DROWNING
SNAPSHOT

122
COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

87%
MALE

13%
FEMALE

Location
58%
AT THE BEACH

ROCK/CLIFF

15%
OFFSHORE

AT LEAST 5KM FROM A LIFESAVING SERVICE

18%

42%

Activity
35%
SWIMMING

14%
BOATING & PWC

8%
WATERCRAFT

7%
SNORKELLING

15↑

13↑

23↑

23↑

44↑

3↓
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A ustralian beaches have long occupied a special place in Australian culture, with eighty-five per cent of the population living within 50km of the coast and more than 300 million visitations to the coast in the last year. The Australian coastline is where three of the world’s great oceans meet - the Pacific, Indian and Southern oceans – each providing a diversity of conditions and experiences to Australians and its visitors. The beach is a place of significance where people from all over the world can meet, live and come together.

Our interactions with the Australian coastline represent a legacy that is recognised nationally and internationally with Australians renowned for their affinity with the coast. Most visits to the coast are ones of delight and fun, yet over the years too many have been peppered with disaster and tragedy.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) is one of the nation’s most respected organisations and the peak body for coastal water safety and drowning prevention. We are Australia’s largest volunteer organisation, with 176,000 members drawn from all age groups and demographics. Membership across 314 clubs is almost fifty per cent female, with volunteer surf lifesavers performing more than 10,176 rescues each year and over 1.3 million volunteer hours on patrol. In addition, they attend to 89,695 emergency care treatments and perform more than 1.5 million preventative actions. With research showing that for every dollar invested or donated to Surf Life Saving there is twenty-nine dollars of value returned to the community it is undeniable the Surf Life Saving’s dividend to the nation is immense - and growing.

The National Coastal Safety Report 2019 is a comprehensive summary and analysis of our research and presents evidence relating to community perceptions, delivery of core lifesaving services, coastal drowning deaths and other fatal coastal incidents. The report continues to focus on coastal drowning deaths, however, the National Coastal Safety Report 2019 delves further into other coastal-related deaths, presenting a fifteen-year overview and laying the foundations for future research to encompass all coastal-related fatalities.

The 2018-19 period resulted in 190 recorded coastal fatalities. This includes 122 coastal drowning deaths, the third highest recorded in the past fifteen years. Of all 190 coastal fatalities, drowning was recorded as the causal factor in sixty-five per cent of incidents. For the 2018-19 period the majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths occurred while swimming (35%), boating and PWC (14%) or using watercraft (8%). Swimming, watercraft, attempting a rescue, falls and snorkelling drowning deaths all being above the fifteen-year average. Males continue to be over-represented in coastal drowning deaths (87%), with young males aged 16-39 identified at a greater risk and are twice as likely to drown than other adults. On average forty young males drown each year (2004-19).

For other unintentional coastal fatalities boating, swimming and watercraft are the three highest activities undertaken at the time of the fatality over the fifteen-year period, similar to that of coastal drowning deaths. The 2018-19 period saw swimming, scuba diving and snorkelling deaths above the fifteen-year average.

Bystander rescues involve members of the public going to the aid of those in distress, with these actions increasingly recognised for the significant role in saving lives. Without these invaluable actions there is no doubt many other lives would have been lost. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for the rescuer to become the victim, with fatal bystander rescues on Australian beaches between 2004-17 representing four per cent of all coastal drowning deaths.

Rock fishing has recorded the third highest number of coastal drowning deaths over the fifteen-year period. Media has often attributed these to unexpected large swell or ‘freak waves’. Research has found that the ‘freak wave’ concept is a myth and that understanding the wave period is vital. More experienced fishers have a better understanding of wave period, which enables them to better manage associated risks, and are encouraged to share their knowledge with less experienced fishers.

The National Coastal Safety Report 2019 presents evidence-based insights into factors relating to drowning deaths and other fatalities, in addition to participation. This information is invaluable for understanding circumstances around incidents and assisting with the development of education and awareness programs, initiatives and actions to reduce fatalities in the future. I have the pleasure of commending this comprehensive report to you and encourage all to support SLSA in its objectives of reducing injury and the loss of life along our coastline. As has been stated in the past, the numbers and statistics represented are much more than this – they represent the loss of life of many individuals. The loss of 190 lives is not tolerable, nor is the loss of one life, our vision is zero preventable deaths in Australian waters.

Adam Weir
Chief Executive Officer
Surf Life Saving Australia
The Total Service Plan is SLSA’s national drowning reduction strategy and service plan. It is created using an iterative process of analysis and review to identify coastal safety issues of national importance. This approach follows the public health model and is consistent with international risk management principles.

In collaboration with stakeholders, SLSA identifies coastal safety risks using incident monitoring, coastal risk assessments and participation analysis. This information is analysed to identify the top national coastal safety issues, priorities and blackspot areas that require intervention or mitigation strategies.

THE NATIONAL SAFETY AGENDA
The issues and blackspots identified through the Total Service Plan process form the basis of SLSA’s National Safety Agenda. The agenda influences lifesaving operations, including services and equipment allocation. It drives public education, including evidence-based mitigation strategies, communications campaigns and pilot projects, and informs SLSA’s research plan.

The Total Service Plan takes a risk management approach. It allows SLSA to use the evidence to ensure we locate lifesaving services and assets in areas of need and have appropriate public education programs and mitigation strategies to address the coastal safety issues and known blackspots. Embedded in the process is continual monitoring and evaluation to ensure the treatments and interventions are effective in reducing drowning deaths along the Australian coast.

The coastal safety needs of the Australian community reflected in the National Safety Agenda and the Surf Life Saving movement’s capacity and capability to meet these needs are explored in the ‘Capability’ section of this report.

**NATIONAL SAFETY AGENDA ISSUES**

1. RIP CURRENTS
2. BOATING
3. ROCK FISHING
4. WATERCRAFT
5. TOXICITY & HEALTH
6. INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS
7. SNORKELLING & SCUBA DIVING
8. OVER 55 YEARS
9. DANGEROUS MARINE CREATURES
10. NEW MIGRANTS

**TOTAL SERVICE PLAN OVERVIEW**

The Total Service Plan aligns with the International Standard ISO 31000:2018 framework, which provides principles and guidelines for risk management.
COMMUNITY
SECTION ONE

14.7M
Australian adults visited the coast in 2018/19

11.1M
Coastal activity participants

9.3M
Swimming/Wading participants
Figure 2
AUSTRALIAN POPULATION DENSITY PER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)

This map shows the estimated Australian population density per LGA at June 2019. Most LGAs with a population density higher than 100 persons per square kilometre are located on Australia’s coastal fringe.

Key to Population Density per LGA
- < 0.1 persons per km²
- 0.1–1 persons per km²
- 1–10 persons per km²
- 10–100 persons per km²
- > 100 persons per km²
COASTAL PARTICIPATION

1.4 million surfers
0.8 million frequent surfers (at least once a month)
6 surfing hours per occasional surfer per year
150 surfing hours per frequent surfer per year

0.9 million fishers
0.7 million frequent fishers (at least once a month)
11 fishing hours per occasional fisher per year
125 fishing hours per frequent fisher per year

0.4 million frequent snorkellers (at least once a month)
3 snorkelling hours per occasional snorkeller per year
170 snorkelling hours per frequent snorkeller per year

0.2 million PWC users
0.1 million frequent PWC users (at least once a month)
4 PWC hours per occasional PWC user per year
30 PWC hours per frequent PWC user per year

0.6 million scuba divers
0.2 million frequent scuba divers (at least once a month)
5 diving hours per occasional diver per year
110 diving hours per frequent diver per year

FREQUENT VS OCCASIONAL PARTICIPATION

Annually, there are at least 11.1 million coastal activity participants. On average Australians visit the coast 3.4 times per month.

Land-based Fishing
2.9 million fishers
0.9 million frequent fishers (at least once a month)
11 fishing hours per occasional fisher per year
125 fishing hours per frequent fisher per year

Surfing
Total: 7%

Snorkelling
Total: 9%

Boating
Total: 14%

Watercraft
Total: 6%

Swimming/Wading
Total: 15%

Rock Fishing
Total: 6%

Scuba Diving
Total: 3%

Personal Water Craft (PWC)
Total: 3%

Boating
2.7 million boaters
0.7 million frequent boaters (at least once a month)
10 boating hours per occasional boater per year
150 boating hours per frequent boater per year

Surfing
1.4 million surfers
0.8 million frequent surfers (at least once a month)
6 surfing hours per occasional surfer per year
150 surfing hours per frequent surfer per year

Rock Fishing
1.1 million rock fishers
0.5 million frequent rock fishers (at least once a month)
10 fishing hours per occasional rock fisher per year
190 fishing hours per frequent rock fisher per year

Scuba Diving
0.6 million scuba divers
0.2 million frequent scuba divers (at least once a month)
5 diving hours per occasional diver per year
110 diving hours per frequent diver per year

Swimming
9.3 million swimmers
3.3 million frequent swimmers (at least once a month)
4 swimming hours per occasional swimmer per year
90 swimming hours per frequent swimmer per year

Figure 3
2019: COASTAL VISITATION BY ACTIVITY

Questions: Which of the following coastal activities have you participated in during the past 12 months? How often do you participate in these activities?
ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

COASTAL ACTIVITY PARTICIPANTS: DEMOGRAPHIC & LOCATION SELECTION

2019: SWIMMING/WADING

Figure 4
2019: SWIMMING/WADING PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Figure 5
2019: SWIMMING/WADING PARTICIPATION BY STATE

2019: FISHING

Figure 6
2019: FISHING PARTICIPATION BY TYPE AND GENDER

Figure 7
2019: FISHING PARTICIPATION BY TYPE AND STATE

HOW SWIMMERS SELECT LOCATION

- WEATHER CONDITIONS: 68%
- SEA/SURF CONDITIONS: 63%
- SAFETY: 66%
- PATROLLED LOCATION: 43%

FISHERS WHO USE A LIFEJACKET OR BUOYANCY AID

- LAND-BASED FISHERS: 36%
- ROCK FISHERS: 50%
2019: BOATING & PWC

- 2.7M Boating
- 0.6M PWC

- 48% Male
- 52% Female

2019: SNORKELLING & SCUBA DIVING

- 1.7M Snorkelling
- 0.6M Scuba Diving

- 46% Male
- 54% Female

**Figure 8**
2019: BOATING AND PWC PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

**Figure 9**
2019: BOATING AND PWC PARTICIPATION BY STATE

**Figure 10**
2019: SNORKELLING AND SCUBA DIVING PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

**Figure 11**
2019: SCUBA DIVING AND SNORKELLING PARTICIPATION BY STATE

**Swimming Ability of Frequent Participants**

- PWC users identify as weak swimmers or can’t swim: 23%
- Boaters identify as weak swimmers or can’t swim: 9%

**Lifejacket or Buoyancy Aid Use by Participants**

- 35% Snorkellers
- 78% Scuba divers
2019: SURFING

Figure 12
2019: SURFING PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Figure 13
2019: SURFING PARTICIPATION BY STATE

SAFETY EQUIPMENT USED BY SURFERS

14% Helmet
17% Shark Deterrent Device

2019: WATERCRAFT

Figure 14
2019: WATERCRAFT PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Figure 15
2019: WATERCRAFT PARTICIPATION BY STATE

POPULAR LOCATIONS FOR WATERCRAFT ACTIVITIES

34% Bay or Harbour
22% Estuary or Mangrove
**ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION**

**PARTICIPATION FREQUENCY AND EXPERTISE**

Figure 16

**2019: PARTICIPANTS (MILLIONS) IN COASTAL ACTIVITIES**

- Swimming/Wading: 6.0 Millions
- Boating: 3.3 Millions
- Land-based Fishing: 2.0 Millions
- Snorkelling: 2.0 Millions
- Watercraft: 1.3 Millions
- Surfing: 0.7 Millions
- Rock Fishing: 0.7 Millions
- Scuba Diving: 0.6 Millions
- PWC: 0.6 Millions
- Occasional: 4.0 Millions
- Frequent: 2.0 Millions

Figure 17

**2019: AVERAGE HOURS SPENT AT THE COAST BY DISTANCE OF RESIDENCE FROM THE COAST PER PERSON ANNUALLY**

- Less than 2 hours: 55%
- Two hours or more: 72%
- 85%
- 80%

Figure 18

**2019: HOURS SPENT AT THE COAST PER VISIT BY DISTANCE OF RESIDENCE FROM THE COAST**

Where data does not total 100%, respondents answered ‘Can’t say’.
SWIMMING ABILITY
CONFIDENCE IN COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS

Figure 19
2019: LEVEL OF EXPERTISE FOR SWIMMING AND WADING PARTICIPANTS

Figure 20
2019: ABILITY TO SWIM 50M BY REPORTED LEVEL OF EXPERTISE IN THE OCEAN COMPARED TO OVERALL

OF SWIMMERS CANNOT SWIM 50M IN THE OCEAN WITHOUT TOUCHING THE BOTTOM

Figure 21
2019: PORTION OF PARTICIPANTS THAT CAN SWIM 50M IN THE OCEAN WITHOUT TOUCHING THE BOTTOM BY ACTIVITY
RISK PERCEPTION
PERCEPTIONS OF THE COAST AND COASTAL ACTIVITIES

Figure 22
2019: THINGS THAT COME TO MIND WHEN THINKING OF THE COAST

- Beach: 49%
- Sand, sandy: 21%
- Water: 13%
- Sun, sunshine: 9%
- Surf, surfing: 8%
- Swim, swimming: 7%
- Fish, fishing: 7%
- Relax, relaxation, lifestyle: 6%
- Cliff, rocks: 1%
- Sharks: 1%

HAZARDS ARE LARGELY IGNORED WHEN THINKING OF THE COAST. THIS SUGGESTS VISITORS ARE UNPREPARED WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THESE HAZARDS AT THE COAST.

Figure 23
2019: COASTAL FEATURES RATED AS EXTREMELY OR VERY HAZARDOUS BY ALL ADULTS

- Waves: 39%
- Rocks / Rocky platforms: 59%
- Other marine stingers: 60%
- Crocodiles: 62%
- Sharks: 62%
- Sun exposure: 65%
- Tropical marine stingers: 69%
- Rip currents: 80%
**COASTAL SAFETY**

**PERCEPTIONS OF THE COAST AND COASTAL ACTIVITIES**

---

**Figure 24**

2019: HOW SAFE DO AUSTRALIAN ADULTS THINK COASTAL ACTIVITIES ARE

Where data does not total 100%, respondents answered ‘Can’t say’.

---

**Figure 25**

2019: PERCEIVED CONFIDENCE TO IDENTIFY A RIP CURRENT BY SWIMMING ABILITY BROKEN DOWN BY ACTUAL ABILITY TO IDENTIFY A RIP CURRENT

Where data does not total 100%, respondents answered ‘Can’t say’.

---

82% OF HIGHLY COMPETENT OCEAN SWIMMERS FELT CONFIDENT TO IDENTIFY A RIP BUT ONLY 27% COULD DO SO ACCURATELY
SAFETY PRACTICES
SAFETY MEASURES IN COASTAL ENVIRONMENTS

Those who live less than 10km from the beach were more likely to swim outside of patrol times or at unpatrolled beaches.

Figure 26
2019: Usual swimming location by distance of residence from the coast

Figure 27
2019: Likelihood of coastal activity participants to follow safety practices compared to their perception that they are experienced enough to take a few risks

A safety index rating from 0 - 100 was created to demonstrate how likely coastal activity participants are to follow safety practices. For example, on average boaters follow safety practices 86% of the time.
Y

oung males are a significant demographic as they are continually over-represented in coastal drowning data. Since 2004, men aged between 16-39 account for 36% of all drowning deaths and 33% of other coastal fatalities. In 2018-19, 44 drowning deaths were young males aged between 16-19, above the 15 year average of 40. The average drowning death rate for young men is double that for other adults within the population (2.05:1), meaning young men are twice as likely to drown than the rest of Australian adults.

Young men often participate in coastal activities more than the average Australian adult and often exhibit over-confidence in their abilities. For drowning deaths involving young males aged 16-39, 58% had little to no experience in the activity they were participating at the time of death (Figure 28). This confidence is also evident in their reported risk taking behaviours, with consistently more young males considering themselves experienced enough to take risks during activities when compared to the total adult population (Figure 29). This risk taking tendency may escalate further under the influence of alcohol and drugs. For example, two-thirds of young males had consumed alcohol when they drowned (Figure 30).

These results show that the adventurous and confident side to young males puts them at greater risk than other demographics and should be considered when trying to understand the impact of drowning and other fatalities on our communities.

64% OF YOUNG MALES HAD CONSUMED ALCOHOL WHEN THEY DROWNED
FEATURE: YOUNG MALES
MEN AGED 16 - 39

ALCOHOL USE

THE AVERAGE BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT WAS 0.16, MORE THAN TRIPLE THE LEGAL LIMIT

CANNABIS USE

2.08:1
RATIO YOUNG MALES:OTHER ADULTS

AMPHETAMINE USE

2.71:1
RATIO YOUNG MALES:OTHER ADULTS

40
YOUNG MALES: 15 YEAR DROWNING AVERAGE

44
YOUNG MALES: 2018-19 DROWNING DEATHS

2.05:1
YOUNG MALES TO OTHER ADULTS RATE OF DROWNING DEATHS

Figure 30
2004-19: ALCOHOL AND DRUGS CONTRIBUTED TO 23% OF YOUNG MALE DROWNING DEATHS (n=135). OF THESE CASES, 39% HAD CONSUMED ALCOHOL ONLY (n=52), 36% HAD TAKEN DRUGS ONLY (n=49), WHILE 25% HAD BOTH ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN THEIR SYSTEM (n=34)

Figure 31
2004-19: 15-YEAR TREND OF YOUNG MALES DROWNING DEATHS
Water safety and drowning prevention is a complex public health challenge especially given that many drowning incidents occur away from lifeguard or lifesaver services. In these situations, the only available help is often in the form of bystander rescuers. The term ‘bystander’ describes any member of the public, be it family, friend or stranger, who attempts to rescue someone in distress. However, bystander rescuers may lack experience, thereby placing both themselves and the rescuee at risk and tragically it is not uncommon for bystander rescuers to drown. Nevertheless, bystander rescues are increasingly recognised for the significant role they play in saving lives and the World Health Organisation has identified “train bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation” as the fourth-most important action to reduce the global rates of drowning.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) report 53 coastal drowning deaths of bystander rescuers on Australian beaches between 2004-2017, representing four percent of all coastal drowning deaths. Additionally, thirteen percent of Australians aged 16-69 have reported conducting a bystander rescue. SLSA with the University of NSW, Sydney and James Cook University recently investigated the characteristics of bystander rescues in Australia. The main aims of this study were to determine the importance of prior water safety training in bystander rescues and to guide future public education strategies.

The Citizen Lifesaver Survey was completed by 243 people, approximately half of whom had received prior water-safety training, and found that bystander rescues were different depending on aquatic environment. Most occurred at beach locations more than 1km away from lifesaving services. Comparatively, males performed more bystander rescues in natural waterways (coastal and inland) than females, who conducted more rescues in swimming pools. Most male bystander rescuers had some level of water safety training compared to females.

Results of the study highlight the valuable role that off-duty lifesavers and lifeguards play in drowning prevention, as bystanders with water safety training made three times more rescues than those without training. Most bystanders did not use a flotation device, but those with training were more likely to use one during a rescue. None of the 53 bystander coastal drowning deaths reported the use of a flotation device, indicating that more training and better communication regarding the usefulness of flotation devices are potentially important messages to help reduce numbers of drowning deaths.

BYSTANDER RESCUES SNAPSHOT

36% BYSTANDER RESCUES WERE CONDUCTED AT BEACHES

68% OF BYSTANDER RESCUERS RATE THEMSELVES AS A STRONG SWIMMER

63% NO FLOTATION DEVICE USED

66% PREVIOUS WATER SAFETY TRAINING

36% MALE

36% FEMALE

28% 46% 54% 72%

Male Female

Previous training

76% CONFIDENT IN ABILITY TO MAKE RESCUE

13% OF AUSTRALIANS AGES 16 - 69 HAVE REPORTED CONDUCTING A BYSTANDER RESCUE
SECTION TWO

PROFICIENT MEMBERS
50,534

10,176 RESCUES

1,379,056 VOLUNTEER PATROL HOURS

IRBs
1,094

Clubs
314

UAVs
103
Surf Life Saving (SLS) has significant capability to provide coastal surveillance patrols and aquatic search and rescue (SAR) operations, working in close partnership with police and other emergency services.

These services are expertly delivered and managed by the 40,959 Bronze Medallion holders and 9,575 Surf Rescue Certificate holders (totaling 50,534 proficient surf lifesavers) through the 314 Surf Life Saving Clubs. This is alongside over 1,000 full time, seasonal and casual lifeguards. Surf lifesavers and lifeguards receive specialised training to industry best-practice standards under the Australian Qualifications Framework ensuring the community receives consistent service of the highest quality across the nation.

Radio communications provide support to all services via SLS coastal radio networks or government radio networks, which are connected to SLS communication and operation centres. These centres provide operational support, data management and when required coordinate the SLS emergency response system.

**Volunteer Surf Lifesavers**

Our volunteer surf lifesavers are provided with fit-for-purpose equipment designed to operate in the hazardous and challenging conditions that SLS services encounter. Surf lifesavers utilise thousands of rescue boards and rescue tubes mostly around the red and yellow flagged patrol areas. They are supported by 1,094 inflatable rescue boats (IRB), allowing surf lifesavers to quickly navigate the surf zone and inshore environment.

Roving surveillance patrols that actively monitor stretches of coastline near a primary patrolled areas are vital to the SLS drowning prevention strategy. Surf lifesavers undertake these patrols using 567 side-by-side (SSV) and 4WD vehicles. Similarly, aerial surveillance can be undertaken through the fleet of 103 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

SLS services extend beyond the red and yellow flags to provide surveillance and emergency response in isolated and hazardous coastal areas. Agile craft such as 181 rescue water craft (RWC) and six jet rescue boats (JRBs) allow surf lifesavers to access white-water areas such as coastal bars and rocky coastlines.

A fleet of ten offshore rescue boats (ORBs) and eight rigid-hull inflatable boats (RIBs) further extend the SLS response capability providing longer range surveillance, blue-water rescue and SAR operations.

**Australian Lifeguard Service**

The Australian Lifeguard Service (ALS) is a national lifeguard provider of beach and pool lifeguard services to 65 local government councils and land managers across Australia. It is the largest supplier of professional lifeguards in Australia.

ALS operations are fully integrated into the 24-hour surf emergency response system and work with SLS’s volunteer lifesaving services including the strategically located Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Services.

ALS patrols provide a range of services, from single-day patrols during periods of peak attendance (i.e. public holidays) to 365-day services for local governments. They are a crucial component in offering a seamless service to the community during peak periods. Several councils around Australia operate internal lifeguard services. Statistics for those services have not been included in this report.

**Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopters**

For rapid, isolated or complex rescues, eight Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopters provide aerial support to lifesaving services and further extend our surveillance and SAR capability. These important assets also support police and other emergency services in a range of emergency and disaster situations.
40,959 proficient Bronze Medallion holders also are proficient in nine other lifesaving awards, totalling over 60,000 additional lifesaving qualifications. This highlights the large amount of additional volunteer training our surf lifesavers undertake to ensure they are highly skilled first responders.

---

Figure 33
2018–19: TOTAL QUALIFICATIONS OF PROFICIENT LIFESAVERS
There are 314 Surf Life Saving Clubs around Australia: 129 in New South Wales, 57 in Queensland, 57 in Victoria, 31 in Western Australia, 22 in South Australia, 15 in Tasmania and 3 in Northern Territory. The Australian Lifeguard Service provides 238 lifeguard services around Australia: 90 in New South Wales, 78 in Queensland, 44 in Victoria, 17 in Western Australia, 5 in Northern Territory, 2 in South Australia and 2 in Tasmania.
2018–19: PATROLLING MEMBERS

There were a total of 43,092 members who performed a patrol. This includes 6 unspecified gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>3,663</td>
<td>2,896</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>3,663</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>1,425</td>
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<td>582</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2018–19: PROFICIENT MEMBERS

There were a total of 40,959 proficient Bronze Medallion holders and 9,575 Surf Rescue Certificate holders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Bronze Medallion</th>
<th>Surf Rescue Certificate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>3,494</td>
<td>17,961</td>
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<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>9,363</td>
<td>5,589</td>
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<td>NT</td>
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</table>

2018–19: EQUIPMENT USE IN RESCUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Tube</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Tube</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWC</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Gear</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2018-19: PATROLLING SURF LIFESAVERS

61% MALE
39% FEMALE
SLS maintains a fleet of 181 rescue water craft (RWC), as well as 6 jet rescue boats (JRB), 8 rigid-hull inflatable boats (RIB), 10 offshore rescue boats (ORB) and 8 rescue helicopters. Their locations and service ranges are depicted on this map.

Key to Asset Location
- Rescue Water Craft (RWC)
- Jet Rescue Boat (JRB)
- Rigid-hull Inflatable Boat (RIB)
- Offshore Rescue Boat (ORB)
- Rescue Helicopter
SLS lifesavers, lifeguards and lifesaving services performed 10,176 rescues across 117 LGAs around Australia.

Key to Rescues per LGA
- < 14 Rescues
- 15 - 49 Rescues
- 50 - 149 Rescues
- 150 - 899 Rescues
- > 900 Rescues

Figure 39
2018–19: RESCUES PER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)
PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

Figure 40
2018–19: PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS PER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA)

SLS lifesavers, lifeguards and lifesaving services performed 1,566,449 preventative actions across 117 LGAs around Australia.
SLS lifesavers, lifeguards and lifesaving services performed 89,695 first aid treatments across 117 LGAs around Australia.
Rock fishing is currently Australia’s third highest cause of coastal drowning, following swimming and boating. The media often attributes these fatalities to unexpected large waves or ‘freak waves’. Now, the rock fishing community, Melbourne University and Surf Life Saving Australia are challenging the idea of ‘freak waves’ on Australia’s coasts by offering new ways to consider risk.

During this project, highly experienced fishers (i.e., experiential-experts) revealed that only fishers who do not understand how the wave period influences the timing of waves would refer to a large wave during seemingly calm conditions as a ‘freak wave’.

To help explain how wave periods effect the appearance and timing of waves, an experiential-expert provided a sketch showing that when the wave period is 4 - 12 seconds, you can see dangerous waves more easily. But, during wave periods over 12 seconds, wave heights appear less often, giving the sea a calm appearance (figure 42).

The relationship between rock fishing-related drowning deaths were then compared with the daily average wave height, swell direction, and wave period to examine whether experienced fishers’ perceptions of long wave periods aligned with the conditions when fishers drowned.

Results showed that the wave periods were higher than average, in support of experiential-expert fishers accounts claiming that when waves are less obvious, inexperienced fishers are at greater risk due to a lack of understanding on how to accurately perceive risks.

The media contributes to this myth by drawing on the fear of terrifying freak waves, but results from this study suggests that attempts to scare fishers into behaving differently is unlikely to be effective. From the perspective of experienced fishers, when media and government draw on the concept of a ‘freak wave’ they are demonstrating either a poor understanding of coastal processes and risk, or perhaps worse, a misrepresentation of the situation in an effort to govern coastal users.

The expert knowledge held by experienced fishers is invaluable, and they should be encouraged to share their knowledge-practices with less-experienced fishers.

This sharing or exchange of knowledge should be supported by coastal risk managers by improving the communication between the experienced and inexperienced components of the rock fishing community. For example, better communication regarding how longer wave periods affect the appearance of risk will help inexperienced fishers to learn, understand and experience the variety of conditions they are likely to encounter while fishing. Integration of such supportive strategies will increase overall enjoyment by fishers and ultimately work towards reducing rock-fishing related incidents.

Inexperienced fishers tend only to assess risk on the conditions close to shore. More experienced fishers are attuned to the fact that calm conditions close to shore can still precede large waves in long period sets.

Figure 42
DIFFERENT RISK PERCEPTIONS AND THE ASSOCIATED SPATIALITY OF THOSE PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN INEXPERIENCED AND EXPERIENCED; DESCRIBED BY A ROCK FISHER WITH OVER SEVEN YEARS EXPERIENCE. ADAPTED FROM AN EXPERIENTIAL-EXPERT SKETCH
DROWNING ANALYSIS
SECTION THREE

122 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

87% MALE  
13% FEMALE

CONTRIBUTING DROWNING FACTORS 2004-19

- Rip Currents 25%
- Medical Condition or Injury 32%
- Alcohol/Drugs 22%
Figure 43

2004-19: 15-YEAR TREND OF NATIONAL COASTAL DROWNING DEATHS

National coastal and ocean drowning death numbers and crude drowning rates for 2004-19 are illustrated above. The 2018-19 rate per 100,000 population is 0.48, exactly on the 15-year average.

**0.48**

15-YEAR AVERAGE RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION

**110**

15-YEAR AVERAGE DROWNING DEATHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2004-19</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming/Wading</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boating &amp; PWC</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watercraft</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Fishing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempting a Rescue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scuba Diving</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snorkelling</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 44

2004-19: 15-YEAR AVERAGE COMPARED TO 2018-19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

Nationally, the number of activity types being undertaken when coastal and ocean drowning deaths occur varies over time. In 2018-19, the number of drowning deaths while conducting swimming/wading, watercraft, fall, snorkelling and attempting a rescue activities were above the 15-year average, while boating and PWC and rock fishing incidents were below the 15-year average. The number of drowning deaths while scuba diving were equal to the 15-year average.
The region of birth is currently known for 73% of all coastal and ocean drowning deaths (n=1,225), with 53% from Australia. When breaking it down to continents, the top 3 are Australia (n=637), Asia (n=271) and Europe (n=185).

The highest percentage of coastal and ocean drowning deaths occurred in the month of January (n=260), followed by December (n=194) and March (n=184). Sixty-two per cent occurred outside of the summer months. Shading denotes seasons.

The 20-34 year old age group represents 27% of all drowning deaths. The 45-54 year old age group accounts for 19% of all drowning deaths.

Incident time is currently known for 84% of all coastal and ocean drowning deaths (n=1,381). The highest density of fatalities occurred between 12pm and 5pm (n=608).
Since 2017, SLSA has reported coastal fatalities as well as coastal drowning deaths. This allows SLSA to better understand the impact other coastal fatalities, such as medical conditions, marine creatures and other causes, may have on surf lifesaving services and the wider community. Further research has been undertaken to investigate the environment (aquatic or non-aquatic) in which the other coastal fatalities occur. Non-aquatic fatalities refer to incidents which have occurred at a coastal location but not in the aquatic environment.

In 2018-19, a total of 122 coastal drowning deaths were recorded. Additionally, SLSA recorded 68 coastal fatalities taking the total number of coastal fatalities to 190. Coastal drowning deaths and other coastal fatalities can have long term, devastating impacts to family, friends and loved ones in addition to emergency and lifesaving services.

Acknowledging that 35 per cent of coastal fatalities are not as a result of drowning creates a range of challenges for the greater community, SLS and all other aquatic emergency service agencies. Understanding the type of incidents that occur and the contributing factors that lead to the fatality will assist to develop strategies to help reduce incidents in the future.

As the peak coastal rescue authority, Australia’s Surf Lifesaving Services respond to a range of different coastal incidents. Research that incorporates coastal drowning deaths and fatalities will help to identify black spots, provide evidence-based recommendations to develop preventative or mitigation strategies for communities as well as provide the necessary training and support to our lifesaving services.
Figure 50
2018-19: COASTAL DROWNING DEATHS AND FATALITIES BY STATE

In 2018-19 there were 122 coastal and ocean drowning deaths and 68 coastal fatalities. Red numbers indicate coastal and ocean drowning deaths per state. Blue numbers indicate coastal fatalities per state. The black number indicates both coastal drowning deaths and fatalities combined.
The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths occurred at a beach (n=71), rock/cliff (n=22) or an offshore location (n=18).
Forty-three individuals (35%) drowned within 1km of the nearest lifesaving service. Almost half (n=52, 42%) of incidents happened further than 5km from a lifesaving service.

Twenty-seven individuals (22%) lived less than 10km from the drowning location. Forty-five individuals (37%) lived more than 50km from the incident location while nine individuals (7%) were international visitors.

Of the 122 coastal and ocean drowning deaths, 42% (n=52) happened over the summer months (Dec-Feb). Dark-red squares indicate the 15-year average drowning deaths per month.
Figure 57

2004–19: COASTAL DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

Key to Drowning Activity

- Attempting a rescue
- Boating and PWC
- Fall
- Jump
- Land-based fishing
- Other
- Rock fishing
- Scuba diving
- Snorkelling
- Swimming/wading
- Unknown
- Watercraft
- Multiple instances per activity at the same location
- Capital city
Key to Drowning Activity

- Attempting a rescue
- Boating and PWC
- Fall
- Jump
- Land-based fishing
- Other
- Rock fishing
- Scuba diving
- Snorkelling
- Swimming/wading
- Unknown
- Watercraft

Multiple instances per activity at the same location

Capital city
4
Cocos (Keeling) Islands
Christmas Island
Christmas Island to Port Hedland approximately 1,800 km

INSET: Indian Ocean Territories
Ashmore Reef
Lord Howe Island

Inset is same scale as main map

25 3 4 2
7 3 2 9
6 2
3 2 4 2
4 3 2
8 2 3
5 2
4 3 2
2 4 2
15 7
2 2
12 4
5 2
2 2
10 2 2
3 2
4 3
7 3 2 2
3 2
5 2
3 2
2 2
2 4 2
2 2
13 9 2 2 2 2
25 20 16 6 5 4 4 4 3 2
14 16 14 8 5 3
Coastal drowning deaths have long held the focus of water safety research due to the severe, accidental and preventable nature of the incidents. While drowning deaths make up the bulk of coastal fatalities, a significant proportion of unintentional coastal fatalities are non-drowning related. These coastal fatalities include medical incidents, accidents, injuries, alcohol, drugs and marine creatures. From an emergency service and rescue perspective, the response to drowning deaths and other coastal fatality incidents is similar but until now, most research has focused on drowning deaths. As a result, there has been a lack of understanding to the number of fatal incidents faced by lifesavers and emergency services and therefore the impact this has on first responders.

This research aims to assess the frequency and nature of non-drowning coastal fatalities compared to drowning deaths and provide an overview of all fatalities that occur in Australian waters. Using coronial data, the SurfGuard Incident Report Database (IRD) and media articles a dataset of non-drowning coastal fatalities was collated and compared to Surf Life Saving Australia’s national database of drowning deaths. These databases were extended to include Australian governed waters including sovereign waters (including the Australian Fishing and Exclusive Economic Zones) and our external territories.

Between 2004 and 2019, 42% of all fatalities on the Australian coast were not drowning-related (n=1,230). Two-thirds of these other coastal fatalities were unintentional (n=830). Some states (NT, Qld, SA) showed that these unintentional coastal fatalities occur more or as frequently than drowning deaths (Figure 58). Males accounted for 88% of unintentional fatalities, of which 44% were between 45-64 years of age. Most unintentional fatalities occurred between 9am-4pm (53%, n=346) and during December (13%, n=109). The highest number of unintentional coastal fatalities occurred while boating (32%) followed by swimming/wading (11%) and watercraft (9%), which is similar to drowning deaths (boating – 21%, swimming/wading – 30%, watercraft – 7%). Medical episodes and injuries contributed to 656 (88%) unintentional coastal fatalities but only 442 of drowning deaths (33%). Toxicology data was available for 87% of incidents (n=2,144) with alcohol and/or drugs contributing to 109 coastal fatalities (15%) and 315 of drowning deaths (19%). Marine creatures accounted for 29 (4%) coastal fatalities and no drowning deaths, while rip currents were known to contribute to 315 drowning deaths (25%) compared to seven coastal fatalities (1%).

Drowning deaths and coastal fatalities are both increasing at beaches, coastal fatalities are increasing at rock/cliff environments while drowning deaths remained stable (Figure 65). Swimming/wading incidents are increasing, while boating fatalities are decreasing over time (Figure 64). Australian born individuals accounted for over half of all incidents, followed by people born in Asia then Europe (Figure 66). For cases involving Australian residents, 34% of drowning deaths and 26% of coastal fatalities were born overseas (Figure 67).

This research highlights the extent to which coastal fatalities on top of drowning deaths impact on lifesaving services and the wider community. Further investigation will align causal factors with potential interventions and safety campaigns in addition to how we can better equip our frontline people to manage these tragic situations.
Figure 58
PERCENTAGE OF DROWNING DEATHS AND OTHER FATALITIES IN DIFFERENT AQUATIC ZONES
UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES
2004-19: 15-YEAR REVIEW

Figure 59
2004-19: NATIONAL 15-YEAR TREND OF UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES

National unintentional coastal fatality numbers and crude rates for 2004-19 are illustrated above. Unintentional coastal fatalities include deaths other than drowning deaths (such as medical incidents, accidents, or marine creature), excluding homicide and self-harm related incidents.

Figure 60
2004-19: 15-YEAR AVERAGE COMPARED TO 2018-19 UNINTENTIONAL FATALITIES BY ACTIVITY

Nationally, the number of activity types being undertaken when unintentional fatalities occur varies over time. In 2018-19, the number of coastal fatalities while swimming/wading and scuba diving were above the 15-year average, while boating and PWC, watercraft, rock fishing, attempting a rescue and non-aquatic transport related incidents were below the 15-year average. The number of unintentional fatalities while snorkelling is equal with the 15-year average.
**SECTION THREE  DROWNING ANALYSIS**

**Figure 61**  
**2004-19: LOCATION OF UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES**

The majority of unintentional coastal fatalities occurred at a beach (46%), offshore locations (16%) or bay (12%).

**Figure 62**  
**2004-19: UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES BY MONTH**

The highest percentage of fatalities occurring in the month of December (n=109), followed by January (n=86) and April (n=76). Sixty-eight per cent occurred outside of the summer months. Shading denotes seasons.

**Figure 63**  
**2004-19: UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES BY TIME**

The time is known for 78% of all unintentional coastal and ocean fatalities (n=657). The highest density of fatalities occurred between 9am and 4pm (n=346).

**0.25**  
**15-YEAR AVERAGE FATALITY RATE PER 100,000 POPULATION**

**55**  
**15-YEAR AVERAGE UNINTENTIONAL FATALITIES**

**11-12am**

**10-11pm**

**9-10pm**

**8-9pm**

**7-8pm**

**6-7pm**

**5-6pm**

**4-5pm**

**3-4pm**

**2-3pm**

**1-2pm**

**12-1pm**

**11-12pm**

**10-11am**

**9-10am**

**8-9am**

**7-8am**

**6-7am**

**5-6am**

**4-5am**

**3-4am**

**2-3am**

**1-2am**

**12-1am**

**60**

**50**

**40**

**30**

**20**

**10**

**0**

**2004-19: KEY DEMOGRAPHICS IN UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES**

The 45-64 year old age group represents 44% of all unintentional deaths. The 60-64 year old age group accounts for 11% of all unintentional deaths.

**88%**  
**MALE**

**12%**  
**FEMALE**

**45-64**  
**YEARS OF AGE**

**&**

**60-64**  
**YEARS OF AGE**

**2004-19: UNINTENTIONAL COASTAL FATALITIES**

**47**  
**DROWNING ANALYSIS**
DROWNING DEATH VS FATALITY
REVIEW OF TRENDS OVER TIME

Figure 64
Continent of origin was known for 74% drowning deaths (n=1,225) and 76% of fatalities (n=630). For these cases combined, 54% were Australian, 18% were from Asia and 17% were European.
In 2018–19, coastal and ocean drowning deaths in New South Wales (NSW) were over the 15-year average of 41. The rate per 100,000 population was 0.55, under the average rate of 0.56.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in NSW occurred when swimming/wading (n=209), rock fishing (n=117), boating (n=68) and using watercraft (n=49).

In 2018–19 drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were lower than the 15-year average in boating and PWC, watercraft and rock fishing related incidents. The yearly rate of incidents related to attempting a rescue and falls were higher than the 15-year average.
DROWNING SNAPSHOT

2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

FATALITY RATE

0.55
PER 100,000 POPULATION

DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

Swimming/Wading
41%

Rock Fishing
5%

Scuba Diving
7%

Snorkelling
5%

Watercraft
18%

Other
11%

Unknown
3%

DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION

Beach
59%

Rocks/Cliffs
34%

Offshore
7%

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC

20-34 YEAR OLD SWIMMERS/WADERS

40-59 YEAR OLD ROCK FISHERS

89% MALE

11% FEMALE

45% LESS THAN 1KM FROM A SURF LIFE SAVING SERVICE

ATTEMPTING A RESCUE

BOATING AND PWC

FALL

JUMP

LAND-BASED FISHING

OTHER

ROCK FISHING

SCUBA DIVING

SNORKELLING

SWIMMING/WADING

UNKNOWN

WATERCRAFT

MULTIPLE INSTANCES PER ACTIVITY AT THE SAME LOCATION

@CAPITAL CITY

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%

7%

59%

7%

34%
In 2018–19, coastal and ocean drowning deaths remained the same as the previous year in Queensland (Qld). This is above the 15 year average of 19.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Qld occurred when swimming/wading (n=95), boating & PWC (n=81), snorkelling (n=35) and using watercraft (n=23).

Drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were higher than the 15-year average in swimming/wading, watercraft and snorkelling activities in 2018-19. The rates are lower than the 15-year average for boating and PWC, rock fishing, attempting a rescue and scuba diving.
**DROWNING SNAPSHOTS**

### 2004-19 Coastal & Ocean Drowning Deaths

- **Average Number**: 19
- **Average Fatality Rate**: 0.42 per 100,000 population

### Key Demographic

- **15-34 Year Old Swimmers/Waders**
- **60-64 Year Old Boaters**

### 2018-19 Coastal & Ocean Drowning Deaths

- **Fatality Rate**: 0.46 per 100,000 population
- **Drowning Deaths**: 23

#### Drowning Deaths by Activity

- **Swimming/Wading**: 57%
- **Fall**: 4%
- **Boating & PWC**: 9%
- **Snorkelling**: 13%
- **Other**: 17%

#### Drowning Deaths by Location

- **Beach**: 79%
- **Offshore**: 13%
- **Rock/Cliff**: 4%
- **Port/ Marina**: 4%

**Capital City**

Multiple instances per activity at the same location
2004–19: 15-YEAR TREND OF VIC COASTAL AND OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

In 2018–19, the number of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Victoria (Vic) showed an increase from 2017-18 and was above the 15-year average of 16.

2004–19: COASTAL AND OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY (n=244)

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Vic occurred when swimming/wading (n=78), boating & PWC (n=49) and using watercraft (n=20).

15-YEAR AVERAGE COMPARED TO 2018-19 COASTAL AND OCEAN DROWNING RATES BY ACTIVITY

In 2018-19 drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were higher than or equal to the 15-year average for all activities except for swimming/wading, boating and PWC and rock fishing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2004-19 (Rate)</th>
<th>2018-19 (Rate)</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming/Wading</td>
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<td>0.08</td>
<td>↓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boating &amp; PWC</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>↓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watercraft</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Fishing</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempting a Rescue</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scuba Diving</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snorkelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DROWNING SNAPSHOT

2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- Average number: 16
- Average fatality rate: 0.28 per 100,000 population

2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- Coasts & ocean drowning deaths: 23
- Fatality rate: 0.35 per 100,000 population

DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

- Swimming/Wading: 22%
- Boating: 9%
- Fall: 9%
- Rock Fishing: 9%
- Unknown: 9%
- Scuba Diving: 13%
- Snorkelling: 13%
- Jump: 4%
- Attempting a Rescue: 4%
- Watercraft: 4%
- Other: 4%

DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION

- Beach: 52%
- Port/Marina: 13%
- Offshore: 17%
- Jetty: 9%
- Rock/Cliff: 9%
- Other: 4%

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC

- 20-29 year old swimmers: 35%
- 60-69 year old boaters: 35%
In 2018–19, coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Western Australia (WA) dropped to below the 15-year average of 17. From 2004 to 2019, the average rate per 100,000 population is 0.73.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in WA occurred when boating & PWC (n=65), swimming/wading (n=57), rock fishing (n=36) and snorkelling (n=29).

Drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were lower than the 15-year average in all activities in 2018-19, except boating and PWC.
DROWNING SNAPSHOT

2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- Attempting a Rescue
- Boating and PWC
- Fall
- Jump
- Land-based Fishing
- Other
- Rock Fishing
- Scuba Diving
- Snorkelling
- Swimming/Wading
- Unknown
- Watercraft
- Multiple instances per activity at the same location
- Capital city

2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- 15

FATALITY RATE

0.58

PER 100,000 POPULATION

DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

- 53% Boating
- 7% Swimming/Wading
- 7% Non-aquatic Transport
- 7% Rock Fishing
- 7% Snorkelling
- 7% Watercraft
- 7% Unknown

DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION

- 53% Offshore
- 20% Beach
- 13% Rock/Cliff
- 7% Bay
- 7% Port/Marina

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC

- 30-39 YEAR OLD SWIMMERS/WADERS & SNORKELLERS
- 53%

- 60-65 YEAR OLD BOATERS

- 53% GREATER THAN 5KM FROM A SURF LIFE SAVING SERVICE
In 2018–19, the number of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in South Australia (SA) increased above the 2004-19 annual average of 8. This year, the rate per 100,000 population was 0.75.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in SA occurred when swimming/wading (n=46) and boating and PWC (n=30).

Drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were increased from the 15-year average in swimming/wading, watercraft, scuba diving and attempting a rescue activities in 2018-19. There was a decrease from the average for boating and PWC, fall and snorkelling activities.
DROWNING SNAPSHOT

2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- AVERAGE NUMBER: 8
- AVERAGE FATALITY RATE: 0.47 PER 100,000 POPULATION

2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS: 13
- FATALITY RATE: 0.75 PER 100,000 POPULATION

DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

- 54% Swimming/Wading
- 15% Boating and PWC
- 8% Fall
- 8% Jump
- 8% Land-based Fishing
- 8% Other
- 8% Rock Fishing
- 8% Scuba Diving
- 8% Snorkelling
- 8% Swimming/Wading
- 8% Unknown
- 8% Watercraft
- Multiple instances per activity at the same location
- Capital city

DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION

- 69% Beach
- 23% Rock/Cliff
- 8% Other
- 8% Unknown

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC

- 15-24 YEAR OLD SWIMMERS/WADERS
- 45-54 YEAR OLD BOATERS

- 54% GREATER THAN 5KM FROM A SURF LIFE SAVING SERVICE
In 2018–19, there were three coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Tasmania (Tas). This is below the 15-year annual average of five.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Tas occurred when boating (n=37), swimming/wading (n=9) and falls (n=8).

Drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were lower than the 15-year average in all activities in 2018-19, except for swimming/wading and watercraft activities.

**Figure 83**
2004–19: 15-YEAR TREND OF TAS COASTAL AND OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

**Figure 85**
2004–19: COASTAL AND OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY (n=81)
**DROWNING SNAPSHOT**

**2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS**

- **Average number**: 5
- **Average fatality rate**: 1.06 per 100,000 population

**2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS**

- **Fatalities**: 3
- **Fatality rate**: 0.56 per 100,000 population

**DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY**

- 33% Swimming/Wading
- 33% Watercraft
- 33% Non-aquatic Transport

**DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION**

- 67% Beach
- 33% Jetty

**KEY DEMOGRAPHIC**

- 35-44 year old boaters
- 55-59 year old boaters

- 86% Male
- 14% Female

- 33% Greater than 5km from a surf life saving service
In 2018–19, coastal and ocean drowning deaths in Northern Territory (NT) decreased to 1, below the 15-year average of 3.

The majority of coastal and ocean drowning deaths in NT occurred when boating (n=17) and falls (n=4).

Drowning death rates (per 100,000 population) were lower than the 15-year average for boating, attempting a rescue, scuba diving and snorkelling activities in 2017-19. The rates were higher for falls and swimming/wading related incidents.
2004–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- Average number: 3 per 100,000 population

2018–19 COASTAL & OCEAN DROWNING DEATHS

- Fatality rate: 0.41 per 100,000 population

2017–19 DROWNING DEATHS BY ACTIVITY

- Boating: 43%
- Unknown: 14%
- Fall: 14%
- Jump: 14%
- Swimming/Wading: 14%
- Other: 14%

2017–19 DROWNING DEATHS BY LOCATION

- Offshore: 29%
- Jetty: 14%
- Beach: 14%
- Port/Marina: 14%
- Capital city: 14%

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC

- 35-39 year old boaters: 71%
- 60-69 year old boaters: 29%

DROWNING SNAPSHOT

- Attempting a rescue: 14%
- Boating: 43%
- Fall: 14%
- Jump: 14%
- Land-based fishing: 14%
- Other: 14%
- Rock fishing: 14%
- Scuba diving: 14%
- Snorkeling: 14%
- Swimming/Wading: 14%
- Watercraft: 14%
- Multiple instances per activity at the same location: 14%
- Unknown: 14%

- Male: 88%
- Female: 12%

- 2017–19 coastal & ocean drowning deaths: 1

- 2017–19 coastal & ocean drowning deaths trend:
  - 2004–19: 3 per 100,000 population
  - 2018–19: 0.41 per 100,000 population

- 2017–19 coastal & ocean drowning deaths breakdown:
  - Activity: Boating (43%), Unknown (14%), Fall (14%), Jump (14%), Swimming/Wading (14%), Other (14%)
  - Location: Offshore (29%), Jetty (14%), Beach (14%), Port/Marina (14%), Capital city (14%)

- Age demographics: 35-39 year old boaters (71%), 60-69 year old boaters (29%)

- Gender demographics: Male (88%), Female (12%)

- Key demographic: Greater than 5km from a surf life saving service (71%)
**Glossary**

**Adult**  For the purpose of this report, adults refer to a person 16 years of age and over.

**Advanced Resuscitation Techniques**  A certification providing the skills and knowledge required to use specialised equipment in the provision of resuscitation in line with the Australian Resuscitation Council (ARC) guidelines.

**ALS**  Australian Lifeguard Service.

**Apply First Aid**  A certification providing the skills and knowledge required to provide a first aid response to a casualty.

**Attempting a rescue**  Trying to retrieve a person in distress and deliver them to a place of safety.

**AWSC**  Australian Water Safety Council also Australian Water Safety Conference.

**AWSS**  Australian Water Safety Strategy.

**Bay**  A body of water partially enclosed by land but with a wide mouth, affording access to the sea.

**Beach**  A wave-deposited accumulation of sediment – usually sand, but ranging in size up to boulders deposited between the upper swash limit and wave base.

**Blackspot**  An area with a concentration of coastal/ocean incidents and a high probability/risk of ongoing recurrence.

**Boating**  Using either a powered vessel or sailing boat for pleasure and/or fishing.

**Bystander**  A person who is present at an incident but not part of it initially.

**Coastal**  Describes the foreshore, seabed, coastal water and air space above a large body of water (harbour/bay/inlet), including areas up to 3nm offshore and of which the landward boundary is the line of mean high water, except where that line crosses a river/inlet, the landward boundary at that point shall be the point upstream that is calculated by multiplying the width of the river/inlet mouth by five. (Adopted from the Resource Management Amendment Act 1993 New Zealand).

**COD**  Cause of death.

**Crude drowning rate**  A comparative rate of drowning to the size of the population in a given area.

**Dangerous surf warning**  An alert issued by the Bureau of Meteorology indicating that surf conditions in an area are unsafe for coastal activities. The warnings are calculated based on wave height, swell direction and swell period and must exceed the predetermined limitations to be in effect.

**Drowning**  The process of experiencing respiratory impairment from submersion/immersion in liquid; outcomes are classified as death, morbidity and no morbidity.

**Drowning Death**  A fatal incident arising from the process of respiratory impairment as a result of submersion/immersion in liquid.

**Drugs**  A medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced to the body. The category includes therapeutic, over-the-counter and illicit drugs.

**Emergency response**  An action taken by an SLS entity in response to a call for assistance from an emergency management organisation.

**Falls (trips/slips)**  Events that result in a person coming to rest inadvertently on the ground or other lower level.

**Fatality**  A fatal incident arising from circumstances other than drowning (e.g. medical condition, injury, self-harm, marine creature).

**First Aid**  Assessments and interventions that can be performed by a bystander (or by the victim) with minimal to no equipment.

**Fishing**  The act of attempting to catch fish from anywhere except coastal rock platforms.

**Foreign ethnicity**  Describes an individual who identifies with a cultural group other than Australian based on heritage, language or shared customs. This identification is extrapolated from reported data such as the individuals’ country of birth and the main language spoken at home.

**Hazard**  A source of potential harm.

**ILS**  International Life Saving Federation.

**Incident**  Any unplanned event requiring lifesaving services intervention.

**Inland**  An area that is beyond the line of mean high water or within a landward distance of five times the width of the coastal inlet/river mouth.

**Inshore**  The coastal water area within 500m of the low tide area of the foreshore.

**International**  Describes an individual who is confirmed to reside overseas and/or is a temporary visitor to Australia.

**IRB**  Inflatable rescue boat.

**IRD**  Incident report database. A web-based portal used by SLS services to electronically record incident reports.

**Jetty**  An artificial structure that projects out into the water from land.

**JR**  Jet rescue boat.

**Jump(ing)**  The activity of launching off a cliff, rock platform, pier, jetty. Aka tombstoning (UK/Europe/North America).

**Lake**  An inland body of water surrounded by land.

**Lifeguard**  An individual who undertakes patrols at a beach or another aquatic environment. He/she is typically a salaried member, qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.

**Lifejacket**  A buoyant or inflatable garment or device designed to keep a person afloat in water and increase their likelihood of survival.
**Lifesaving Service** A coordinated group that exists to provide aquatic safety services to the public. This includes Surf Life Saving Clubs, Lifeguards, SurfCom, RWCs, RIBs, ORBs, Rescue Helicopters and 4WD units.

**Local Government Area (LGA)** Also known as local councils, LGAs include cities, town, shires, municipalities or boroughs.

**Marina** A man-made boat basin having sea walls or breakwaters and offering dockage and other services for water vessels.

**Medical** For the purpose of this report, medical refers to an aquatic incident that was caused by a medical episode, e.g. a heart attack or epileptic seizure.

**NCIS** National Coronial Information System.

**Non-aquatic fatality** Non-aquatic fatalities refer to incidents which have occurred at a coastal location but not in the aquatic environment.

**Non-aquatic transport** Any form of transport that is not meant for the water such as airplanes, bicycles, and motor vehicles.

**Offshore** Describes the coastal water area beyond the surf zone and inshore area from 500m to 200nm.

**Ocean** The seabed, water and air space above the water between 3nm and 12nm (the Australian Territorial Sea) offshore.

**ORB** Offshore rescue boat.

**Other** An uncommon known activity not otherwise listed (e.g., paragliding, aircraft crash).

**Patrol** Service undertaken to monitor activities in/around an aquatic environment and respond accordingly through either preventative actions or rescue operations.

**Patrol flags** Red/yellow horizontally divided flags which are set after performing a risk assessment to determine the most suitable area for swimming. The flags identify a zone for swimming and bodyboarding within a patrolled location.

**Patrolled location** A location supervised by a lifesaving service.

**Preventative action** Direct action taken to reduce or eliminate the probability of a specific rescue, first aid or other reportable incident from happening in the future.

**PWC** Personal water craft, also known as jet ski.

**Rescue** The retrieval of a person in distress, delivering them to a place of safety and the application of first aid and basic life support as may be required.

**Resuscitation** Prevention or restoration of life by establishing and maintaining a person’s airway, breathing and circulation.

**RIB** Rigid-hull inflatable boat.

**Rip current** A seaward flowing current of water moving through a surf zone.

**River** A natural stream of water flowing into an ocean, lake or other body of water.

**Rock/cliff** A rock platform that may or may not have a high steep face.

**Rock fishing** The act of attempting to catch fish from a coastal rock platform.

**Rock shelf** A section of rock above or below the water level that projects out from the coast.

**RWC** Rescue water craft.

**Scuba diving** Swimming underwater with the aid of scuba equipment for recreational or commercial purposes.

**Service season and hours** Vary between states due to climatic factors, but in the context of this report, the season is for the period July 2018 to June 2019.

**Snorkelling** Swimming with a snorkel and face mask. Includes freediving and spearfishing.

**Sovereign waters** The seabed, water and air space above the water between 12nm and 200nm (the Australian Contiguous, Exclusive Economic and Fishing Zones) offshore.

**SurfCom** SLS radio communications centre that assists in managing the communications of lifesaving operations and data collection.

**Surf lifesaver** An individual who undertakes patrols at a beach or other aquatic environment. He/she is typically a nonsalaried member qualified in public safety and aquatic rescue.

**Surf Life Saving Club** A SLS affiliated not-for-profit organisation that has volunteer members who provide coastal safety services to the community.

**Swimming** Moving through water by moving the body or parts of the body.

**Territorial seas** The seaward limits of Australia’s maritime zones, from the coastline to 12nm from the low tide line.

**Total Service Plan** An assessment of current and future lifesaving resources, trends, national blackspots and coastal safety issues combined with evidence-based mitigation strategies to address these issues.

**Toxicity** The degree to which a chemical substance or a particular mixture of substances is toxic or poisonous to an organism. In the context of this report, toxicity refers to alcohol or drug used by a drowning victim.

**Unintentional Fatality** Include deaths other than drowning deaths (such as medical incidents, accidents, or marine creature), however for this report exclude homicide and self-harm related incidents.

**Wading** Walking through water while partially immersed.

**Watercraft** A piece of non-powered recreational equipment used in water. Examples include surf boards, stand-up paddle boards, boogie boards, windsurfers or kayaks.
METHODOLOGY
The National Coastal Safety Report 2019 contains information on Australian community behaviours and attitudes to the coast; SLS capability and membership capacity; rescues and emergency response; and coastal drowning deaths and other fatalities that occurred in Australia’s waters for the period of 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. This information is correct as of 7 August 2019. All care is taken to ensure the statistical information included within this report is correct. However, pending the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations and as SLS state/territory entities update their operational information, this data may be amended. Data in figures may not always add up to 100% due to rounding.

THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY ANALYSIS
Information about community swimming ability, behaviours and attitudes to coastal safety, risk perceptions, safety strategies and rescues was gathered from the SLSA National Coastal Safety Survey. Conducted by Omnipoll Market Research, the latest survey was run online over the period 10 - 23 April 2019 among a national sample of 1,642 respondents aged 16 and above. The study was carried out in compliance with AS-ISO 20252 - Market, Social and Opinion Research. To reflect the population distribution, results were post-weighted (on age, gender, geographic strata and education) and projected to Australian Bureau of Statistics data. The Australian population aged 16 and above (the reference population for this survey) is 18,712,000.

CAPABILITY AND RESCUE ANALYSIS
SurfGuard, the Incident Report Database (IRD) and SurfCom management system (SurfCom) are web-based applications and part of a suite of applications that enable members, clubs, branches, state offices and SLSA to enter and access SLS operational (including rescues and first aids), capability (including assets and services), educational and administrative data. Information was extracted from SurfGuard to identify how many rescues were performed by volunteers, lifeguards and lifesaving services during 2018-19; and how many active surf lifesavers and award holders there were during 2018-19. The data was verified by SLS state/territory entities. Information about assets and services were gathered from each SLS state/territory entity.

DROWNING AND FATALITY DATA ANALYSIS
SLSA collects incident data from SurfGuard, the IRD, SurfCom, the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) and by monitoring media reports for coastal and ocean incidents. The information is verified with the assistance of each state/territory SLS entity and compiled for analysis by SLSA’s Coastal Safety Department. The following variables are used to match fatal incidents from more than one data source: incident date; location; age; gender; and incident description. The NCIS is considered the ‘gold standard’ when there is a discrepancy in the detail collected from different data sources. Deaths are excluded as a coastal drowning if they are reported as ‘intentional deaths’, they are inland locations, or ‘drowning/immersion’ is not a contributory factor as noted by the coroner. Coastal incidents that are deemed intentional or not due to drowning/immersion are logged as coastal fatalities instead. The authors are responsible for the use made of the data in this report. More detailed methodology can be found in the 2018 Coastal Safety Brief - Beaches.

DROWNING DATA LIMITATIONS
Over years of investigation as part of the NCIS process, some cases are amended prior to their closure, resulting in changes to the classification of cases in our datasets. Therefore, the number of coastal drowning deaths published in this report may be different from annual totals previously reported. In an effort to produce a timely report on our current year’s data we acknowledge that these figures will change. Each year, the changes that occur in the previous year’s report will be made transparent. The data in this current report are not the final figures as 84% of 2018–19 coastal/ocean drowning deaths and 67% of 2018–19 other fatalities reported remain open cases and 35% of all cases do not yet have a cause of death (COD) listed. Once NCIS closes a case, SLSA modifies those with unknown intent and those where the cause of death is not drowning, from ‘coastal drowning’ to ‘coastal fatality’. Bars of two different colours are used to illustrate the incidents where a COD has not been listed on NCIS in Figure 43. The incidents are included in our annual totals and analysis, and they will remain so until a COD is listed other than drowning/immersion.

CHANGES FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS
As part of the NCIS investigation process, some cases are amended prior to their closure and have resulted in changes to our datasets. This year SLSA has commenced a thorough review of its coastal and ocean fatality database to update all cases to the same inclusion standards. See Table 1.
# Table 1

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REFERENCES

- SLSA Annual Reports.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

SLS receives Government funding to commence valuable initiatives and programs. However, we rely on the generosity of the community and corporate support to ensure they continue.

To help Surf Life Saving please donate to:
For more information:
- Surf Life Saving Tasmania—[slst.asn.au](http://slst.asn.au)
- Surf Life Saving Western Australia—[mybeach.com.au](http://mybeach.com.au)
DROWNING
SNAPSHOT

122
COASTAL &
OCEAN
DROWNING
DEATHS

87%
MALE

13%
FEMALE

Location

58%
AT THE BEACH

15%
OFFSHORE

18%
WATERCRAFT

42%
AT LEAST 5KM FROM A
LIFESAVING SERVICE

Activity

35%
SWIMMING

14%
BOATING &
PWC

8%
WATERCRAFT

7%
SNORKELLING