NATIONAL BEACH & COASTAL SAFETY REPORT

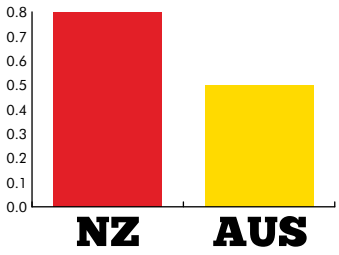
10-YEAR OVERVIEW | 2012-22 & 1-YEAR OVERVIEW | 2021-22

SURF LIFE SAVING®
NEW ZEALAND

KEY FINDINGS

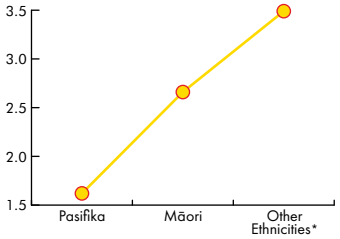
10-YEAR OVERVIEW | 2012-22

1 **Our Ten Year Average Fatal Drowning Rate is 46% Higher Than Australia's**



And it is on the increase...

2 **Other Ethnicities* Had the Greatest Fatal Drowning Rate Over the Last Ten Years**



Other Ethnicities*

3.49 per 100,000 pop.

*Other Ethnicities represent all other ethnicities that are not NZ European, Pasifika, Asian nor Māori.

3 **Māori Had the Second-Highest Fatal Drowning Rate**

2.66

per 100,000 pop.

Māori

2012-2022 Fatal Drowning Rate

4 **Pasifika Had the Third-Highest Fatal Drowning Rate**

1.62

per 100,000 pop.

Pasifika

2012-2022 Fatal Drowning Rate

5 **Over the Last Ten Years, 180 Fatal Drownings Occurred in the Busy Summer Months.**

That Represents

46.6%

of the Total Annual Fatal Drownings

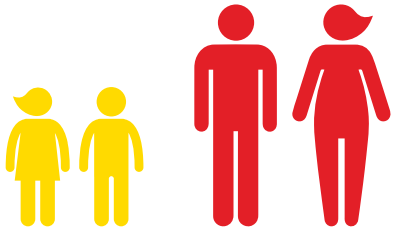
“We, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, are saying 'enough is enough' and are calling for greater investment in a long term, evidence-based beach and coastal safety education strategy.”

6 Over the Last Ten Years, Males Have Fatally Drowned More Than Females

7 Many New Zealand Adults Cannot Swim or Float Unaided.

3 in 10
New Zealand Adults Cannot Swim or Float

8 Adults Have Fatally Drowned More Than Children and Young Adolescents

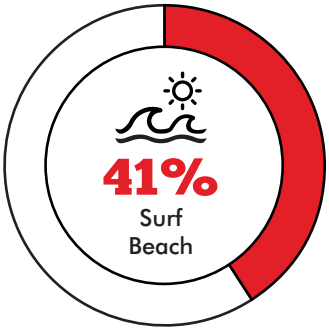


5% (0-15 years old)

95% (15 years old and over)

2012-2022 Fatal Drownings

9 Surf Beaches Pose the Greatest Risk for Beach and Coastal Fatal Drowning in New Zealand.



2012-2022 Fatal Drownings

10 Over the Last Ten Years, the Greatest Risk Activities on NZ Beaches and Coasts Have Been:


Swimming/ Wading


Boating


Snorkelling

However... Last Year, the Greatest Risk Activities Were:


Swimming/ Wading

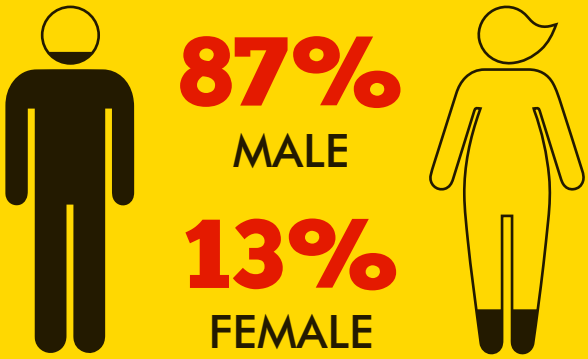

Snorkelling


Land-Based Fishing

DROWNING SNAPSHOT

10-YEAR OVERVIEW | 2012-22

386
Beach and Coastal Fatal Drownings



87% MALE

13% FEMALE

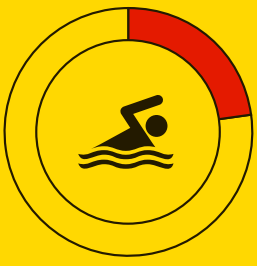
LOCATION

41%
Surf Beach

14%
Harbour

12%
0-1km Offshore

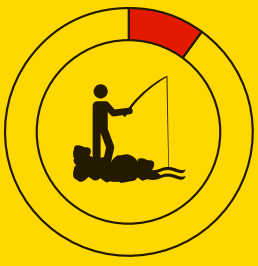
ACTIVITY



23%
Swimming/Wading

16%
Boating

10%
Snorkelling



10%
Land-Based Fishing

SYNOPSIS

Between July 2021 and June 2022 there were 54 beach and coastal fatal drownings in New Zealand (more than double than the previous year of 25 fatal drownings). This brings the total over the last ten years to 386, which is an average of nearly 39 beach and coastal fatal drownings each year. Each one of these fatal drownings leaves families and communities devastated. Our drowning toll is something every New Zealander should see as a national tragedy and one we all have a responsibility to address.

"Last year the rate of drowning around New Zealand's coastline was twice that of Australia."

We can highlight the severity of the problem here in New Zealand by making a comparison to our antipodean neighbours. The New Zealand ten-year average fatal drowning rate is 46% greater than the Australian ten-year average. In 2021-22, this fatal drowning rate rose to almost 50%... so in other words last year the rate of drowning around the coastline of New Zealand was twice that of Australia.

In order to help understand the problem in more detail, Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ) produces the National Beach and Coast Safety report on an annual basis, documenting incidents that have occurred within the coastal zone, while also analysing coastal participation, behaviours and perceptions. The report in itself does not provide answers, but it does provide the data in such a way that highlights the problem and will aid further analysis to help provide potential solutions, some of which are mentioned here.

Between May 2021 and April 2022, 3.1 million New Zealand adults (16 years and above) visited the coast on average 3.4 times each month. This suggests there were over 10 million individual visits to the coast. Swimming and wading were the most popular activities, followed by kai gathering for food and boating, with swimming, wading, snorkelling and land-based fishing the highest risk activities.

Surf beaches remain the most dangerous environment, followed by harbours and locations 0-1 km from shore. Most beach and coastal fatal drownings occurred while swimming or wading, followed by boating and snorkelling. As a response, SLSNZ provides coastal risk assessments to Councils and land managers who want them, to help them provide a hierarchy of control measures designed to mitigate the risk. This is backed up by providing detailed fatal drowning reports to the coroner to help understand what went wrong and why, and what can be done to try and prevent it from happening again.

Across all coastal activities, men are more likely to take risks and less likely to follow safety practices, while the opposite is true for women. Not surprisingly, men continue to fatally drown more than women on our beaches and coastline, accounting for 87% of drowning deaths on average, although this dropped to 80% last year. As a response, SLSNZ has run several social media safety campaigns with 'save the males' as a theme. This is also supported by summer safety messaging via the media and campaigns run by our partners bp, DHL and TSB.

Over the last ten years, Māori and Pasifika account for the highest fatal drowning rate per capita (4.28 per 100,000 pop.) followed by the other non-European ethnicities (3.49 per 100,000 pop.). As a response, SLSNZ has translated all of its safety messaging into Māori and multiple Pacific Island languages.

"Rip currents are the greatest hazard at a surf beach."

Over the last ten years, 41% of beach and coastal fatal drownings occurred at a surf beach in New Zealand. Rip currents are the greatest hazard at a surf beach accounting for the large majority of rescues and fatal drownings. Research shows 41% of people are confident they can identify a rip current. From those, just over half (56%) actually can identify them correctly, which means we estimate only 23% of people can really identify a rip current, or more importantly nearly 80% of people can't. As a response, SLSNZ is working with NIWA to develop AI technology to help the public identify rips and with the University of Plymouth, UK to develop a rip current hazard prediction model to warn people when rip currents are going to be at their most dangerous.

SLSNZ has also introduced the 3Rs Rip Survival Plan to increase awareness and knowledge on what to do if caught in a rip. The 3Rs message comprises three simple and easy-to-remember steps:

R – Relax and float to conserve energy.

R – Raise your hand to signal for help.

R – Ride the rip until it stops and you

can swim back to shore or help arrives.

Research shows that almost a third of New Zealanders cannot swim or float in the ocean for more than a few minutes, and many cannot swim 50m in the ocean without touching the bottom. SLSNZ recommends choosing a lifeguarded beach and swimming between the flags, especially those

whose swimming and floating ability in the ocean is limited. As a response, to help people choose a Lifeguarded beach, SLSNZ has partnered with Auckland Council and helped to develop the Safeswim (safeswim.org.nz) website, which is now the national preferred beach & coastal safety communications platform. It shows which beaches are Lifeguarded, when they are Lifeguarded and has live safety warnings to keep the public informed about hazards as they occur.

Across New Zealand, the Auckland region has the highest number of fatal drownings, followed by Northland and Waikato. However, when looking at per-capita figures, last year Northland had New Zealand's greatest fatal drowning rate (3.38 per 100,000 pop.) and Auckland, with a far greater population size, has a fatal drowning rate of only 0.64. Therefore, the risk of fatally drowning on the beach and coastal environments of Northland is over five times greater than in Auckland. As a response, SLSNZ has worked with Northland Regional Council to provide hazard assessments on 50 of its beaches, so they can be added to the Safeswim website. SLSNZ has also developed national Beach Safety Signage guidelines to help Councils provide standard, internationally-approved information and warning signs.

Over the last ten years there have been 180 beach and coastal drowning fatalities during the three summer months of December, January and February. This figure represents nearly half of the total annual beach and coastal drowning fatalities recorded, highlighting the increased risk associated with the short but busy summer season. As a response, SLSNZ provides a national lifeguard service consisting of 74 volunteer Surf Life Saving Clubs who patrol at weekends and council funded lifeguards who patrol during the week at the most popular locations during the summer holiday period. When combined, these services patrol a total of 92 locations nationwide. During 2021-22 there were 4,377 qualified SLSNZ Lifeguards, with 833 of them gaining their Surf Lifeguard Award during the season.

"SLSNZ Lifeguards protecting our beaches in the last decade have saved more than 9,400 lives, provided 21,604 people with first aid and carried out 1,030,841 preventative actions."

The interventions performed by SLSNZ Lifeguards protecting our beaches in the last decade have saved more than 9,400 lives. Over the same period, SLSNZ Lifeguards have carried out 1,030,841 preventative actions. That is a huge number of drownings that have been potentially averted because of the vital role that SLSNZ performs. SLSNZ also runs a Beach Education Programme, educating around 25,000 school children each year and some Surf Life Saving Clubs regularly visit schools and run community beach safety education programmes.

SLSNZ also saves lives on the land as well as in the sea. All SLSNZ Lifeguards are first aid trained, and many as First Responders. Under an operational partnership with St John Ambulance, SLSNZ Lifeguards in selected parts of NZ respond to major first aid incidents on and close to the beach on their behalf. Over the last ten years, SLSNZ Lifeguards have provided 21,604 people with first aid.

As part of the 'National Search and Rescue (SAR) Framework', Volunteer SLSNZ Clubs are regularly called upon by the Police to respond to incidents out of hours. These call-outs have significantly increased in recent years as more and more people need our services. More lives are being saved, and more people are being rescued than ever before. Unfortunately, SAR Squads have also been busy searching for and recovering people who have died, returning them to their whanau and loved ones. Over the past ten years, SLSNZ Lifeguards have searched for 3,271 people and unfortunately had to recover 120 deceased people.

Research has shown that 15% of NZ adults have rescued someone, while 11% have reported being rescued. From those who rescued someone, 31% did not use any floatation device. The fatal drowning data shows that 100% of those who have fatally drowned whilst trying to save someone, were not carrying any form of floatation. Therefore this indicates that the safest option is for bystanders to take some form of floatation when entering the water to rescue someone. As a response, SLSNZ has partnered with Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA) and, thanks to funding from New Zealand Search & Rescue (NZSAR), instigated a national Public Rescue Equipment (PRE) programme to establish the most appropriate and effective PRE to recommend to Councils to place around the coastline of New Zealand. In addition, SLSNZ has partnered with Surfing New Zealand (SNZ) to train surfers how to rescue and provide first aid to people in difficulty through a programme called Surfers Rescue 24/7.

"Anyone can drown, but no one should."

As a coastal nation, we need to do far better. Despite our initiatives to reduce drowning, we need to do more, so we, SLSNZ, are calling for greater investment towards a long-term, evidence-based national beach and coastal safety education strategy. This can only come from a more strategic, top-down, coordinated approach from all stakeholders, from Government, something that we hope the current Ministry of Transport led review into recreational safety and Search & Rescue will achieve.

KEY FINDINGS

- There were 54 beach and coastal fatal drownings between July 2021 and June 2022 (more than double than the previous year of 25 fatal drownings).
- 3.1 million NZ adults visited the coast between May 2021 and April 2022. There were on average around 3.4 visits per month per person and about 10 million individual coastal visitations.
- 2.1 million NZ adults participated in coastal activities. Despite coastal participation being very similar between males and females (51% of coastal visitation is represented by males, 52% of participants in coastal activities are males), males are drowning more than females (87% males and 13% females in the past ten years; 89% males and 11% females in the last year).
- Swimming and wading remains the most popular activity (42% of New Zealanders), followed by kai gathering (38% of New Zealanders) and boating (18% of New Zealanders).
- On average, New Zealand has a 46% higher ten-year average beach and coastal fatal drowning rate per capita (per 100,000 pop.) than Australia. However, in 2021-22, the fatal drowning rate (1.05 per 100,000 pop.) was almost double than the Australian fatal drowning rate (0.55 per 100,000 pop.)
- Over the last ten years, Other Ethnicities (that don't include NZ European, Asian, Māori and Pasifika) had the highest fatal drowning rate per capita (3.49 per 100,000 pop.) of any ethnicity, followed by Māori (2.66 per 100,000 pop.) and Pasifika (1.62 per 100,000 pop.). The 2021-22 fatal drowning rates for each ethnicity was higher than their respective ten-year average, except for Pasifika which stayed the same.
- Over the last ten years, there were 180 beach and coastal drowning fatalities during the three summer months of December, January and February. This figure represents nearly half of the total annual beach and coastal drowning fatalities recorded, highlighting the increased risk associated with the busy summer season.
- Over the last ten years, adults over the age of 15 accounted for 95% of all drowning fatalities in the beach and coastal environment. The 45-54 and 65+ age groups have the greatest number of fatal drownings.
- Over the last ten years, 41% of beach and coastal fatal drownings occurred at a surf beach in New Zealand.
- Rip currents are the greatest hazard at a surf beach. About 41% of people are confident they can identify a rip current. From those, just over half (56%) actually identified them correctly, which means we estimate only 23% of people can really identify a rip current, or more importantly nearly 80% of people can't.
- Over the last ten years, swimming/wading, snorkelling and boating have been the highest risk activities on the coast. Last year swimming/wading, snorkelling and land-based fishing were the highest risk activities.
- Nearly three in ten New Zealanders (31%) cannot swim or float in the ocean for more than a few minutes. Only 9% of New Zealand adults swam further than 50m in the ocean in 2022, while 30% have never swum this distance in the ocean.
- 15% of NZ adults have rescued someone, while 11% reported have been rescued. From those who rescued someone, 31% did not use any flotation device.

“ New Zealander’s love the coast. Sadly, in the last ten years, there have been 386 beach and coastal fatal drownings in New Zealand. Each one leaves families and communities devastated. Our drowning toll is something every New Zealander should see as a national tragedy and one we all have a responsibility to address. ”

SURF LIFE SAVING®
NEW ZEALAND

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