

Statement of Strategic Direction

2025–2035



VISION:

No one drowns

PURPOSE:

We prevent drowning by empowering New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be safe in, on, and around water.

VALUES:

He aha te mea nui o te ao. He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata.

Tika – we do things the right way to help protect people.

Māhaki – we are humble and connect with people.

Pono – we are transparent and evidence-based.

APPROACH:

Advocate • Enable • Sustain • Kaitiakitanga

Influencing policy, equipping partners, building sector resilience, and guiding national direction.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME

KEY MEASURES BY 2035

KEY INITIATIVES

1

Water safety education

More tamariki and young New Zealanders can survive in the water.

By 2035, more tamariki and young New Zealanders will have the aquatic survival competence to keep themselves safe in, on, and around water.

- 60% of primary and intermediate-aged tamariki in quality programmes each year (baseline: 20%).
- 75% of participating tamariki reach age-appropriate aquatic competence.
- Aquatic survival education embedded in the national curriculum by 2030.
- 10-year average drowning rate per 100,000 for 14–25-year-olds sustained at or below current low levels.

- Expand Water Skills for Life™ across pool, beach, and river.
- Embed aquatic competency benchmarks; track national progress.
- Strengthen curriculum integration through partnerships.

2

Reduce harm in highest-risk communities

Less harm where the risk is greatest.

By 2035, the communities, places, and activities most at risk of drowning will experience a sustained reduction in fatalities and water-related harm.

- 10-year average drowning rate per 100,000 for Māori reduced to 1.15 – in line with the all-population target (baseline: 2.34).
- 10-year average drowning rate per 100,000 for Asian New Zealanders maintained at or below 1.13.
- 100% of the 10 identified national drowning blackspots have clear guidance on risks and how to address them by 2030, supporting community-driven solutions.

- Use DrownBase™ to target the highest-risk people, places, and activities.
- Co-design culturally tailored campaigns with Māori and Asian communities (including Kia Maanu Kia Ora).
- Contribute to and support efforts to reduce Pasifika drowning, particularly in high-risk activities like craft use, alongside Pasifika communities, the Safer Boating Forum and partners. This will include ongoing monitoring of trends and data.
- Develop Blackspot guidance; enable community-driven solutions.
- Secure and deploy funding to scale high-impact prevention.

3

A stronger water safety system

A sector working together as one.

By 2035, drowning prevention effort across Aotearoa is better aligned, collaborative, more evidence-led, and focused on the people, places, and activities where collective action can have the greatest impact.

- 10-year average drowning rate per 100,000 (all population) reduced to 1.15 by 2035 (baseline: 1.71).
- Aligned behind a shared sector strategy, with 2+ targeted collective prevention initiatives delivered each year against agreed priorities and measures.
- Partner and stakeholder trust grows year-on-year (baseline set in 2026/27).
- Growth in public recall of key water safety messages (baseline set in 2026/27).

- Facilitate Wai Ora Aotearoa and enable aligned, sector-wide action.
- Expand the use of data and build sector capability.
- Position Water Safety NZ as the trusted national voice for water safety.
- Establish a partner trust and feedback mechanism.
- Advocate for legislative and policy change that lowers drowning risk.