

Chair Report

Kate Wareham

Chairperson – Water Safety New Zealand

Tēnā koutou

As Chair of the Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) Board, I am honoured to present the annual report for 2022/23.

The challenges Aotearoa faces with preventable drowning remain significant. Despite the tireless efforts of our members and sector organisations, the number of preventable drownings and water-related injuries remains a concern. Special mention to our core members – Coastguard New Zealand, Surf Life Saving New Zealand, and Swimming New Zealand for your lead role. I want to acknowledge and thank all these individuals and groups; without their dedicated efforts the situation could be far worse. The 94 preventable drownings recorded in 2022, represented the highest annual drowning fatalities in the last decade. This figure was 12 fatalities above the 10-year average of 82 and reminds us of the work ahead.

Our commitment to the Wai Ora Aotearoa Strategy 2025 – NZ's Water Safety Sector Strategy remains unwavering. This strategy represents our collective effort to enhance water safety in New Zealand and as the lead agency for this kaupapa, WSNZ is tasked with ensuring its effective implementation. The sector's aspirational goals and action plans have been crafted with collaboration at their core. Our vision that "Everyone connects to and enjoys the water safely" can only be realised if we continue to work hand in hand, evaluating and refining our strategies.

To best enable progress on the Sector Strategy, WSNZ has undergone a transformation, aligning our objectives and operations to be partner-centric, evidence-driven, and focused on long-term behavioural change. The WSNZ Board is confident that by working collaboratively, aligning our efforts, and making evidence-based investments, we can enhance community well-being and prevent future tragedies.

The ongoing development and evolution of our Board have been truly positive. The dedication and expertise each member brings has been invaluable. A special acknowledgment to our new Board members who joined last year – Anna Toothill, Corinna Gage, James Helmore

and Peter Kara. Thanks also to the chairs of our two Board sub-committees, Kira Schaffler and Anne-Marie Jackson, both have played a lead role in assuring and leading work to successfully govern WSNZ this year.

While I extend my heartfelt thanks to all Board members for their dedication, I must give a special mention to Michael Bassett-Foss, who, like me, is concluding his six-year journey with WSNZ. Michael's unwavering commitment and significant contribution to the water safety sector has been incredible and his legacy will undoubtedly influence WSNZ's trajectory for years to come.

As I prepare to step down after six years on the Board, I reflect on the positive changes and the consolidation of WSNZ's role as the lead agency for water safety. I also want to express my appreciation to the WSNZ staff who have delivered so strongly in support of us achieving our goals. My special thanks to Daniel, our Chief Executive, for his unwavering commitment to our mission and for being a strong voice for action to prevent drowning.

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou ka ora ai te iwi – With your basket and my basket the people will thrive. As a sector we must continue to bring our strengths together for no single entity alone can achieve real change for water safety in Aotearoa.

Nāku, nā
Kate Wareham

