

Royal Life Saving Summer Drowning Report 2023/24

An investigation into drowning across
Australia between 1 December 2023
and 29 February 2024



ROYAL LIFE SAVING
AUSTRALIA

SUPPORTED BY



Australian Government

ABOUT ROYAL LIFE SAVING

Royal Life Saving Society - Australia (RLSSA) is focused on reducing drowning and promoting healthy, active and skilled communities through innovative, reliable, evidence based advocacy; strong and effective partnerships; quality programs, products and services; underpinned by a cohesive and sustainable national organisation.

Royal Life Saving is a public benevolent institution (PBI) dedicated to reducing drowning and turning everyday people into everyday community lifesavers. We achieve this through: advocacy, education, training, health promotion, aquatic risk management, community development, research, sport, leadership and participation and international networks.

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The drowning prevention research of the Royal Life Saving Society – Australia is proudly supported by the Australian Government.



Australian Government

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> OUR VISION

A water-loving nation free from drowning.



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CONTENTS

2	About Royal Life Saving
4	Background
5	Summer drowning report 2023/24 snapshot
8	Holiday period insights: Peak drowning period – 25 December 2023 – 2 January 2024
9	State and Territory insights: Summer drowning deaths 2023/24
10	State breakdown: New South Wales
11	State breakdown: Victoria
12	State breakdown: Queensland
13	State breakdown: Western Australia
14	State breakdown: Tasmania
15	State breakdown: South Australia
16	State breakdown: Northern Territory & Australian Capital Territory
17	Methodology and limitations



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of our national office in Ultimo, Sydney are the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We pay our respects to Australia's First Nations cultural and spiritual connections to water, and acknowledge the land where we work, live, and play always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

BACKGROUND

Royal Life Saving (RLS) has tracked and reported drowning deaths over summer since the 2018/19 summer season.

Motivated to provide a clear summary of the drowning situation over summer, in December of 2018, RLS started tracking and reporting drowning deaths captured in media sources. In part as a response to various outlets collating their own inconsistent records of people drowning over summer, the core purpose of the RLS Summer Drowning Toll is to inform the public and media of drowning deaths in real time using a systematic and consistent approach.

The Summer Drowning Toll is publicly accessible on the Royal Life Saving website and updated daily from the 1st of December to the 29th February. The numbers provided represent a record of all drowning deaths reported in the media during the summer months. This information is also informed by the Victorian Coroners Prevention Unit through Life Saving Victoria, and Surf Life Saving Australia incident reports.

Importantly, the deaths reported in the Summer Drowning Toll are not yet under investigation from the coroner. This information should therefore be considered interim and will be different to the confirmed drowning deaths published in the National Drowning Report released later in the year.

Ultimately, the Summer Drowning Toll is a helpful tool for timely tracking of drowning deaths, but RLS cautions against relying only on data from one summer to make important decisions regarding drowning prevention policy, funding, or programmes. While interim summer numbers will shift from year to year, drowning prevention strategy and action should be guided by long-term trends and patterns.

Summer Drowning Toll Dashboard

This summer RLS was pleased to deploy the Summer Drowning Toll on an interactive data dashboard. The new system allowed users to compare this summer's numbers to last summer and the previous 5-year average, as well as select variables to evaluate on the national level or filtered by state. The dashboard improved the ability for media and drowning prevention organisations to quickly access information in a visual format.

Aims

- › Record and report summer drowning deaths that were reported in the media between 1 December 2023 and 29 February 2024
- › Compare summer trends of drowning deaths reported in the media from the previous five years (2018/19 up to 2022/23)



2023/24 Summer Drowning Toll Dashboard



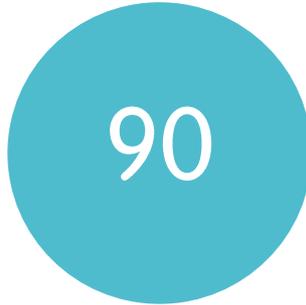
Scan or Click the QR code to visit the Summer Drowning Toll section of the RLS website and view the Dashboard

SUMMER DROWNING REPORT 2023/24 SNAPSHOT

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



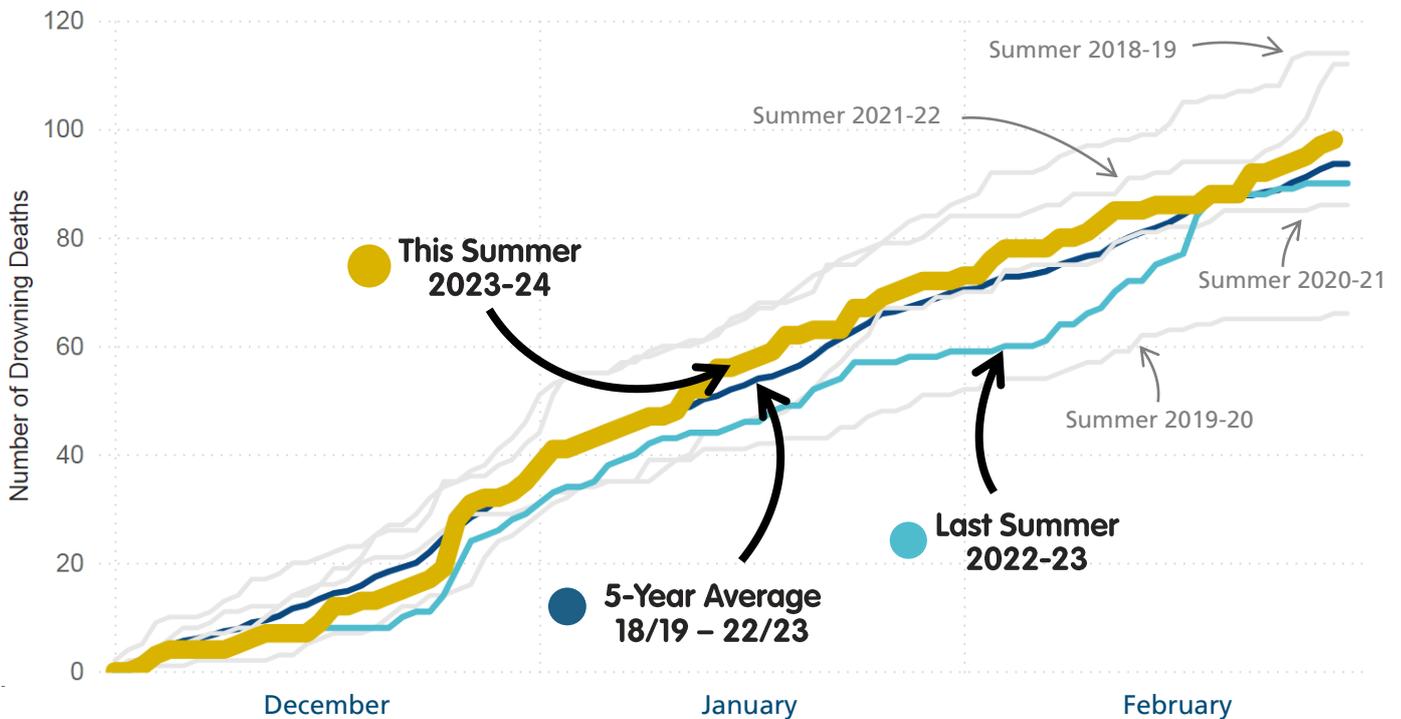
Flood related (all in Queensland and Victoria)



Occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm to 6pm



Average number of cases per day



Number of 2023/24 summer drowning deaths reported in the media compared to last summer and the five-year average

SUMMER DROWNING REPORT 2023/24 SNAPSHOT

SUMMER 2023/24

1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024

SUMMER 2022/23

1 December 2022 to 28 February 2023



SUMMER 2023/24
1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024

Activity



Location



Definitions

Activity - Other includes includes rescue, jumped in, fishing and rock fishing, swept away and swept in.

Location - Other includes pond, storm drain, and waterfall.

SUMMER 2022/23
1 December 2022 to 28 February 2023

Activity



Location



Disclaimer – Media Analysis Only

2023/24 figures shown are derived from media reports only. As such, they should be considered interim, pending the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations.

2023/24 figures are derived from media reports and may vary from coronial statistics.

These numbers are likely to be different when final drowning deaths are reported in the National Drowning Report released in September.

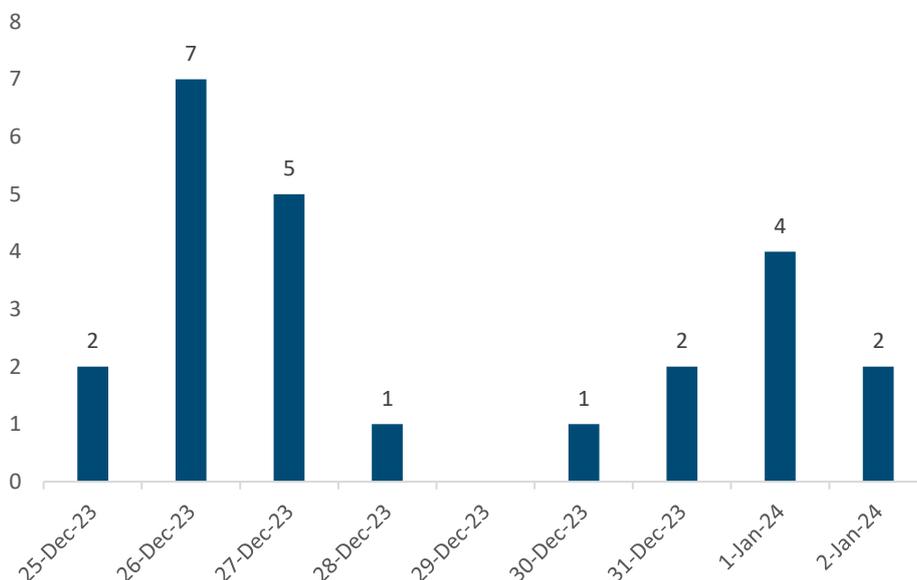
HOLIDAY PERIOD INSIGHTS: PEAK DROWNING PERIOD – 25 DECEMBER 2023 TO 2 JANUARY 2024

Between 25th December 2023 and 2nd January 2024

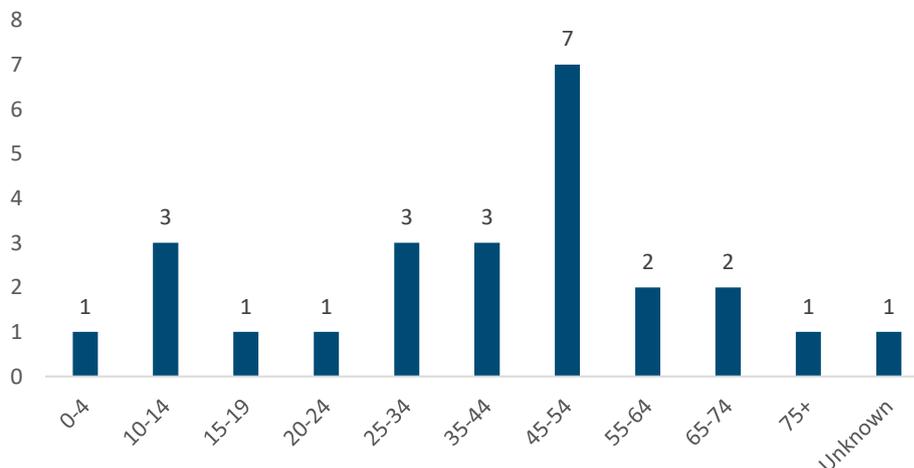
Between Monday 25th of December and Tuesday 2nd of January, was the highest period of drowning incidents, representing 26% of total drowning over the summer. Boxing day (26th December) had the highest number of drowning deaths (n=7) over the summer period. Males represented 71% of drowning deaths during the holiday period, 29% of which were in the 45-54-year age group.

The highest age group that drowned during the summer Christmas period was the 45-54-year age group, representing 29% of drowning deaths. Drowning occurred mainly in the afternoon (n=14) between 12:01pm to 6pm.

Most drowning deaths occurred in New South Wales (NSW) (n=9) and Queensland (n=8). Top activities prior to drowning was swimming/recreating (n=6), followed by boating (n=5). Beaches were the highest location for drowning during the Christmas period, followed by rivers/creeks (n=6). Five drowning deaths were flood-related.



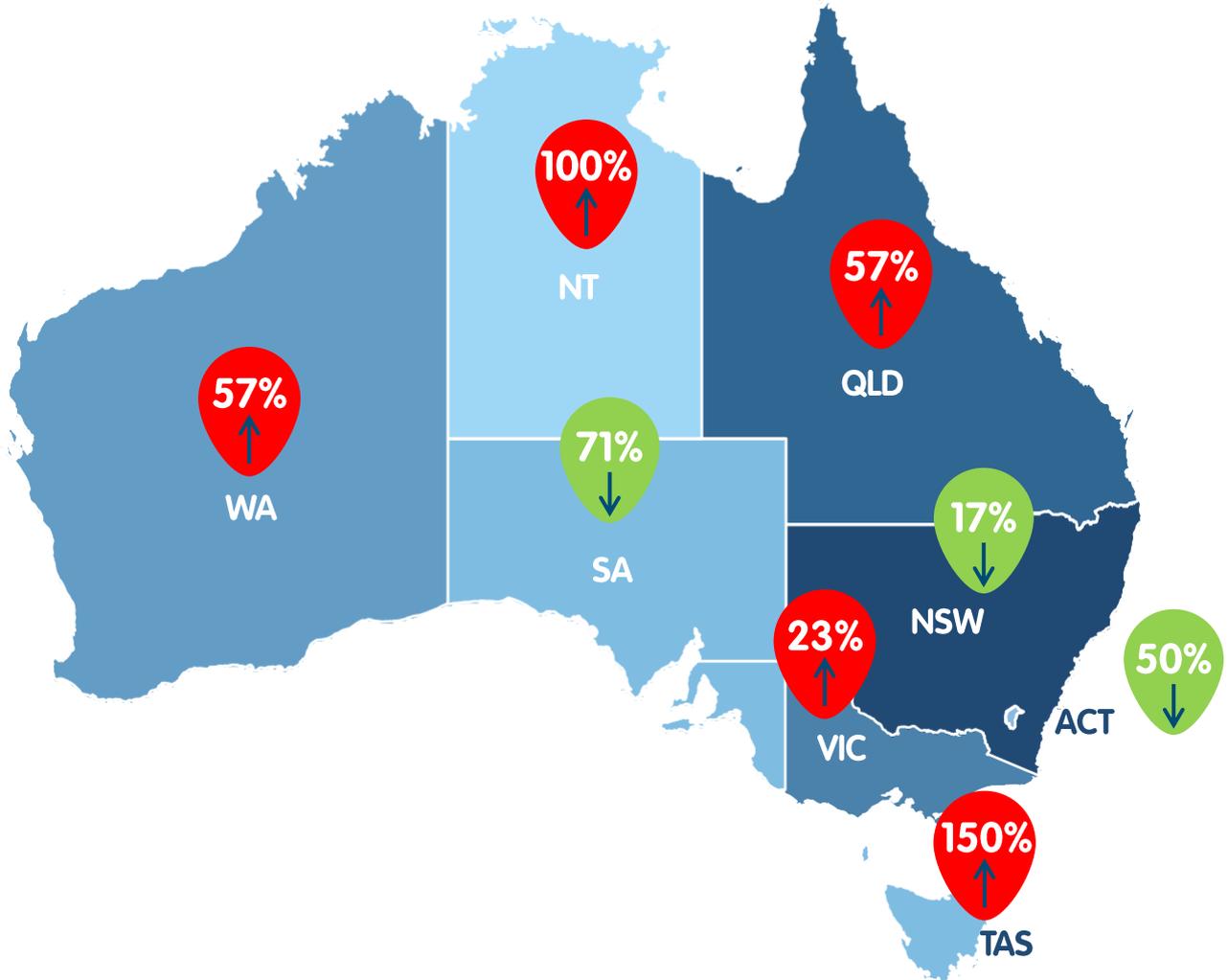
Number of drowning deaths each day of the 2023/24 holiday period



Number of drowning by age group in the 2023/24 holiday period

STATE AND TERRITORY INSIGHTS: SUMMER DROWNING DEATHS 2023/24

State and Territory breakdown with percentage change from last year



State or Territory 2023/24

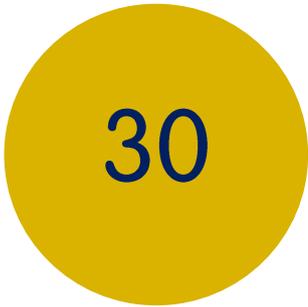
1 ACT (1%)	2 SA (2%)
30 NSW (31%)	5 TAS (5%)
1 NT (1%)	27 VIC (28%)
22 QLD (23%)	11 WA (10%)

State or Territory 2022/23

2 ACT (2%)	7 SA (8%)
36 NSW (40%)	2 TAS (2%)
0 NT	22 VIC (25%)
14 QLD (16%)	7 WA (8%)

STATE BREAKDOWN: NEW SOUTH WALES

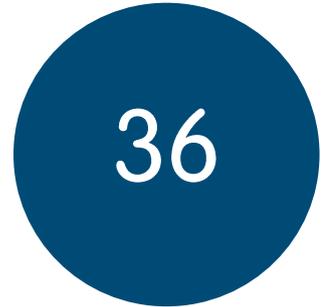
Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 to 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights

30%

occurred between 25th December and 2nd January

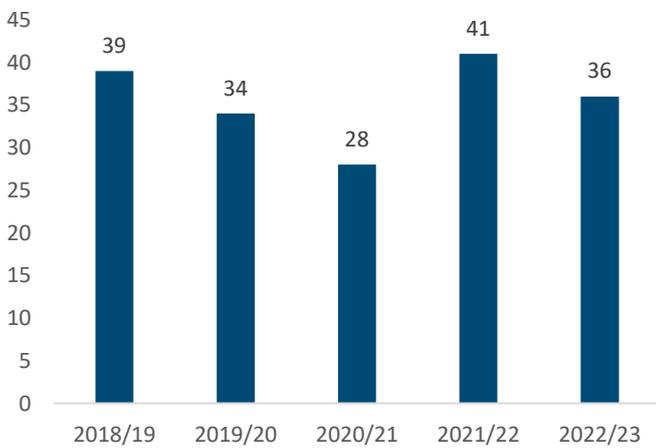
63%

occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm and 6:00pm

83%

of drowning deaths were males

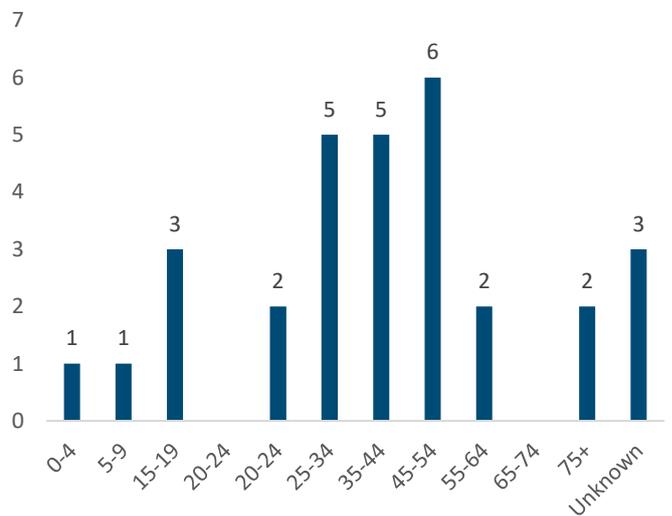
Summer drowning deaths in New South Wales
2018/19 to 2022/23



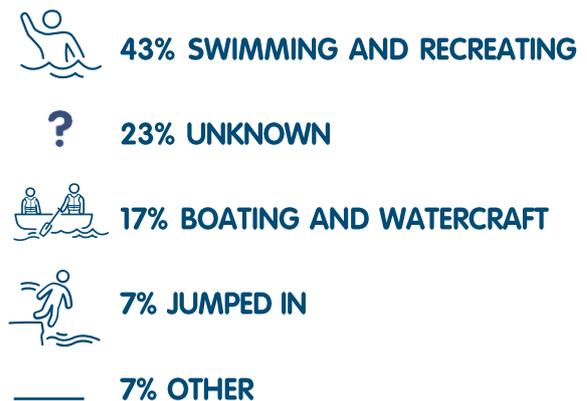
Top 5 Locations



Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



STATE BREAKDOWN: VICTORIA

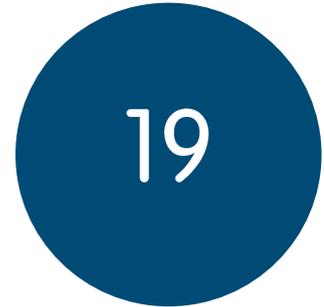
Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights

15%

occurred between 25th December and 2nd January

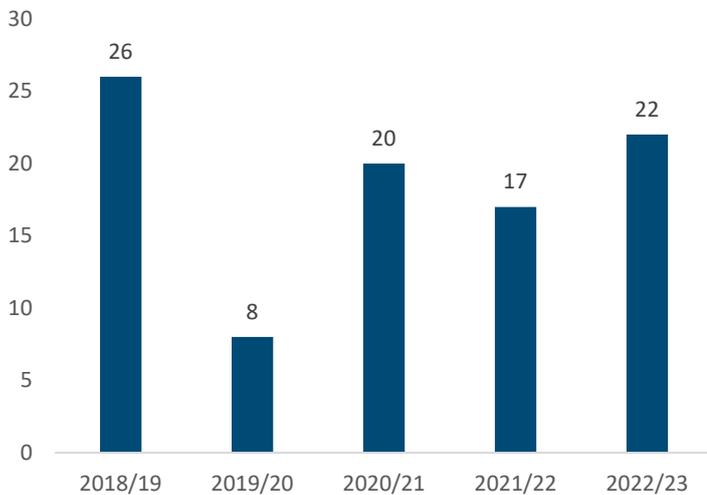
48%

occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm and 6:00pm

8%

of drowning deaths were flood-related

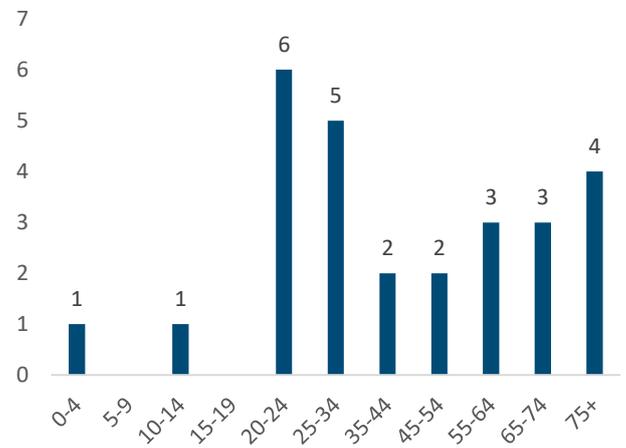
Summer drowning deaths in Victoria
2018/19 to 2022/23



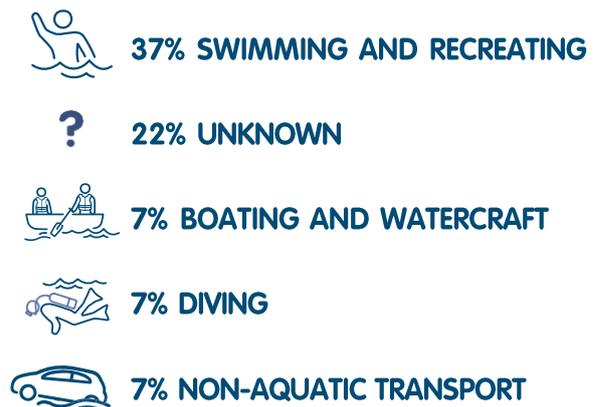
Top 5 Locations



Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



STATE BREAKDOWN: QUEENSLAND

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights

36%

occurred between 25th December and 2nd January

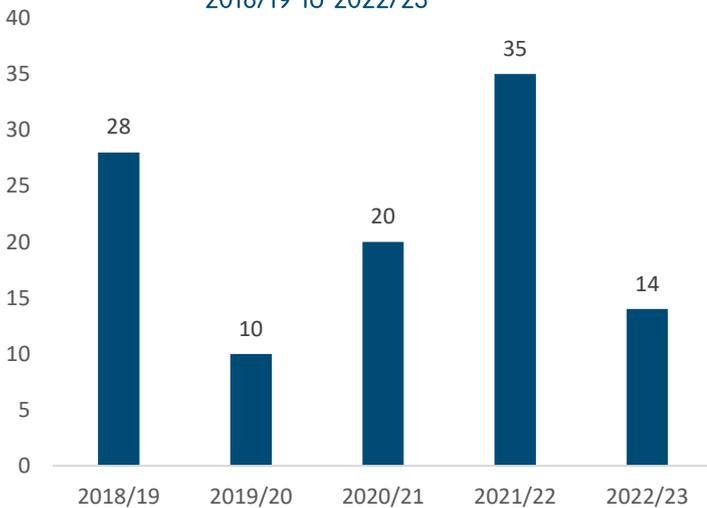
41%

occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm and 6:00pm

23%

of drowning deaths were flood-related

Summer drowning deaths in Queensland
2018/19 to 2022/23



Top 5 Locations



45% RIVER/CREEK



27% OCEAN/HARBOUR



18% BEACH

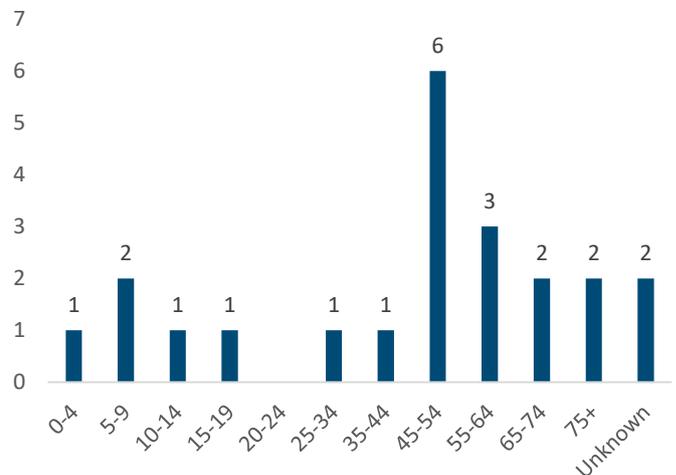


5% OTHER



5% SWIMMING POOL

Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



23% BOATING AND WATERCRAFT



18% SWIMMING AND RECREATING



14% NON-AQUATIC TRANSPORT



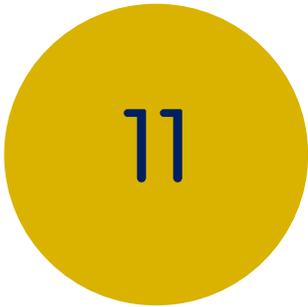
14% SWEEP AWAY



9% FALL

STATE BREAKDOWN: WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights

18%

occurred between 25th December and 2nd January

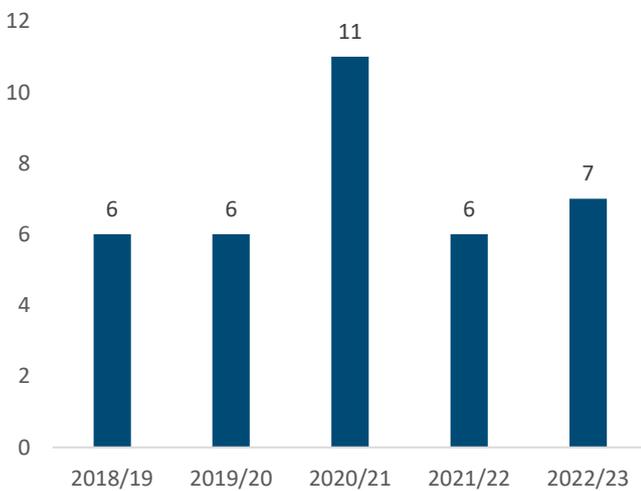
55%

occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm and 6:00pm

91%

of drowning deaths were males

Summer drowning deaths in Western Australia 2018/19 to 2022/23



Top 5 Locations



55% BEACH

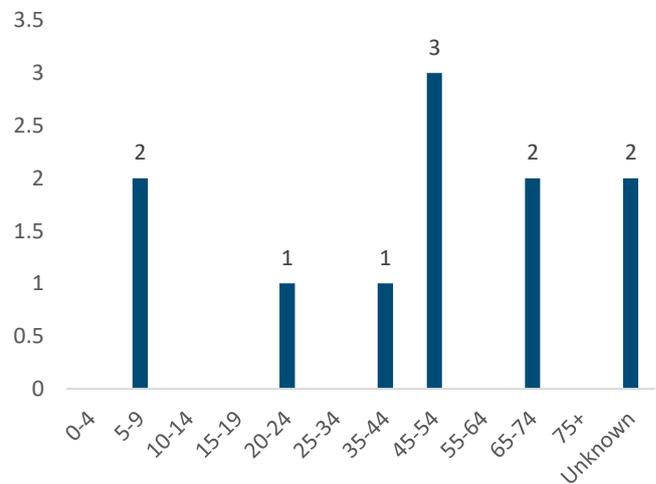


36% RIVER/CREEK



9% OCEAN/HARBOUR

Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



36% SWIMMING AND RECREATING



18% OTHER



18% FALL



9% FISHING



9% RESCUE

STATE BREAKDOWN: TASMANIA

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights



occurred between 25th December and 2nd January

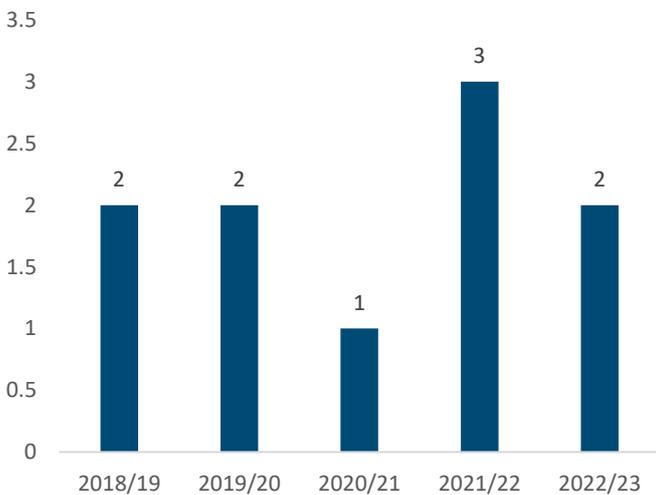


occurred in the afternoon between 12:01pm and 6:00pm and in the evening (6:01pm to 12am)



of drowning deaths were males

Summer drowning deaths in Tasmania 2018/19 to 2022/23



Top 5 Locations

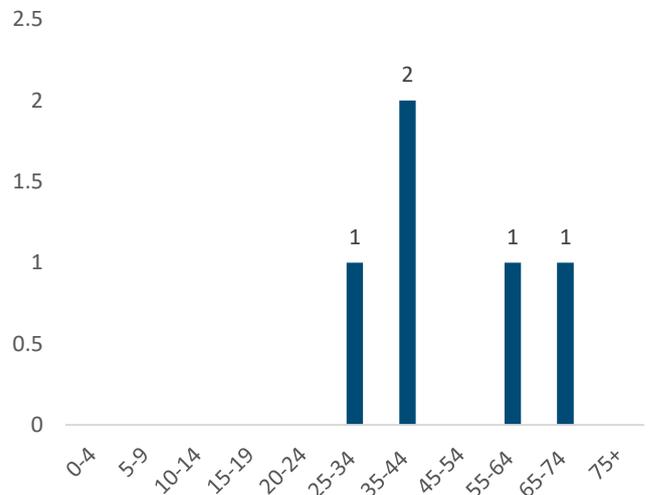


60% OCEAN/HARBOUR



40% BEACH

Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



40% DIVING/SNORKELLING



20% SWIMMING AND RECREATING



20% OTHER



20% UNKNOWN

STATE BREAKDOWN: SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



Summer 2023/24 Key Insights

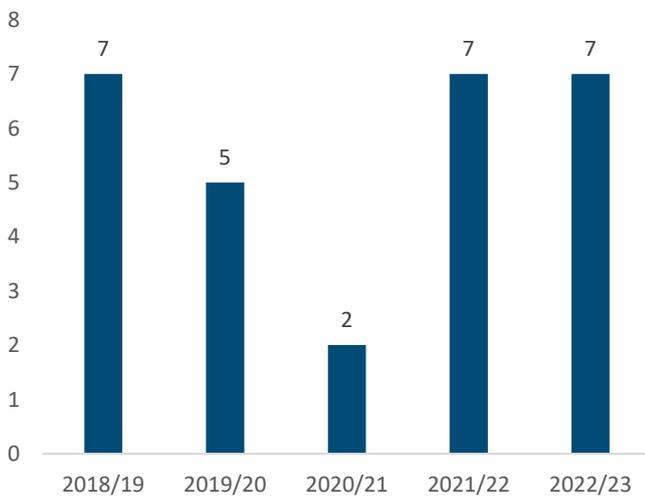
100%

occurred in the afternoon
between 12:01pm and 6:00pm

100%

of drowning deaths
were males

Summer drowning deaths in South Australia
2018/19 to 2022/23



Top 5 Locations

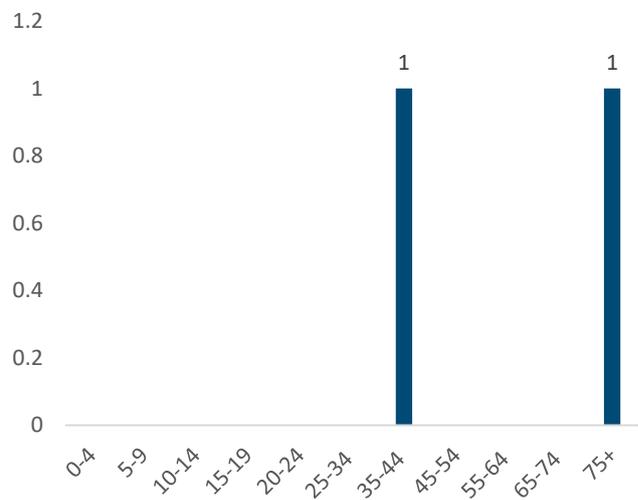


50% BEACH



50% LAKE/DAM

Age breakdown



Top 5 Activity



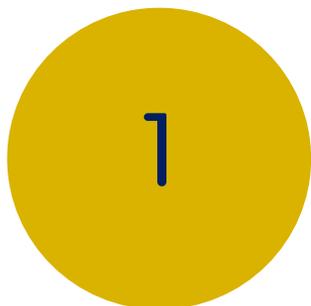
50% RESCUE



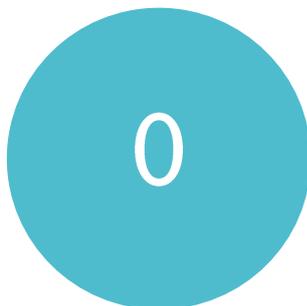
50% UNKNOWN

STATE BREAKDOWN: NORTHERN TERRITORY

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23

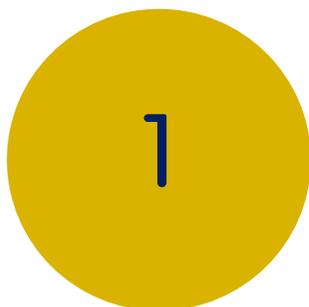


5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



STATE BREAKDOWN: AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Summer 2023/24



Summer 2022/23



5-Year Summer Average
2018/19 – 2022/23



For long-term trends from ACT and the Northern Territory, please see the Royal Life Saving [National Drowning Report](#) and/or the [20-year Analysis of Unintentional Drowning in Australian 2002-2022](#) report.

METHODS

Collation of summer drowning cases

The data collated for this report are derived primarily from media reports of drowning deaths that occurred between 1 December 2023 and 29 February 2024.

As such, these numbers should be considered interim, pending the outcome of ongoing coronial investigations.

Drowning data for Victoria are drawn from a combination of media reports and data from the Coroners Prevention Unit. Historical drowning numbers used for this report have been derived from previous years Summer Drowning Tolls for comparative purposes, which are also from media monitoring, therefore numbers will not be the same as that reported in National Drowning Reports. Consistent with all Royal Life Saving drowning reports, where deaths were known to be a result of suicide or homicide, deaths from natural causes, shark and crocodile attack were excluded. The data included in this report are accurate to the best of the authors knowledge and as per the information available at the time. At the time of completing this report, 90 per cent of cases were under coronial investigation.

Definitions

The circumstances of the drowning incident were coded into defined variables related to age, sex, location, day of drowning incident, time of drowning, activity being undertaken. The time of drowning was coded into four bands: early morning (12:01am to 6am), morning (6:01am to 12pm), afternoon (12:01pm to 6pm) and evening (6:01pm to 12am).

LIMITATIONS

As indicated throughout the report, the figures regarding drowning deaths over summer 2023/24 should be regarded as interim until ongoing coronial investigations have been finalised. Following the conclusion of formal investigations, relevant documentation will be assessed, including autopsy reports, toxicology reports and coroner's findings.

It is possible that the formal investigation of some cases may result in a change in the assigned cause of death. For example, a case may be determined to be due to natural causes, rather than drowning. This is why the final number of drowning deaths that occurred in summer reported in the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report (released in September) will differ.

Risk factors commonly reported in Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report, such as the presence of alcohol and drugs, lifejackets, swimming ability were unknown at the time of writing and unlikely to be known until the coronial investigation has been conducted.





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