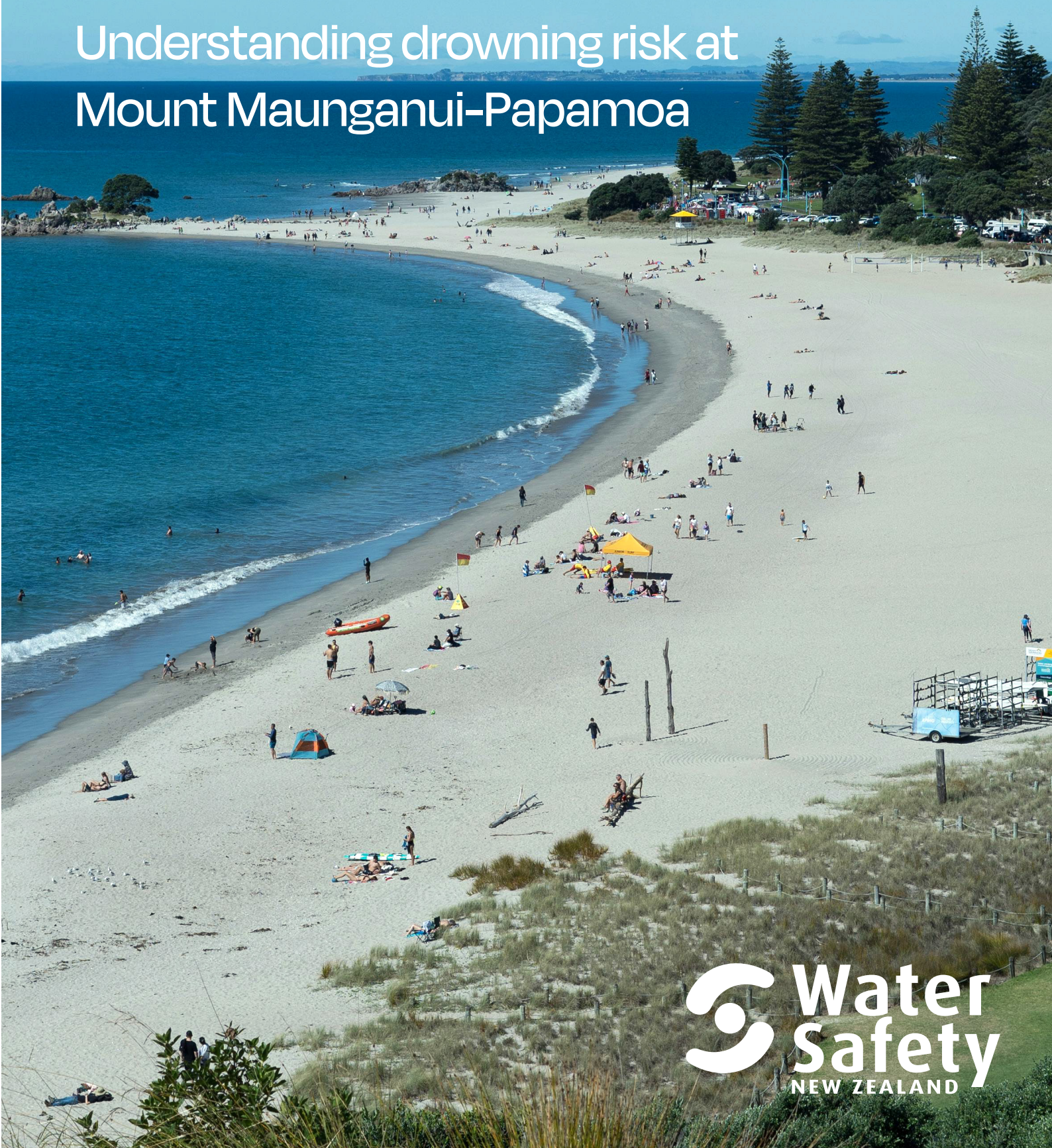


Water Safety New Zealand Drowning Blackspots

Understanding drowning risk at
Mount Maunganui-Papamoa



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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mount Maunganui-Papamoa coastline is one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most heavily used coastal recreational environments. Stretching from Mauao through to the long open beaches of Papamoa, the coastline supports year-round swimming, surfing, walking, fishing, and family recreation. Rapid residential growth and increasing coastal use have further intensified exposure to surf-related risk across the region.

But behind this popularity sits a persistent pattern of preventable drowning. Between 1980 and 2025, 46 people lost their lives to preventable drowning along this coastline. These incidents were not concentrated around unusual events or exceptional weather conditions. Instead, they reflect the interaction between everyday recreational behaviour and dynamic coastal environments.

Unlike some urban blackspot locations, risk along the Tauranga coastline is not dominated by a

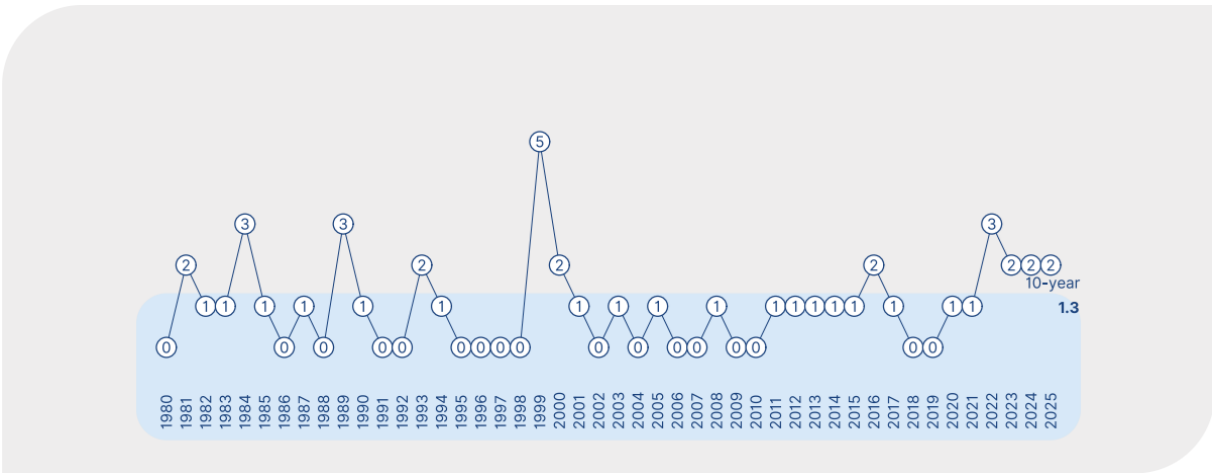


Figure 1: Annual Drowning fatalities Mount Maunganui Papamoa, 1980-2025

single behavioural factor such as alcohol. Instead, fatalities reflect three broad and recurring themes: swimming-related incidents at surf beaches; elevated risk among local residents familiar with the coastline; and overrepresentation of both young adults and older adults in drowning fatalities.

Most fatalities occurred while swimming in surf environments, often outside patrolled areas and during periods of routine recreational use. Local residents accounted for the majority of fatalities, suggesting that familiarity with the coastline may contribute to reduced hazard perception and lower levels of safety preparation. Two distinct age groups were particularly represented in the data: adults aged 25-44 years and adults aged 55-64 years.

This report identifies opportunities for targeted prevention through strengthened surf safety messaging, improved access to real-time hazard information, continued promotion of swimming between the flags, and place-responsive approaches that recognise how local communities interact with the coastline.

Together, these findings reinforce the importance of prevention strategies that are grounded not only in coastal hazards themselves, but also in the everyday ways people use and understand the coast.

2 INTRODUCTION

This report examines patterns of preventable drowning along the Mount Maunganui-Papamoa coastline. It analyses the environmental, behavioural, and demographic factors associated with fatal incidents across this coastline and explores how drowning risk emerges through the interaction between people, place, and coastal conditions.

This work was commissioned as part of Water Safety New Zealand's *blackspot* initiative, which identifies locations across Aotearoa where drowning fatalities occur with heightened frequency over time. The Tauranga coastline was identified due to the persistent occurrence of fatal incidents across multiple decades and the wide range of recreational activities undertaken in this coastal environment.

While national drowning statistics have shown gradual improvement in recent years, the overall burden remains significant, with 74 and 79 preventable drowning deaths recorded nationally in 2024 and 2025 respectively. The 10-year national average remains at 85 preventable drowning deaths per year. Around one in five of these fatalities occur within recognised drowning blackspot locations.

Stretching over 20 km from the Mount to Papamoa Beach, the Tauranga coastline encompasses several distinct coastal environments. Rocky foreshores, surf beaches, headlands, and long open stretches of coastline each present different hazard profiles and patterns of recreational use. These environments attract both residents and visitors year-round and support a wide range of coastal activity, particularly swimming and surf recreation.

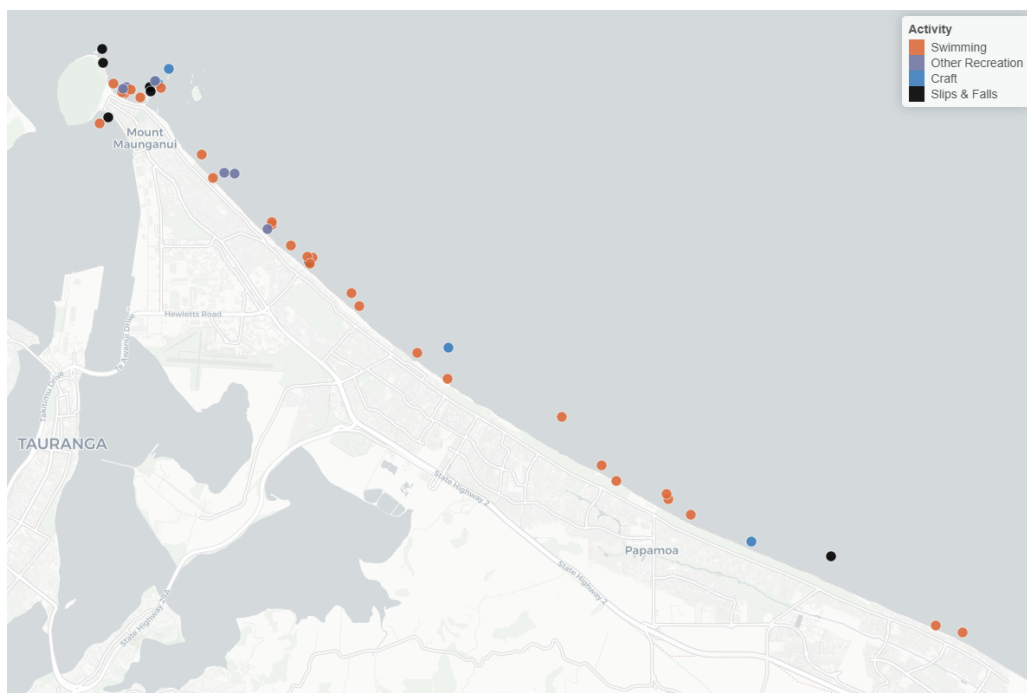


Figure 2: Drowning fatalities Mount Maunganui Papamoa, 1980-2025

This report draws on DrownBase data alongside coronial and police records to examine 46 preventable drowning fatalities occurring between 1980 and 2025. The aim is to identify recurring patterns, understand how risk is distributed across the coastline, and support practical prevention strategies that reflect the realities of how people use these beaches.

3 METHODOLOGY

This report draws on a detailed quantitative review of preventable drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline, using data from two key sources: Water Safety New Zealand's national drowning database DrownBase, and coronial and police records. These datasets provide a layered, evidence-informed understanding of drowning risk across the coastline, including where incidents are occurring, who is most affected, and the circumstances in which fatal incidents take place. The goal is to identify recurring patterns and systemic risk factors that can guide both immediate prevention efforts and longer-term coastal safety planning.

3.1 FATALITY DATA: DROWNBASE

The Mount Maunganui-Papamoa coastline was identified as a national drowning blackspot through WSNZ's spatial mapping of fatal incidents recorded in DrownBase. Geocoded fatality data from January 1980 to December 2025 was used to identify locations with persistent drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline. This coastline stood out due to the frequency and distribution of incidents across a heavily used recreational coastal environment extending from Mauao through to Papamoa Beach.

This mapping approach provides a clearer understanding of where risk is most acute and where targeted interventions may be most effective. DrownBase was then used to examine key variables across the 46 recorded fatalities between 1980 and 2025. These included age, gender, ethnicity, residence, activity at the time of drowning, alcohol involvement, environment type, temporal characteristics, and social context.

While the database cannot capture the full complexity of each incident, this type of analysis enables recurring themes to be identified across multiple cases. These include behavioural patterns, environmental hazards, and broader contextual factors associated with coastal recreation and surf environments. Each fatality represents a significant loss, and the aim of this work is to ensure those patterns are translated into practical efforts to protect others in the future.

3.2 POLICE AND CORONIAL FILE ANALYSIS

To complement the database findings, coronial and police records were reviewed where available for each fatality. These reports provided deeper insight into the conditions at the time of each incident, including surf and sea state, weather conditions, activity prior to drowning, presence of others, access to assistance, and attempts at rescue. Each case was examined using a consistent set of criteria to build a clearer picture of common contributing factors and situational risks.

The details of each incident are unique but the accumulation of evidence across cases provides a strong foundation for identifying where improvements in prevention messaging, hazard awareness, and coastal safety practice could reduce future harm.

Although this report is focused primarily on quantitative findings, it is intended to support further place-based engagement and prevention. Future work could involve closer collaboration with mana whenua, Tauranga City Council (TCC), Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ), Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA) and other relevant organisations to explore how coastal risk is understood, experienced, and navigated in everyday life. These perspectives would add valuable context and help ensure that prevention approaches are informed not only by data, but also by lived experience and local knowledge.

3.3 REVIEW OF FATAL DROWNING REPORTS

A review of drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline identified three broad and recurring domains of drowning risk that are strongly associated with this coastline: swimming-related incidents in surf environments; elevated risk among local residents and frequent coastline users; and the overrepresentation of both young adults and older adults in fatal drowning statistics.

These domains interact with the physical characteristics of the coastline, including long open surf beaches, changing coastal conditions, rip currents, dispersed access points, and varying levels of surf patrol coverage. Together, they provide a framework for understanding how risk emerges across this coastline and how prevention efforts may be better aligned to local patterns of coastal use.

3.3.1 SWIMMING RISK

Swimming presents a significant risk along the Tauranga coastline, with most drowning fatalities occurring at surf beaches. The risk is spread across all ethnicities and affects both people swimming alone and those recreating with family or friends. Drowning incidents are strongly seasonal, with the majority occurring during the summer months when beach use is at its highest.

Surf environments are dynamic and conditions can change rapidly. Hazards such as rip currents, shifting sandbanks, wave action, and fatigue may not always be immediately visible or recognised by beach users. The predominance of swimming-related fatalities indicates that drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline is strongly associated with routine recreational activity rather than specialist or technical aquatic pursuits.

Importantly, incidents occur throughout the week rather than being confined to weekends or holiday periods, reflecting the regular and ongoing use of these beaches by local communities and visitors alike.

3.3.2 LOCALS AT RISK

The data also shows that local residents are disproportionately represented in drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline. Familiarity with beaches and coastal conditions may contribute to a degree of complacency, with people more likely to visit when convenient rather than carefully considering the safest location or current environmental conditions.

Local residents may also be less likely to undertake important preparation such as checking surf forecasts, identifying patrolled areas, or assessing hazards before entering the water. This pattern suggests that familiarity with place does not necessarily reduce risk and may, in some circumstances, contribute to reduced hazard perception.

These findings reinforce the importance of prevention approaches that are visible, place-specific, and responsive to the everyday ways people interact with the coastline.

3.3.3 AGE RISK

Two distinct age groups stand out as being at greater risk along the Tauranga coastline. The first peak occurs among adults aged 25-44 years, a group strongly associated with higher participation in swimming and coastal recreation. The second peak occurs among adults aged 55-64 years.

While the reasons for risk may differ between these groups, the pattern highlights that drowning prevention efforts need to recognise that risk is not isolated to one stage of life. Younger adults

may be more likely to engage in extended swimming activity, underestimate changing conditions, or overestimate their capability in surf environments. Older adults may face additional vulnerabilities associated with endurance, fatigue, or reduced physiological capacity during prolonged immersion or periods of exertion.

Together, these age patterns reinforce the importance of prevention strategies that extend beyond traditional child-focused messaging and recognise the broad range of adults who are active users of the coastline.

4 RESULTS

This section presents the key findings from the data review and case analysis. The results are structured into three broad areas: demographic and social patterns; activity and environmental patterns; and temporal patterns.

Together, these findings illustrate how drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline is shaped not by isolated incidents, but by recurring interactions between people, surf environments, and everyday recreational behaviour. Unlike urban waterfront blackspots where alcohol and night-time exposure dominate, the Tauranga coastline reflects a predominantly daytime recreational risk profile centred around swimming activity in dynamic surf conditions.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL PATTERNS

This section examines demographic and social characteristics associated with drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline. These findings help identify which groups are most represented in fatal incidents and how social context may shape exposure to coastal risk.

4.1.1 AGE

Primarily, this is a problem affecting adults rather than children. Drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline were concentrated among adult age groups, with two distinct peaks emerging in the data.

Adults aged 25-44 years accounted for a substantial proportion of all fatalities, while adults aged 55-64 years formed a second clear peak. This pattern differs somewhat from traditional water safety narratives that focus primarily on children and adolescents, and instead highlights the importance of recognising drowning risk across multiple adult life stages.

The over-representation of adults aged 25-44 years likely reflects high participation in swimming

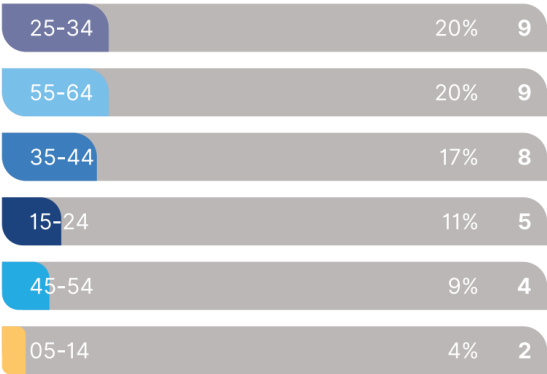


Figure 3: Drowning fatalities by age group, Tauranga coastline, 1980-2025.

and recreational coastal activity, combined with confidence and familiarity in surf environments. The prominence of fatalities among adults aged 55-64 years may reflect a combination of continued recreational participation alongside reduced physiological capacity, fatigue tolerance, and recovery during immersion incidents.

4.1.2 GENDER

Fatalities along the Tauranga coastline occurred predominantly among males. Of the 46 preventable drowning fatalities recorded between 1980 and 2025, 40 involved male victims and five involved females.

This pattern closely reflects both national and international drowning trends, where males are consistently overrepresented across a wide range of aquatic environments. Research suggests this reflects differences in exposure, activity participation, perceptions of capability, and responses to risk rather than any single behavioural factor.

The strong overrepresentation of males along the Tauranga coastline indicates that prevention efforts should continue to consider how confidence, familiarity, and recreational behaviour interact within surf environments.

4.1.3 ETHNICITY

The ethnicity profile along the Tauranga coastline broadly reflects national drowning patterns observed across Aotearoa New Zealand.

New Zealand European victims accounted for 25 of the 46 fatalities, representing just over 55 percent of cases. Māori accounted for nine fatalities, while four involved Asian victims and three involved Pacific peoples. A further five fatalities were classified within an “Other” category, including several international visitors.



Figure 4: Drowning fatalities by ethnicity, Tauranga coastline, 1980-2025.

When examined spatially across the coastline, the ethnicity distribution does not suggest strong ethnicity-specific risk profiles associated with particular coastal locations. Similarly, there is little evidence of changing ethnicity patterns over time.

These findings suggest that drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline is shaped more strongly by exposure, recreational behaviour, and coastal conditions than by ethnicity itself.

4.1.4 RESIDENCE

Residence patterns indicate that drowning risk is strongly concentrated among people with an ongoing connection to the Tauranga coastline.

Of the 46 fatalities recorded, 15 involved people living directly along the Mount Maunganui-Papamoa coastline, while a further six involved Tauranga residents living away from the immediate coast. Two additional fatalities involved residents from elsewhere in the Bay of Plenty region. Together, these groups account for more than half of all fatalities.

Outside the local and regional population, Auckland residents formed the largest non-local group. Several international victims also had prior connections to the area.

Importantly, fatalities over the past decade involved individuals living either within the Bay of Plenty or Auckland regions, reinforcing the role of familiarity and repeated exposure rather than unfamiliarity alone.

This pattern suggests that many incidents occur within the context of routine and repeated coastal use. Familiarity with beaches may contribute to reduced hazard perception and lower levels of preparation before entering the water.

4.1.5 ALCOHOL

Unlike several urban drowning blackspots elsewhere in Aotearoa, alcohol was not identified as a dominant contributing factor along the Tauranga coastline.

Alcohol involvement was identified in only six of the 46 fatalities, with only one case recording a blood alcohol level above the legal driving limit. This suggests that drowning risk along this coastline is driven more strongly by environmental exposure, swimming activity, and surf conditions than by alcohol-related impairment.

This distinction is important because it indicates that prevention efforts should focus primarily on surf awareness, hazard recognition, and swimming behaviour rather than alcohol-specific interventions.

4.1.6 SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The social context surrounding coastal recreation also shapes drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline.

Twenty-one fatalities occurred when individuals were completely alone, with no witnesses present. While this proportion is lower than the national proportion of alone drowning deaths, it still represents a substantial component of fatalities along this coastline. Recreational activity undertaken alone removes opportunities for hazard recognition, immediate assistance, or rapid emergency response.

At the same time, a large number of fatalities occurred when others were nearby or present as part of family or friendship groups. Shared recreation does not necessarily eliminate risk. Responsibility for recognising distress may become diffuse, particularly in busy surf environments where people are dispersed across long sections of beach.

In several cases, subtle signs of difficulty may not have been spotted until it was too late, reinforcing how rapidly surf-related incidents can escalate.

4.2 ACTIVITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PATTERNS

This section examines how activity type and environmental conditions contribute to drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline.

4.2.1 ACTIVITY

Swimming was by far the most common activity associated with drowning fatalities in this blackspot.

Of the 46 fatalities recorded, 25 occurred while swimming, accounting for more than half of all incidents. Immersion-related incidents, including falls or being swept from rocks, represented the next most common activity category. All other activities, including angling, surfing, boogie boarding, diving, and scuba diving, occurred relatively infrequently.

This distribution indicates that drowning risk along the coastline is primarily linked to everyday recreational swimming rather than specialist or technical aquatic pursuits. Swimming places people directly within dynamic surf environments where conditions can change rapidly and where fatigue, rip currents, and wave action can quickly overwhelm even confident swimmers.

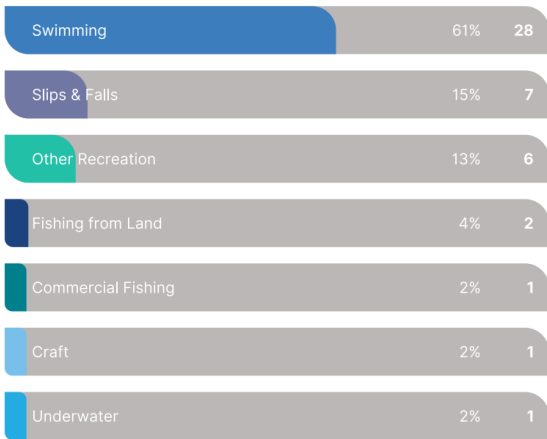


Figure 5: Drowning fatalities by activity type, Tauranga coastline, 1980–2025.

4.2.2 ENVIRONMENT

Most fatalities occurred at surf beaches, with 34 of the 46 cases occurring within surf beach environments. Rocky foreshores accounted for a further six fatalities.

The dominance of surf beach settings reflects both the physical character of the coastline and its popularity for recreational swimming and surf activity. Surf beaches are inherently dynamic environments where currents, wave action, and shifting sandbanks create constantly changing hazards.

Distinct environmental profiles also emerge across different parts of the coastline. The Mauao and Moturiki area includes rocky foreshores and headland environments where slips, falls, and wave exposure contribute to immersion risk. In contrast, the Mount Township to Arataki and Papamoa coastlines are characterised primarily by long open surf beaches with changing surf conditions and dispersed access points.

4.2.3 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COASTLINE / RIPS

Rip currents were identified as a contributing factor in approximately one quarter of all fatalities at this blackspot.

All rip-related fatalities occurred along the Mount Township-Arataki and Papamoa sections of coastline. These areas consist of long open surf beaches exposed to prevailing swell and currents, where hazardous rip channels may shift location over time.

Importantly, the locations of incidents suggest that many people are entering the water close to where they access the beach rather than specifically seeking out patrolled swimming areas. Given the length of coastline and relatively dispersed surf patrol coverage, this creates a persistent challenge for prevention efforts.

The physical structure of the coastline also shapes localised risk. Mauao and Moturiki include rocky coastal environments, complex water movement, and wave interaction around headlands, while the open coast sections are dominated by surf conditions and rip hazards.

4.3 TEMPORAL PATTERNS

This section examines how drowning fatalities vary across time, including long-term trends, seasonality, day of week, and time of day.

4.3.1 YEAR

Drowning fatalities occurred consistently across the full study period rather than being clustered within a short timeframe. Most years recorded one or two fatalities, suggesting that drowning risk has been a persistent feature of coastal use along the Tauranga coastline rather than the result of isolated or exceptional periods.

However, the past four years (2022–2025) recorded between two and three fatalities per year, higher than the long-term average of approximately one fatality annually. While the relatively small numbers and short timeframe prevent firm conclusions, this pattern warrants continued monitoring to determine whether it represents a sustained change over time.

4.3.2 SEASON / MONTH

Drowning risk along this coast is strongly seasonal and closely aligned with periods of increased coastal recreation.

Twenty-seven of the 46 fatalities occurred during summer, particularly between December and February. This pattern reflects the substantial increase in swimming and beach activity during warmer months, when both residents and visitors make greater use of the coastline.

Despite this strong summer concentration, fatalities still occurred across multiple seasons, reinforcing that coastal risk remains present year-round.

4.3.3 DAY

Fatalities were most common on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays, although incidents occurred throughout the week.

The distribution suggests that drowning risk is not confined solely to peak weekend recreation periods, but also reflects routine and repeated use of the coastline during weekdays and holiday

periods.

Different sections of coastline also exhibit subtly different temporal profiles. The Mauao and Moturiki area showed stronger clustering around weekends and holiday periods, while the Mount Township-Arataki and Papamoa sections displayed a more even distribution across the week, consistent with regular local recreational use.

4.3.4 TIME

Unlike several urban waterfront drowning blackspots, most fatalities along the Tauranga coastline occurred during daylight hours.

Twenty-nine of the 46 fatalities occurred during the day, compared with nine during evening hours. This pattern reflects the predominantly recreational nature of coastal use in this area, where exposure is greatest during normal daytime swimming and beach activity.

This finding reinforces that drowning risk along this coastline is driven primarily by surf conditions, swimming behaviour, and recreational exposure rather than darkness, isolation, or night-time movement patterns.

5 FINDINGS

This section consolidates the key insights emerging from the data analysis and file review. While each drowning incident is unique, several clear and repeating patterns emerge across the Tauranga coastline. These findings highlight how environmental exposure, recreational behaviour, and familiarity with place combine to shape drowning risk.

5.1 KEY FINDINGS

1. **Swimming is the dominant risk activity.**

Swimming accounted for more than half of all drowning fatalities along the Tauranga coastline. Most incidents occurred at surf beaches, often outside patrolled areas and during periods of normal recreational activity. This indicates that drowning risk is strongly associated with routine coastal use rather than specialist or high-risk aquatic pursuits.

2. **Surf environments are the primary setting for fatalities.**

The majority of fatalities occurred at surf beaches characterised by dynamic conditions, changing sandbanks, and rip currents. These hazards are often difficult to identify visually, particularly for inexperienced or overconfident swimmers.

3. **Risk is concentrated among adults rather than children.**

Two age groups stand out most clearly in the data: adults aged 25–44 years and adults aged 55–64 years. This pattern reinforces that drowning prevention must extend beyond traditional child-focused messaging and recognise that significant risk exists across multiple adult life stages.

4. **Local residents are disproportionately represented.**

More than half of all fatalities involved people living locally or within the wider Bay of Plenty region. Familiarity with the coastline may contribute to complacency, including reduced likelihood of checking conditions, selecting patrolled beaches, or recognising changing hazards such as rip currents.

5. Alcohol is not a dominant driver of risk at this location.

Unlike several urban drowning blackspots elsewhere in Aotearoa, alcohol was identified in only a minority of cases. This suggests that prevention efforts along the Tauranga coastline should focus more heavily on surf awareness, hazard recognition, and swimming behaviour rather than alcohol-related interventions.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section consolidates practical actions that may reduce preventable drowning risk along the Mount Maunganui–Papamoa coastline. Unlike several urban drowning blackspots elsewhere in New Zealand, the evidence from this location does not point toward a single dominant behavioural factor such as alcohol or night-time exposure. Instead, the findings suggest drowning risk emerges through the interaction between everyday recreational behaviour, rapid coastal urbanisation, expanding residential exposure to surf environments, and the dynamic nature of open surf beaches.

As Tauranga continues to grow, drowning prevention increasingly needs to be understood not solely as a recreational safety issue, but also as part of broader conversations around urban growth, public space design, and how coastal communities interact with water environments in everyday life.

6.1 PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1.1 STRENGTHEN PLACE-BASED SURF SAFETY ALONG THE EXPANDING COASTLINE

The Tauranga coastline has undergone significant urban and population growth over recent decades. What was once a smaller coastal township centred around seasonal and weekend beach use has evolved into a large, permanently populated urban coastline extending from Mauao through to Papamoa.

This growth has fundamentally changed how, when, and where people interact with the coast.

Large residential developments now sit directly alongside surf environments, placing growing numbers of residents within walking distance of beaches and creating patterns of frequent, routine, and often spontaneous coastal recreation. Beach use is no longer confined primarily to summer weekends or holiday periods. Instead, exposure now occurs across weekdays, evenings, shoulder seasons, and throughout the year as coastal recreation becomes embedded within everyday urban life.

The findings in this report strongly reflect this shift. Fatalities were distributed across weekdays as well as weekends, and many incidents involved local residents engaging in routine recreational activity rather than exceptional or high-risk events. This suggests that drowning prevention along the Tauranga coastline increasingly needs to be understood not solely as a recreational safety issue, but also as part of broader urban growth and coastal planning.

As coastal populations increase, prevention efforts should move beyond static messaging approaches and toward integrated, place-responsive safety systems embedded within the built environment itself.

This includes:

- Expanding highly visible surf safety messaging at key beach access points.
- Improving real-time hazard communication including rip current warnings and patrol visibility.
- Ensuring new coastal developments maintain strong visual and physical connections to patrolled swimming locations.
- Supporting urban design approaches that naturally guide beach users toward safer entry points and supervised areas.
- Recognising coastal safety infrastructure as part of broader community planning alongside transport, parks, lighting, and public space design.

As Tauranga continues to urbanise, drowning prevention should increasingly be considered not only within the domains of emergency response and recreation management, but also within long-term urban planning and coastal development decision-making.

6.1.2 CONTINUE TO PROMOTE SWIMMING BETWEEN THE FLAGS

Most fatalities along the Tauranga coastline occurred while swimming at surf beaches, often outside patrolled areas.

The long open nature of the coastline means many people access the beach at the closest available entry point rather than travelling to a surf lifesaving patrol location. This appears particularly relevant along Papamoa, where residential growth has expanded well beyond the immediate catchment areas of existing patrols.

While surf patrols cannot cover the entire coastline, prevention efforts should continue reinforcing the importance of swimming between the flags wherever possible and improving public understanding of why patrolled areas are safer.

This should include:

- Continued public education regarding the dynamic nature of surf environments, including changing currents, shifting sandbanks, wave conditions, and the reality that hazards may not always be visible or easily recognised from shore.
- Exploration of additional seasonal patrol coverage or mobile safety approaches in high-use growth areas.
- Encouraging, or socially and environmentally engineering beach users to actively choose safer swimming locations rather than simply the closest access point.
- Improved visibility of patrol locations through beach signage and digital information.

Importantly, many of the people represented in these fatalities were local residents familiar with the coastline. Prevention messaging should therefore avoid assuming that familiarity equates to safety awareness.

6.1.3 DEVELOP PREVENTION APPROACHES THAT TARGET ADULT RECREATIONAL RISK

The findings in this report show that drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline is concentrated primarily among adults rather than children.

Two groups were particularly overrepresented:

- Adults aged 25–44 years.
- Adults aged 55–64 years.

These groups likely encounter risk in different ways. Younger adults may be more likely to underestimate surf hazards, overestimate swimming capability, or engage in prolonged swimming activity. Older adults may face vulnerabilities associated with fatigue, endurance, and physiological recovery in surf environments.

This highlights the need for prevention approaches that move beyond traditional child-focused water safety messaging and instead recognise the broad range of adults who are active users of the coastline.

Future campaigns should consider:

- Encouraging people not to swim alone, particularly outside patrolled areas.
- Messaging specifically targeted toward adult recreational swimmers.
- Greater emphasis on fatigue, changing conditions, and self-assessment.
- Messaging that reframes surf beaches as dynamic environments requiring ongoing judgement rather than familiar recreational spaces.

6.2 SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue collaboration between WSNZ, SLSNZ, DPA, Tauranga City Council, and mana whenua around place-based prevention initiatives.
- Improve public access to coastal hazard forecasting and beach condition information.
- Support ongoing monitoring of drowning trends as Tauranga's population and coastal footprint continue to expand.
- Investigate how changing demographics, visitor patterns, and patterns of remote and flexible work may be altering coastal exposure across weekdays and non-traditional recreation periods.
- Encourage future research examining how urbanisation and coastal development influence drowning exposure and recreational behaviour over time.

7 CONCLUSION

The Mount Maunganui–Papamoa coastline is one of New Zealand's most heavily used coastal recreational environments. As Tauranga rapidly grows and urbanises, increasing numbers of people are interacting with surf environments more frequently, more routinely, and across a broader range of times and seasons than in previous decades.

This report shows that drowning risk along the Tauranga coastline is shaped not by isolated events, but by the interaction between people, changing coastal conditions, and everyday recreational exposure to dynamic surf environments. Swimming, familiarity with the coastline, and routine local coastal use all contribute to the recurring risk profile observed across this blackspot.

The findings reinforce the importance of prevention approaches that move beyond traditional awareness messaging alone. Continued promotion of swimming between the flags, improving

understanding of dynamic surf conditions, strengthening visibility of patrol locations, and recognising the influence of urban growth and changing patterns of coastal use will remain critical components of future prevention efforts.

Ultimately, every drowning represented in this report reflects a significant personal and community loss. Understanding the recurring patterns behind these incidents provides an opportunity to support more informed, place-responsive prevention efforts as Tauranga continues to grow and evolve alongside its coastline.

He mihi mutunga ki a rātou kua whetūrangitia, kua ngaro i te wai — e mau tonu nei te mamae. Āpiti hono, tātai hono, te hunga mate ki te hunga mate; te hunga ora ki te hunga ora.

In remembrance of those lost to the water, now among the stars. The pain endures; connections remain between those who have passed and those who live on.