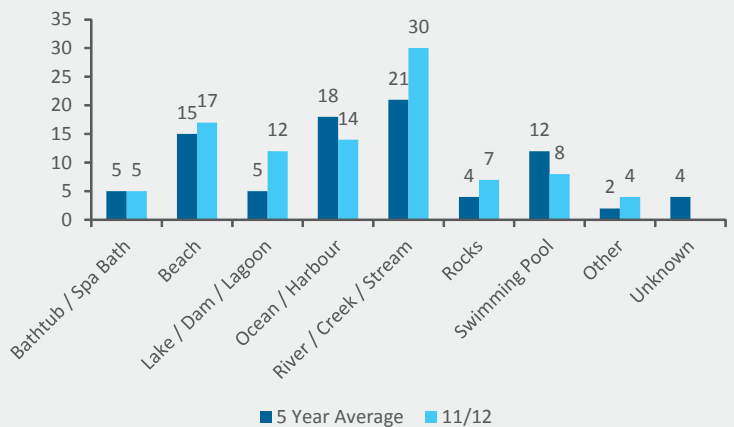


Figure 32: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by Location, 5 Year Average, 2011/12



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MALES AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED

Drowning prevention challenge in people aged 55+ due to diversity of activity

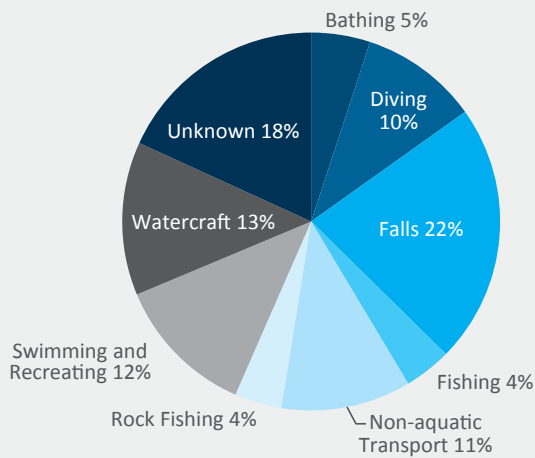


Figure 33: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12

Drownings as a result of falls and driving increasing as people age

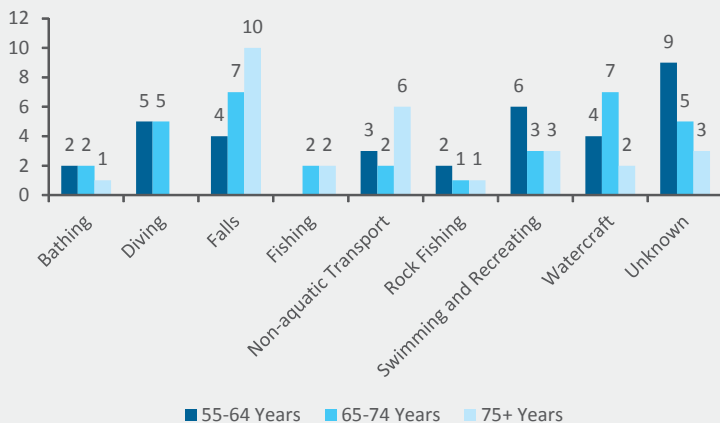


Figure 34: Drowning Deaths of People Aged 55+ Years by Age Group and Activity Immediately Prior, 2011/12



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FEMALES AGED 55 YEARS AND OVER DROWNED



CASE STUDY:
Snorkelling-related deaths in Australia, 1994-2006

Research recently published in the Medical Journal of Australia has examined the frequency and causes of snorkelling-related deaths in Australia.

The research found:

- 130 snorkelling related deaths between 1994 and 2006 with forensic details
- 60 deaths from cardiac or suspected cardiac causes
- 33 deaths from surface drowning
- 19 deaths after prolonged breath holding diving
- 10 deaths from trauma and 8 from other causes

The research found that snorkelling-related deaths are rare in the context of the large population sampled. The article also recommended preventative measures for snorkelling-related deaths such as pre-dive medical assessments for people with a history of cardiac or respiratory disease or with a family history of sudden unexpected death.

It also advocated for improved training in how to use snorkelling equipment, better matching of skills to health, fitness and water conditions, better supervision and quality training of supervisors in rescue and resuscitation techniques and the avoidance of hyperventilation before breath-hold diving.

Lippmann, J. and J. Pearn (2012). "Snorkelling-related deaths in Australia, 1994-2006." Medical Journal of Australia 197(4): 230-232

DROWNING RISK FACTORS

Risk factors that increase a person's chance of drowning can include age, gender, socio-economic status, underlying 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 2011/12.

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DROWNING CASES
WERE VISITORS

Medical Conditions

There were 36 people who were known to have underlying medical conditions that may have contributed to their drowning death. Of these, 81% were men and 72% were aged 55 years and over.

The most common medical conditions were diseases of the circulatory system (such as ischaemic heart disease and cardiac arrhythmias), mental and behavioural disorders (such as dementia and autism) and diseases of the nervous system such as epilepsy.

Medical conditions can increase your risk of drowning in any aquatic environment. Royal Life Saving recommends that any child with a history of epilepsy never be left unsupervised when in, on, or around the water. Regular medical check-ups are recommended for people participating in activities such as scuba diving and for all people aged 55 years and over.

Drugs

Drugs were known to be involved in 22 drowning deaths, with men accounting for 68% of these. Of the drowning deaths known to involve drugs, 32% were illegal drugs or prescription medication at toxic levels.

Of the illegal drugs, cannabis was the most commonly found. In 36% of cases, more than three different drugs were found in the person's system highlighting possible unintended consequences of mixing different drugs. Drugs (both illegal and legal) are known to impair judgement and slow reaction times.

Royal Life Saving highlights the association between using illegal drugs or abusing prescription medication, and drowning. Those on prescription medication should talk to their doctor about possible side effects that may negatively impact upon their safety when undertaking aquatic activities.

Visitor Status

In 59 cases (21%), the person who drowned was a visitor to the location at which they drowned. Of these, 26 people who drowned were interstate tourists and another 6 were international tourists, predominately from European countries, such as Sweden, Switzerland and Belgium. This is contrary to assumptions about people from Asian countries drowning whilst tourists in Australia. There were also 27 people who drowned within their own State, however they drowned at a location that was 100kms or more from their place of residence. Overseas visitors were more likely to drown at the beach than any other location. Interstate and intrastate visitors were more likely to drown at inland waterways (rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, dams and lagoons).

People engaging with unfamiliar aquatic locations should where possible check conditions with residents local to the area before entering the water. Ongoing tourist education about basic water safety messages including being aware of skill level and always swimming at patrolled beaches between the flags must be conducted.

Alcohol

Alcohol was known to be a factor in 26 drowning deaths, with men accounting for 77% of these. Alcohol was most likely to be a factor in drowning deaths of people aged 55-64 years, followed by 18-24 year olds, 35-44 year olds and 45-54 year olds.

Where the blood alcohol content (BAC) was known, all readings were above the legal limit (0.05). The highest BAC level recorded was 0.27, which is over five times the legal driving limit. Anyone drinking alcohol in, on, or around the water puts themselves at a significantly higher risk of drowning.

Alcohol impairs judgement, reduces reaction time and can result in a lack of coordination and greater risk taking behaviour. The more you drink, the greater the risk of drowning. Royal Life Saving urges people not to drink alcohol and undertake aquatic activity.

CASE STUDY: State of the Industry 2012

Each year Royal Life Saving Society - Australia produces the State of the Industry report to provide an important measure of safety standards in aquatic facilities across Australia. Based on the results of Aquatic Facility Safety Assessments (AFSA) conducted across Australia, the State of the Industry report provides the opportunity to benchmark the performance of the industry standard – RLSSA's Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO). The AFSA has twelve sections. Each section consists of a number of criteria directly relating to the application of the GSPO in an individual aquatic facility. Depending on the varied infrastructure at each aquatic facility; different sections and assessment criteria are activated or deactivated as they apply.

The sections of the AFSA are as follows:

1. Administration
2. First Aid
3. Technical Operations
4. Facility Design
5. Spa Pools
6. Dive Pools
7. Water Slides
8. Wave Pools
9. Rivers
10. Water Features
11. Supervision
12. Programs

Key Findings

- Safety standards across Australia have continued to improve with mean compliance of 84.3% in 2012
- Since 2008 Royal Life Saving has assessed 408 aquatic facilities across Australia. More than half (57%) of those facilities have undertaken an assessment only once
- The administration of aquatic facilities has reported a 9.1% increase in mean compliance over the last five years
- Compliance in requirements for pool water quality and pool plant operations (Technical Operations) has remained relatively consistent over the past five years with mean compliance of 79.9% in 2012 highlighting the need for additional focus from aquatic facilities for improvement
- Mean compliance for remote facilities was 14.7% below the five year average (83.2%) for all facilities at 68.5%

Recommendations

- Regular training for Lifeguards covering emergency procedures; initiatives; resuscitation; oxygen equipment; first aid and rescue skills are likely to have the most significant contribution to increasing compliance of aquatic facilities in the AFSA
- All aquatic facilities should prepare a risk assessment for the storage and handling of chemicals and review every 12 months
- All facilities should undertake an AFSA annually to ensure continual improvement of management standards and practices as part of a strategy to reduce risk and prevent drowning in Australian aquatic facilities

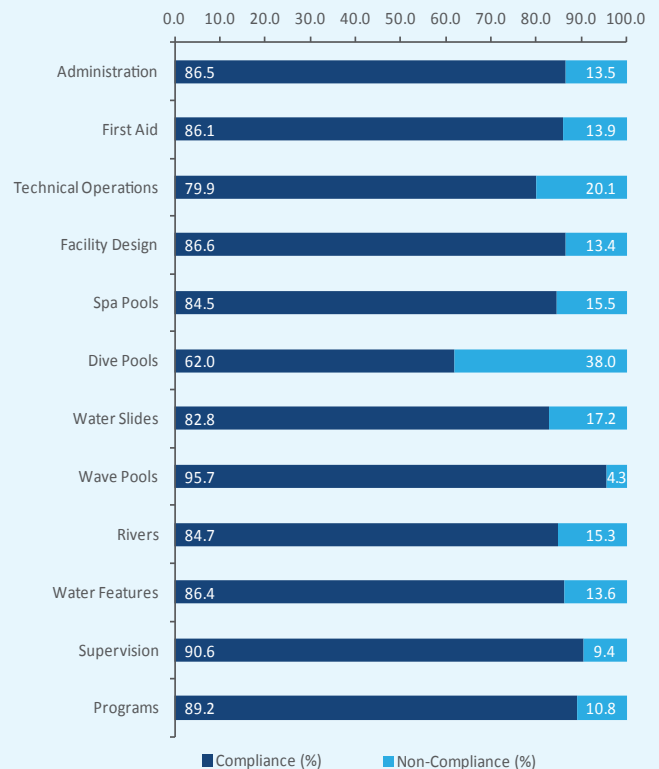


Figure 35: Mean compliance (%), by Section

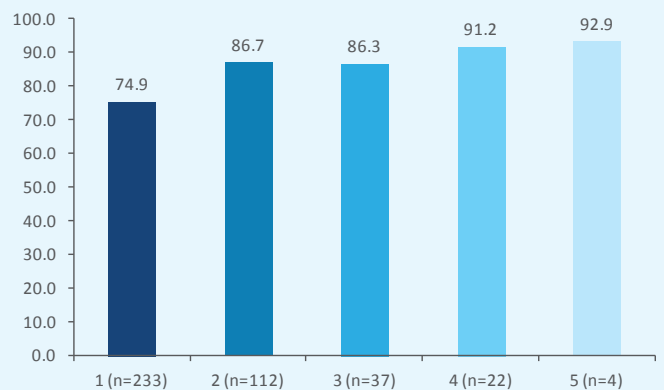


Figure 36: Mean Compliance (%) by Frequency of Assessment



The full report can be downloaded from www.royallifesaving.com.au

METHODS

Information for the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia National Drowning Report 2012 has been collected from State and Territory Coronial Offices, the National Coroners Information System (NCIS) and media reports. 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 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 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 2011 and 2012. Figures may change depending upon the ongoing coronial investigations and findings as 86% of cases were still under investigation (i.e. open) at the time of the production of this report.

This report contains information on 2011/12 drowning deaths known as of 24th August 2012. All other data is correct as of 1 July 2012, in accordance with Royal Life Saving's ongoing quality assurance and data checking processes. All cases in the Royal Life Saving database are checked against the NCIS on a regular basis and figures are updated in drowning reports from year to year as cases close. The 5 year averages are calculated from drowning deaths in 2006/07 to 2010/11.

Drowning rates per 100,000 population are based on the ABS publication 'Australian Demographic Statistics' (Cat. No 3101.0) which are currently calculated using 2006 Census data. Figures for 2006-07 onwards are subject to change based on final figures from the 2011 Census. These rates will be updated based on the final population figures from the ABS in the 2013 National Drowning Report.

Percentages and averages are presented as whole numbers and have been rounded up or down accordingly.

Exclusions include: suicide, homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attack, or hypothermia where known. All information presented is about drowning deaths or deaths where drowning was a factor (e.g. a car rolled into the water and a person drowned).

Non-aquatic Transport replaces the activity category of 'Driving' used in previous reports. Non-aquatic Transport relates to drowning deaths involving a means of transport not primarily designed for aquatic use such as cars, motorbikes, bicycles and aeroplanes. Means of transport primarily used for aquatic purposes are captured in the watercraft category (e.g. boats, jet skis, canoes, kayaks).

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 2012:

- Royal Life Saving State and Territory Member Organisations (STMOs)
- The National Coroners Information System (NCIS)
- The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian (CCYPCG)
- Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)
- Rick Carter (Jimmy Too Design)
- Leanne Daking (NCIS)
- Jo Cotsonis (NCIS)
- Stephanie Muller (CCYPCG)
- Reyelle McKeever (CCYPCG)
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- Barbara Brighton (SLSA)
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- Dr. Richard Franklin (RLSSA)

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

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Australia National Drowning Report 2012.

2012 SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

Overall

284 people drowned in Australia between 1 July 2011 and 30 June 2012

This is a reduction of 3 drowning deaths (1%) on the five year average of 287 drowning deaths

This is a reduction of 26 drowning deaths (8%) on the 310 drowning deaths in 2010/11

Sex and Age

- 232 (82%) drowning deaths were of men
- 52 (18%) drowning deaths were female
- 21 (7%) drowning deaths occurred in children aged 0-4 years
- 13 (5%) drowning deaths occurred in children aged 5-14 years
- 45 (16%) drowning deaths occurred in young people aged 15 to 24 years
- 97 (34%) drowning deaths occurred in people aged 55 years and over

State and Territory

- 105 (37%) drowning deaths occurred in New South Wales
- 75 (26%) drowning deaths occurred in Queensland
- 37 (13%) drowning deaths occurred in Victoria

Location & Activity

- 75 (26%) drowning deaths occurred in River / Creek / Stream locations
- 55 (19%) drowning deaths occurred at Beach locations
- 43 (15%) drowning deaths occurred in Ocean / Harbour locations
- 55 people (19%) were using Watercraft immediately prior to drowning
- 53 people (19%) were Swimming and Recreating immediately prior to drowning



PEOPLE DROWNED IN AUSTRALIAN WATERWAYS



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS REPORT CONTACT:

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

Phone 02 8217 3111

E-mail info@rlssa.org.au

Visit www.royallifesaving.com.au

CONTACT ROYAL LIFE SAVING IN YOUR STATE OR TERRITORY:

ACT Phone 02 6260 5800

E-mail act@rlssa.org.au

NSW Phone 02 9634 3700

E-mail nsw@royalnsw.com.au

NT Phone 08 8981 5036

E-mail nt@rlssa.org.au

QLD Phone 07 3823 2823

E-mail admin@rlssq.com.au

SA Phone 08 8234 9244

E-mail training@royallifesavingsa.com.au

TAS Phone 03 6243 7558

E-mail tas@rlssa.org.au

VIC Phone 03 9676 6900

E-mail mail@lifesavingvictoria.com.au

WA Phone 08 9383 8200

E-mail info@rlsswa.com.au

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