www.watersafetynz.org

Water Safety New Zealand

Drowning Prevention Report 2024

Water Safety NEW ZEALAND

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 Tangaroa ē
The sacred domain of Hinemoana and Tangaroa.

Water Safety New Zealand

Contents

Water Safety New Zealand

Introduction

The 2024 National Drowning Prevention Report is the official account of preventable drownings across Aotearoa over the past year. Compiled by Water Safety New Zealand, using data from DrownBase™, New Zealand's authoritative drowning database, the report synthesises information from coronial findings, incident reports, and other verified sources. It provides an accurate and thorough representation of drowning incidents and remains a cornerstone resource for the water safety community, designed to inform strategy, guide interventions, aid policymakers, and support collaborative efforts to reduce drowning fatalities and promote safer water practices.

This year's report incorporates several key amendments aimed at enhancing clarity, relevance, and usability. One change is renaming the youth category (15–24 years) to Young Adults, reflecting a more accurate description of this life stage. Additionally, while Kai Gathering remains an important theme, this year we have reverted to examining leading activities, specifically land-based fishing and underwater categories, for a more focused discussion. Ongoing research is needed to better understand the "intent" or motivation behind gathering kai and its link to a broader group of activities. The "offshore" category has been reclassified to include only incidents occurring more than 1 kilometre from shore, whereas incidents less than 1 kilometre from shore are now classified as coastal. This change provides clearer distinctions between the two environments.

The report has also undergone cosmetic improvements to enhance readability and accessibility. Its overall structure remains consistent, beginning with a summary of preventable drowning events in 2024 and examining the challenge through the lenses of life stage, activity, and environment. Regional snapshots are provided for all areas, with deeper analysis focused on those regions contributing significantly to overall statistics or nearing their 10-year average.

Further work has been done to refine the identification and analysis of national high-fatality areas, or blackspots. This has added valuable context to our understanding of where and why incidents occur, enabling more targeted interventions in critical locations.

By incorporating these amendments, the 2024 National Drowning Prevention Report records the year's drowning incidents and also strengthens our ability to turn data into actionable insights. It remains a vital tool for guiding efforts and fostering a collective commitment to water safety across New Zealand.

As we reflect on the progress captured in this report, we acknowledge the 72 lives tragically lost to drowning in 2024. Behind each number is a person—a friend, family member, or loved one—whose absence leaves an irreplaceable void. Our thoughts are with their families, whānau, and communities who bear this enduring loss.

Their memories remind us why we strive for safer waters and stronger prevention efforts.

Ka maumahara tonu tātou ki a rātou — We will remember them.

> "Drowning is a solvable problem, and the power is in prevention. By using data to drive our solutions, providing water safety education for all, and by taking personal responsibility, we can save lives and strive for a New Zealand free from the burden of drowning."

Daniel Gerrard BPhEd BSc BMLSc
Chief Executive
Water Safety New Zealand

Executive Summary

Key Statistics

72 Drowning deaths in 2024

13% 11 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

82.7 10 Year Average

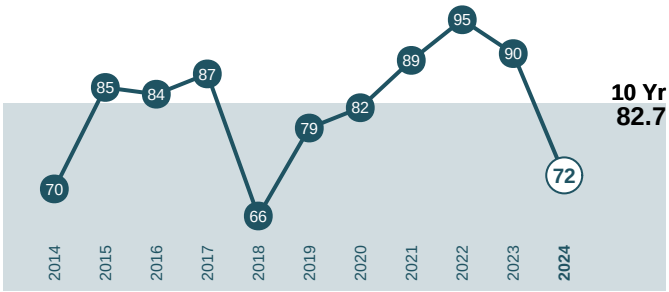
Sex 2024

Male	Female
83%	17%
60	12

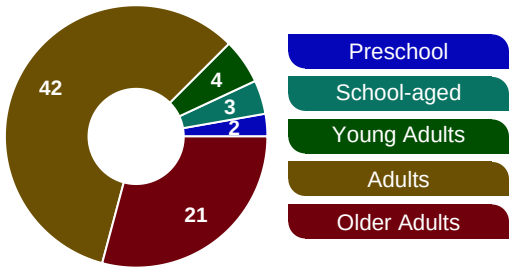
Ethnicity (with Rates) 2024

	Other	Maori	Asian	Pasifika	NZ European
Per 100k	6.46	1.76	1.54	1.44	0.83
	12% 9	21% 15	17% 12	8% 6	42% 30

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



LifeStage 2024



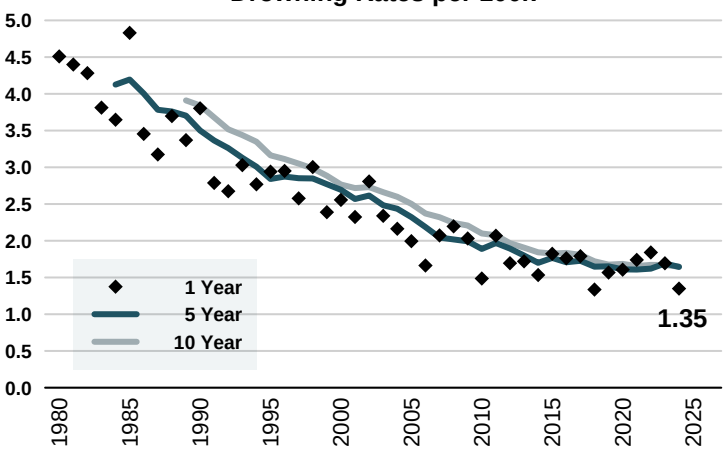
Environment 2024

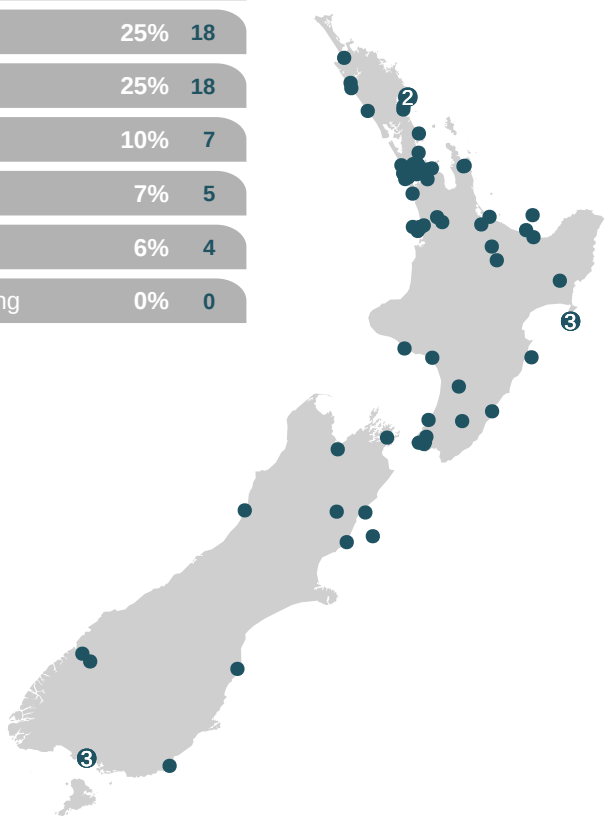
Coast	36%	26
Tidal	24%	17
Rivers	19%	14
Offshore	12%	9
Inland Still	4%	3
Home	3%	2
Pools	1%	1

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	28%	20
Craft	25%	18
Swimming	25%	18
Fishing from Land	10%	7
Other Recreation	7%	5
Underwater	6%	4
Commercial Fishing	0%	0

Drowning Rates per 100k





Executive Summary

Key Insights

New Zealand recorded 72 drowning fatalities in 2024, our lowest since 2018, a significant decline from 90 in 2023 and falling well below the 10-year average of 82.7. This reduction reflects increasing levels of personal responsibility and New Zealanders making smarter decisions around water. This is an achievement to be acknowledged and presents an opportunity to examine the dynamics influencing drowning in New Zealand in 2024.

A Global perspective

New Zealand has made significant gains over the past 45 years that have steadily reduced the risk of drowning. Since 2000, remarkable progress has been made in drowning prevention to achieve a reduction in drowning rates that aligns with the World Health Organisation global benchmark for improvement. While the global drowning rate has fallen by 38% over the same period, from 6.1 to 3.8 per 100,000 population, our achievements are even more substantial. Over the last 25 years, we have reduced our national drowning rate from 2.56 in 2000 to 1.35 in 2024, representing a 47% decline.

New Zealand's Drowning Prevention Plateau

Changes in how Kiwi engage with water, combined with a range of targeted interventions, have been the key drivers of this dramatic reduction. Of greatest impact was the introduction of mandatory swimming pool fencing. The risk of drowning is now three times lower than in the 1980s.

But over recent years our rate of progress in reducing drowning risk has stalled. By reviewing the graph 'Drowning Rates per 100k,' the convergence of the ten-year and five-year averages (grey and teal lines) indicates slowing and potential plateauing of the long-term downward trend. This convergence suggests the reduced pace of improvement, reflected by a narrowing gap between short- and long-term trends.

This pattern of potential stagnation suggests the need for another circuit breaker to ensure the current downward trend in drowning rates continues. It's time for fresh thinking, new strategies, increased targeted resources, and innovative intervention.

Declining Drowning Rates Among Under-25s

In 2024, 88% of all drownings involved individuals over the age of 25, a demographic representing 69% of the population with high participation in recreational water activities. New Zealanders under-25 years make up 31% of our population, but account for only 12% of total drownings.

This significant difference highlights the steady decline in drowning rates in those under 25. This decline mirrors sustained and focused water safety education initiatives of the past 15 years. The collective effort of the water safety community to improve aquatic skills, knowledge and competence in young New Zealanders appears to be paying off.

We are seeing sustained low rates of drowning of school-aged children and reduced risk for younger New Zealanders over time as illustrated by the graph 'Young Adults 10-year,' (p16).

Maintenance of this trend demands continued focus and sustained interest in delivering high-quality, survival-focused education, to all school-aged children.

Weather Patterns-Impact on Drowning

Initial analysis of weather patterns reveals strong correlation between extreme weather events and increased drowning risk. A three-year period of high drowning fatalities, in 2021 (89), 2022 (94), and 2023 (90), coincided with severe weather conditions, including heavy rainfall, storms, and floods, driven by active El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phases like La Niña and El Niño. Conversely, low drowning years, including 2014 (77), 2018 (66), and 2024 (72), were marked by more stable weather patterns. These findings, while unsurprising, suggest that monitoring weather phases and their potential impact, could provide critical insight for tailoring cyclical, drowning prevention strategies and focused public messaging.

Understanding Drowning Risks Across Ethnicities

In 2024, the distribution of drownings by ethnicity reveals significant disparity when compared to population on a per capita basis (per 100,000 of the population).

The "Other" category (including Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African populations) had a rate of 6.46 drownings per 100,000, accounting for 12% (9) of the total. However, this group comprise only 3% of the population. Māori (15) were also overrepresented, with 21% of total drownings (18% of population) with a rate of 1.76 per 100,000. Asians (12) matched their proportional representation (17% and 17% of the total population) with a rate of 1.54 per 100,000. Pasifika, slightly underrepresented, accounted for 8% of drownings with a rate of 1.44 per 100,000, while NZ Europeans, the majority population at 68%, were significantly underrepresented, comprising 42% of drownings with the lowest rate of 0.83 per 100,000.

Refining the Identification of High-Risk Drowning Locations

The concept of high-risk drowning locations (blackspots) was introduced in last year's drowning report. In 2024, Water Safety New Zealand revisited these locations, applying fresh methodology and enhanced data analysis to refine our understanding of these blackspot locations. This has expanded our understanding of these locations, revealing that a small number have significant impact on New Zealand drowning numbers.

Executive Summary

In 2024, blackspots accounted for 18% of all drownings, up from a reported 4.3% in 1999. Newly identified or reclassified locations, such as Manukau Harbour, Waikato River (Hamilton city limits), and expanded areas like Piha (North & South), highlight the scale of risk associated with these identified sites.

In Auckland, seven drownings occurred at identified blackspots. This accounted for nearly 40% of all Auckland drownings. Clearly, a pattern of repeated fatalities at identified, high-risk locations demand a refreshed, collaborative approach.

Lifejackets: A Simple Solution to Save Lives

Lifejacket use remains one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent drowning fatalities in New Zealand, particularly in small vessels. In 2024, 94% of craft-related fatalities involved individuals not wearing lifejackets. Long-term data indicates that nearly two-thirds of all craft-related fatalities were influenced by the absence of lifejacket use. These figures don't account for other activities, such as fishing from land, where lifejacket use could also have prevented fatality.

Central and local governments must eliminate confusion by establishing a single, consistent national rule. Backed by clear, unequivocal data, this represents a vital step toward implementing long-overdue legislative changes. It is crucial to normalise lifejacket use in New Zealand, encouraging all Kiwis to make the conscious choice to wear one.

Further investigation is needed to identify environments, specific locations, and activities where promoting, enforcing, and supporting lifejacket use would be most beneficial.

Understanding Alcohol's Contribution to Drowning

There is a disturbing, emerging theme reflecting the role alcohol plays in drowning, particularly among males. This warrants further investigation. Over the past decade, alcohol was involved in 30-40% of drowning deaths, though underreporting may mask the true impact of alcohol. Significant prevalence patterns include males aged 15-24 years, involving public holiday activity, and in freshwater environments. Common descriptors include accidental immersion ('falls' - 62%) and swimming/ "playing in water" and boating incidents, often reflecting non-use of lifejackets despite availability. While these initial findings demand further investigation the logic for urgent focus on alcohol-related behaviour around water is inescapable.

The Burden of Drowning

Refreshed investigation of hospitalisation data, has provided Water Safety New Zealand a better understanding of the human cost as well as a clear indication of the financial burden of drowning to New Zealand.

In 2024[1], a total of 214 non-fatal, water-related hospitalisations, aligned with the 10-year average of 209. Put another way, for every fatal drowning in New Zealand each year there are approximately three hospitalisations for non-fatal drownings.

Based on the Ministry of Transport's Value of Statistical Life (VoSL) calculation of $739,197 per serious injury, these hospitalisations add an estimated burden to the public health system of $158.2 million. When applying the VoSL fatality cost of $12.5 million per death to drowning fatalities, the economic impact in 2024 is estimated at $900 million. This over $1 billion burden highlights the financial and societal impact of drowning, and must serve as a powerful call for increased, targeted, prevention investment by politicians and policymakers. The significant economic strain is both preventable and inescapable.

Acknowledging Persistent Drowning Challenges

While 2024 demonstrated overall improvement with encouraging positive trends, stubborn challenges still persist. These include areas identified as 'blackspot' locations, high-risk activities such as land-based fishing, and demographic vulnerability, particularly among older males. These remain the focus of the water safety community.

Regional disparities, including Auckland's persistently high representation, emphasise the need for targeted, location-specific intervention. Addressing these challenges requires innovative, evidence-based strategies that promote informed decision-making and personal responsibility at high-risk locations.

Future efforts should ensure access for all children to high quality water safety education, support for individuals to choose safer aquatic environments, support for local communities to create local solutions, and continued effort to strengthen frontline rescue services and infrastructure in areas with elevated drowning risk.

The National Drowning Prevention Report underscores the importance of long-term, sustained commitment to prevention-focused initiatives. Crucial government investment into frontline rescue agencies needs to be complemented with support for long term drowning prevention programmes. The real human costs of drowning, the pain, suffering and disruption to families and work can be reduced, and critical rescue services will not be overwhelmed. This shift demands fresh thinking and innovation to maintain momentum and build on collective, historic success.

Findings of this report highlight that while drowning remains a complex, persisting challenge, it is becoming an increasingly solvable problem.

[1] The data from the Ministry of Health covers the period from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024.

Blackspots

NZ's High Fatality Locations

The Shift to Identifying National Drowning Blackspots

The identification of national high fatality locations, drowning blackspots, represents a crucial evolution in targeted, evidence-based interventions. Much like high-risk areas on state highways and local roads, drowning blackspots are locations with alarmingly high rates of drowning incidents and fatalities. Publicised for the first time in the 2023 National Drowning Report, Water Safety New Zealand has made it a priority to spotlight these high-risk locations.

This initiative aims to focus the attention of the public, the media, and our partners across the water safety community to drive meaningful action. By shining a light on specific geographical areas, we aim to foster increased collaboration among local government, mana whenua, the private sector, aquatic educators, and other organisations to usher in a new era of community-driven water safety efforts across New Zealand.

Reflecting Increased Capability in 2024

The updated 2024 blackspot data reflects Water Safety New Zealand's growing capability and commitment to refining our understanding of drowning risks in New Zealand.

The most significant driver behind the changes in blackspot numbers is the comprehensive work undertaken over the past 12 months to review each DrownBase™ case. By meticulously examining every synopsis, dating back to 1980, we were able to log precise GPS locations for many incidents. This refinement has provided unparalleled accuracy, enabling us to identify new and emerging blackspots that had previously gone unrecognised or were underreported.

In 2023, our methodology focused on identifying fatal incidents within a two-kilometre radius of every locality in New Zealand since 1999. This has now evolved to bespoke polygons for each location provided more complete data. While DrownBase™ has recorded drowning data since 1980, location data had only begun to be included since 1999. By revisiting historical data and incorporating GPS precision, we now have a clearer and more reliable understanding of high-risk areas.

Key Changes in 2024 Blackspots

The updated blackspot list for 2024 shows both continuity and significant changes compared to 2023. These changes reflect Water Safety New Zealand's enhanced data capabilities and a broader and widening scope of analysis:

1. Manukau Harbour: Newly identified as the highest-risk blackspot with 54 reported incidents, highlighting risks within the harbour.

2. Piha (North & South): Reclassified to include both northern and southern areas, increasing to a reported 52 incidents.

3. Waikato River (Hamilton city limits): Newly added with 46 reported incidents, emphasising the dangers of urban waterways.

4. Muriwai Beach: Reclassified and expanded area resulted in 33 recorded incidents, reflecting its treacherous surf conditions and ongoing challenges.

5. Manukau Heads: Reclassified area with a focus on bar crossing fatalities. 29 recorded incidents.

6. Wellington Harbour: Reclassified and expanded area resulted in 27 reported incidents, highlighting the growing risks in this busy central city location.

7. Te Henga/Bethells Beach: Reclassified and expanded area resulted 21 reported incidents, consistent with its identification as a high-risk coastal location.

8. Papanui Point: Increased 19 reported incidents, underscoring the need for targeted land-based fishing interventions.

9. Mt Maunganui: Increased to 19 reported incidents, reflecting its popularity and associated risks.

10 Karioitahi Beach: Increased to 17 reported incidents.

Locations such as Auckland's Princes Wharf and Lake Pupuke, which appeared in the 2023 list, have been replaced by new high-risk areas in 2024. This shift underscores the importance of refining our data and focusing resources on emerging priorities.

Emerging Trends

In 1999, based on data available, blackspot locations accounted for 4 drownings out of the national total of 92 (4.3%). Over the years, this percentage has steadily increased. By 2024, blackspots contributed 18% of all New Zealand drownings. 40 percent (7) of Auckland drownings occurred at blackspot locations in 2024.

The Road Ahead

Complementing the refined geographic analysis, we are incorporating additional datasets such as participation rates, exposure data, weather and climate data, and information from other partners. This multi-faceted approach enables us to better understand the dynamics of drowning risks and inform more effective interventions.

The expanded scope of blackspot analysis represents a proactive step toward reducing the burden of drowning in New Zealand. By leveraging data, fostering collaboration, and engaging communities, we are making strides toward a future where every drowning is preventable.

Blackspots

Papanui Point

Drowning at Papanui Point: Lessons in Risk and Responsibility

Papanui Point, a hazardous fishing spot on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island (south of Raglan) has claimed 19 lives since 1989. This tragic legacy, explored in depth by Dr. Chanel Meads in a report commissioned by Water Safety New Zealand as part of its obligations to the Wai Ora Aotearoa strategy and the water safety community, highlights the pressing need for greater community engagement, improved safety practices, education, and cultural alignment in prevention strategies.

Understanding the Risks

Papanui Point serves as a shared boundary marker (pou whenua) between the Tainui hapū of Raglan and Ngāti Whakamarungi of Ruapuke to Aotea, highlighting its longstanding ancestral connections to the land and sea. Papanui Point's rugged beauty masks its dangers. Steep, slippery paths, jagged rocks, and unpredictable ocean currents make it a perilous destination for even seasoned fishers. Analysis reveals that most fatalities occurred during rough sea conditions, with high swells and strong winds creating insurmountable hazards. Yet even calm seas have proven deadly, reflecting the unpredictability of this popular spot.

Compounding these risks, Papanui Point's remote location limits emergency response times. Tragically, none of the 19 people wore a life jacket, and many engaged in high-risk behaviours such as fishing alone or standing too close to the water's edge.

Those at Risk

Key demographic trends emerge from the analysis of each tragedy and 'regular-user' interviews:

Middle-Aged Men (35–44): Most fatalities fall within this group. Potential overconfidence in physical ability, coupled with familiarity with the location, could often led to risky decisions.

Non-local visitors and new residents: A user lacking local knowledge or understand of safety warnings, could contribute to increased vulnerability.

Solo Activities: Fishing alone, a common practice, leaves individuals without support in emergencies, compounding the risk.

Behavioural Challenges

Human behaviour played a critical role in these tragedies:

Safety Gear Neglect: None of the victims wore life jackets—a single preventative measure that could have drastically reduced fatalities.

Risky Practices: Alcohol consumption and dangerous actions, such as retrieving snagged lines from rocks

Overconfidence: Many users believed that either their local knowledge or 'swimming ability' would protect them, leading to complacency and misjudgement.

Lack of connectivity: limited mobile coverage increased rescue response time combined with limited weather monitoring (swell buoy).

Respecting wāhi tūpato

For local Māori, Papanui Point is wāhi tūpato, a place of caution and reverence. The Wai Puna framework[1] integrates ancestral wisdom with modern safety strategies.

Whakapapa: Recognising historical connections and understanding of the inherent risks of Papanui Point

Mātauranga: Understanding and utilising data to inform prevention strategies

Tikanga: Implementing safety measures that honour cultural values and practices

This culturally grounded approach ensures safety interventions resonate deeply with local communities and users while preserving the spiritual significance of the waters.

From Data to Action

The initial report offers clear, actionable steps to reduce drowning risks:

Mandate Life Jackets: Require life jackets and appropriate footwear for all visitors, with free or subsidised gear at high-risk sites like Papanui Point.

Develop targeted localised campaigns for high-risk user-groups

Enhance Community Engagement: Partner with local user-groups to promote not fishing alone, responsible alcohol use, and respect for changing environmental conditions.

Strengthen Emergency Infrastructure: Install wave monitoring buoys to provide accessible weather alerts tailored to the area.

Improve Safety Messaging: Implement location and risk specific multilingual signage and universally recognised symbols.

Behavioural Nudges: Normalise life jacket use and address stigmas around safety gear through public campaigns.

Improved use of technology: provide mobile phone notifications to fishers on days where weather modelling suggests higher risk.

Provide on-site support: work with the local community, Iwi and land managers to provide community 'patrol' or wardens to share local knowledge and weather/condition insights.

Turning Tragedy into Prevention

Papanui Point exemplifies the delicate balance between nature's allure and its dangers. Its tragic history serves as a call to action for building a culture of respect for the sea and responsibility for safety. By combining robust data analysis, community engagement, and culturally aligned interventions. Let Papanui Point not only remind us of the lives lost but inspire a collective commitment to protecting others and honouring the sacredness of our waterways.

[1] Phillips, Chanel Ph.D. (2020) **Wai Puna: An Indigenous Model of Māori Water Safety and Health in Aotearoa, New Zealand,** *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education* Vol. 12: No. 3, Article 7.

The Burden of Drowning

What does drowning cost NZ?

Public health implication of drowning – hospitalisations

Non-fatal drowning occurs when an individual survives respiratory impairment caused by submersion or immersion in water. These incidents often lead to significant health impacts, including hospitalisation and potential long-term complications such as neurological damage due to oxygen deprivation. Water-related injuries, which include non-fatal drownings, also encompass a broader range of aquatic incidents such as spinal injuries and fractures sustained during activities like diving, jumping or boating.

From data we receive from Ministry of Health, New Zealand recorded 214 hospitalisations for drowning and water-related injuries in 2024, slightly increased from the 10-year average of 205.

However, examining hospitalisations shows us that there is a lack of details available to analyse the data. Unreliable data restricts us in how we can better target New Zealanders to not only prevent deaths, but expensive, time consuming and painful injuries. We are working to collaborate with our partners in health to generate better data. With current limitations, below is what we know about hospitalisations in New Zealand, but we believe the true burden on our health system from drowning and water related injuries is still to be discovered.

Even with imperfect data, the Ministry of Transport's Value of Statistical Life (VoSL) calculation of $739,197 per serious injury means that the 2024 hospitalisations equate to a *$158,188,158* burden on New Zealand's public health system this past year.

The 2024 data showed a total of 448 days spent in the hospital by non-fatal drowning patients, with an average stay of 2 days per patient and a range from 0 to 25 days in hospital, without follow-up care data added. The total hospital days emphasises the on-going burden of non-fatal drowning on healthcare systems.

Non-fatal drownings place a significant and costly burden on New Zealand's health system, yet gaps in data limit our ability to fully understand and address this issue. To prevent these life-altering injuries and reduce their impact, we must prioritize better data collection and collaboration across sectors. Together, we can uncover the true extent of the problem and take targeted action to protect New Zealanders in and around water.

DrownBase™

Insights from Data

DrownBase™: Transforming Drowning Prevention Through Data

Launched in 1995 by Water Safety New Zealand, DrownBase™ has revolutionised drowning prevention by centralising and leveraging data. Once reliant on fragmented and unreliable data, New Zealand is now a world leader in understanding the drowning problem through this pioneering system.

From Fragmentation to Innovation

Before DrownBase™, drowning data was inconsistently collected and stored, hampering efforts to identify risks or evaluate prevention strategies. The 1970s introduced standardised questionnaires, but inefficiencies persisted. Recognising these challenges, Water Safety New Zealand developed DrownBase™. By integrating data from sources like police reports, coronial findings, and health records, DrownBase™ transformed how risks were identified and addressed, enabling real-time insights and precise trend analysis.

Key Tools and Recent Advancements from DrownBase™

DrownBase™ has become more than just a database, it is the foundation for cutting-edge tools and methodologies that drive effective drowning prevention strategies. Recent advancements include:

Predictive Modelling: Using statistical analysis, this tool estimates drowning risks daily.

Categorised Insight Tools: These pre-coded summaries of key data points enable rapid visualisation of data segments and categories—such as environment, activity and demographics to inform the water safety community.

High Fatality Location Identification: Launched in 2023, this tool uses coded mapping applications and layered data analysis to pinpoint high-fatality areas (blackspots). By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from local communities, it supports tailored interventions to address specific site risks.

Trend Regression Analysis: Leveraging linear regression techniques, this tool identifies long-term trends in drowning rates, highlighting both progress and emerging challenges.

Refreshed Blackspot Mapping: Ongoing updates to high-fatality area identification will reflect changes in environmental conditions, demographic behaviours, and usage patterns, ensuring interventions remain effective and relevant.

The Future of Data-Driven Prevention

As Water Safety New Zealand advances its mission, data science will remain central to combating drowning. The development of DrownBase™ and its associated tools highlights the vital role evidence-based decision-making plays in saving lives. Moving forward, Water Safety New Zealand is dedicated to enhancing its data capabilities, ensuring that interventions are increasingly precise and impactful.

DrownBase™ is more than a database—it is a cornerstone of drowning prevention, enabling communities, practitioners and user groups to understand their specific challenges and to focus limited resources on the highest-risk areas. By continuing to prioritise data science and evidence-based strategies, Water Safety New Zealand is paving the way for safer waterways and working toward the ultimate goal: a drowning-free New Zealand.

For nations seeking to enhance their water safety strategies, DrownBase™ offers a proven framework.

Water Safety New Zealand remains committed to sharing the lessons of DrownBase™ demonstrating that data is not just numbers – it is a powerful tool to save lives.

‘We haven’t the money, so we’ve got to think’. Ernest Rutherford, New Zealand physicist

Life Stages

Life Stages

Overview

Drowning remains a complex and preventable issue, impacting individuals across all stages of life. By examining these incidents through the lens of life stages, we gain a deeper understanding of the vulnerabilities, behaviours, and environments that contribute to these fatalities. This approach allows us to develop life-stage-specific recommendations that can save lives and guide the efforts of water safety organisations, policymakers, and communities.

While some encouraging trends are emerging—such as the significant reduction in drownings among Pre-schoolers (2), School-aged (3) and Young Adult (4)—Adults aged 25–54 (42) continue to account for a disproportionate share of fatalities, representing 55% of all drownings despite comprising only 40% of the population. This finding underscores the urgent need to address risky behaviours, complacency, and the lack of adherence to basic water safety practices, particularly during recreational activities.

Older Adults (55+), who account for 29% of drownings in 2024 (21), face unique challenges, including reduced physical agility and increased medical events, which increase their susceptibility to incidents, particularly from falls near water.

SUPPORT FOR OUR MOST VULNERABLE

Across developed and undeveloped nations, drowning disproportionately impacts children and young people. **World Health Organisation** drowning data shows children aged under five years account for nearly a quarter of the 300,000 annual drowning deaths worldwide.

New Zealand's drowning statistics for pre-schoolers are drastically different from this stark global reality. While the drowning risk profile for children under five differs from country to country, and variations with undeveloped nations are high, we can look to locations with vast coastlines similar to New Zealand – such as Australia, Canada, and Vietnam, where most drowning happens inland.

For very young children almost all water is a risk for drowning - whether that is in a bucket, bathtub, pond, or pool.

The collective impact of New Zealand's water safety and child safety sectors since the early 2010s has made incredible progress by targeting drowning prevention initiatives for three sub-groups of little people – Babies (under 18 months), Toddlers (18 months to three years), and pre-schoolers.

Increasing knowledge about drowning risks, changing attitudes, and reducing risk-taking behaviour continues to save lives.

Back in 2000, an **average of 12** New Zealand children aged under five drowned every year. The massive reductions in pre-schooler drownings noted in the 2024 National Drowning Report is a significant difference.

Life Stages

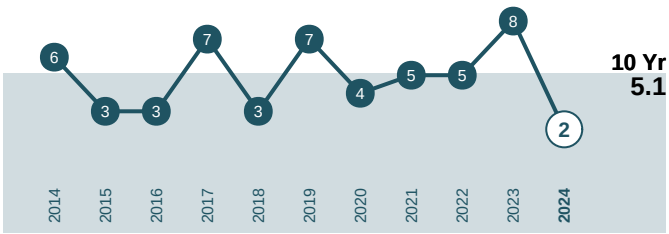
Preschool

2
Drowning deaths in 2024

61%
3 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

5.1
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



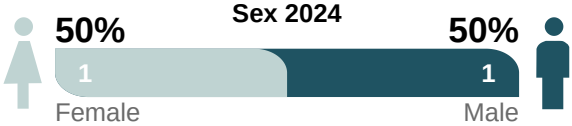
Environment 2024

Home	50%	1
Rivers	50%	1
Coast	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	100%	2
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Life Stages

Preschool

Pre-school (0–4 Years)

Pre-schoolers, who account for 6% of New Zealand's population, remain one of the most vulnerable groups due to their limited ability to assess risks and lack of basic aquatic ability. Significant progress has been made in reducing drowning fatalities in this life stage. In 2024, there were two (2) drowning deaths among pre-schoolers, representing 3% of all fatalities. This marks a significant decrease compared to the 10-year average of 5.1 fatalities per year and the eight (8) fatalities recorded in 2023.

The reduction in preschool drownings reflects the success of long-standing water safety initiatives such as improved pool fencing regulations and public awareness campaigns focused on caregiver's active supervision. Nonetheless, moments of distraction or lapses in supervision remain key contributors to incidents in this group. Effective safety measures, including the use of barriers and alarms around water, have proven effective but must continue to be enforced and expanded.

Making a difference

To sustain this positive trend, continued efforts are required. Public education campaigns should emphasise the importance of constant supervision and the proper use of pool barriers. Tailored initiatives targeting high-risk communities could help to further reduce fatalities in this group.

POOL FENCING LEGISLATION HAS WORKED

New Zealand's bold implementation of mandatory pool fencing legislation has proven to be a pivotal step in reducing child drowning rates.

Introduced in 1987 as part of the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act, the legislation required all private pools to be properly fenced, creating a critical barrier between young children and potential drowning hazards.

This prevention measure has since been credited as one of the most effective public health policies in New Zealand's history. **Child pool deaths dropped almost 80%** from an average of eight fatalities every year in the 1980s to a **ten-year average of 1.7** child pool drownings annually (2014-2023).

The legislation's impact is evident in the significant reduction in drowning fatalities among children under 5 years old.

Prior to the introduction of the law, drowning was a leading cause of preventable death for toddlers, with many incidents occurring in unfenced backyard pools.

This success is a perfect example of the value of sustained legislative action combined with public education to address preventable tragedies.

While pool fencing has transformed child water safety, the broader lesson is clear: well-enforced laws, supported by community awareness, can create meaningful change. The positive outcomes of pool fencing legislation serve as a model for future safety policies, proving that prevention is not only possible but profoundly effective.

Are Lifejackets next?

Life Stages

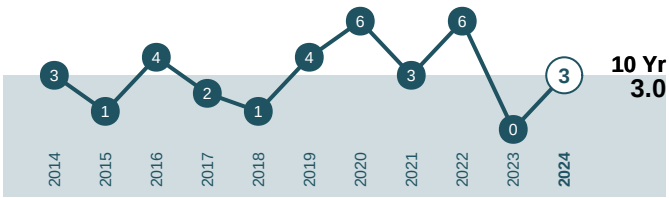
School-aged

3
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

3.0
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



Environment 2024

Inland Still	67%	2
Rivers	33%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	100%	3
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
67%	33%
2	1

Life Stages

School-aged

School-aged (5–14 Years)

School-aged children represent 13% of New Zealand's population and accounted for 4% of drowning fatalities in 2024, with three (3) deaths recorded. This figure aligns with the 10-year average of three fatalities per year, indicating that the risks for this life stage remain consistent despite ongoing interventions.

Children in this age group often engage in outdoor activities near rivers, lakes, and beaches. Many incidents occur during unsupervised swimming or accidental falls into water. While learning basic aquatic skills (like Water Skills for Life™) and school-based education programmes (like Water Skills for Life™-Beach and River) have helped reduce risks, there remains a need for greater awareness of the hazards posed by natural waterways.

Making a difference

Given the persistent nature of these risks, water safety education programmes (like Water Skills for Life™) should remain a priority, with a focus on developing basic aquatic competency and teaching children to recognise dangerous water conditions. Family-oriented safety initiatives could also encourage greater supervision during outdoor activities near water.

WATER SKILLS FOR LIFE™

Reducing Drowning Through Survival Education

Drowning is a preventable tragedy, and **Water Skills for Life™** is dedicated to reducing these incidents by equipping students with the skills and mindset needed for open water survival. It's not about being the strongest swimmer; survival in open water is about having the right tools to respond effectively when things go wrong.

Water Skills for Life™ focuses on teaching age-appropriate competencies that prepare students for real-world challenges. For younger learners, foundational skills like floating, calming techniques, and signalling for help are taught. As students grow older, more advanced skills such as sculling, treading water, and handling moving water are introduced.

Simulated open water scenarios play a crucial role in bridging the gap between controlled environments and real-life conditions. By offering hands-on practice in unpredictable situations, **Water Skills for Life™** helps students build confidence, ensuring they are equipped to handle open water risks and ultimately reduce drowning incidents.

Water Skills for Life

Life Stages

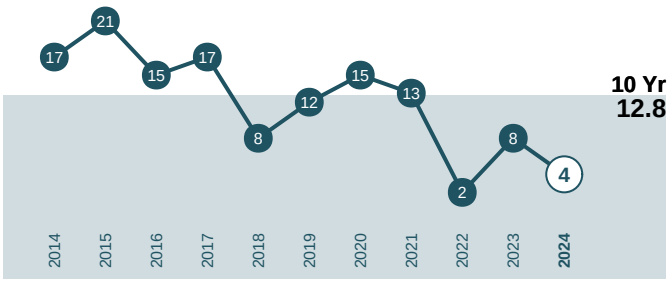
Young Adults

4
Drowning deaths in 2024

69%
9 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

12.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



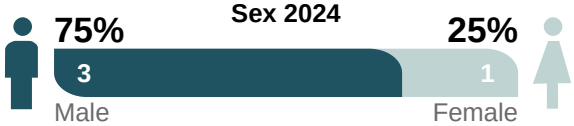
Environment 2024

Coast	50%	2
Rivers	50%	2
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Swimming	75%	3
Craft	25%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Life Stages

Young Adults

Young Adults (15–24 Years)

Young Adults, formerly classified as Youth, comprising 13% of the population, accounted for 6% of drowning fatalities in 2024, with four (4) deaths recorded. This represents a marked improvement compared to the 10-year average of 12.8 fatalities per year and the eight (8) deaths reported in 2023.

This reduction can be attributed to increased awareness campaigns targeting risk-taking behaviours, which are prevalent in this age group. Young Adults often engage in recreational activities such as swimming (playing in the water), diving (jumping/Manu), and social gatherings near beaches and rivers, where they may underestimate risks or overestimate their swimming abilities. Alcohol use during these activities remains a contributing factor.

Making a difference

To build on this progress, the water safety community should continue to deliver targeted campaigns using engaging, peer-led initiatives and social media platforms. Expanding programmes that teach river and beach safety, as well as advanced aquatic skills, will further reduce risks for this group.

THE POWER OF TARGETED CAMPAIGNS

Supporting national sporting event, **Z-Manu World Champs** is one way Water Safety New Zealand contributes to the safety culture of young adults. For many New Zealanders, *"bombing is a way of life."*

DrownBase™ data tells us Māori and Pasifika young adults are over-represented in national drowning statistics, particularly around rivers and often involving jumping.

In line with our mission to target the highest drowning risks, we reinforce critical safety behaviours relevant to the Manu environments.

Sharing consistent messages, over time, aims to increase knowledge about drowning risks, change attitudes, and reducing risk-taking behaviour.

Consistent safety messages reinforce **The Five Ways to Survive** – New Zealand's Water Safety Code, they include:

- **Jumping in appropriate locations**
- **Checking before jumping**
- **Not jumping alone**

Life Stages

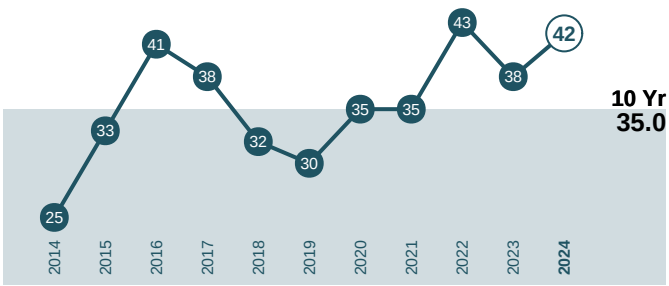
Adults

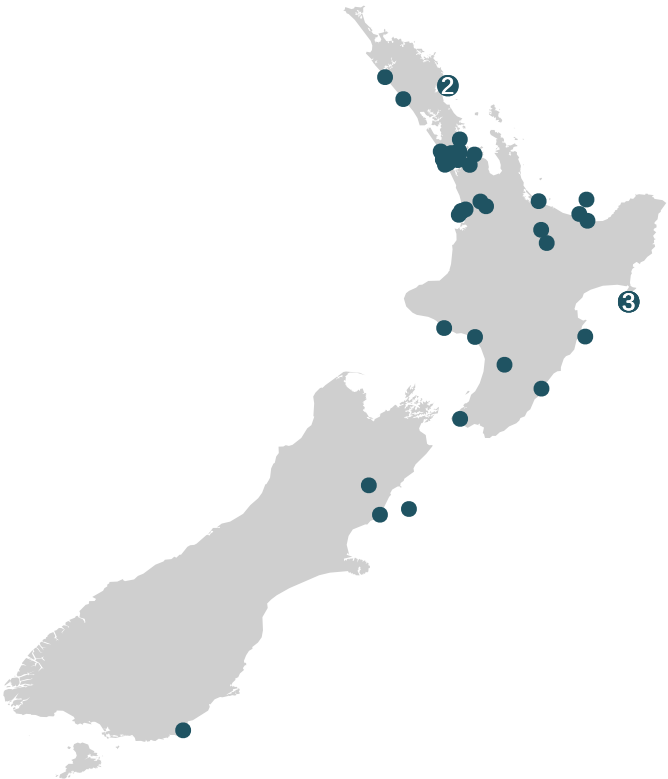
42
Drowning deaths in 2024

20%
7 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

35.0
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





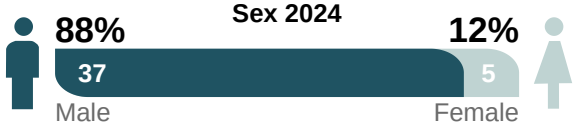
Environment 2024

Coast	40%	17
Offshore	19%	8
Rivers	17%	7
Tidal	17%	7
Home	2%	1
Inland Still	2%	1
Pools	2%	1

Activity 2024

Craft	26%	11
Swimming	26%	11
Slips & Falls	24%	10
Fishing from Land	10%	4
Other Recreation	10%	4
Underwater	5%	2
Commercial Fishing	0%	0

Sex 2024



Life Stages

Adults

Adults (25–54 Years)

Adults make up 40% of New Zealand's population but accounted for 58% of drowning fatalities in 2024, with 42 deaths recorded. This overrepresentation highlights the challenges facing this group, which has the highest drowning rate of all life stages at 2.0 per 100,000 people.

Many incidents in this life stage occur during recreational activities such as fishing, powered craft use, and swimming (playing in the water or "having a dip"). Complacency or familiarity with water environments often leads to neglect of basic safety precautions, such as wearing life jackets. Alcohol use is also a contributing factor in many incidents.

The increase in fatalities compared to the 10-year average (35), where adults represented 42% of drownings, underscores the need for targeted interventions.

Making a difference

Mandatory life jacket use for powered and non-powered craft (under 6m), along with stricter regulations for boating activities (licensing), and refreshed basic aquatic skills (being able to float) should be prioritised. Public campaigns emphasising the dangers of complacency and the importance of personal responsibility in water safety are critical to reducing risks in this group.

ALCOHOL AND WATER DON'T MIX

Alcohol consumption may be a much more significant contributor to drowning fatalities and injury than has been prioritised in the past.

Alcohol increases the risk of drowning and injury by impairing judgement, reducing coordination, and delaying reaction time. Drowning fatalities attributable to **slips and falls** – formally categorised as 'unintentional entry into water' remain a consistent feature of New Zealand's drowning statistics.

Making conclusions on alcohol-related drowning and slips and falls is a complex challenge, partly through the nature of formal inquiries and evidence gathering. Through increased analytical use of **DrownBase™** more definitive work is possible to target drowning prevention in this area.

Promotion of safety messages and new partnerships with both the health and hospitality sectors will play a role in emerging work.

Alcohol and water don't mix:

- Activity in or on the water, it is safest to avoid alcohol altogether
- If you are planning to consume alcohol around a body of water, ensure all water-based activity is finished before consuming alcohol
- Plan your route home after a night out – and don't walk alone around water after consuming alcohol
- If you have consumed alcohol do not get back in the water
- Do not consume alcohol if you are the driver or in charge of a powered boat
- Do not consume alcohol if supervising children around the water.

Life Stages

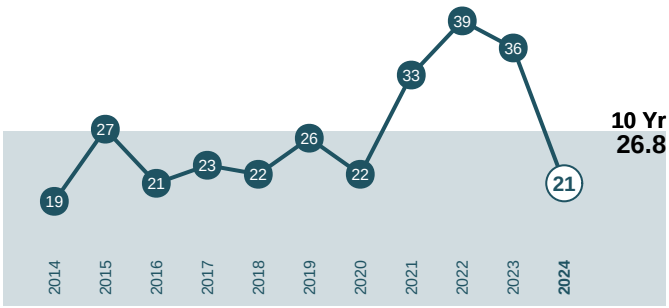
Older Adults

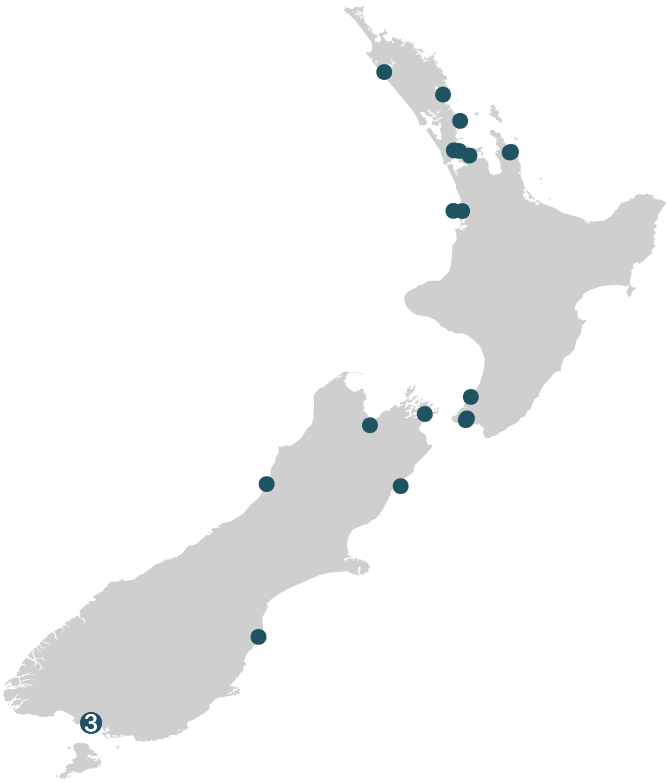
21
Drowning deaths in 2024

22%
6 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

26.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





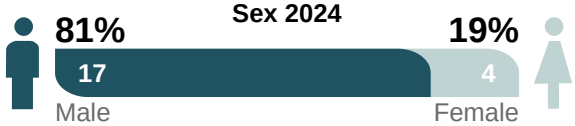
Environment 2024

Tidal	48%	10
Coast	33%	7
Rivers	14%	3
Offshore	5%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0

Activity 2024

Craft	29%	6
Slips & Falls	24%	5
Swimming	19%	4
Fishing from Land	14%	3
Underwater	10%	2
Other Recreation	5%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0

Sex 2024



Life Stages

Older Adults

Older Adults (55+ Years)

Older Adults account for 29% of the population and represented 28% of drowning fatalities in 2024, with 21 deaths recorded. This group has a drowning rate of 1.39 per 100,000 people, second only to Adults aged 25–54 (2.0).

In 2024 drownings among Older Adults predominantly occurred in tidal waters (10) or on the coast (7) and were strongly linked to kai gathering activities. Physical limitations or underlying medical conditions, including reduced agility and slower reaction times, increase the likelihood of incidents. Isolation can also play a role, as many incidents involve individuals alone at the time of the event.

While fatalities in this life stage have decreased slightly in 2024 (21) compared to the 10-year average (26.8), addressing the unique risks faced by the increasingly active Older Adults group remains crucial.

Making a difference

Whilst traditional programmes focused on fall prevention, a greater emphasis should be placed on personal competency in the water (e.g. floating abilities) and greater use and encouragement of lifejacket use and the use of buddy systems for water-based activities.

LIFE JACKETS SAVE LIVES

The importance of lifejacket use cannot be overstated.

Water Safety New Zealand applauds all parts of local government who are strengthening and enforcing bylaws for lifejacket use and making the water safer for their communities.

In 2024 the Bay of Plenty and Tairāwhiti joined other regions, like the Waiakto, and took the initiative to amend their local navigational bylaws.

These changes, show real wisdom and leadership, setting a strong example for others to follow.

The alignment of regional approaches to lifejacket safety is a welcome development, reinforcing the message across multiple areas that wearing a lifejacket is a key factor, like wearing a seatbelt, in staying safe on the water.

The water safety community has advocated for many many years to successive Governments and Ministers of Transport to amend Rule 91 of the Maritime Transport Act.

The call is to introduce clear national consistency – make lifejackets mandatory on all vessels under 6 metres. The numerous and varied interpretations of Rule 91 have resulted in a patchwork of regional variations, creating confusion for the public regarding lifejacket requirements and water safety rules across different areas in New Zealand.

Environments

Environments

Overview

New Zealand's aquatic environments offer a wide range of recreational opportunities, but each carries its own unique set of risks. Personal responsibility in matching your skills, knowledge, and preparation to the environment you select is critical for safety. Whether it's a tranquil looking river, a bustling beach, or a choppy sand bar, understanding the challenges posed by strong currents, submerged obstacles, or unpredictable tides can mean the difference between life and tragedy.

The primary drowning environments are categorised into *Coastal, River, Tidal, Inland Still, Offshore, Pool, and Home* settings, each with distinct subcategories that highlight their diverse hazards. For example, coastal environments include surf beaches, with their powerful rip currents, and rocky foreshores, where sudden waves and slippery surfaces pose significant risks. Rivers are known for hidden dangers like strong currents and submerged obstacles, while pools, with appropriate pool fencing, still require proper supervision. Even home environments, like baths, can be hazardous, particularly for young unsupervised children.

These categories provide critical insights into drowning trends and help guide prevention strategies. For a full breakdown of each environment and its subcategories, refer to the glossary. By choosing environments that match your abilities and understanding the associated risks, you can make informed decisions that ensure safe and enjoyable experiences in and around the water.

This year's environmental analysis does not include a dedicated section for *pool* drownings, as the number of fatalities was 1, significantly below the 10-year average of 5.8. This is important to note in ight of the large spike in pool deaths (11) recorded in 2023.

Key Environments

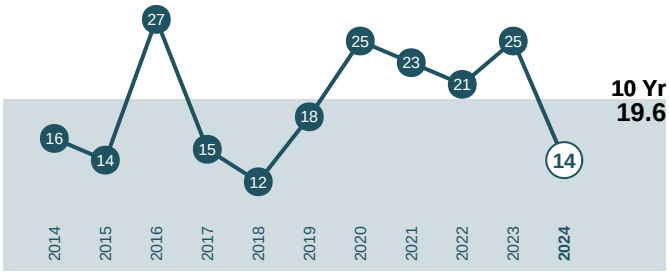
Rivers

14
Drowning deaths in 2024

29%
6 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

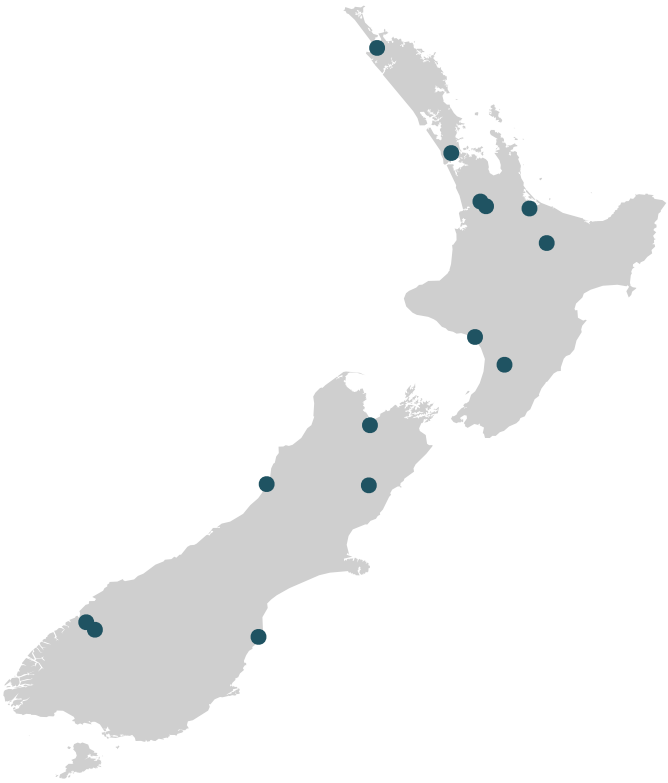
19.6
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

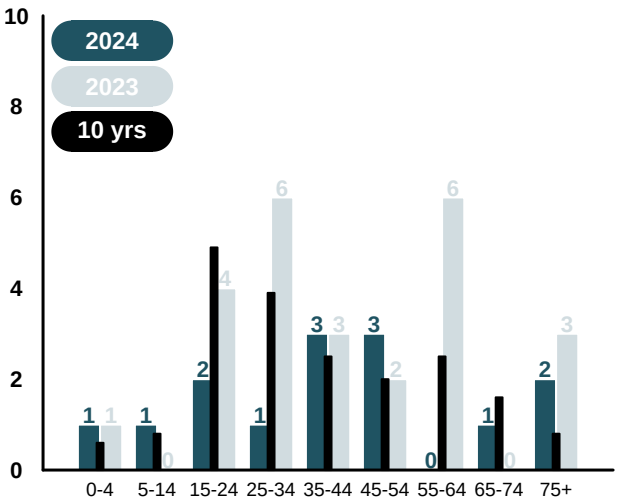


Activity 2024

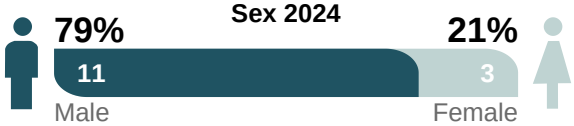
Slips & Falls	43%	6
Swimming	29%	4
Craft	14%	2
Fishing from Land	14%	2
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Environments

Rivers

In 2024, 14 drowning deaths occurred in New Zealand rivers, marking a 29% reduction compared to the 10-year average of 19.6 fatalities. Slips and falls accounted for 43% of incidents, followed by swimming (29%) and craft and fishing-related activities (14% each).

Demographically, progress was noted among younger groups: the 15-24 age group recorded two fatalities, down from the 10-year average of five, while the 25-34 age group had just one fatality, compared to an average of four. Notably, no drownings occurred in the 55-64 age group, a dramatic improvement from six fatalities in 2023 and an average of three annually. However, the 35-44 and 45-64 age groups recorded slightly above-average fatalities, with three deaths each. Males remain disproportionately affected, comprising 79% of fatalities.

New Zealand's extensive network of rivers has historically been a significant source of drowning incidents, with over 1,000 deaths since 1980—accounting for 23% of all drownings. Nearly half (46%) of victims "slipped or fell," highlighting the need for basic river safety skills to prevent unintentional water entry and basic skills, like floating, for when you do enter the water. Despite progress in some areas, rivers remain a critical risk, with a handful of major tributaries causing most of the harm. Sustained efforts are essential to address high-risk activities and vulnerable demographics to ensure continued improvement

PREPARING KIWI KIDS FOR RIVER SAFETY

Water Skills for Life™ – River is New Zealand's only dedicated river-specific safety education programme for school-aged children.

It provides hands-on learning, allowing tamariki to experience and practice survival skills in their local rivers, equipping them to stay safe.

With only 1 in 5 Kiwi kids receiving pool-based survival training, 1 in 20 accessing beach education, and very few offered river-specific programmes, many children are missing out on critical safety skills.

This programme teaches tamariki to read river conditions, identify hazards such as strong currents, sudden drops, and submerged obstacles, respond effectively in emergencies, and make informed decisions around water.

Too many lives are lost in New Zealand's rivers, making it essential to build water safety skills and knowledge to reduce these preventable tragedies.

To expand its reach, Water Safety New Zealand is working with local councils, schools, and community organisations to roll out the programme nationwide. As a life-saving initiative, **Water Skills for Life™ – River** aims to prepare every child in New Zealand with the tools to stay safe around rivers, regardless of their background.

Supported by ACC and local funding partners, it ensures tamariki gain essential survival skills to navigate New Zealand's waterways safely.

Key Environments

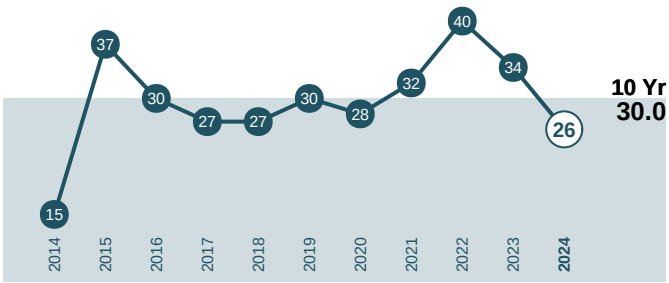
Coast

26
Drowning deaths in 2024

13%
4 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

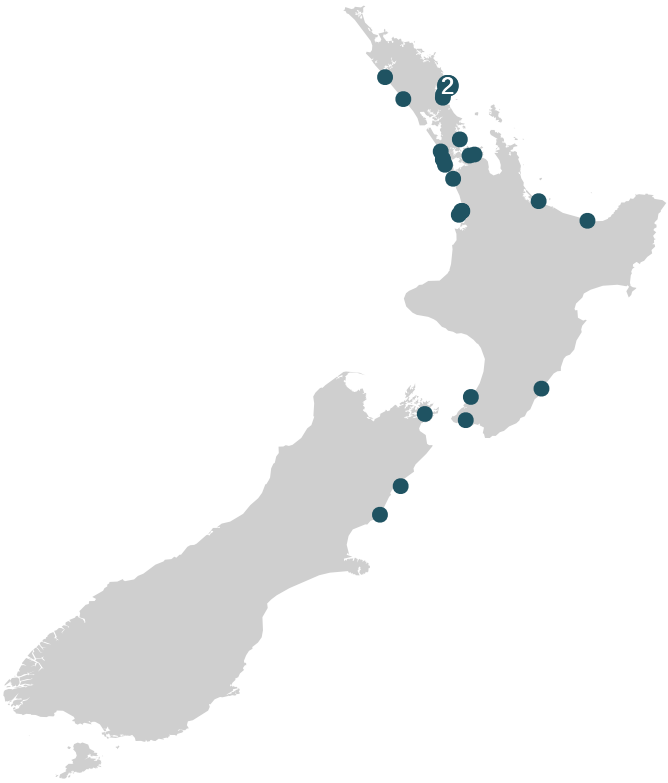
30.0
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

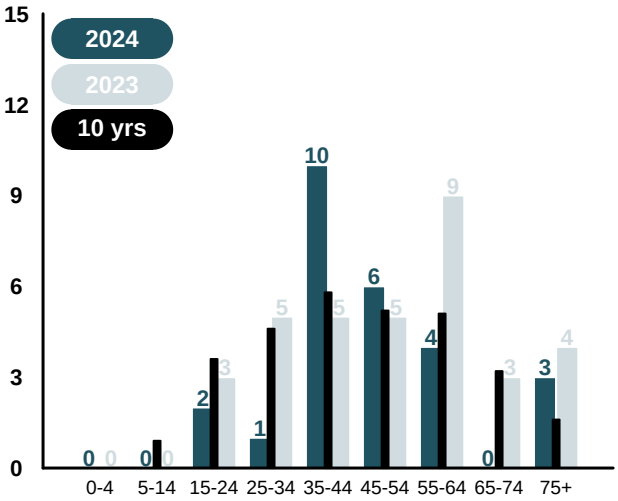


Activity 2024

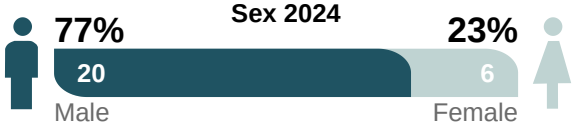
Swimming	50%	13
Other Recreation	15%	4
Fishing from Land	12%	3
Underwater	12%	3
Craft	8%	2
Slips & Falls	4%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Environments

Coast

In 2024, coastal environments, defined as locations along the shoreline characterised by varying water conditions such as waves, tides, and currents, accounted for 26 drowning fatalities, representing 36% of all drownings for the year—a 13% decrease from the 10-year average of 30 fatalities annually. Despite this reduction, coastal fatalities remain a persistent challenge, underscoring the need for more effective interventions.

Fatalities showed mixed trends across age groups. Positive outcomes were observed in the 0-4 and 5-14 age groups, with no recorded fatalities, and significant reductions in the 15-24 and 25-34 groups, with 2 and 1 fatalities, respectively, compared to 10-year averages of 4 and 5. However, the 35-44 group experienced a concerning spike with 10 fatalities, up from an average of 6, while the 45-54 group recorded 6 fatalities, slightly above the average of 5. The 55-64 group showed improvement with 4 fatalities, below the 10-year average of 5 and down significantly from 9 in 2023. The 65-74 group recorded no fatalities, a drop from an average of 3, but the 75+ group increased to 3 fatalities, up from an average of 2. Males accounted for 77% of all fatalities, reinforcing the persistent gender disparity in drowning statistics.

Swimming-related incidents were the leading cause, accounting for 13 deaths (50%), followed by other recreational activities (15%), fishing from land (12%), and underwater activities (12%). Craft-related incidents (8%) and slips and falls (4%) contributed smaller proportions. Geographically, 20 of the 26 fatalities occurred in temperate regions from Bay of Plenty to Northland, where warmer climates and higher water usage likely elevate risks.

Coastal drowning fatalities have stubbornly plateaued at an average of 30 deaths per year over the past decade, despite fluctuations such as a low of 15 in 2014 and a peak of 40 (2022). This persistence indicates that existing interventions are not effectively reducing the overall trend. Breaking this plateau requires a re-evaluation of strategies, focusing on systemic issues, targeting prevention measures, and improved public education, especially for high-risk groups and locations. The data underscores the urgency of innovative, evidence-based approaches to drive meaningful reductions and prevent further loss of life.

Key Environments

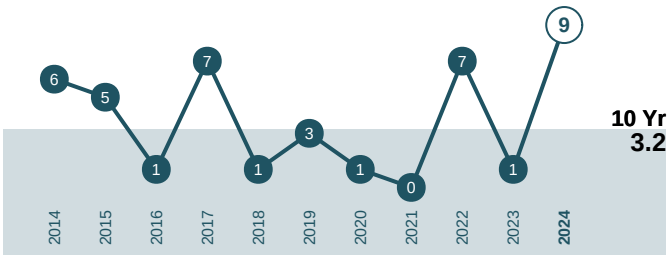
Offshore

9
Drowning deaths in 2024

181%
6 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

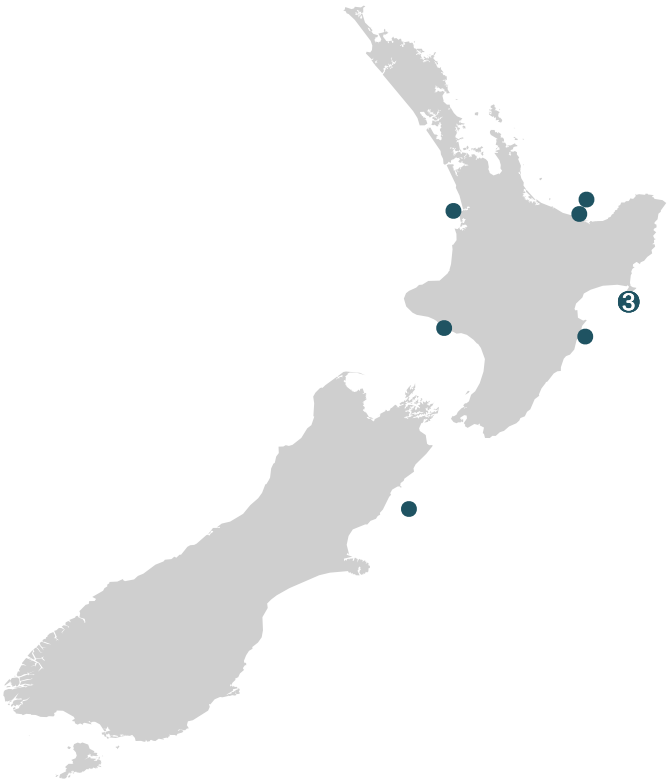
3.2
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

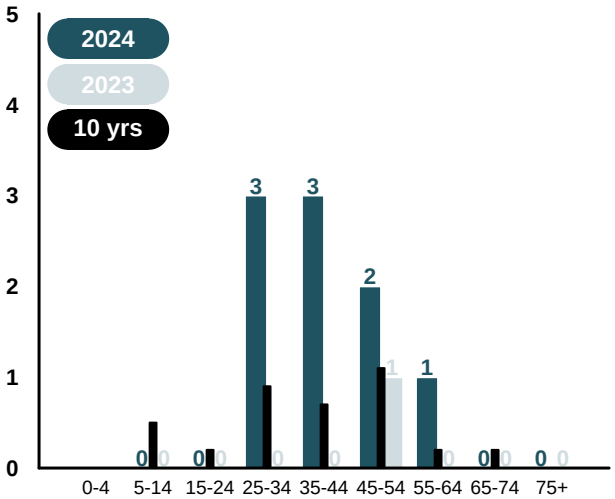


Activity 2024

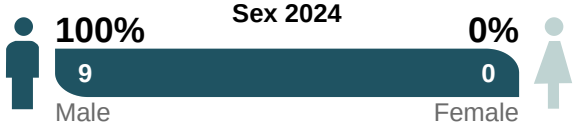
Craft	78%	7
Slips & Falls	11%	1
Underwater	11%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Environments

Offshore

Offshore environments are those located beyond the immediate coastline, characterised by open water and varying depths.

In 2024, offshore environments accounted for 9 drowning fatalities, a dramatic 181% increase compared to the 10-year average of 3.2 fatalities annually. However, this apparent increase is partly due to the reclassification of "offshore" to include incidents occurring more than 1 kilometre from shore. Under the previous definition, incidents less than 1 kilometre offshore were included in this category but are now classified as coastal, reducing historical figures for the offshore category and making the 2024 numbers appear disproportionately higher relative to the adjusted historical average.

Most offshore fatalities in 2024 were linked to craft-related activities, accounting for 78% (7 fatalities), with slips and falls and underwater activities each contributing 1 fatality. All offshore fatalities involved males aged 25-64, highlighting the heightened risks faced by adult males engaging in offshore activities. High variability in the 10-year tracking of offshore fatality data is partly due to tragic multi-fatality events that significantly impact annual figures.

The reclassification has improved clarity in categorisation, but it emphasises the constant need to strengthen safety measures for individuals venturing more than 1 kilometre.

Following the Safe Boating™ core messages of always wearing a life jacket, having two forms of communication, and checking the marine forecast, can help mitigate persistent risks in this environment.

Key Environments

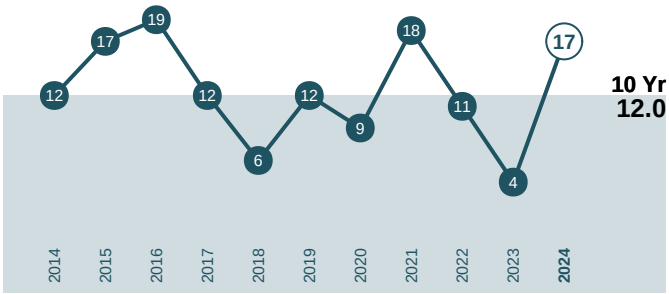
Tidal

17
Drowning deaths in 2024

42%
5 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

12.0
10 Year Average

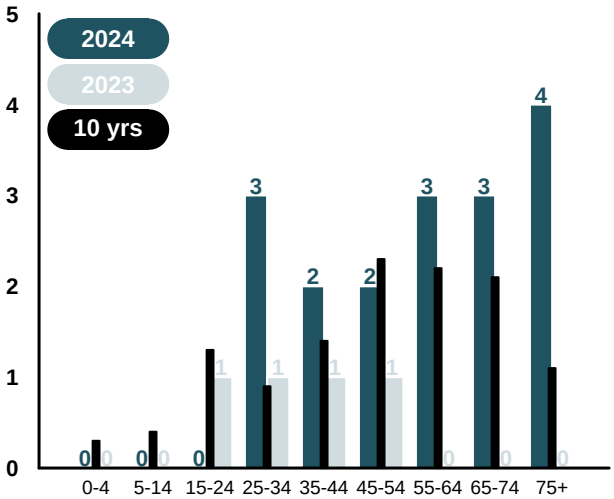
Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



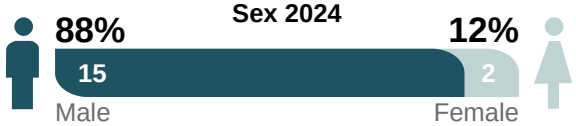
Activity 2024

Craft	41%	7
Slips & Falls	35%	6
Fishing from Land	12%	2
Other Recreation	6%	1
Swimming	6%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Environments

Tidal

In 2024, the tidal environment recorded 17 drowning fatalities, a 42% increase compared to the 10-year average of 12. This sharp rise underscores the risks in tidal areas and highlights the need for localised safety interventions. Annual figures for tidal fatalities have shown significant volatility, with fatalities jumping from 4 in 2023 to 17 in 2024, reflecting the unpredictable nature of this environment and the challenges of effective safety planning.

Fatalities were absent in the 0-24 age groups, a positive outcome. However, older age groups saw a concerning rise, with 55-64 and 65-74 each recording three fatalities, and the 75+ group reporting four, above their respective 10-year averages. Older adults now account for nearly 60% of tidal fatalities, a stark contrast to 2023 when no fatalities occurred in these groups. This shift highlights both their higher participation in activities within tidal environments but also this cohort's adherence to basic safety practices, in particular lifejacket use.

Craft-related incidents were the leading cause of tidal fatalities (41%), with five of the seven craft deaths occurring during bar crossings, emphasising the sustained need for targeted and localised education in this area. Slips and falls (35%) also featured prominently, followed by fishing from land (12%) and swimming or recreational activities (6%). Geographically, incidents were distributed across New Zealand, with bar crossings and strong tidal flows posing significant dangers. Males accounted for 88% of fatalities, reflecting the persistent gender disparity in drowning risks.

RAISING AWARENESS TO SAVE LIVES: COASTGUARD'S BAR SAFETY INITIATIVE

Harbour and river bar crossings rank among the most dangerous challenges for Kiwi boaties, with Coastguard volunteers responding to multiple incidents annually, including fatalities. To combat these tragedies, Coastguard, the New Zealand Sport Fishing Council, and local boating clubs joined forces to deliver the 2024 Bar Awareness Seminar Roadshow.

The nationwide initiative ran through to December 28, with high community demand prompting an additional stop in Queenstown. Two online seminars were also offered to ensure accessibility for all. Over 2,000 boaties attended these free sessions, designed to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed decisions before navigating their local bars.

Seminars covered critical topics, such as recognising bar-specific hazards, understanding weather and tides, and implementing emergency procedures. To further support Aotearoa's diverse communities, Coastguard released Bar Awareness videos with subtitles in eight languages, including te reo Māori, Chinese, and Tongan.

Since 2013, 31 preventable drowning deaths have occurred during bar crossings, with many victims from ethnic communities. Tragedies in 2024, like the loss of three lives in Riverton, Southland, underscore the need for ongoing education and resources.

Boaties can access Coastguard's bar safety videos on their YouTube channel.

COASTGUARD
TAUTIAKI MOANA

Activities

Activities

Overview

Drowning is closely linked to the types of activities people engage in around water, each carrying unique risks and challenges. By analysing these activities, we gain valuable insights into behaviours and environments that contribute to drowning incidents, enabling targeted prevention efforts. Activities are categorised to highlight their specific risks, from craft use (e.g., powered and non-powered vessels), to fishing from land and other recreational pursuits like surfing and jet skiing. High-risk scenarios such as slips and falls, swimming/playing in the water, and underwater activities also reveal vulnerabilities, particularly when basic safety measures are overlooked.

This activity-based approach demonstrates the need for tailored interventions and educational campaigns to address behaviours that elevate risk in specific scenarios. By focusing on activities most associated with drowning, water safety organisations, policymakers, and communities can design initiatives to prevent incidents and save lives.

Key Activities

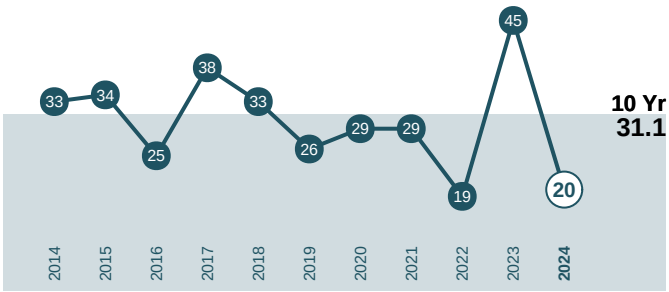
Slips & Falls

20
Drowning deaths in 2024

36%
11 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

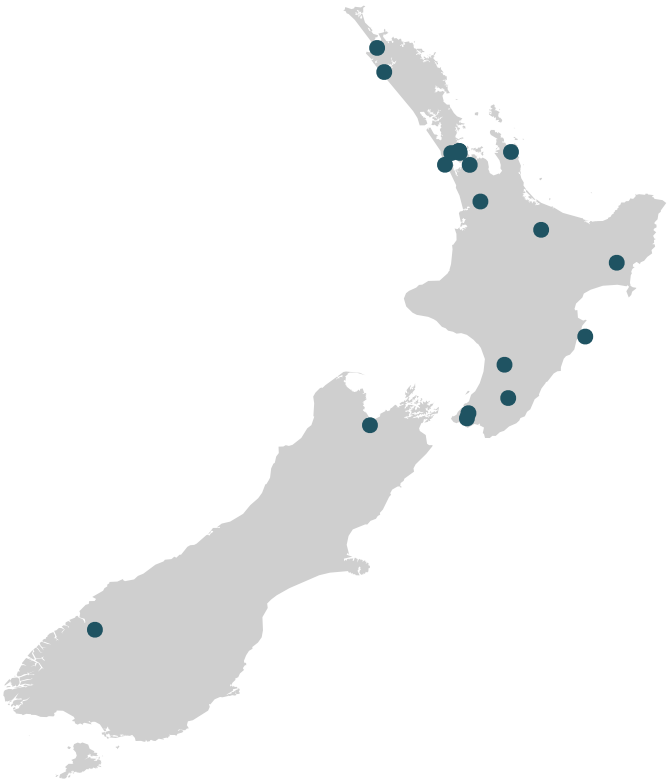
31.1
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

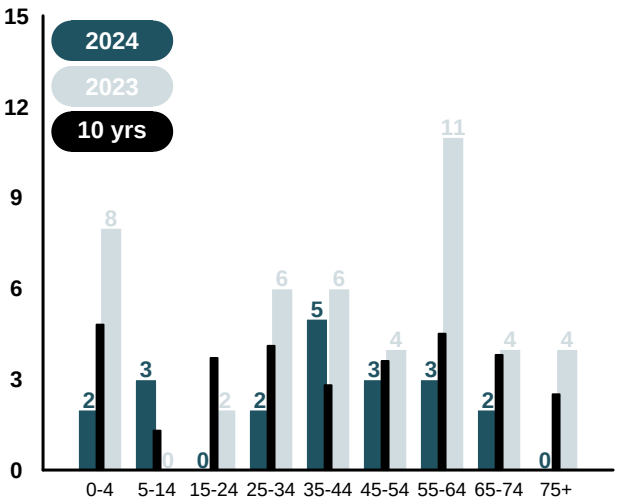


Environment 2024

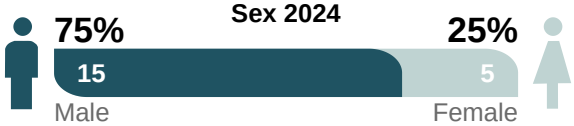
Rivers	30%	6
Tidal	30%	6
Inland Still	15%	3
Home	10%	2
Coast	5%	1
Offshore	5%	1
Pools	5%	1



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Activities

Slips & Falls

Slips and falls is a broad category capturing preventable drownings that don't fit into the other recreation focussed activity categories.

After a significant rise in fatalities in 2023 driven by multiple severe weather events, settled weather in 2024 sees a return to expected levels. There were 20 drownings related to slips and falls over the past year representing a significant reduction (36%) when compared the 10-year average of 31.1 drownings for this category.

The 20 drownings in 2024 were:

- 15 unexpected falls into water - mostly in urban areas or close to home.
- 3 where the deceased was in the water already, usually in baths or pools, and 'slipped under' the water - unsupervised young children or a medical event for older adults.
- 2 resulted from entering the water to rescue others.

The wide variety of circumstances for drownings in this category means that they are widely distributed across New Zealand, occur throughout the year and impact all age groups and ethnicities.

Except for those trying to rescue others in trouble, the common element linking all other drownings related to slips and falls is that the victims were alone at the time that they ended up in the water.

Making a difference

Taking some form of additional flotation with you when trying to rescue others will reduce the risk that you will become a victim yourself. Think before reacting. Do you really need to go in or are others better placed to help? Can a rescue be attempted from land? And if you need to go in, do you have the additional flotation to help you and the other person survive?

Anyone supervising young children anywhere in or around water must be vigilant and always stay in close contact to ensure their safety.

Councils and other managers of infrastructure close to water need to consider how they can minimise the potential for unintended falls into water. Good design should reduce this risk and make it easy for people to get back out of the water quickly.

KEEP CALM & FLOAT ON: THE SKILL EVERY KIWI NEEDS

Slipping and falling into the water unexpectedly is a major contributor to drowning incidents in New Zealand. When things go wrong, the ability to float until help arrives or self-rescue is critical.

One of the most effective yet overlooked solutions to this growing crisis is mastering the skill of floating. **Floating** is not just a simple water skill; it is a critical life-saving measure that keeps the head above water, prevents panic, and buys precious time in emergencies.

Building New Zealanders' floating ability is a national priority. By incorporating floating into the national curriculum and normalising it as an essential life competency, akin to reading or writing, we can equip future generations with the tools to navigate aquatic environments safely.

Practicing floating in different conditions—calm lakes, pools, rivers, and even ocean waves—ensures people of all ages are prepared for the unpredictability of water.

Water Safety New Zealand urges all Kiwi to embrace floating as a first line of defense. With education, practice, and a cultural shift towards water respect and preparedness, floating can transform our relationship with water and save lives.

Together, let's make floating second nature for everyone, from children to adults, and work toward a safer future in and around New Zealand's waterways.

Key Activities

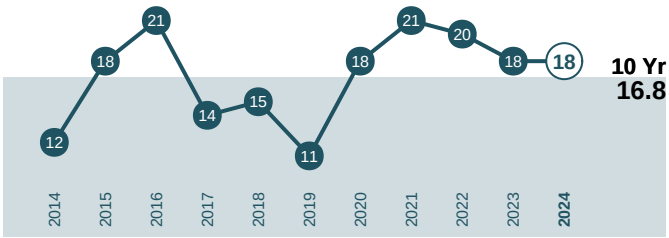
Swimming

18
Drowning deaths in 2024

7%
1 more person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

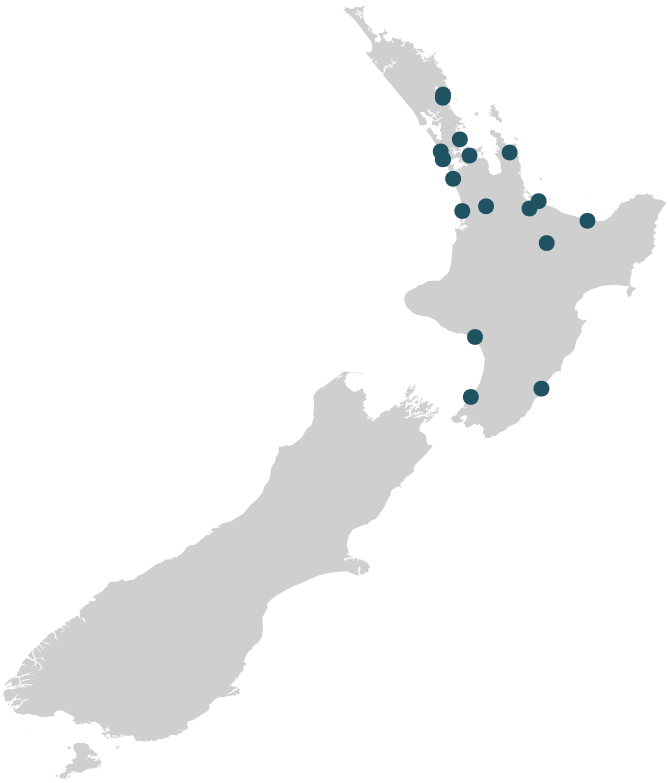
16.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

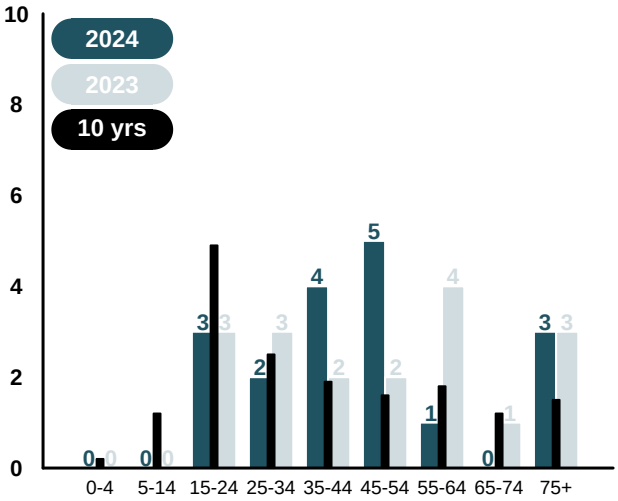


Environment 2024

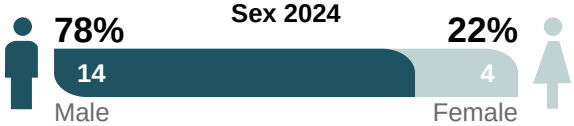
Coast	72%	13
Rivers	22%	4
Tidal	6%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Activities

Swimming

Swimming, wading and 'having a dip' in water is a quintessentially Kiwi activity. It's something that most of us enjoy but perhaps familiarity leads to complacency about the risks?

In 2024, 18 New Zealanders drowned swimming, wading or 'having a dip'. This result, the same as last year, is ahead of the 10-year average of 16.8 fatalities.

In 2024, all swimming related drownings occurred in the North Island, mostly at the coast (13). Rivers remain our second most common risk environment for swimming with 4 deaths over the past year. With no deaths in pools or lakes over the past year, this shows that risks associated with moving water in rivers and at the coast are those that are harder to judge for many Kiwis. Bad weather was not a significant factor in any swimming-related death in 2024 again reinforcing that it is hard to perceive hazards in 'normal' conditions continue to catch many of us out.

Analysis of the past 10 years of swimming-related fatalities highlights these being distributed across all age groups, with those between the ages of 15 to 34 having the greatest burden. The past year's result is at odds with the longer-term pattern showing fewer fatalities for those under 34 and generally higher than average fatalities for all age groups 35+.

In New Zealand, swimming-related drownings often occur very close to land, in shallower waters. Most swimming-related drownings over the past decade impacted people who weren't even intending on being 'out of their depth' in water. Swimming at surf beaches away from lifeguards (lifeguards not present at the beach, outside of lifeguard patrol hours or choosing to swim outside of the flagged area at a beach that is being patrolled) is a persistent characteristic of New Zealand's swimming drownings.

Making a difference

With recent research highlighting that only 18% of Kiwis consider themselves competent swimmers in deep water and 48% of us being competent floaters, you must question why so many of us choose to head to unpatrolled surf beaches when we want to hit the water? Surf beaches have inherent hazards that are hard for most of us to spot. Rips, currents, holes, large infrequent waves are common hazards that exist at surf beaches that can easily catch any of us out. More work is needed to encourage Kiwis to make safer choices about where to go.

56% of those who drowned swimming over the past year didn't have anyone close by in the water to assist. Swimming by yourself might 'feel good for your soul' but when something goes wrong, what happens? If someone is with you, there is an increased chance that they can help get you back to safety.

FOCUS ON AQUATIC LITERACY

A long-term focus to lift the water-related skills, knowledge, and competence of young New Zealanders is showing results. We are seeing **sustained low rates** of drowning amongst primary school-aged children (5 – 13 years) and reducing risk for younger New Zealanders over time.

The **Water Skills for Life™** programme is purpose-built for school-aged children. The mission is to strengthen the quality and focus of aquatic education both in schools and in the aquatic industry. *One in five primary school-aged children currently benefit from the water survival skills and knowledge* that is helping them to be better prepared and make good decisions in and around water.

- New Zealand has approx. 450,000 school age children in Years 1-8
- 2023/24 saw 96,000 young people participating in Water Skills for Life™
- That's more than 750,000 'in water' water survival lessons each year across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The focus is on strengthening educational programmes in schools to emphasise water safety, focusing on key aspects such as *aquatic literacy, floating techniques, understanding water conditions, and knowing how to seek help when in distress.*

To drive further drowning reductions for **school-aged children**, we will need the help of others to find new resources to support the approximately 130,000 children who are not receiving privately funded or school-based support at present.

I ore te tuatara ka puta ki waho
A problem is solved by continuing to find solutions

Key Activities

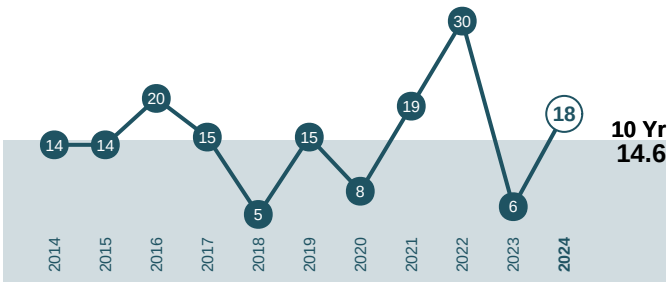
Craft

18
Drowning deaths in 2024

23%
3 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

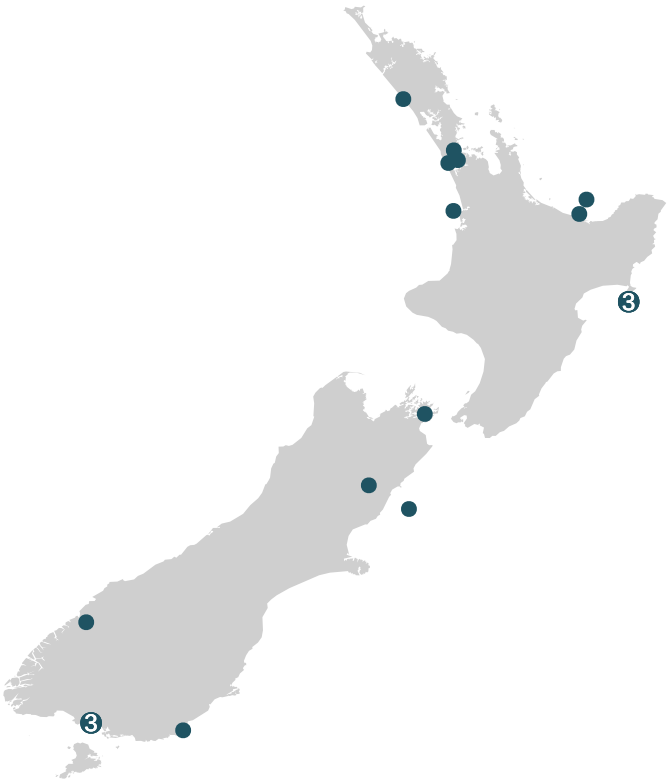
14.6
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)

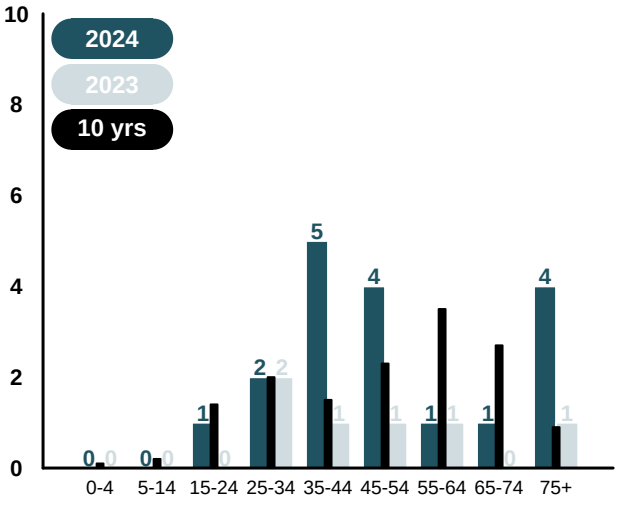


Environment 2024

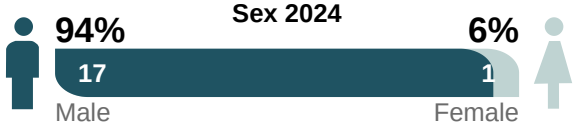
Offshore	39%	7
Tidal	39%	7
Coast	11%	2
Rivers	11%	2
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Activities

Craft

Kiwis use a wide range of craft to get out on the water. Whether it's for fun or for work, if there a drowning associated with the use of a ship, yacht, boat, jet ski, kayak, kiteboard, surfboard or other craft, then it is reported in this section.

Tragically a total of 18 people lost their life in a craft related drowning in 2024. This is significant and is 23% above the 10-year average of 14.6 craft related drownings.

Males (94%) continue to be most impacted. Information from craft related drownings over the past 10 years highlights that more than half of all victims were aged 55+. But in 2024, those aged 25-54 and 75+ have borne a greater share of the burden.

Craft fatalities don't just occur well out at sea in severe weather. More than half (11) of the 2024 craft-related drownings occurred 'near shore' with 5 fatalities (27%) resulting from capsize as they crossed a bar at the entrance to a harbour or river. The majority (77%) of craft related incidents in 2024 occurred in expected weather conditions. It is 'normal' conditions that are catching many of us out.

94% (17) of those who drowned in craft-related incidents in 2024 didn't have lifejackets on. Unfortunately, most victims of craft related drownings over the past decade could well have survived if they had simply been wearing a lifejacket.

Unlike for most other water-based activities, multiple drownings are more common when using craft. In 2024, 2 tragic events resulted in 6 lives being lost. The picture over the past decade tells us that those years with higher-than-average craft fatalities are usually associated with multiple fatality events. Bar crossings, significant weather events and the failure to wear life jackets are key themes that connect most multiple fatality events.

Making a difference

It's simple. Always wear a life jacket when on board as you never know when the unexpected will happen.

Don't get complacent when you are close in or when close to home. Bar crossings, in particular, are challenging. If you are a skipper, take the time to ensure that you know what to do so that you can keep those around you safe. Local Harbourmasters and Coastguard Tautiaki Moana have great bar crossing information and education programmes to help you to be safe so take advantage of it.

IT'S ALL IN THE NUMBERS

Each year, Maritime New Zealand and Water Safety New Zealand report different craft fatality figures due to variations in data collection and reporting, influenced by Maritime New Zealand's obligations under the Maritime Transport Act (1994).

Key differences include:

- **Recreational vs. Commercial Classification:**

Maritime New Zealand categorises incidents as "commercial" if they involve craft defined under its commercial boat criteria, generally when money is exchanged for services. Hired or chartered vessels are excluded from Maritime New Zealand's "recreational" definition but may fall under Water Safety New Zealand's recreational or non-recreational boating fields.

Water Safety New Zealand's DrownBase™ includes a field to indicate if an incident aligns with Maritime New Zealand's commercial classification and further splits "commercial" incidents into fishing or work-related deaths.

- **Inclusion of Non-Drowning Fatalities:**

Maritime New Zealand's recreational craft fatalities include non-drowning deaths (e.g., blunt force trauma), while Water Safety New Zealand's DrownBase™ exclusively records drowning fatalities.

- **Boating Category Differences:**

The types and sizes of boats included in each organisation's data can vary, contributing to discrepancies.

Every effort is made to acknowledge these variability factors to minimise confusion and ensure clarity in reporting.

Key Activities

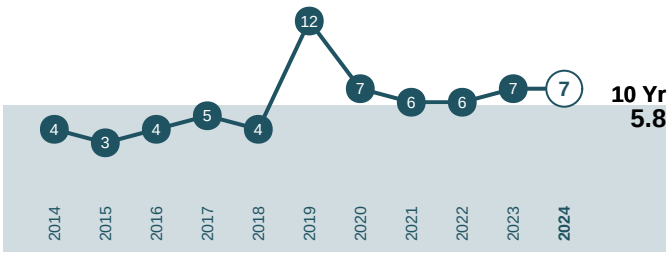
Fishing from Land

7
Drowning deaths in 2024

↑21%
1 more person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

5.8
10 Year Average

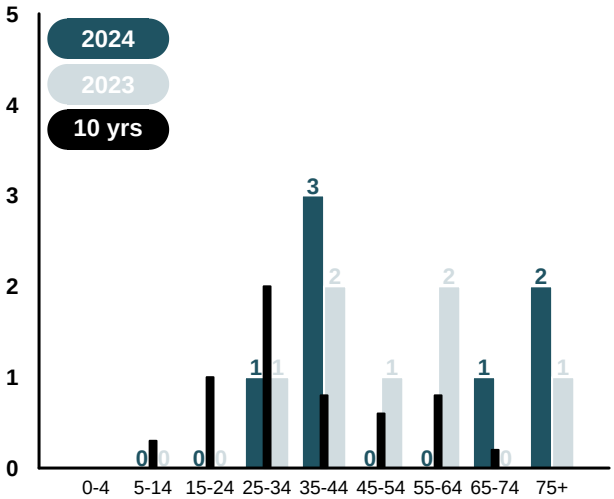
Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



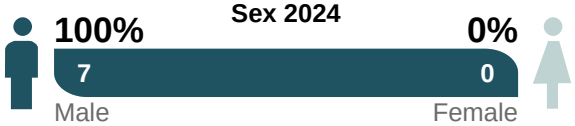
Environment 2024

Coast	43%	3
Rivers	29%	2
Tidal	29%	2
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Activities

Fishing from Land

Fishing from rocks, surfcasting off the beach, fly fishing, and white baiting prove that Kiwi don't need a boat to catch a feed to share with friends and family. This activity is often undertaken regularly in locations close to home.

7 New Zealanders drowned whilst fishing from land in 2024. This is up on the 10-year average of 5.8 fatalities and is the sixth year in a row where drownings associated with this activity have exceeded the 10-year average. This highlights increasing drowning risk associated with this activity.

People drowning whilst land-based fishing in 2024 were all males, consistent with other kai related activities. Older victims 55+ tend to be New Zealand European/Pakeha with younger victims more likely to be Asian New Zealanders from the upper North Island.

Fatalities in rivers (29%), tidal areas (29%) and at the coast (43%) mostly result from people unexpectedly falling or being swept into deep water fully clothed and without any form of additional flotation. These events occur regularly in “normal” weather conditions. None of those who lost their life in 2024 had a lifejacket on.

Six out of the seven land-based fishing fatalities in 2024 relate to rod fishing activity, one was white baiting. Given the nature of these activities perhaps it is not surprising that 5 out of the 7 fatalities in 2024 were fishing alone. Having support to help when something unexpected happens is a key factor influencing survivability.

Making a difference

Two simple actions have the potential to significantly reduce land-based fishing fatalities. Wear a life jacket when out land-based fishing. Most land-based fishers don't expect to be in the water, but it does happen. A life jacket provides the additional support needed to float when fully clothed so buy you the time needed to be rescued. And take a mate to share the experience, keep an eye on each other and help out if the unexpected happens.

Key Activities

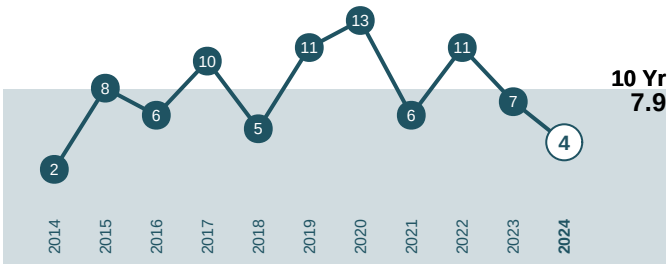
Underwater

4
Drowning deaths in 2024

49%
4 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

7.9
10 Year Average

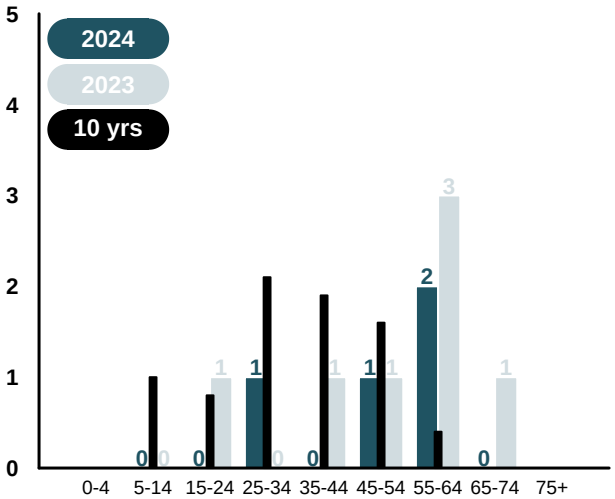
Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



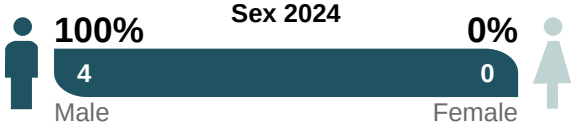
Environment 2024

Coast	75%	3
Offshore	25%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2024



Sex 2024



Key Activities

Underwater

Underwater activities include SCUBA diving, free diving, breath holding and snorkelling. Unlike many other parts of the world where underwater activity is primarily a tourist or recreational activity, the desire to 'get a feed' for family and community, gathering kai, is the dominant motivator for this activity in New Zealand.

In 2024, 4 New Zealanders drowned undertaking underwater activities. This is significantly lower than last year (7) and almost half the 10-year average of 7.9 fatalities.

In 2024, all underwater drownings related to free diving activity. The 10-year data highlights that SCUBA related deaths have been dominant but over recent years an increasing proportion of fatalities now relate to free diving. The popularity of free diving activity has been steadily growing in recent years as gear has improved allowing cheaper access to kai.

All underwater fatalities in 2024 occurred in the central New Zealand. The 10-year data shows that underwater activity deaths occur across New Zealand, with an emphasis in the upper North Island where most people live, and the water is warmer. 75% of underwater fatalities over the past year occurred within 1 km of the coast (3).

Once again, in 2024, all underwater fatalities were men. This is a continuation of the pattern seen for the past decade.

People between the ages of 25 and 54 dominate the 10-year statistics for underwater drownings. But 2023 and 2024 have shown a different pattern with reduced fatalities for all age groups under 54 but increased fatalities when compared to the 10-year average for those over 55 years. It is likely that health, fitness and underlying medical conditions are playing a significant role in outcomes for this group as more people continue underwater activity later in life than has been seen in the past.

Making a difference

3 of the 4 underwater fatalities (75%) occurred in situations where close buddy contact wasn't maintained throughout all time underwater. They were all diving with others, but the group was busy gathering kai, and this led to a loss of close contact. Having a buddy in close contact is the vital help that you will need if something goes wrong underwater. Looking after each other might mean that a little less kai is collected but it will mean that everyone is around to collect kai into the future. Underwater safety programmes have been a priority focus for New Zealand's water safety community for the past 5 years.

They have focussed on lifting the underwater competence of males, aged 35+ in key regions where the underwater fatalities have been the most common. Underwater fatalities over the past 2 years are showing early signs that this work is making a difference with fewer fatalities in the upper North Island and those under 45 showing reduced risk.

WAI PUNA SAFETY VALUES

Since 2019, Northland-based **Moana Futures** has worked with Water Safety NZ to deliver water survival programmes. Initially focused on snorkel education for males aged 15-24 in Whangarei, the kaupapa has grown to include swim, snorkel, and dive skills for young adults and their whānau through pool and beach-based sessions.

During summer 2022/23, **Moana Futures** expanded to include *Mana Moana programmes* targeting younger generations and the *Kai Ruku Dive Programme*, offering swim and snorkel skills alongside a tohu/dive qualification incorporating whakapapa, mātauranga, tikanga, and the Wai Puna model.

Originally aimed at Māori males aged 45+ in Whangarei, *Kai Ruku* expanded in 2023-2024 to include Tainui iwi in Waikato and Whakatāne iwi.

Designed for marae divers needing qualifications or refreshers, the programme often exceeded funded numbers. Participants gained awareness of fitness and safety requirements needed for competent diving and supporting dive buddies.

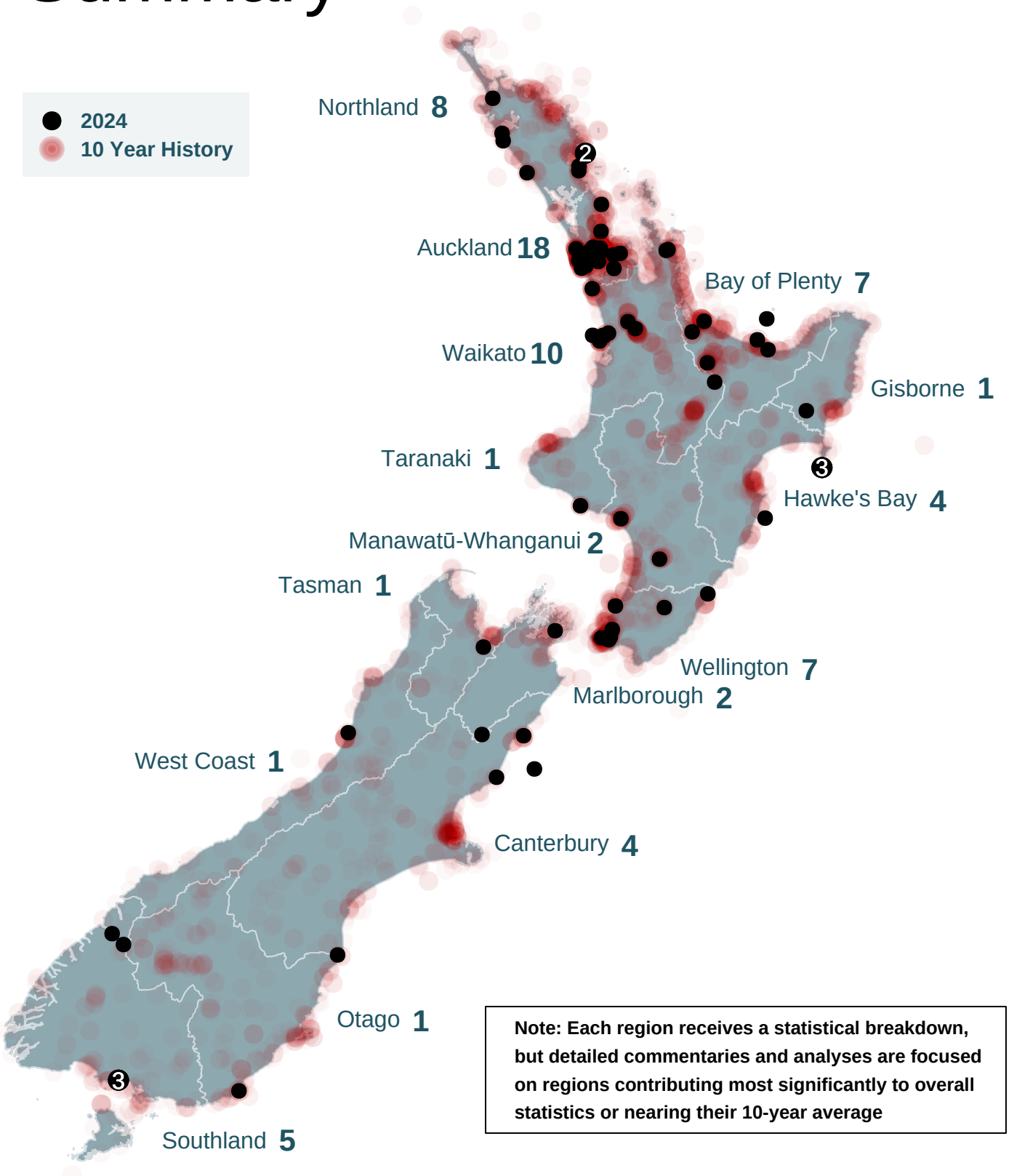
Early 2024 saw the first all-wāhine *Kai Ruku* programme, recognising wāhine's influence in embedding safety values within whānau.

Moana Futures stands out with its "by Māori for Māori" approach but welcomes tau iwi participants, ensuring inclusivity. Its programmes reflect a commitment to enhancing water safety through culturally tailored initiatives while addressing broader community needs.

Regions

Regional

Summary



Note: Each region receives a statistical breakdown, but detailed commentaries and analyses are focused on regions contributing most significantly to overall statistics or nearing their 10-year average

Regions

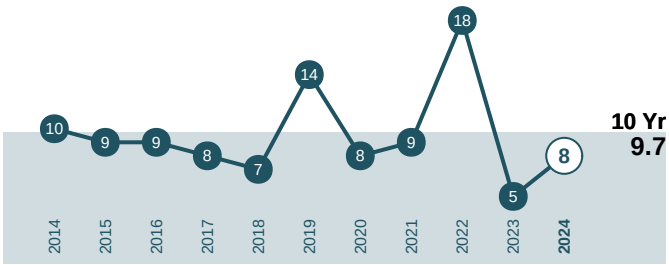
Northland

8
Drowning deaths in 2024

18%
2 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

9.7
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



Environment 2024

Coast	75%	6
Rivers	12%	1
Tidal	12%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0

Activity 2024

Fishing from Land	25%	2
Slips & Falls	25%	2
Swimming	25%	2
Craft	12%	1
Other Recreation	12%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

62% Male — 5

38% Female — 3

Regions

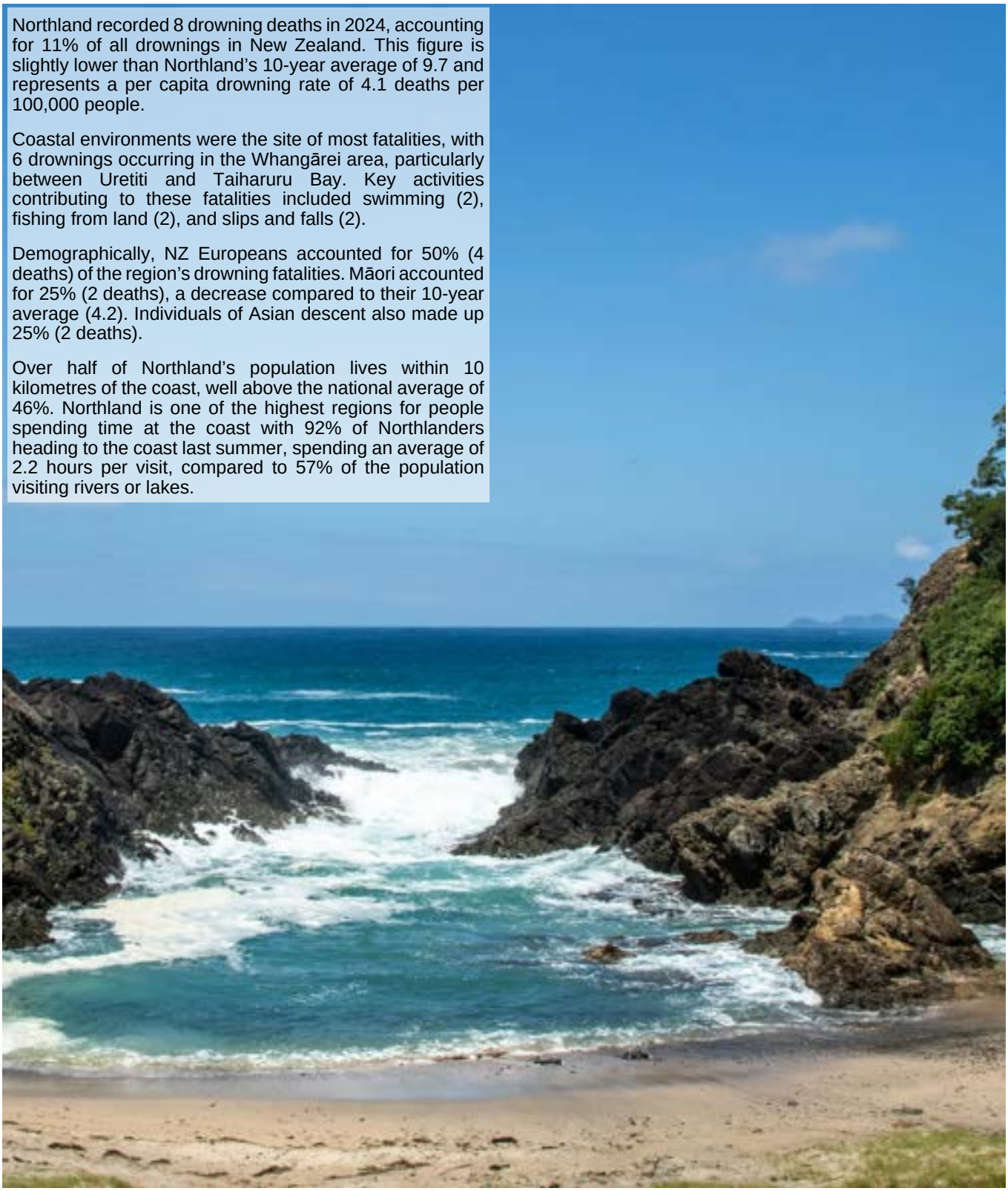
Northland

Northland recorded 8 drowning deaths in 2024, accounting for 11% of all drownings in New Zealand. This figure is slightly lower than Northland's 10-year average of 9.7 and represents a per capita drowning rate of 4.1 deaths per 100,000 people.

Coastal environments were the site of most fatalities, with 6 drownings occurring in the Whangārei area, particularly between Uretiti and Taiharuru Bay. Key activities contributing to these fatalities included swimming (2), fishing from land (2), and slips and falls (2).

Demographically, NZ Europeans accounted for 50% (4 deaths) of the region's drowning fatalities. Māori accounted for 25% (2 deaths), a decrease compared to their 10-year average (4.2). Individuals of Asian descent also made up 25% (2 deaths).

Over half of Northland's population lives within 10 kilometres of the coast, well above the national average of 46%. Northland is one of the highest regions for people spending time at the coast with 92% of Northlanders heading to the coast last summer, spending an average of 2.2 hours per visit, compared to 57% of the population visiting rivers or lakes.



Regions

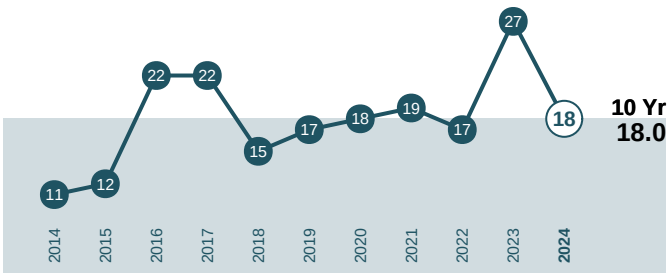
Auckland

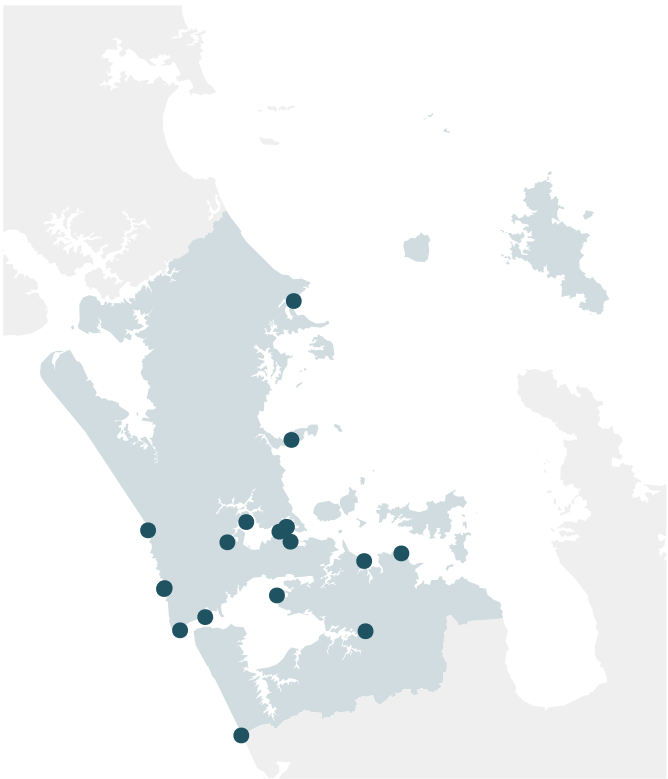
18
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

18.0
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Coast	44%	8
Tidal	39%	7
Home	6%	1
Pools	6%	1
Rivers	6%	1
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	39%	7
Swimming	33%	6
Craft	17%	3
Fishing from Land	6%	1
Other Recreation	6%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
72%	28%
13	5

Regions

Auckland

The Auckland data for 2024 reveals 18 drowning fatalities, representing 25% of all drownings in New Zealand for the year. This is equal to the 10 year average for the region. Alarmingly, 39% of these fatalities (7 out of 18) occurred at known and identified high-fatality locations (blackspots). This stark figure highlights the urgent need for immediate and targeted safety interventions at these dangerous locations to prevent further loss of life.

Coastal environments accounted for most of Auckland's drownings, with 44% (8 deaths), followed by tidal environments at 39% (7 deaths). Other environments, including home, pools, and rivers, each accounted for 6% (1 death), while no fatalities were reported in inland still waters or offshore environments. 4 individuals were gathering kai, such as shell fishing or angling, highlighting the risks associated with these common activities.

Demographically, the ethnic breakdown of fatalities highlights the diversity of those impacted. Individuals of Asian descent accounted for 39% of Auckland's drowning deaths, followed by 22% NZ European, 17% Pasifika, 17% "Other," and 6% Māori. All victims were adults, with 17 of the 18 fatalities involving individuals over 20 years old. Males accounted for 72% of Auckland's drowning fatalities, lower than the national average of 83%.

Activity data reveals that swimming-related incidents ("taking a dip") were the highest activity 33% (6 deaths), and craft-related incidents at 17% (3 deaths). Fishing from land and other recreational activities each accounted for 6% (1 death), these findings emphasise the critical need for region-specific safety measures in Auckland, particularly at blackspot locations, which are consistently high-risk and preventable with focused interventions. The risks associated with gathering kai and other high-risk activities further underscore the importance of targeted education, culturally tailored safety messaging, and localised efforts to address these alarming trends.

Aucklanders are uniquely connected to water, a factor that contributes to higher levels of engagement with aquatic environments and, subsequently, a greater exposure to drowning risks. The region's geography plays a significant role, with the Auckland isthmus flanked by the Waitematā Harbour to the east and the Manukau Harbour to the west, as well as Kaipara Harbour to the north and extensive stretches of accessible coastline. At its narrowest point, the isthmus is less than 2 kilometres wide, meaning water is always close.

Half of Auckland's population lives within 10 kilometres of the coast, slightly above the national average of 46%, and Aucklanders demonstrate a strong preference for the coast over rivers and lakes. Last summer, 86% of Aucklanders visited the coast, spending an average of 2.2 hours per visit, compared to only 42% visiting rivers or lakes.

Warmer-than-average weather conditions and higher water temperatures further enhance this engagement, drawing more people to the coast and increasing their time spent near the water. This combination of geographic accessibility, cultural preference, and favourable weather highlights Aucklanders' deep connection to the water and the accompanying risks that must be addressed through safety interventions.

Regions

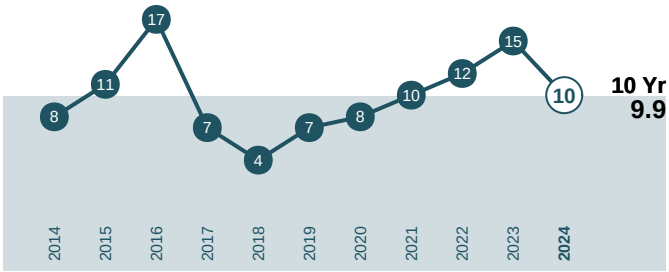
Waikato

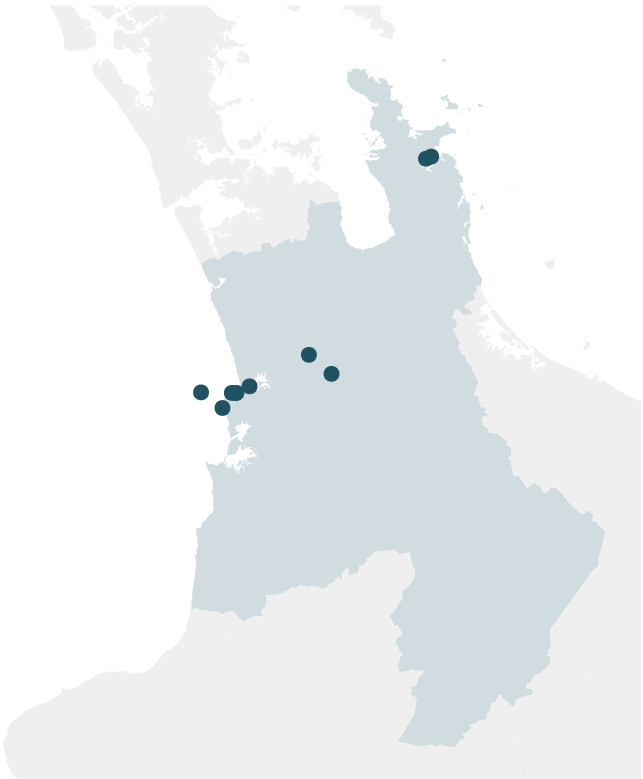
10
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

9.9
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





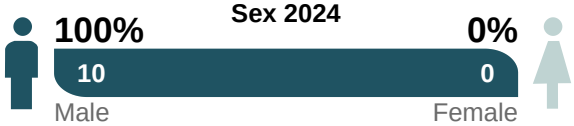
Environment 2024

Coast	40%	4
Tidal	30%	3
Rivers	20%	2
Offshore	10%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0

Activity 2024

Swimming	30%	3
Fishing from Land	20%	2
Other Recreation	20%	2
Slips & Falls	20%	2
Craft	10%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

Waikato

In 2024, Waikato recorded 10 drowning fatalities, consistent with its 10-year average of 9.9. It is encouraging to see the number come down after several years of increased drownings. The region's per capita drowning rate for 2024 was 2.0 deaths per 100,000 people.

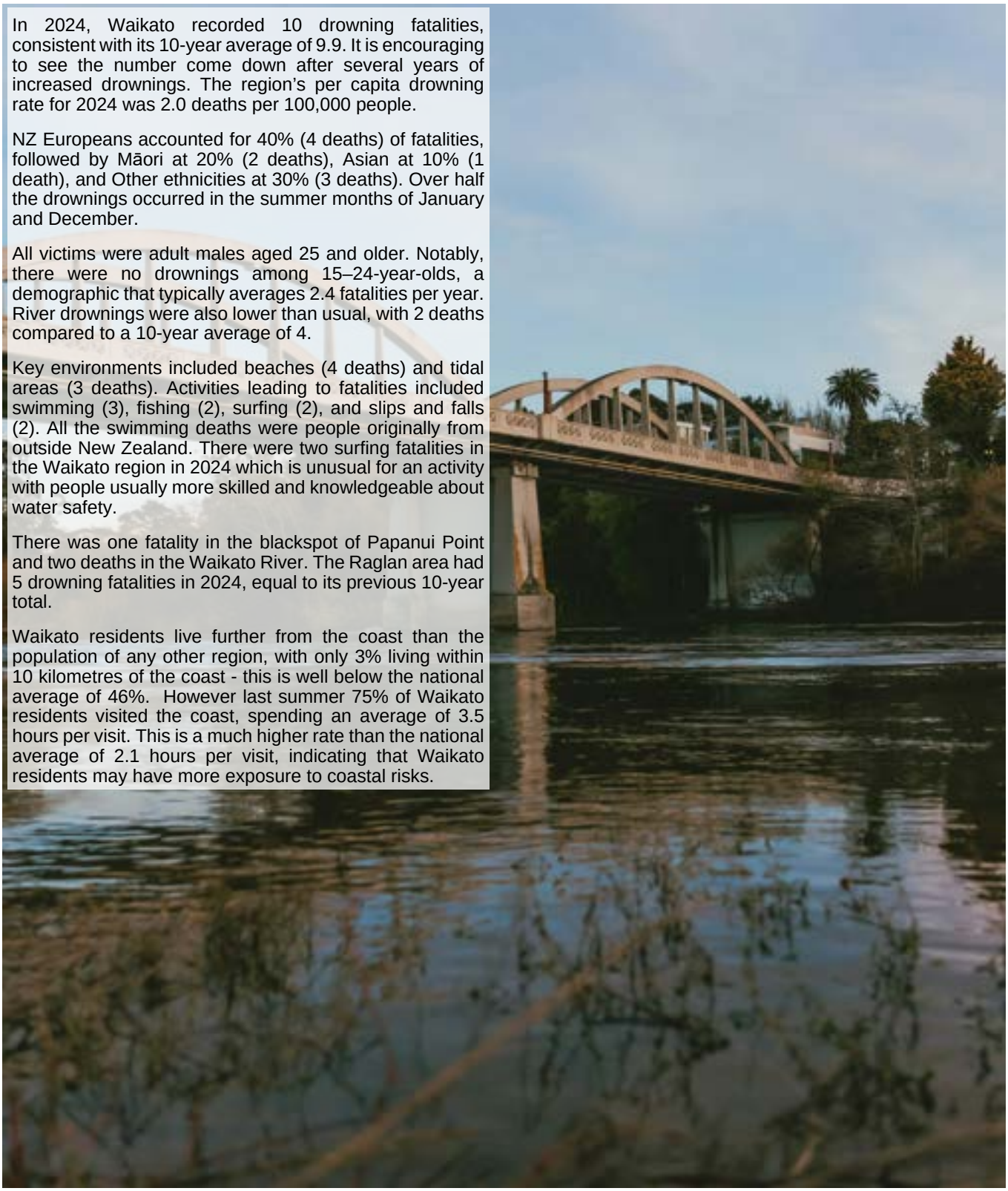
NZ Europeans accounted for 40% (4 deaths) of fatalities, followed by Māori at 20% (2 deaths), Asian at 10% (1 death), and Other ethnicities at 30% (3 deaths). Over half the drownings occurred in the summer months of January and December.

All victims were adult males aged 25 and older. Notably, there were no drownings among 15–24-year-olds, a demographic that typically averages 2.4 fatalities per year. River drownings were also lower than usual, with 2 deaths compared to a 10-year average of 4.

Key environments included beaches (4 deaths) and tidal areas (3 deaths). Activities leading to fatalities included swimming (3), fishing (2), surfing (2), and slips and falls (2). All the swimming deaths were people originally from outside New Zealand. There were two surfing fatalities in the Waikato region in 2024 which is unusual for an activity with people usually more skilled and knowledgeable about water safety.

There was one fatality in the blackspot of Papanui Point and two deaths in the Waikato River. The Raglan area had 5 drowning fatalities in 2024, equal to its previous 10-year total.

Waikato residents live further from the coast than the population of any other region, with only 3% living within 10 kilometres of the coast - this is well below the national average of 46%. However last summer 75% of Waikato residents visited the coast, spending an average of 3.5 hours per visit. This is a much higher rate than the national average of 2.1 hours per visit, indicating that Waikato residents may have more exposure to coastal risks.



Regions

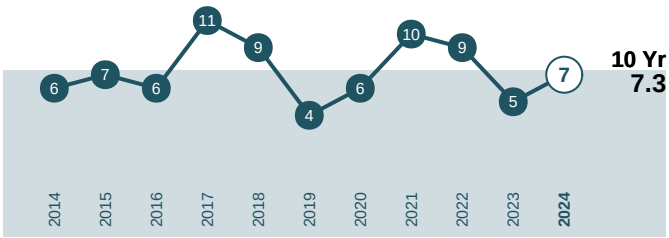
Bay of Plenty

7
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

7.3
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



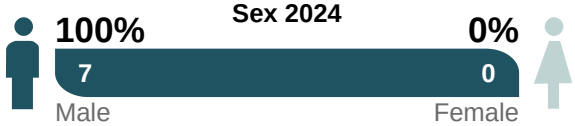
Environment 2024

Coast	29%	2
Offshore	29%	2
Rivers	29%	2
Inland Still	14%	1
Home	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Swimming	57%	4
Craft	29%	2
Slips & Falls	14%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

Bay of Plenty

The Bay of Plenty reported 7 drowning fatalities in 2024, close to its 10-year average of 7.3. The region's per capita drowning rate for the year was 2.1 deaths per 100,000 people.

NZ Europeans represented 43% (3 deaths) of drowning fatalities, followed by Māori at 29% (2 deaths), Pasifika at 14% (1 death), and Other ethnicities at 14% (1 death).

All fatalities involved men aged 20–50 years. Fatalities were evenly distributed across rivers (2 deaths), beaches (2 deaths), and offshore environments (2 deaths). The leading activities were swimming, which accounted for 4 deaths (double the 10-year average), and powered boating, which accounted for 2 deaths.

63% of Bay of Plenty's population lives within 10 kilometres of the coast, well above the national average of 46%, and last summer, 75% of Bay of Plenty residents visited the coast, spending an average of 2.0 hours per visit, compared to 53% visiting rivers or lakes.

Regions

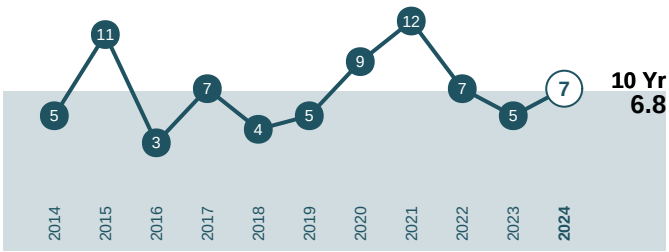
Wellington

7
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

6.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



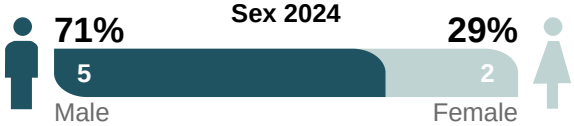
Environment 2024

Coast	43%	3
Tidal	29%	2
Home	14%	1
Inland Still	14%	1
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	43%	3
Swimming	29%	2
Other Recreation	14%	1
Underwater	14%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

Wellington

Wellington recorded 7 drowning deaths in 2024, consistent with its 10-year average of 6.8. The region's per capita drowning rate for the year was 1.3 deaths per 100,000 people.

NZ European individuals made up 57% (4 deaths) of fatalities, followed by Māori at 14% (1 death), Pasifika at 14% (1 death), and Other ethnicities at 14% (1 death). Almost half (3 deaths) of the fatalities involved individuals aged 55 and older.

Beaches (3 deaths) and tidal environments (2 deaths) were the most common locations for drowning fatalities. Leading causes included slips and falls (3 deaths) and swimming (2 deaths). Wellington Harbour again was a blackspot, accounting for 3 drowning fatalities.

Over half of Wellington's population lives within 10 kilometres of the coast, well above the national average of 46%. Last summer, 86% of Wellingtonians residents visited the coast, spending an average of 1.6 hours per visit, which is less than the national average of 2.1 hours. 55% of Wellington residents visit rivers or lakes.

Regions

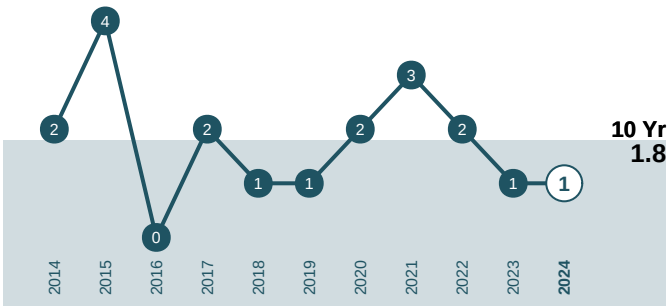
Gisborne

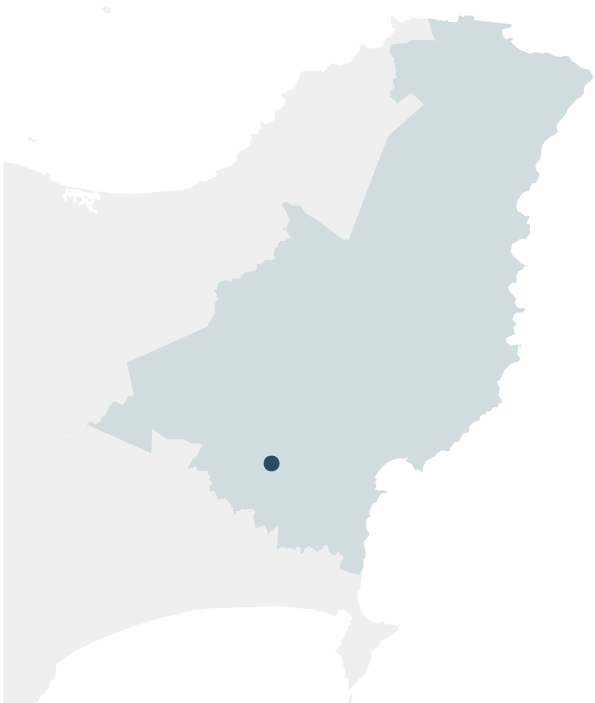
1
Drowning deaths in 2024

44%
1 less person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

1.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





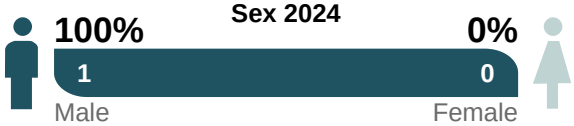
Environment 2024

Inland Still	100%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	100%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

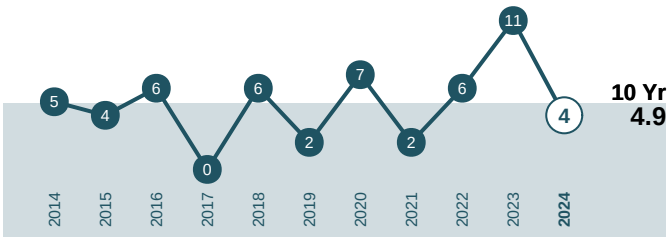
Hawke's Bay

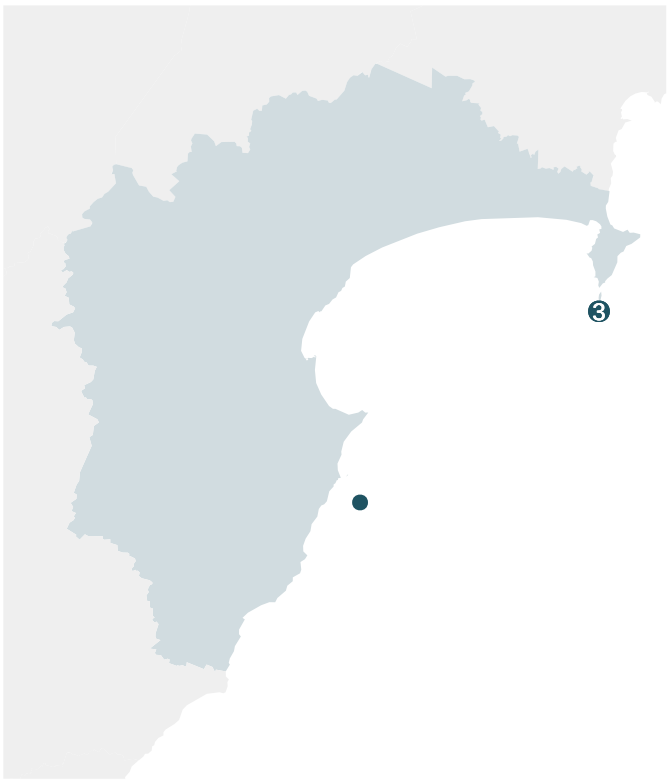
4
Drowning deaths in 2024

18%
1 less person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

4.9
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Offshore	100%	4
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Craft	75%	3
Slips & Falls	25%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
100%	0%
4	0

Regions

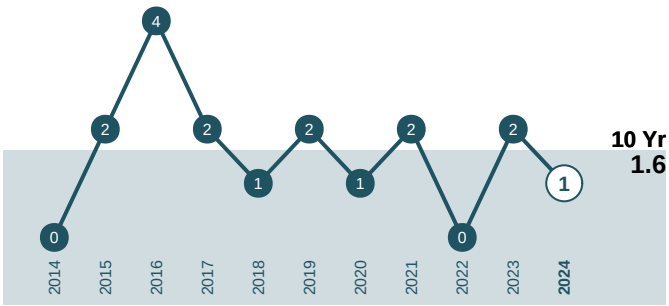
Taranaki

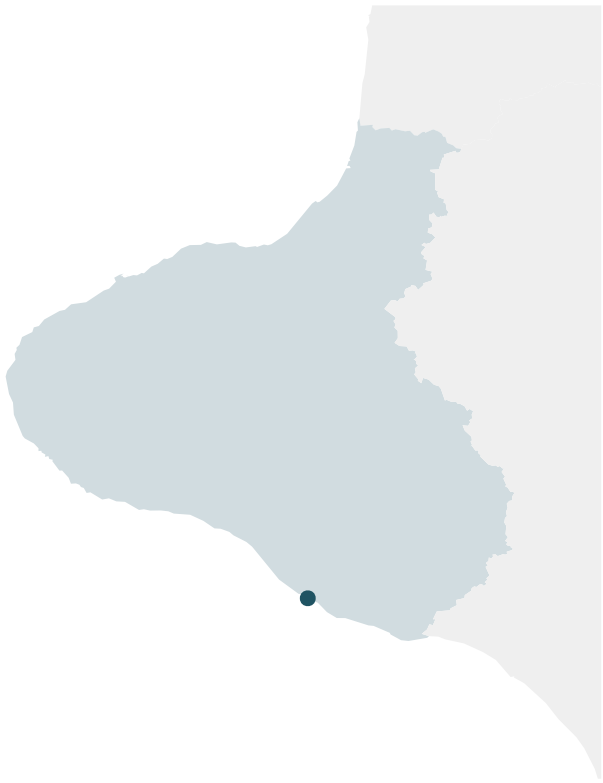
1
Drowning deaths in 2024

38%
1 less person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

1.6
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





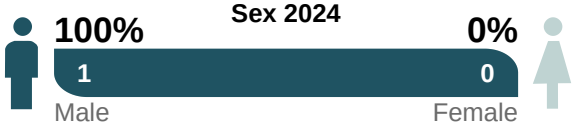
Environment 2024

Offshore	100%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Underwater	100%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

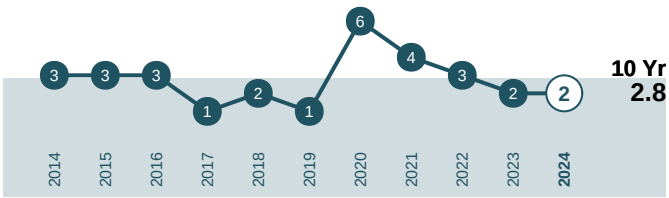
Manawatū-Whanganui

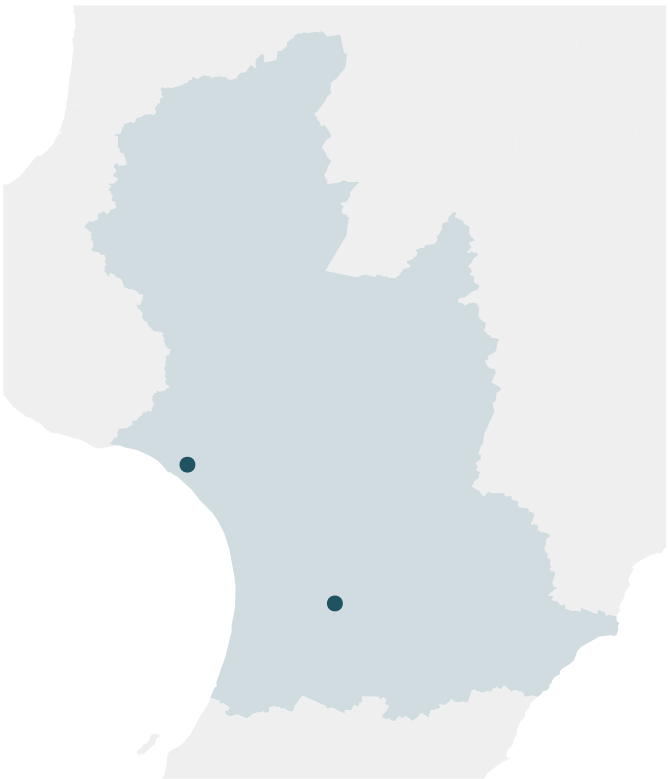
2
Drowning deaths in 2024

29%
1 less person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

2.8
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Rivers	100%	2
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	50%	1
Swimming	50%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
100%	0%
2	0

Regions

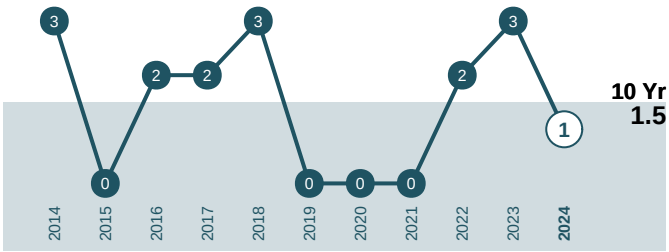
Tasman

1
Drowning deaths in 2024

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

1.5
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



Environment 2024

Rivers	100%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Slips & Falls	100%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
100%	0%
1	0

Regions

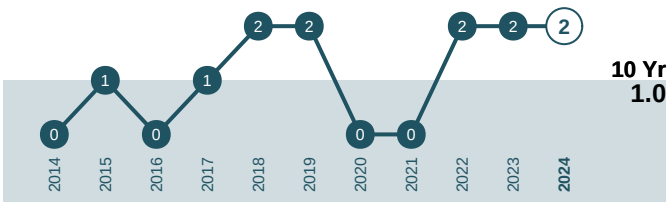
Marlborough

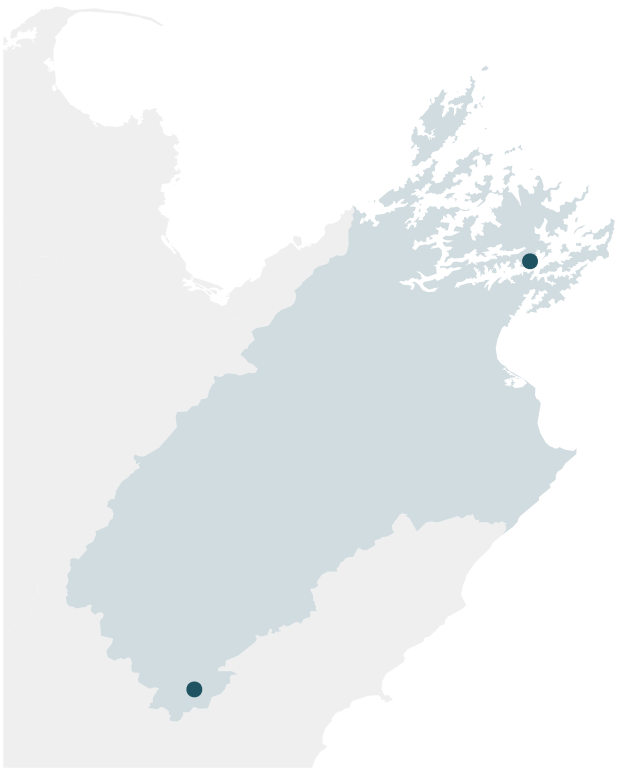
2
Drowning deaths in 2024

↑100%
1 more person lost their life compared to the 10 year average

1.0
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Coast	50%	1
Rivers	50%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Craft	100%	2
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
100%	0%
2	0

Regions

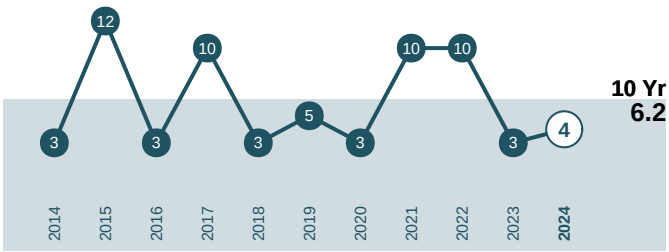
Canterbury

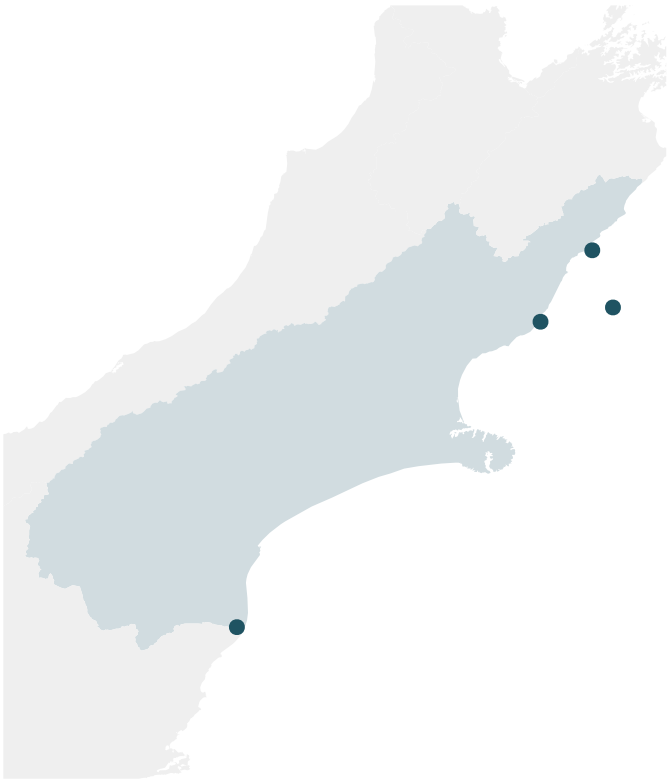
4
Drowning deaths in 2024

35%
2 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

6.2
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Coast	50%	2
Offshore	25%	1
Rivers	25%	1
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Underwater	50%	2
Craft	25%	1
Fishing from Land	25%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male		Female
100%		0%
4		0

Regions

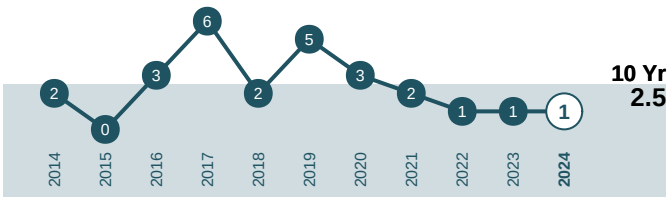
West Coast

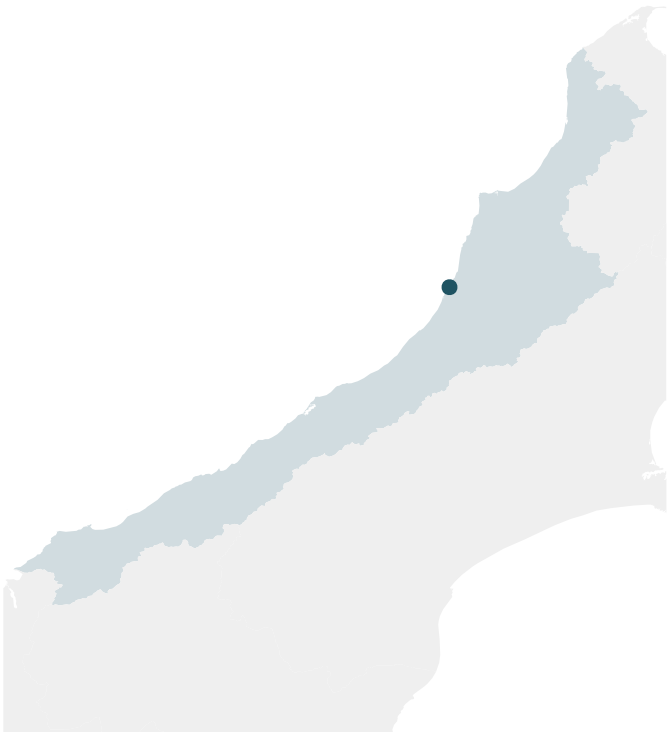
1
Drowning deaths in 2024

60%
2 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

2.5
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Rivers	100%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Tidal	0%	0

Activity 2024

Fishing from Land	100%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Craft	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
100%	0%
1	0

Regions

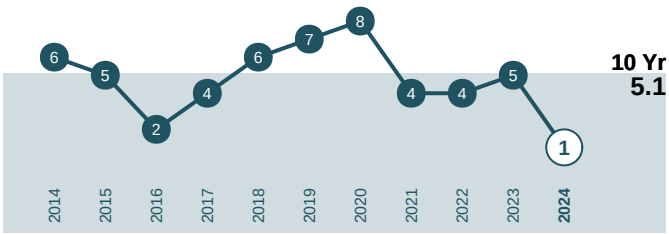
Otago

1
Drowning deaths in 2024

80%
4 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

5.1
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)



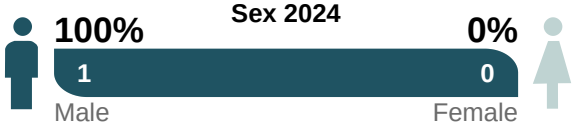
Environment 2024

Tidal	100%	1
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0
Rivers	0%	0

Activity 2024

Craft	100%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Slips & Falls	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024



Regions

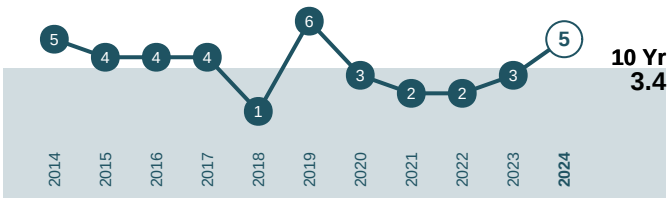
Southland

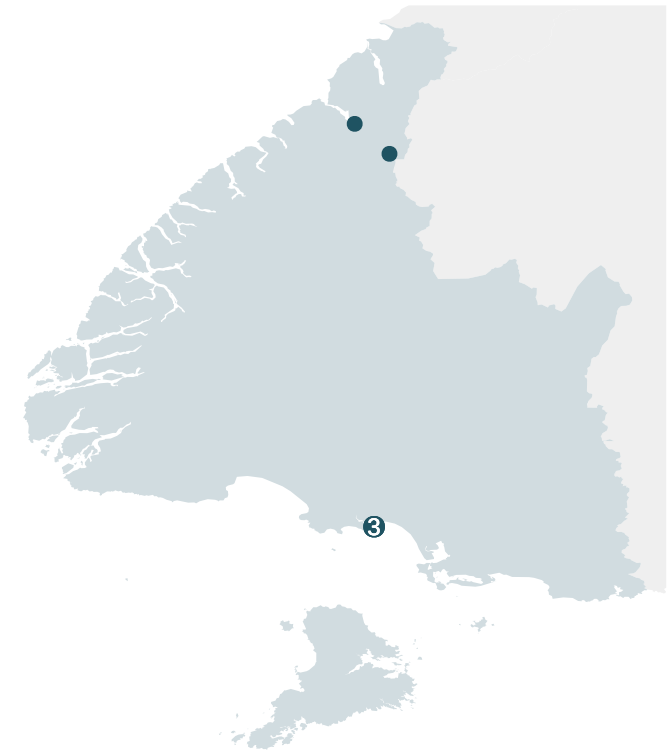
5
Drowning deaths in 2024

47%
2 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

3.4
10 Year Average

Fatalities 2024 (with trailing 10 Yr Average)





Environment 2024

Tidal	60%	3
Rivers	40%	2
Coast	0%	0
Home	0%	0
Inland Still	0%	0
Offshore	0%	0
Pools	0%	0

Activity 2024

Craft	80%	4
Slips & Falls	20%	1
Commercial Fishing	0%	0
Fishing from Land	0%	0
Other Recreation	0%	0
Swimming	0%	0
Underwater	0%	0

Sex 2024

Male	Female
60%	40%
3	2

Glossary

Water Safety New Zealand

Glossary

Activity

Craft A vessel or device that is designed or used for travel on water. Craft can be classified into two broad categories: powered and non-powered. Powered craft are vessels that are propelled by a motor or engine, and can range in size from small personal watercraft to large commercial vessels. Non-powered craft are vessels that are not propelled by a motor or engine but rely on human power or wind to move through the water.		
	Canoeing	A narrow open boat with pointed ends propelled with a paddle.
	Kayaking	A narrow closed boat propelled with a double bladed paddle.
	Rafting	A small flatish platform or boat.
	Rowing Craft / Dinghy	A small boat propelled with oars.
	Stand Up Paddleboarding	A board that a person stands on while propelling themselves with an oar.
	Jet Boat	Motor boat with s.low draught propelled by a jet of water pumped forcefully out below waterline
	Jet Ski	Small, jet propelled machine for 1 -2 people that skims across the water and is ridden like a motorbike.
	Over 4m	Motor boat over 4m in length.
	Under 4m	Motor boat under 4m in length.
	Fixed Keel Boat	A sail powered boat with a keel that doesn't move or lies all the way along the bottom of the boat. Usually up to about 6-8m.
	Offshore Sailing	A large sail powered boat often designed for multiple night trips in open waters.
	Sailing Dinghy	A small sail powered boat, usually for racing and crewed by one-two people.
	Trailer Sailer	A sail powered boat that can be transported on a trailer. Can have a small cabin. Usually up to 6-8m.
	Windsurfing	Sail powered board that a person stands on.
Commercial Fishing Fishing for profit as an independent contractor or for a company.		
Fishing from Land Fishing without use of a boat or underwater gear.		
	Angling	Fishing from land with a rod or line.
	Net Fishing	Fishing using a small or large net while onshore or wading/swimming in water.
	Shellfishing	Collecting shellfish while onshore or wading/swimming in water.
Other Recreation Activities which a person undertakes for enjoyment and relaxation.		
	Board Riding	Surfing - lying or standing on a board while using a wave to move.
	Boogie Boarding	Lying on a small flexible board while using a wave to move
	Diving / Jumping	Jumping headfirst or feet first into water.
	Other Recreation	Participating in an activity that is not water related but required going into the water at some point e.g. tramping
	Rescuing Others	Attempting to rescue another person in trouble in water.
	River Crossing	Attempting to cross a river.
	Tubing / Canyoning	Jumping into river current and making your way downstream using a tube or other means (e.g. rappelling)
	Water Skiing	Being pulled along behind a boat while standing on skis or while on an inner tube.
Slips & Falls Unintentionally becoming underwater without intending to.		
	Fall	Not intending to be in the water and falling in.
	Flood / Civil Emergency	Being caught in temporary water coverage caused by extreme weather events.
	Slipped Under	In the water but not taking part in a recreational water activity (e.g. a child in a bath).
	Swept Away	On the edge of water but not taking part in a recreational water activity and swept away by a wave or current.
	Unknown Immersion Incident	There is not enough information to conclude how or why the deceased ended up in the water.
Swimming Leisure, training or learn to swim in water. Includes paddling, wading or playing around in water.		
Underwater Activities occurring under the water.		
	Free Diving	Underwater swimming or fishing using no breathing equipment.
	Scuba Diving	Underwater swimming or fishing using SCUBA equipment (tanks/ breathing apparatus).
	Snorkelling	Underwater swimming or fishing using a snorkel to breathe.

Water Safety New Zealand

Glossary

Environment

Coast Environments include locations along the shoreline, characterised by varying water conditions such as waves, tides, and currents.		
	0-1km from shore	Ocean area close to the shore, typically frequented for swimming or boating.
	Calm Water Beach	Beaches with gentle water conditions, often perceived as safer but not without risks.
	Rocky Foreshore	Coastal areas with rocky terrain, posing unique hazards such as slippery surfaces.
	Surf Beach	Popular beaches with significant wave activity, often used for recreational purposes.
Home Non-pool domestic water environments found within or around homes.		
	Bath	Bathrooms, particularly bathtubs, which pose risks for young children and the elderly.
	Domestic Location	Any other water-related hazard within a household setting, such as water tanks.
	Buckets	Containers for carrying liquid.
Inland Still Enclosed or semi-enclosed water bodies with little or no movement, often used for recreational or agricultural purposes.		
	Drains	Man-made channels designed for water flow, often hazardous for children, can be covered or uncovered.
	Lakes	Large natural or artificial water bodies surrounded by land used for swimming, fishing, and boating.
	Other Waters	Miscellaneous still water bodies not categorised elsewhere.
	Ponds	Smaller, often shallower natural or artificial water bodies surrounded by land.
Offshore environments located beyond the immediate coastline, characterised by open water and varying depths.		
	1-5km from shore	Ocean area closer to the coast, commonly used for fishing or recreational boating.
	5+ km from shore	Ocean area further from land, often used for commercial or deep-sea recreational activities.
Pools Artificial, enclosed water structures primarily used for recreational swimming.		
	Home Pools	Permanent residential swimming pools.
	Hotel/Motel Pooks	Pools located at accommodations, catering to guests.
	Institution Pools	Pools located at an organisation or institutional facilities.
	Portable Pools	Temporary pools, often inflatable or collapsible.
	Public Pools	Larger pools open to the public, often monitored by lifeguards.
	School Pools	Pools specifically used by schools for lessons or recreational swimming.
	Spa Pools	Small, heated pools designed for relaxation.
	Thermal Pools	Geothermal-heated pools, often located in tourist areas.
Rivers Flowing water environments, ranging from large rivers to smaller creeks and streams, often subject to flooding and strong currents.		
	Creeks	Smaller, shallow watercourses often used for casual recreation.
	Floods	Temporary water coverage caused by extreme weather events, posing significant drowning risks.
	Rivers	Large, flowing water bodies used for recreation, fishing, or transport.
	Streams	Natural flowing watercourses, smaller than rivers but larger than creeks.
Tidal Bodies of water subject to tidal flows and currents which vary in peak, flow and time, including estuaries, river bars and harbours.		
	Estuary	Locations where rivers meet the sea, with fluctuating water levels and salinity.
	Harbour	Large inner body of water, sheltered land on multiple sides, often busy with boats and other activity.
	Marinas	Docking areas for boats, often with restricted swimming zones.
	River/Harbour Bar	Areas where rivers meet harbours, where a (often moveable) ridge makes the water depth shallower, known for strong currents and unpredictable conditions.

Water Safety New Zealand

Glossary

Life Stage

Preschool (0 - 4 Years) Babies and young children who are heavily reliant on caregivers and engineered environments to keep them safe around water.
School-aged (5 - 14 Years) Children who have developing skills but still have dependence on caregivers for safety around water.
Young Adults (15 - 24 Years) People who are becoming independent and are gaining some ability to use their skills and knowledge to stay safe around water.
Adults (25 - 54 Years) People who have matured into decision making with experience and knowledge to keep themselves and others safe around water.
Older Adults (55+ Years) People who may have more leisure time and changing health which requires adaptation to previously understood safety around water.

Other Terms

Activity The action being undertaken when a drowning death occurred.
Commercial boating events Incidents involving craft that would be subject to Maritime NZ's commercial boat definition. In general, this is where money has been exchanged for services involving a craft. Some incidents that are entered into DrownBase as recreational or non-recreational boating fields will also be covered by Maritime NZ's commercial definition. DrownBase has a field indicating if an incident falls under this categorisation.
Coronial data Data from coronial findings where the provisional or final cause of death was drowning.
Environment The water conditions and surroundings in which the drowning death occurred.
Life Stage Distinct phases during a person's life.
Missing, presumed drowned A deceased person whose body has not been recovered but the circumstances strongly indicate a drowning death. Confirmed by coronial inquest.
Preventable drowning fatalities Drowning fatalities that include recreational and non-recreational deaths. They do not include fatalities arising from vehicle crashes, suicides or homicides.
Provisional data Coronial findings take time and reported drowning related statistics often change - drowning statistics data is provisional due to regularly updated information compiled from a range of sources before an active coronial inquiry has been completed.

Water Safety New Zealand

Contact

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