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Media Release

For immediate release



Is Water Safety Still a Priority?

For the six month period of January to June 2008 there have been 55 drowning deaths in New Zealand according to statistics Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has released today.

At the same time last year there had been 56 fatal drownings. The five year average (2003 – 2007) for the six month period year to date is 61 drowning deaths.

The regions with the highest drowning toll on a per capita basis (100,000 of population) are:

1. West Coast
2. Wanganui – Manawatu
3. Hawkes Bay

Additionally, Northland and Waikato continue to appear consistently as ‘high-risk’ regions over any period of time.

WSNZ General Manager Matt Claridge comments: “the relevance and need for attention to be paid to regional New Zealand in terms of water safety education has never been more apparent, given the ongoing disproportionate representation in drowning incidents. New Zealanders drown in a diverse range of locations, acknowledgement of regional and/or demographic needs are important if ultimately there are to be greater gains made in reducing the drowning toll.”

“WSNZ have recognised this issue and established Regional Water Safety Strategy. The benefits of the Regional Strategy is becoming increasingly obvious as data analysis is refined along with identification of local issues. Essentially, working with the community to provide water safety solutions is a focus of WSNZ’s Regional Water Safety Strategy.”

An increase in the proportion of *Recreational* drownings is evident with 37 (67%) deaths; the five year average (2003 – 2007) is 31 (51%). Contributing to the higher than average total is the Mangatepopo River incident in April when seven people perished.



A reduction in *Boating* related fatalities is evident with seven for the year to date versus the five year average (2003 – 2007) of nine. Conversely, an increase in *Land Based Fishing* incidents has occurred with six recorded in 2008 compared with the five year average (2003 – 2007) of four.

Rivers are the most represented *Environment* for drowning incidents. There have been 22 drowning deaths thus far this year in comparison to the five year average (2003 – 2007) of 17.

The *Environment's* with notable decreases are *Offshore* related drownings, typically from activities such as *Scuba Diving* or *Boating*, down to five from the five year average (2003 – 2007) of nine. Also *Beach* related drownings are at 13 for the year to date compared to the five year average (2003 – 2007) of 17.

60% of all drowning victims this year are New Zealand European and 16% Maori. There have been no Pacific people drowned since February at which time 25% of the total drowning toll were Pacific people.

Claridge continues: “the drowning profile in New Zealand hasn’t changed over recent time; there is still a matter of predictability around the type of people most prone to drowning and whilst partaking in certain activities. Fortunately a consistent decline in drowning incidents across all categories of *Activity*, *Environment* or *Demographic* indicates some success.”

“Recent initiatives put in place to further increase awareness and educate New Zealanders about water safety are designed to reduce the number of drowning incidents in the future. For example, learning to swim is a fundamental skill that all New Zealanders should have the opportunity to develop. It is an imperative that swim and survival skills are taught to every child while they are at school.”

Claridge concludes: “recognition of the drowning issue is important to ensure appropriate support is received to educate New Zealanders. Ensuring sustainable and effective programmes are implemented requires coordination and cooperation at a number of levels, the outcome of which should be children, well equipped with the skills to survive in the water.”

...Ends...

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Water Safety New Zealand

Drowning Statistics by Activity January to June by Year



Provisional Statistics

Activity	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Jun-08
Recreational																					
Land Based Fishing																					
Angling	4	3	7	4	2	7	4		5	1	2	3	1	5	1	3	4	1	2	4	
Net Fishing					6									1	2			2	2		
Shellfishing		1	1	1			2		4				1	4	1	2	1	1		2	
Non Powered Boat																					
Canoeing			1	1	2		2		1	1				2							1
Kayaking					1					1		4		1	2	2	1		1		
Rafting	2	3		3		1							1		1						1
Rowing Craft / Dinghy	1	2		3			1	3	4			1	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	3	2
Powered Boat																					
Jet Boat	2	3						1							1						
Jet Skis					1					1										1	
Over 4m	6	3	3	2	2	1	2	5	3	1	3	4	1	1	3	3	4	6	2	1	
Under 4m	2	5	3	3	5	3		2	1	3	2	5	4	5	1		2				
Sailing																					
Fixed Keel Boat		1	1	1		1	1	2	1		2	2			1						1
Offshore Sailing	1															1	2				
Sailing Dinghy																					
Trailer Sailer																					
Underwater																					
Free Diving						1								1	1		1		1	1	
Scuba Diving	2	5	4	2	4	4	2	1	3	1	3	5	1	2	5		1	2	2	1	
Snorkelling	1	2		2		3	4		2	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	
Water Sport / Recreation																					
Board Riding	1										1	1			2	3			1	2	
Boogie Boarding			1				1				1		1	1		3					
Diving / Jumping	1	1				3	1	1	1	2	2	1	1		1	1	2		4		
Other Recreation	4	3		2	2	3	2	2			2	2		1	1		1	4	2	11	
Swimming	9	21	12	5	10	11	11	11	13	21	15	9	2	10	16	11	6	6	5	7	
Tubing		1	1			1										1					
Water Skiing												1	1								
Windsurfing												2									1
Total Recreational	36	54	34	29	35	39	33	28	38	34	34	43	19	39	42	34	28	24	26	37	2
Non-Recreational																					
Immersion Incident																					
Accidental Immersion	24	24	13	18	10	15	10	18	15	20	15	15	17	15	17	9	17	14	17	11	2
Flood/Civil Emergenc														1							
Rescuing Others	3	2	3	3	1			1	2	2		3	1	4	1	3	2	1	1	3	
Occupational Related																					
Commercial Fishing		3	2	5	5	1	2	5		3	2	3	3		1	2					
Total Non-Recreational	27	29	18	26	16	16	12	24	17	25	17	21	21	20	19	14	19	15	18	14	2
Activity - Other																					
Other Activites																					
Aircraft	1		1		1																
Homicide			1	1						3			2	1				1	1		
Other Commercial					1		1	1		2		1						2			
Passenger Ship																					
Road Vehicle	11	3	12	5	12	8	5	6	6	3	1	2	11	4	4	10	11	5	5	3	
Suicide	5	8	13	11	10	5	10	7	12	7	8	9	6	5	4	5	9	2	6	1	
Total Activity - Other	17	11	27	17	24	13	16	14	21	12	9	14	18	9	8	15	20	10	12	4	0
Total Drownings	80	94	79	72	75	68	61	66	76	71	60	78	58	68	69	63	67	49	56	55	4

