



Water Safety New Zealand

2025 – 2035 Strategy

Karakia for Tangaroa

He huanui, he huaroa ki te Ao
From the energies of the extensive and intensive
ocean we will learn

Omāio ki tua e
To maintain balance

Ka rongo ki te Waitai e
Reciprocation of healing is needed

Haramai e te Taipari – Haramai e te Taitimu
Celebrate the provisions of the full and low tides

Nāu e Hinemoana – Nāu e Tangaroa ē
The sacred domain of Hinemoana and Tangaroa.



Strategy 2035: the power of prevention

Too many lives are still lost to preventable drowning. In 2024, we lost 74 people - each a friend, whānau member, or colleague. Each one irreplaceable. The water safety challenge in Aotearoa is clear, and the time for action is now. Water Safety New Zealand exists to prevent drowning by empowering all Kiwis to be safe in, on, and around water. We are seeing a slow but steady reduction in fatality risk. Hospitalisation risk has stabilised after a large period of growth.

Our vision is bold: **No one drowns – all Kiwis have the skills to be safe in, on and around water.**

We'll get there by working together, making smart, consistent decisions, and focusing where it matters most. The data tells us that the greatest burden of drowning falls on specific communities, places, and activities. This strategy is about doing what works, where it matters most. It sharpens our national focus on three strategic areas where we know we can make the biggest difference:

- Water Safety Education - Lifting aquatic literacy, especially for tamariki.
- Reducing Harm for At-Risk Communities - Targeting high-risk people, places, and activities.
- Collaborating and Partnering - Strengthening the water safety system through collective impact.

This strategy is guided by insights from DrownBase - our nationally significant water safety database - and informed by voices from our community. We're growing our capability to use the right data in the

right way, so we can act precisely and effectively. Water Safety New Zealand plays a unique role:

- **Advocate** – Influencing policy, raise public visibility, and drive investment in proven prevention
- **Enable** – Equipping partners and communities with data, tools, and support to create targeted impact
- **Sustain** – Strengthening Water Safety New Zealand's systems, capability, and funding to build a resilient sector
- **Kaitiaki** – Guiding national direction & co-design culturally responsive solutions where needed most

This strategy guides us to 2035. It outlines national outcomes, measurable targets, and focused initiatives – while remaining flexible enough to adapt over time. Together, with shared purpose and targeted action, we can shift the culture of water safety in Aotearoa and save lives.

Strategy 2035

Our Vision

No one drowns – all Kiwis have the skills to be safe in, on and around water in Aotearoa

Our Purpose

Prevent drowning by empowering Kiwis with water safety

Water Safety Education

All New Zealanders have the knowledge and skills to enjoy the water safely.

Funded partners raise awareness & deliver education using evidence-based approaches.

Water Skills for Life and other programmes build aquatic literacy across New Zealanders' lifespans.

Key measures:

- 60% of tamariki aged 5-13 participate in quality water safety programmes.
- 75% of participating tamariki demonstrate age-appropriate aquatic competence.
- Aquatic survival education embedded in national curriculum by 2026.

Key initiatives:

- Expand Water Skills for Life reach, quality, scaling up beach and river-based delivery.
- Embed aquatic competency benchmarks in schools and track national progress.
- Strengthen curriculum integration through partnerships.

Reduce Harm for At-Risk Communities

Kiwis who are most at risk, experience less water-related harm.

Prevention messaging, education, & campaigns target high-risk people, places, & activities using DrownBase insights.

Councils, partners, & media use Water Safety New Zealand data & expertise to inform local plans and actions.

Key measures:

- Sustained reduction in fatalities and hospitalisations for our highest risk communities (Māori and Asian New Zealanders).
- 100% of highest risk drowning locations have active community-led plans by 2030.
- Increased awareness of key safety messages among priority groups.

Key initiatives:

- Use DrownBase to focus effort on high-risk people, places, and activities.
- Co-design community-led solutions and deliver culturally tailored campaigns.
- Secure new funding to scale high-impact prevention initiatives.

Collaborate and Partner

New Zealand has a united, capable and evidence-driven water safety community.

Water Safety New Zealand builds trusted relationships & supports coordinated, evidence-based action on shared drowning risks.

Sector partners align around Wai Ora Aotearoa & use DrownBase to drive consistent & collective impact.

Key measures:

- Partner trust grows (measured by Net Promoter Score).
- Wai Ora Aotearoa collaborative effort is focused on addressing high risk people, places and activities.
- Sector-wide use of DrownBase and evidence-based campaigns increase.

Key initiatives:

- Lead Wai Ora Aotearoa and enable aligned sector-wide action.
- Expand DrownBase and strengthen sector capability.
- Position Water Safety New Zealand as the trusted voice for national messaging and engagement.

Approach

Advocate | Enable | Sustain | Kaitiakitanga

Values

Whanaungatanaga | Manaakitanga | Evidence-Driven



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