



Embargoed until 10:15am Thursday 25th March 2021

New Water Safety Strategy seeks to significantly cut the drowning rate in Australia.

The new Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 has been launched by the Hon Mark Coulton, Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government on behalf of Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services, Minister for Sport in conjunction with the Australian Water Safety Council (AWSC) today at Parliament House, Canberra.

Each year more than 280 people die due to drowning, with many more admitted to hospital following a non-fatal drowning incident. 41% of drowning occurs in coastal environments (beaches, ocean and rocks), 36% in rivers and lakes, and 61% outside of major cities. Males drown at a rate four times that of females and one-year-old toddlers record the highest drowning rate of any age.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) plays an essential role in National, State and Territory, and community approaches to preventing drowning and promoting safe use of the nation's waterways and swimming pools. It outlines priority areas where Australia's peak water safety bodies Royal Life Saving and Surf Life Saving, and AWSC Members can work together to prevent drowning on beaches, at rivers and lakes, and in swimming pools across Australia.

In launching the Australian Water Safety Strategy, Justin Scarr, Convenor of the Australian Water Safety Council says, "The previous Australian Water Safety Strategy proved effective with the fatal drowning rate reducing by 26% over the last ten years and drowning in children aged 0-4 years reducing by 50%, however drowning remains unacceptably high, impacting more than 280 families each year".

Minister for Sport Richard Colbeck says there was more work to be done to ensure all Australians are safe in the water. "I applaud the Australian Water Safety Council for its commitment to reducing drowning by 50 per cent by 2030," Minister Colbeck says. "Every drowning prevented or avoided is another family which doesn't have to face the heartbreak of losing a loved one."

This new Australian Water Safety Strategy seeks to raise awareness about non-fatal drowning incidents, encourage communities to create local water safety plans and promote access to swimming and water safety skills for all Australians, including refugees, migrants and those living in regional areas.

"Being able to swim for fun, fitness or health is a great Australian past-time and is a skill that is essential for drowning prevention. The Australian Water Safety Strategy seeks to help all Australians to learn swimming and water safety skills, irrespective of where they live" Mr Scarr Says.

In addition to skills, the Australian Water Safety Strategy promotes the importance of frontline water safety services, including volunteer surf lifesavers, lifeguards, and swimming instructors. "The

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Strategy encourages extension of services, as well as innovative approaches such as the use of drones and emergency stations in remote locations” Mr Scarr says.

“Water safety is everyone’s responsibility and the strategy outlines what water safety organisations, councils and community members can do to help. We acknowledge the long-standing support of the Federal Government in reducing drowning in Australia. We have some of the lowest drowning rates in the world but still every drowning is tragic and preventable.”

The Australian Water Safety Council was formed in 1998 and provides a forum for collaboration among peak water safety organisations, conducts regular conferences, workshops and symposiums, and develops, monitors and evaluates progress of the Australian Water Safety Strategy.

For more information on the Australian Water Safety Council and to download a copy of the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030, visit www.watersafety.com.au

Media enquiries to Media Key on 03 9769 6488. A range of spokespeople, including Justin Scarr, Convenor of the Australian Water Safety Council will be available for comment.

Press Event

Time: 10:00am for 10:15am start

Location: Dame Enid Lyons Alcove, Parliament House, Canberra

In attendance: the Hon Mark Coulton, Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government and Justin Scarr, Convenor Australian Water Safety Council

Key findings – Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030

- For every fatal drowning, there are three non-fatal drowning incidents
- Males drown at a rate 4 times that of females
- One-year-old toddlers record the highest drowning rate of any age
- Rivers and lakes account for 36% of drowning deaths
- Coastal environments (beaches, ocean and rock) account for 41% of drowning deaths
- 23% of drowning deaths occur while swimming and recreating
- 61% of drowning deaths occur outside of major cities
- Fatal drowning rate has reduced by 26% over the last ten years
- Child (0-4 years) fatal drowning rate has reduced by 50% over the last ten years

To stay safe around water, the Australian Water Safety Council urge all Australians to:

- Supervise children at all times in, on and around water
- Learn swimming, water safety and lifesaving skills
- Wear a lifejacket when boating, rock fishing or paddling
- Swim at a patrolled beach between the red and yellow flags
- Avoid alcohol and drugs around water

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