Water Safety New Zealand

Drowning Prevention Report

2023

Water Safety NEW ZEALAND

Karakia for Tangaroa

He huanui, he huaroa ki te Ao
From the energies of the extensive and intensive ocean we will learn

Omāio ki tua e
To maintain balance

Ka rongo ki te Waitai e
Reciprocation of healing is needed

Haramai e te Taipari – Haramai e te Taitimu
Celebrate the provisions of the full and low tides

Nāu e Hinemoana – Nāu Tangaroa ē
The sacred domain of Hinemoana and Tangaroa.

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Water Safety New Zealand

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Introduction

This report serves as the formal record of preventable fatal drownings in New Zealand for the year 2023. It stands not just as a collection of statistics and analyses, but as a solemn acknowledgement and an act of honouring the individuals and their families and whānau who tragically lost their lives to drowning. Beyond its role in memorialising these lives, this document is a clarion call to the entire nation, urging a collective understanding and acknowledgment of the drowning problem in New Zealand. It aims to be an instrumental tool for the water safety sector and its partners, providing crucial insights to prioritise and focus efforts where they are most needed. In doing so, this report endeavours to turn data into action, transforming numbers and trends into life-saving strategies and interventions.

As we present the 2023 Drowning Prevention Report, it is with a heavy heart that we acknowledge the 90 individuals whose lives were lost to drowning. This figure stands as a stark reminder of the fragility of life and the relentless need to promote water safety and drowning prevention. Each data point or number represents a valued life, a person full of potential, and a family left with an irreplaceable void. Our collective memory of them fuels our mission to prevent such tragedies.

Ka maumahara tonu tātou ki a rātou, We will Remember them.

The last year has been particularly challenging, with unintentional “falls” into the water emerging as the predominant activity leading to drownings, accounting for nearly half of the fatalities. This brings to light the need for robust conversations about what are “floating” skills and safety protocols to mitigate the risks associated with unexpected immersions. We must continue to advocate for the use of life jackets and personal flotation devices, especially in circumstances where the danger may not be immediately apparent.

Amidst these sombre statistics, we must also consider the socio-economic context that compels individuals to embrace riskier behaviours, such as fishing from precarious spots or venturing into treacherous waters. The pursuit to provide for one’s family can overshadow the inherent dangers, and it is our duty to ensure that safety is not a privilege of the affluent but a standard accessible to all, regardless of their economic status.

Our report reveals a worrying trend among older men, who often harbour a 'bullet-proof' mindset. This attitude, coupled with a lifetime of experience, sometimes leads to a false sense of invulnerability . Addressing this requires not just education but also a cultural shift in how we perceive risk and personal safety as we age.

In response to these findings, our message is one of compassion and care, but also a call for change. We are committed to fostering a culture where the love and respect for our waters are matched by a deep-rooted commitment to safety. It is crucial that we, as a community, look out for each other, challenge the norms that lead to complacency, and embrace practices that can save lives.

As Kiwis, our connection to the water is profound—it is our playground, our source of sustenance, and a core part of our identity. But with this connection comes the responsibility to respect the power of water and to prioritise safety in every encounter. We urge each member of our community to reflect on their actions, to arm themselves with knowledge, and to adopt a proactive stance on water safety. Together, we can turn the tide on preventable drownings and ensure that our waters are a source of joy, not tragedy.

Let us remember that drowning does not discriminate—it can happen to anyone, and it is only through collective action and behavioural change that we can hope to safeguard our loved ones. As we look ahead, Water Safety New Zealand remains steadfast in its commitment to advocacy, education, optimising our understanding of the data and the implementation of life-saving measures. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to make water safety a way of life.

> “As Kiwis, our connection to the water is profound — it is our playground, our source of sustenance, and a core part of our identity.”

Daniel Gerrard
CEO, Water Safety New Zealand

Water Safety New Zealand

Foreword

Kia ora Whānau of Aotearoa

As Edmund Burke, the esteemed Anglo-Irish statesman and philosopher, once noted, "By gnawing through a dike, even a rat may drown a nation."

In line with this wisdom, our latest Drowning Report sadly highlights the loss of numerous individuals from our communities — friends, family, and colleagues — to water-related incidents. My deepest sympathies are with those grieving the loss of their loved ones. I also extend my gratitude to the volunteers and emergency service members who have tirelessly responded to these tragic events. The report underscores a collective responsibility to reduce these heartbreaking numbers. Without a shift in our behaviour around water bodies, we risk repeating these grim statistics — statistics that represent our loved ones.

If we, as a nation, fail to alter our practices regarding our moana (rivers, seas, lakes), we are likely to face similar outcomes in next year's report. Ensuring safety while enjoying our magnificent whenua and moana isn't solely the responsibility of a single entity or organisation; it's a collective issue.

There's a pressing need for adequate funding to sustain water safety programmes, training, and education. It's vital not only for those in need of learning but also to remind each of us about staying safe in the water. In Aotearoa, surrounded by the sea and blessed with rivers, lakes, and streams, we cherish our water-related recreational activities, including the gathering of kai moana and revelling in our country's natural beauty.

Heeding Burke's analogy, if we don't address the critical issue — our current behaviour — our nation risks metaphorical drowning.

Peter Kara

Chairperson, Water Safety New Zealand

Executive Summary

Who is Losing Their Life?

90
Drowning deaths in 2023

↑11%
9 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

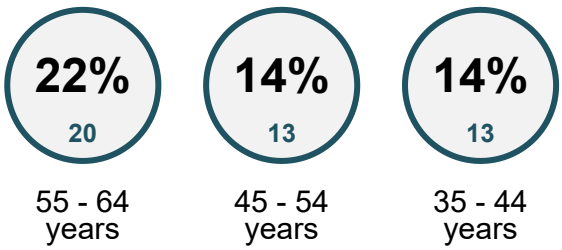
81.3
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Activity (Top 3) 2023

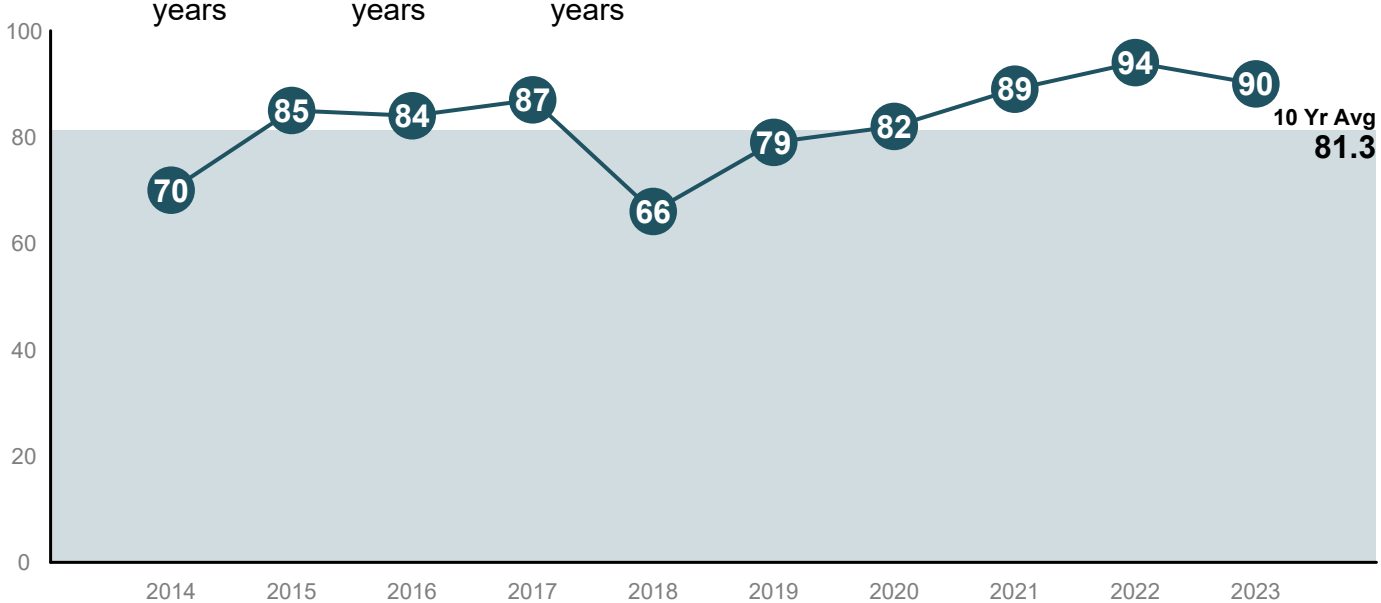
Fatalities by Environment (Top 3) 2023

Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



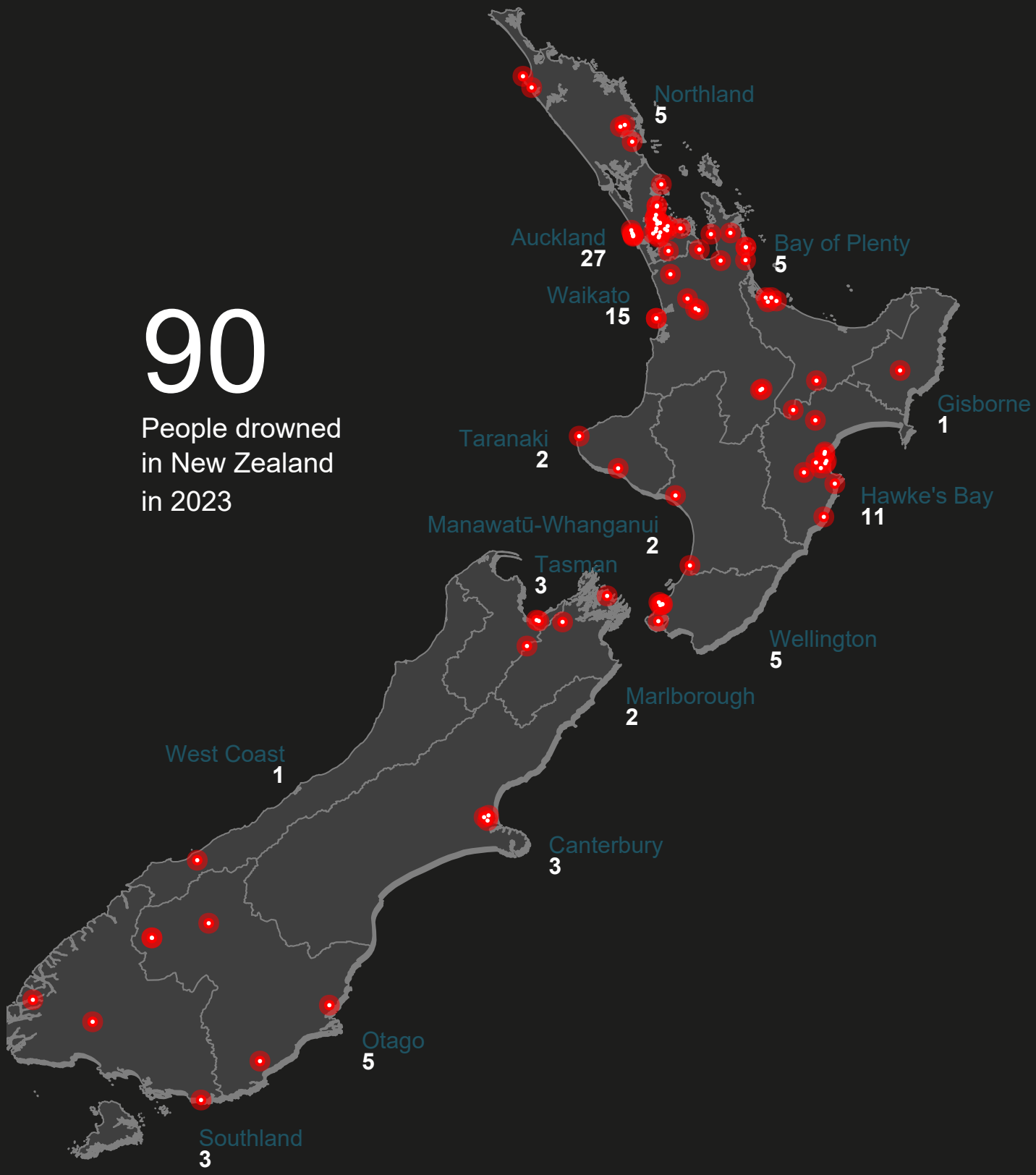
Fatalities by Ethnicity (with Rates) 2023

Other	Maori	Asian	NZ European	Pasifika
Per 100k 4.75	Per 100k 2.46	Per 100k 2.27	Per 100k 1.40	Per 100k 0.79
7% 6	21% 19	18% 16	51% 46	3% 3



Executive Summary

Where are People Drowning?



Water Safety New Zealand

Executive Summary

In 2023, New Zealand faced a troubling increase in water-related fatalities, with 90 lives lost to drowning. This is a slight decrease on the 2022 number of preventable drownings, 94. This year marked a concerning 11% rise from the 10-year average of 81, drawing attention to the urgent need for enhanced water safety measures across the nation.

A detailed analysis of these incidents reveals stark regional disparities. Auckland notably experienced a significant surge in drownings, with 27 cases reported (30% of all NZ's preventable drownings), substantially exceeding its 10-year average of 16. This alarming statistic calls for immediate and targeted interventions in the Auckland region. On the other end of the spectrum, Northland showcased a more encouraging trend, recording only 5 drownings compared to 18 (72% decrease) the previous year, indicating possible advancements in safety measures or shifts in public awareness and behaviour.

Demographic patterns in these drownings were also revealing. Most victims were males, who accounted for a staggering 83% of the total drownings. Age-wise, the older demographics were particularly affected, with the 55-64 age bracket experiencing the highest number of incidents (20), followed closely by those aged 45-54 (13) and 35-44 (13). This data points towards the necessity for age-specific safety initiatives.

The nature of the drowning incidents varied, with non-recreational immersions, colloquially classified as "falls" into water emerging as the predominant cause, representing half of the total fatalities (45). Swimming, a seemingly benign activity, was the second most common cause, involved in 20% of the drownings. Notably, fatalities while fishing from land, which traditionally posed a high risk, accounted for 9% of the drownings.

Ethnic disparities in drowning rates were also observed. The Asian and Māori communities exhibited higher rates per 100,000 people, at 2.46 and 2.27, respectively, underscoring the need for culturally tailored water safety education and outreach programs.

A glimmer of hope in the 2023 data was the notable decrease in boating-related tragedies, a testament to the efficacy of recent safety campaigns and regulations in this specific area. This success story could potentially be replicated in other high-risk water activities.

The report also highlights two key emerging or current issues in drowning fatalities in New Zealand: an increase in flood-related drownings and the impact of poverty on drowning risks. Firstly, the rise in flood-related incidents, with 9 drownings recorded in 2023 contrasted by a total of 18 flood-related incidents in the previous 42 years. This underscores the growing threat posed by severe weather events, likely exacerbated by climate change. These incidents emphasise the need for improved flood preparedness and public awareness, particularly in flood-prone areas.

Secondly, the intersection of drowning incidents and poverty suggests that socio-economic factors play a crucial role in drowning risks. Individuals in lower socio-economic groups often have limited access to water safety education, basic water skills training, and emergency response resources, making them more vulnerable to drowning incidents. This emerging insight calls for targeted interventions and resource allocation to address the disparities in drowning risks associated with poverty.

Overall, the 2023 drowning report serves as a stark reminder of the diverse and complex nature of water safety challenges in New Zealand. While the reduction in boating incidents is a positive development, the overall increase in drownings, particularly in regions like Auckland and among older age groups, highlights the critical need for region-specific strategies and age-appropriate safety education.

The disparities in drowning rates among different ethnic groups further emphasise the importance of implementing culturally sensitive approaches. As we reflect on the lives lost, this report is a call to action for concerted efforts to improve water safety and prevent future tragedies in New Zealand's waters.

Black Spots

High Fatality Areas

Black Spots

A Focused Approach

WSNZ Black Spots - Focusing our Efforts

Water Safety New Zealand Black Spots, like their Land Transport New Zealand road safety counterparts, are locations with very high incident and fatality rates.

The purpose of designating drowning Black Spots is to bring attention to areas where tailored preventive measures can be impactful.

WSNZ uses its DrownBase™ database to identify drowning black spots. This enables targeted safety initiatives like educational campaigns, improved hazard signage, increased surveillance, and community-driven water safety efforts. Analogous to road safety strategies, installing warning signs, providing suitable rescue equipment, and sending mobile alerts at these water black spots can greatly reduce drowning risks.

These efforts go beyond the physical. Education plays a crucial role. Just as motorists are made aware of high-risk areas on roads, swimmers, divers, rock-fishers and recreational water users can be educated about the dangers of specific local water bodies. This awareness can lead to appropriate or more cautious behaviour, such as fishing or diving with a buddy, wearing life jackets, avoiding alcohol, and understanding the local water currents and conditions.

In New Zealand, the application of this concept can be particularly effective. With its extensive coastline, numerous lakes, and rivers, identifying and addressing these high-risk areas can form a cornerstone of the country's water safety strategy. It empowers local communities, enables efficient allocation of resources, and most importantly, saves lives by preventing drowning incidents.

Therefore, WSNZ's initiative to use DrownBase™ for identifying black spots is a significant step forward. It represents a data-driven, proactive approach to water safety, combining statistical analysis with practical, on-the-ground localised interventions. It is hoped that this approach not only helps in saving lives but also contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of water safety and drowning prevention in New Zealand.

Methodology and Analysis

Our methodology finds the number of fatal incidents within a two kilometre radius around every locality in NZ since 1999. It wasn't until 1999 that latitude/longitude pairs were first stored in the DrownBase system which previously had only stored the territorial authority where the death occured.

This means we have 25 year totals for every locality in New Zealand. Choosing the locations with more than 10 fatal incidents leads to ten WSNZ Black Spots. Incredibly, the worst Black Spot, Piha Beach, has one fatality on average, *every* year.

Of major interest (and concern) is the fact that seven Black Spots in the Auckland Region have a combined total of 105 drownings in the 25 year period from 1999. That represents 5% of New Zealand's total - in just 7 localities. It would seem we can make a real difference just by addressing these spots.

Below we list the yearly drownings for each of the 10 Black Spots from 1999-2023.

In 1999, Black Spots contributed 4 drownings to the national total 92 (4.3%) and since then they have been steadily making up more of the cumulative national total by percentage. In 2023 the percentage crossed 6.5% for the first time (6.7% made up of 142 drownings from the NZ's total of 2135 from 1999-2023).

Annual Fatalities by WSNZ Black Spot (1999-2023)

	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Total	Rate	5y Rate
Piha Beach	3	1	1		2	1		1	1		1	2			3			1			1		2	1	4	25	1.00	1.60
Muriwai Beach		1		1		2	2						2	1					2	2	1			1		15	0.60	0.40
Bethells Beach					1		1	1		3	1	1	1	1			1				1	1	1		1	15	0.60	0.80
Princes Wharf		3	2	1	1		1	1			1					2					1				1	14	0.56	0.40
Papanui Point				1		2	1										2		1	1		1	3		2	14	0.56	1.20
Wellington			1					1		1				1		1	2	1			1	1	2		1	14	0.56	1.00
Lake Pupuke	1		2			1				2		1	2	1								1		1	1	13	0.52	0.60
Karioitahi Beach		1		1	1								4									1	2	1		12	0.48	0.80
Manukau Heads			1	2		1	2		1							2	1				1					11	0.44	0.20
Mount Maunganui			1		1					1					1		1	2	1				1	2		11	0.44	0.60

DrownBase™

Insights from Data

Celebrating DrownBase™ – New Zealand's Vital Tool in Drowning Prevention and Water Safety

Since its inception in 1949, Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) has been steadfast in its commitment to drowning prevention and water safety. This was further reinforced with the implementation of DrownBase™ in 1994 – a comprehensive, meticulously curated database designed to confront the pervasive threat of drowning. DrownBase™ contains records of all drowning deaths that have occurred in New Zealand's waterways since 1 January 1980 and all water related hospitalisations requiring a stay in hospital since 2003, categorising them in a variety of ways.

By harnessing the power of detailed data, DrownBase™ has evolved to become a cornerstone in drowning prevention strategies, policies, and programme development, making a significant impact both nationally and on the global stage.

The Significance of Drowning Data Collection and Analysis

Drowning is a complex and multifaceted issue, impacting communities indiscriminately. The collection and rigorous analysis of drowning data, both fatal and non-fatal, is paramount for several reasons:

1. Informing Prevention Strategies: Detailed data allows for identifying trends, high-risk areas, and vulnerable groups, enabling targeted interventions.

2. Policy Development and Advocacy: Solid, evidence-based data is crucial for shaping effective water safety policies and advocating for necessary changes at all levels of governance.

3. Public Awareness and Education: Awareness campaigns grounded in real-world data resonate more powerfully with the public, driving home the importance of water safety practices.

4. International Benchmarking: Sharing data contributes to global understanding of drowning, fostering international collaboration in prevention strategies.

DrownBase™: A Model of Excellence

DrownBase™ stands as a testament to WSNZ's commitment to drowning prevention. Gathering data from diverse and reliable sources such as police, coroners, health ministries, ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) and search and rescue organisations, it offers a holistic view of the drowning landscape in New Zealand.

Key Highlights of DrownBase™

Comprehensive Coverage: With data included since 1980, DrownBase™ offers an unparalleled longitudinal view of drowning trends in New Zealand.

Multifaceted Data Sources: Integration of data from various authoritative sources ensures a complete and nuanced understanding of each incident.

Recognition and Trademark: Internationally acknowledged as the "gold standard" in drowning databases, DrownBase™ is a trademarked entity, underscoring its reliability and significance.

Impactful Insights: Insights from DrownBase™ have been instrumental in shaping drowning prevention and water safety policies and prevention programmes, significantly contributing to water safety in New Zealand.

DrownBase™ – Pioneering Drowning Prevention Through Data Excellence

Water Safety New Zealand proudly heralds DrownBase™ as a national asset. The organisation firmly believes in the database's pivotal role in not only saving lives but also in setting an example for drowning prevention efforts globally.

DrownBase™ is more than a database; it is a beacon of hope and a powerful tool in the ongoing battle against drowning. Its continued evolution and success echo WSNZ's unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety of its people in and around water. As we look to the future, DrownBase™ will undoubtedly continue to play a critical role in steering the nation, and potentially the world, towards safer, drowning-free waters.

Life Stages

Preamble

Age Band Vs Life Stage Reporting

In WSNZ's ongoing efforts to enhance water safety and prevent drowning in New Zealand, we are adopting a new approach in categorising age-specific drowning data. Traditionally, data has been presented in 10-year age bands, but we are now transitioning to more targeted age groupings:

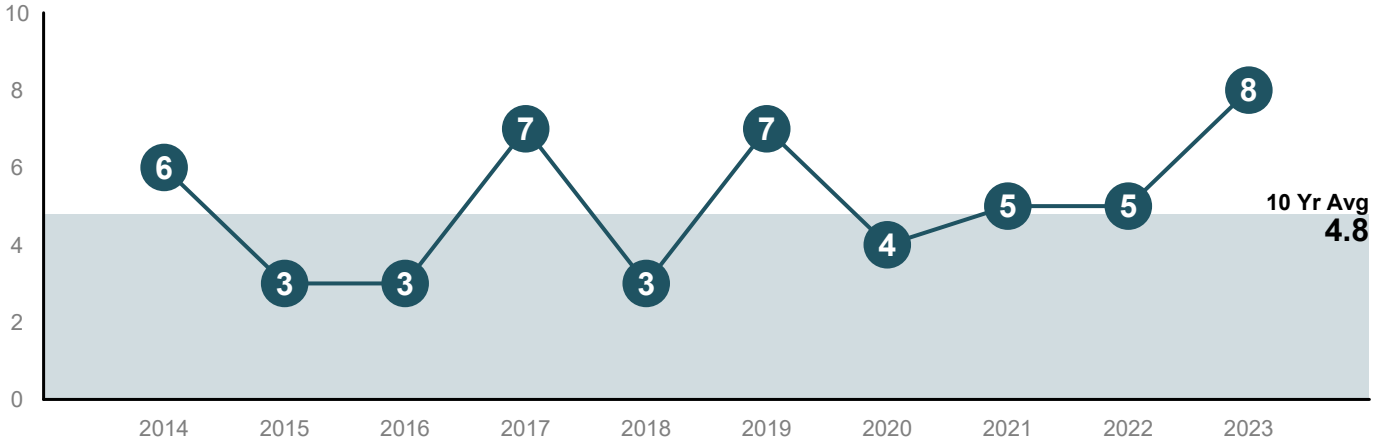
1. **Preschool**
2. **SchoolChildren**
3. **Youth**
4. **Adult**
5. **OlderAdult**

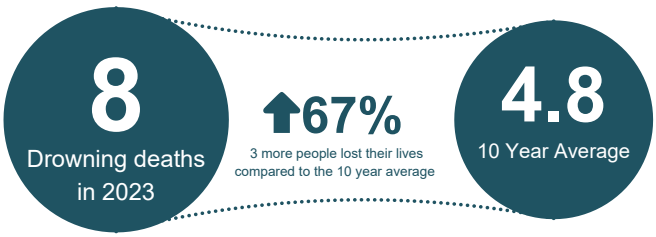
This restructuring aligns with contemporary behavioural research and intervention strategies, allowing for more nuanced understanding and targeted action. Similar methodologies have been employed in various New Zealand reports, such as the NZ Health Survey and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) injury reports, which categorise age groups in a way that reflects different life stages and associated risk factors. This approach aids in tailoring prevention strategies to specific developmental and lifestyle characteristics, thereby increasing the potential impact of water safety initiatives.

To ensure continuity and comprehensive analysis, the traditional 10-year age bands will still be included in the appendix of this report. This will provide a historical perspective and facilitate comparisons with past data, enriching our understanding of trends over time in drowning incidents across New Zealand.

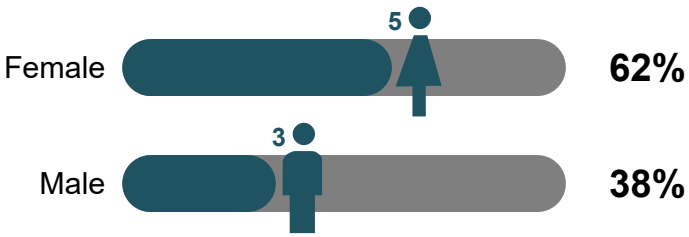
Life Stages

Preschool

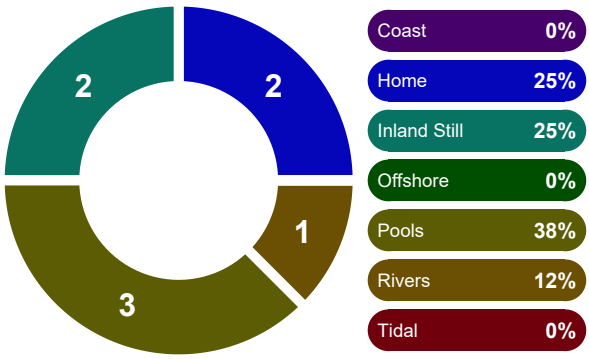




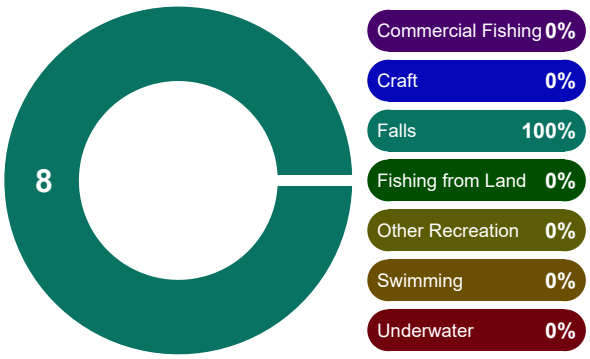
Fatalities by Sex 2023



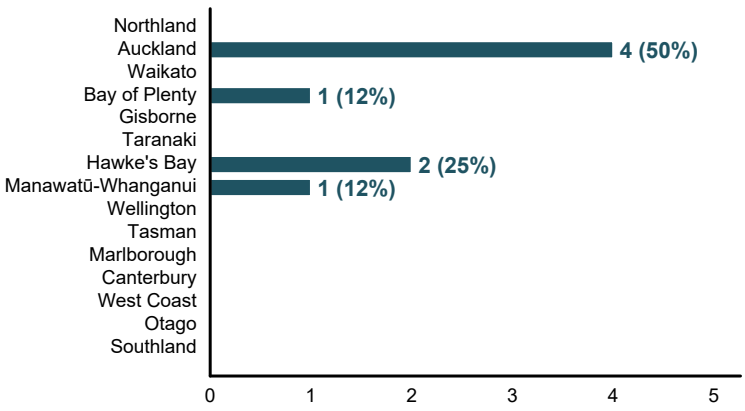
Fatalities by Environment 2023



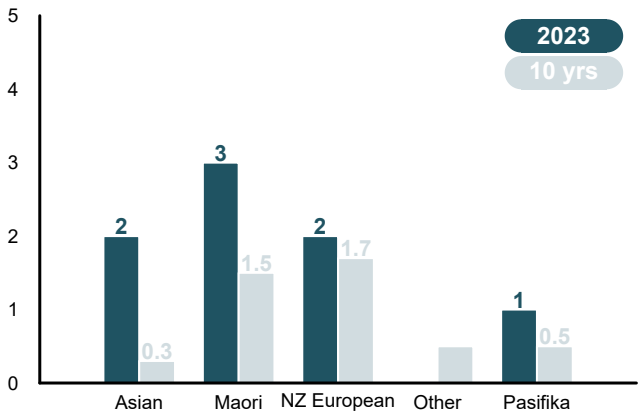
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Region 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Life Stages

Preschool

8

People drowned
in the Preschool life stage
in 2023

Life Stages

Preschool

Preschool

For preschool-aged children (0-4 years old), the risk of injury and drowning is particularly high due to their developmental characteristics. Small children in this age group are naturally inquisitive and drawn to water, which is a normal part of their development. They have increasing mobility, are fast, and often lack a sense of danger. They can slip and drown in a matter of minutes. Even in less than 5 centimetres of water, like in buckets, sinks, puddles, or standing water in ditches, they can drown quickly and silently. Lack of barriers around water, insufficient supervision, and their inability to float are critical factors that increase the risk of drowning for preschoolers. So, it's crucial for caregivers to be vigilant and take measures to keep their kids safe around water.

Snapshot

There were 8 drowning deaths in the under-5 age group in New Zealand in 2023.

This number represents a 67% increase compared to the previous year and is higher than the 10-year average of 4.8.

A higher proportion of drowning incidents for this age group occurred in pools (3) followed by home environments (2) and ponds (2) and river (1).

When considering fatalities by ethnicity, the highest number of deaths were among Māori cchildren (3), there were (2) Asian children, (2) NZ European children and (1) Pasifika child. All groups exceeded their corresponding 10-year average.

In Auckland, there were four preschool drowning fatalities, accounting for half of the total incidents in this age category. Hawkes Bay reported two drownings related to flooding. Both the Manawatu-Whanganui and Bay of Plenty regions experienced one fatal drowning each.

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Active Supervision: Caregivers must continue to be educated on the importance of constant, close active supervision around water bodies, no matter how shallow.

2. Safety Barriers: Homes with pools, spas and those near natural bodies of water should have safety barriers installed to prevent children from accessing the water unsupervised.

3. Family-Based Water Safety Education: Initiatives to raise awareness about water safety should be targeted toward households, particularly emphasising the risks present in home environments.

4. First Aid Training: Promote first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) training for parents, caregivers, and older siblings, focusing on the specific needs of young children.

5. Targeted Interventions: Tailor water safety interventions to address the specific risks associated with each ethnicity, accounting for cultural practices and accessibility to water safety resources.

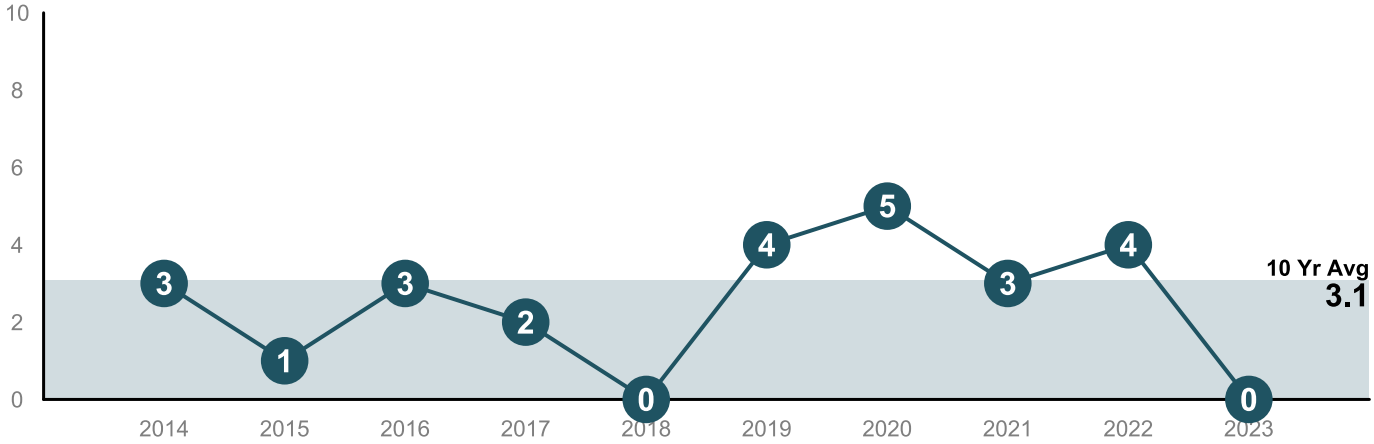
6. Legislation and Policy: Continue to advocate for stronger water safety legislation, including increased surveillance of portable pool fencing.

7. Research and Funding: Support research to understand the specific factors contributing to the increase in drowning rates in this age group and target investment to programmes that have been effective in reducing these incidents.

These insights should be used to guide policy development, community education, and resources allocation to prevent future drowning incidents among children under the age of five in New Zealand.

Life Stages

School Children

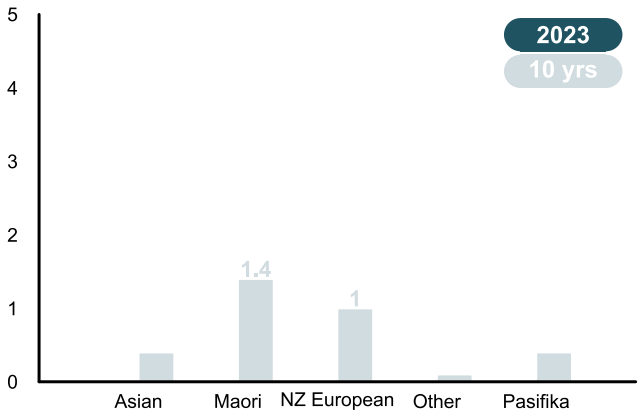


0
Drowning deaths in 2023

100%
3 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

3.1
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Life Stages

School Children

0

People drowned
in the School Children life stage
in 2023

Life Stages

School Children

School Children

The primary school-age group, typically considered to range from 5 to 13 years old, represents a developmental stage where children become increasingly independent and adventurous.

This age bracket is characterised by growing physical capabilities, cognitive skills, and social awareness. Despite these developments, children at this stage still have limited experience and judgment, particularly in assessing risks associated with water activities. In the context of aquatic literacy and water safety, it's crucial to emphasise the need for them to develop the ability to make safe decisions when engaging in water activities.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to enhance their knowledge about environmental risks, enabling them to better understand how to protect themselves. This age bracket may sometimes overestimate their swimming abilities, fail to recognise dangerous water conditions, or lack the foresight to understand the consequences of risky behaviours near water.

As for the general risks of injury and drowning for 5-13 year-olds, these can include unsupervised access to water bodies, lack of water safety skills, absence of barriers preventing access to pools, and lack of wearing life jackets when boating or participating in water sports. Other factors can include the environment in which they are swimming or playing, with risks varying between pools, beaches, rivers, and lakes due to different hazards like currents, waves, and water quality.

Snapshot

In 2023, there were no drowning deaths in this age group, which is a reduction from the 10-year average of 3.1 deaths per year

This is also down dramatically from 4 fatalities in 2022.

Recommendations

1. Expanded Commitment to Aquatic Literacy: Continue collaborating with the Ministry of Education to integrate fundamental aquatic skills and literacy into the school curriculum. Strengthen educational programs in schools to emphasise water safety, focusing on key aspects such as aquatic literacy, floating techniques, understanding water conditions, and knowing how to seek help when in distress

2. Basic Skill Development: Encourage and facilitate fundamental aquatic and water safety skill lessons, such as Water Skills for Life, for children to ensure they acquire the necessary skills to stay safe in and around water.

3. Life Jackets Use: Continue to promote the use of life jackets for all water activities, particularly when boating or engaging in sports that take place on open water.

4. Community Engagement: Work with local communities to identify water hazards unique to their area and develop targeted strategies to mitigate these risks.

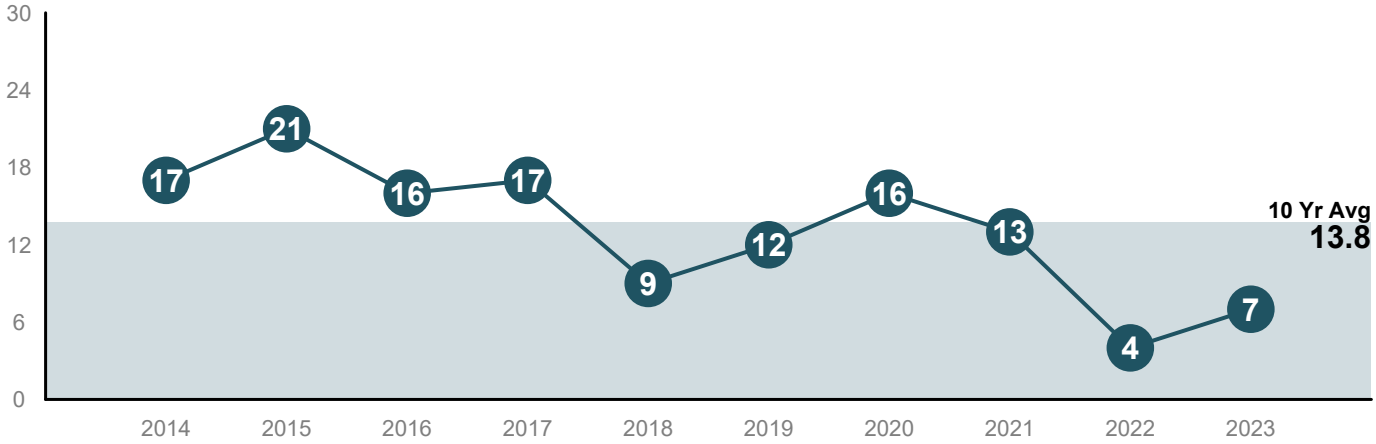
5. Data Monitoring: Continue to monitor and analyse drowning data to identify trends, at-risk populations, and the effectiveness of interventions, adjusting strategies as needed.

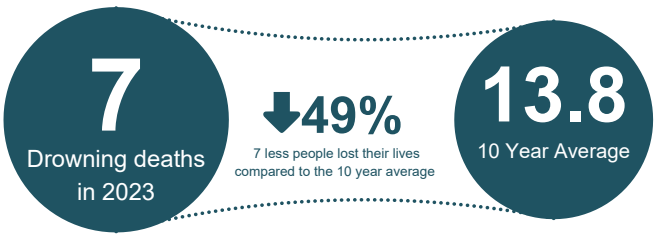
6. Policy and Regulation: Support policies that enforce water safety regulations, such as pool fencing requirements, and advocate for policies that can reduce risks, such as mandatory wearing of life jackets for children.

The remarkable achievement of zero fatalities in 2023 is a testament to the effectiveness of interventions and safety measures that have been put in place. It's critical to sustain and build upon these efforts to ensure that the safety of school-age children in aquatic environments remains a priority.

Life Stages

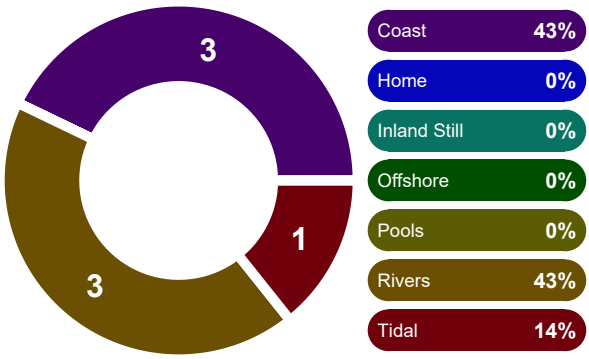
Youth



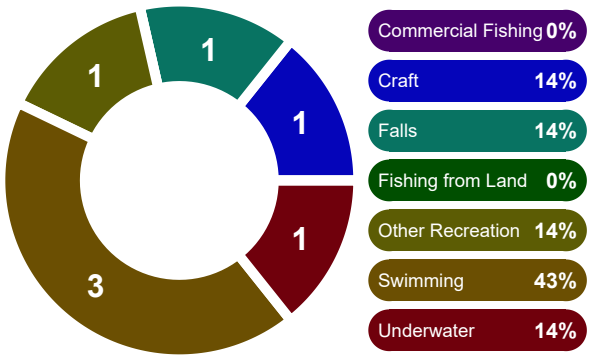


Fatalities by Sex 2023

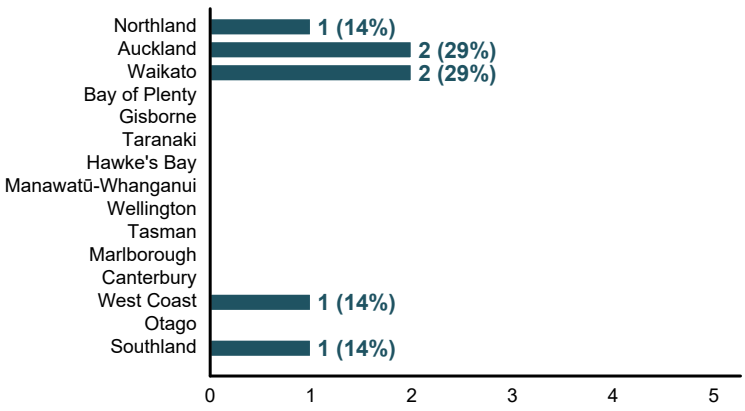
Fatalities by Environment 2023



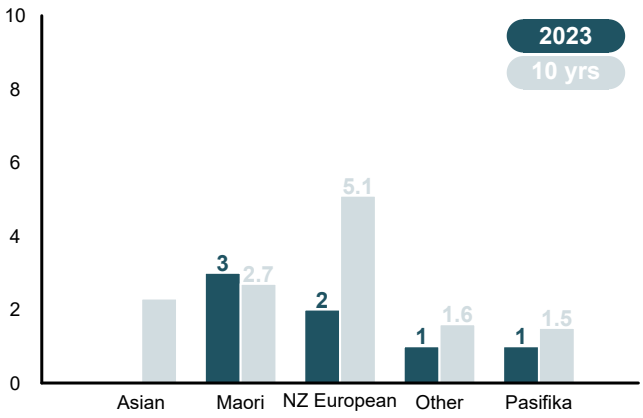
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Region 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Life Stages

Youth

7

People drowned
in the Youth life stage
in 2023

Life Stages

Youth

Youth

The youth age group, referring to young people aged 13 to 24 years, is characterised by a transition phase from childhood to adulthood. This period often involves increased autonomy, exploration, and engagement in a variety of activities, including those around water. However, with this newfound independence and propensity for risk-taking behaviour, young people face various risks of injury, including a higher potential for drowning incidents. Water-related activities, such as swimming, boating, and fishing, are popular among this age group, but without adequate water safety knowledge and skills to make decisions, especially considering the influence of peer pressure during activities around water.

Snapshot

Trend Analysis: There has been a significant decline in drowning deaths this decade. From a peak of 21 fatalities in 2015 to the decade low of 4 in 2022. There were 7 youth fatalities in 2023. This is still below the 10-year average of 13.8 incidents and is a rare positive result in our drowning statistics.

Gender Disparity: All recorded fatalities in 2023 were male, indicating a possible gap in risky behaviour or safety practices between genders.

Environment: The coast (3) and rivers (3) are the most prevalent environments for drowning incidents.

Activities: Swimming or engaging in water activities were the leading causes of drownings by youth.

Regional Data: Youth drownings over the past year cluster in the upper north island. The data, when compared to the 10-year average, indicates that in certain regions like Northland and Auckland, the number of drownings is higher, while in others like Tasman and Canterbury, it is lower or consistent with the average

Ethnic Disparities: There is a notable disparity in drowning incidents among ethnic groups, with Māori (3) and NZ European (2) communities experiencing the highest numbers.

Recommendations

1. Targeted Education: Implement extended water safety educational programs in schools (such as Water Skills for Life-Beach and Water Skills for Life-River) and high-risk communities. Focus on water safety, with a particular emphasis on tailored programs for young males, as they are disproportionately represented in fatalities.

2. Coastal & River Safety Initiatives: Enhance safety measures around rivers and coastal areas, such as increased lifeguard presence, safety signage, and targeted investment into localised water safety campaigns, particularly in areas identified as hot spots where drownings have occurred

3. Activity-Specific Training: Provide training and safety education for specific high-risk activities like swimming and underwater activities, ensuring Rangatahi are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

4. Targeted Community Engagement: Work closely with regional communities, particularly in areas like Northland and Auckland, to develop localised action plans that address specific regional risks.

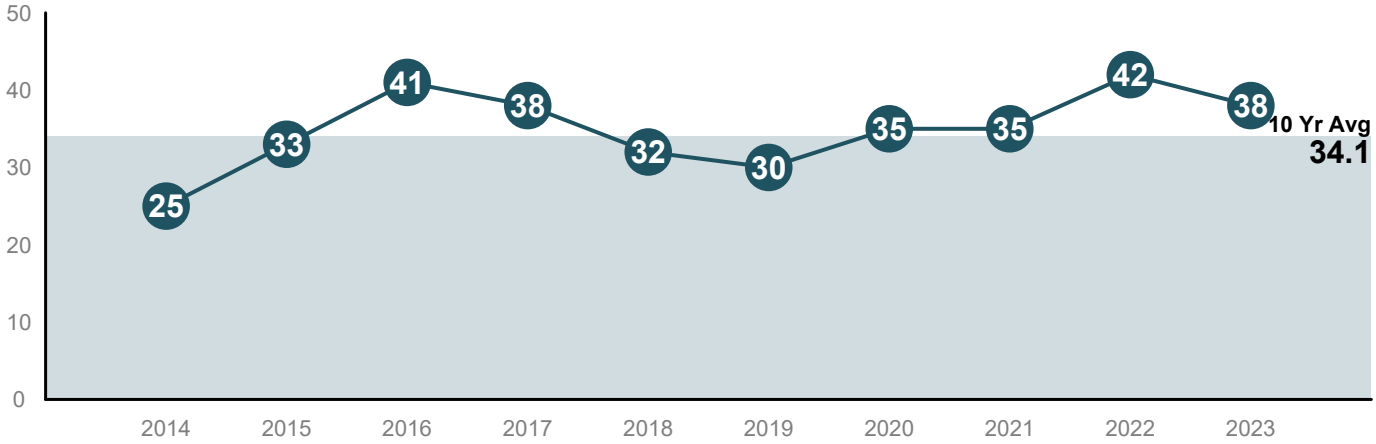
5. Ethnicity-Sensitive Approaches: Develop culturally sensitive water safety programmes, especially for Māori and Asian communities, to address the specific needs and behaviours of these groups.

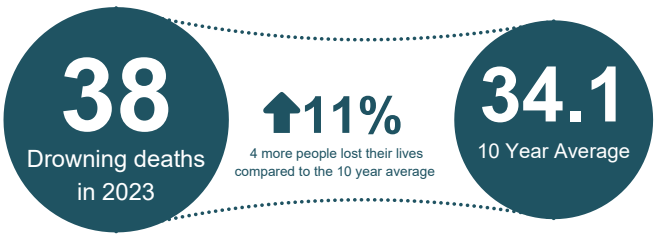
By focusing on these areas, there is potential to further reduce the number of drownings among Rangatahi and enhance overall water safety for young people in New Zealand.


COASTGUARD

Life Stages

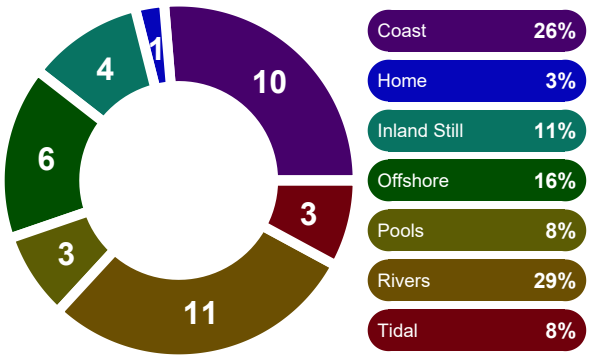
Adults



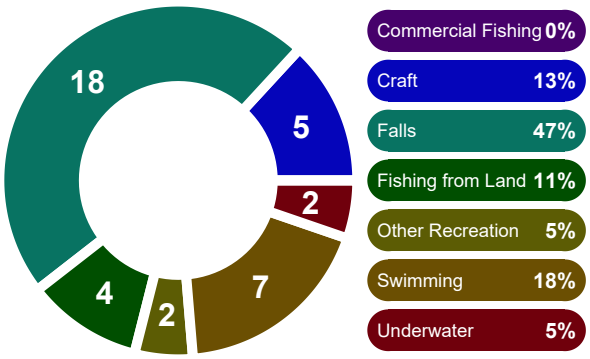


Fatalities by Sex 2023

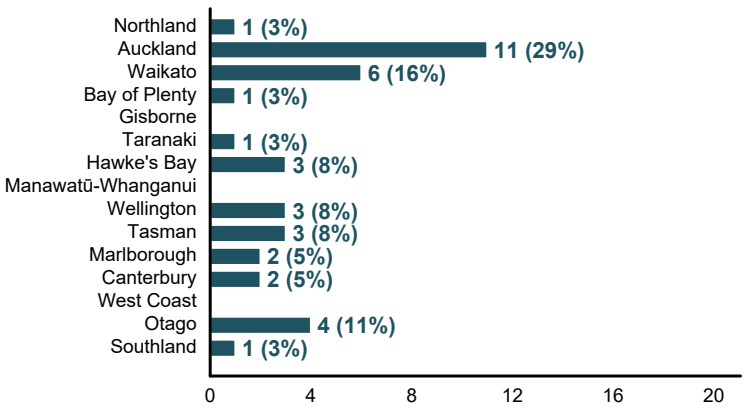
Fatalities by Environment 2023



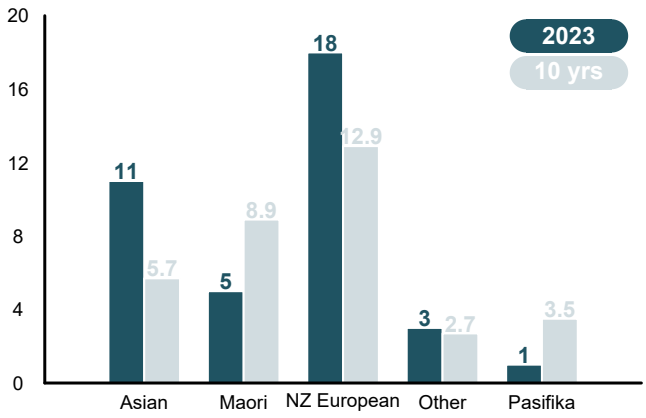
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Region 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

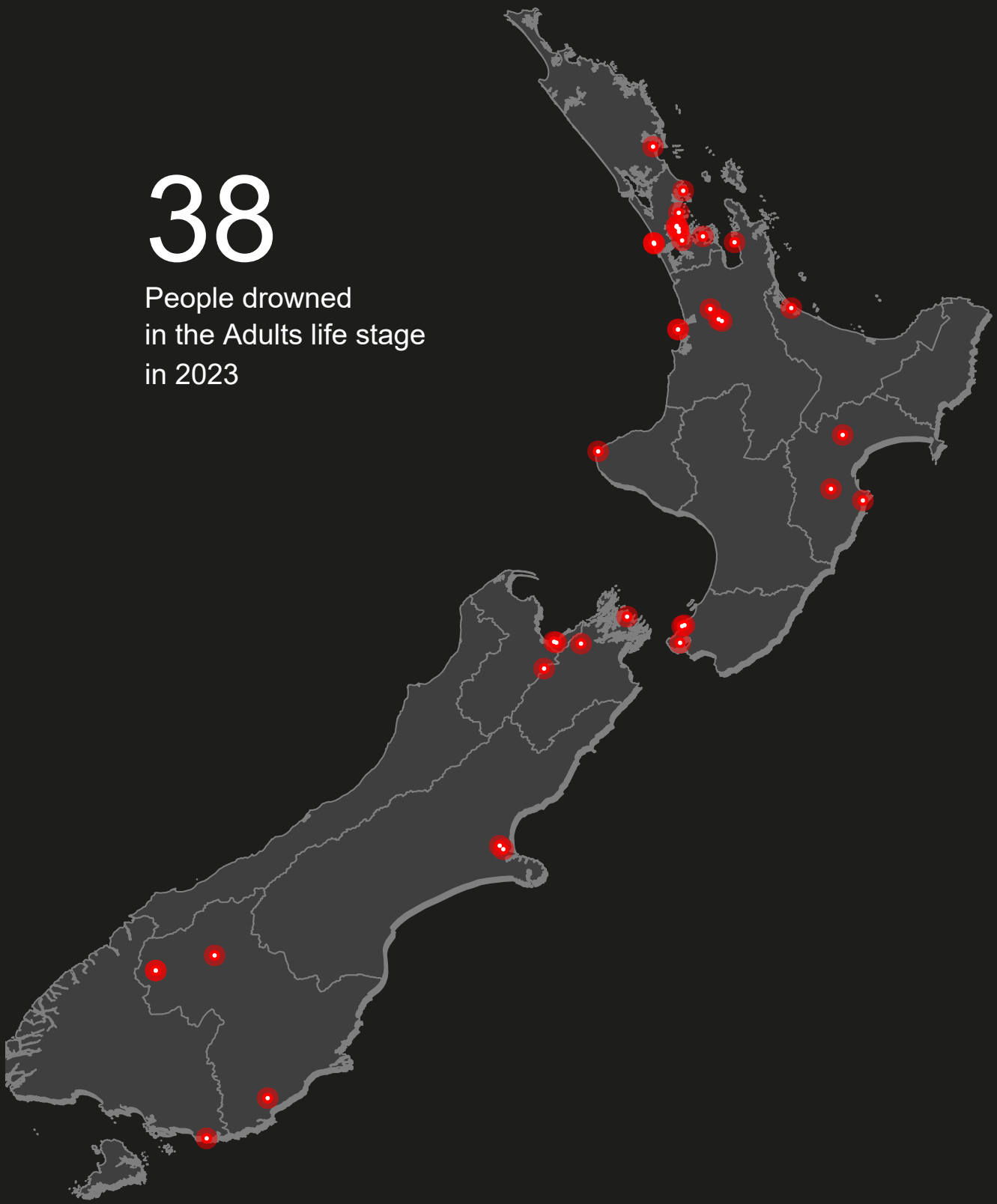


Life Stages

Adults

38

People drowned
in the Adults life stage
in 2023



Life Stages

Adults

Adults

The adult age group of 24-54 years encompasses a wide range of individuals, typically active in various recreational, occupational, and daily life activities that may increase their exposure to water-related risks. This age group is often engaged in activities such as swimming, fishing, boating, and other water sports, which can pose a risk of drowning, especially if safety measures are not adequately followed.

Additionally, alcohol consumption, overestimation of one's abilities, lack of life jacket use, and swimming in unpatrolled or isolated areas can further exacerbate the risk.

Snapshot

There were 38 adult drowning deaths, which is 11% above the 10-year average of 34.1 deaths.

Most fatalities were male (89%), with female fatalities accounting for 11%.

The environments where drownings occurred most were rivers (29%) and coastlines (26%).

Nealy half of all fatal drowning were associated with falls (47%). The key activities for fatalities were swimming (18%) fishing from the land (11%) and craft accidents (13%)

Regionally, nearly a third of fatalities occurred in Auckland (29%, 11). Further fatalities were observed in Waikato (7) and Otago (4).

Regarding ethnicity, nearly 50% of all fatalities were NZ European (18). This was significantly higher than the 10-year average of 13. Asian (11) were also nearly double their 10-year average. While Māori (5) reversed this trend by almost halving their rate compared to the 10-year average (9).

Recommendations

1. Targeted Water Safety Education: Tailor programmes to emphasise the risks associated with popular activities like swimming and fishing from the land, in high-risk areas, targeting adult males due to their higher fatality rate.

2. Promote Life Jacket Use: Continue to launch campaigns to encourage the use of life jackets, especially when engaging in boating or fishing from land.

3. Focus on High-Risk Areas: Direct resources and safety measures toward regions with increased drowning incidents, such as Auckland, and Waikato.

4. Engage with Māori Communities: Develop culturally appropriate water safety initiatives in collaboration with Māori leaders to address the overall disproportionate impact on the Māori population.

5. Alcohol Awareness: Further research is needed to better understand the dangers of alcohol consumption near or in New Zealand waters.

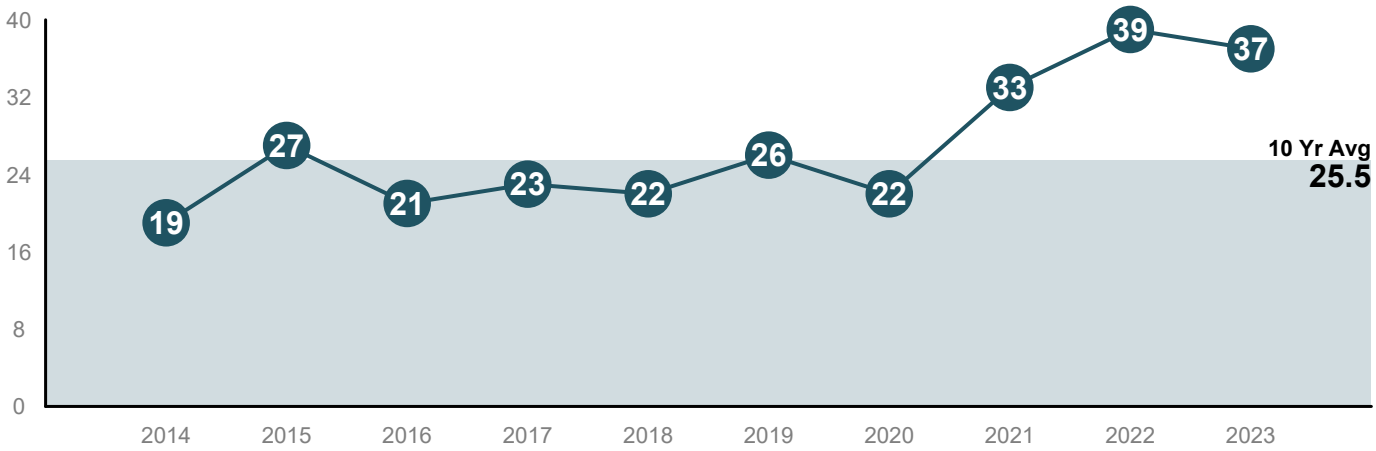
6. Monitor and Patrol High-Risk Environments: Increase surveillance and lifesaving services on coastlines and rivers, where a significant number of drownings occur.

7. Targeted & Localised Investment: Target investment to interventions for activities with higher drowning rates, in high-risk areas, to educate 24–54-year-olds on best practices and safety measures.

These recommendations aim to improve water safety awareness, encourage the adoption of safe practices, and deploy resources to areas and populations most at risk, all of which can contribute to a reduction in drowning incidents among adults aged 24-54.

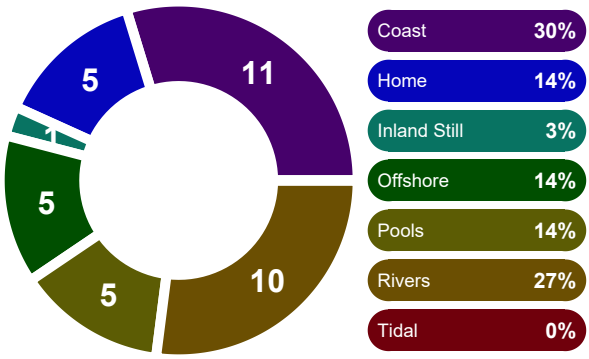
Life Stages

Older Adults

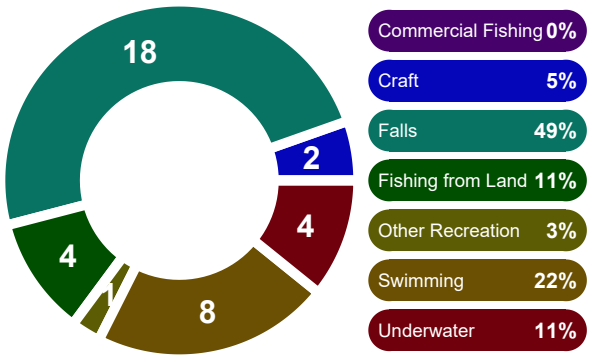


Fatalities by Sex 2023

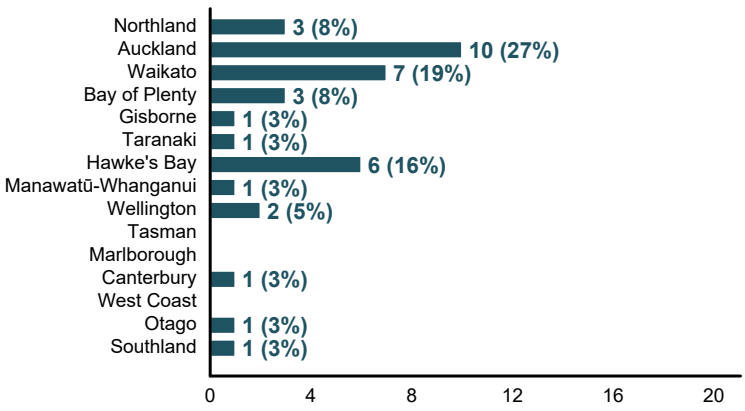
Fatalities by Environment 2023



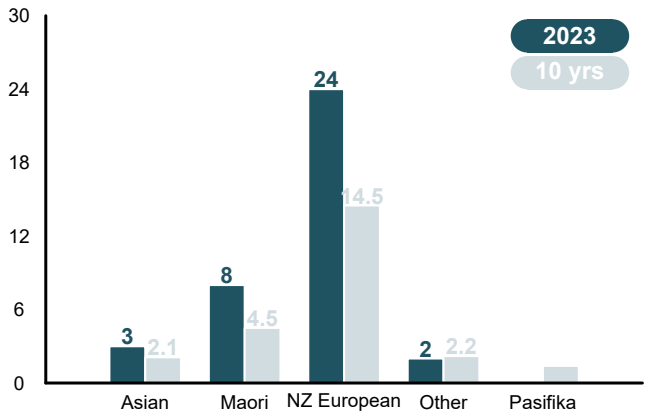
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Region 2023

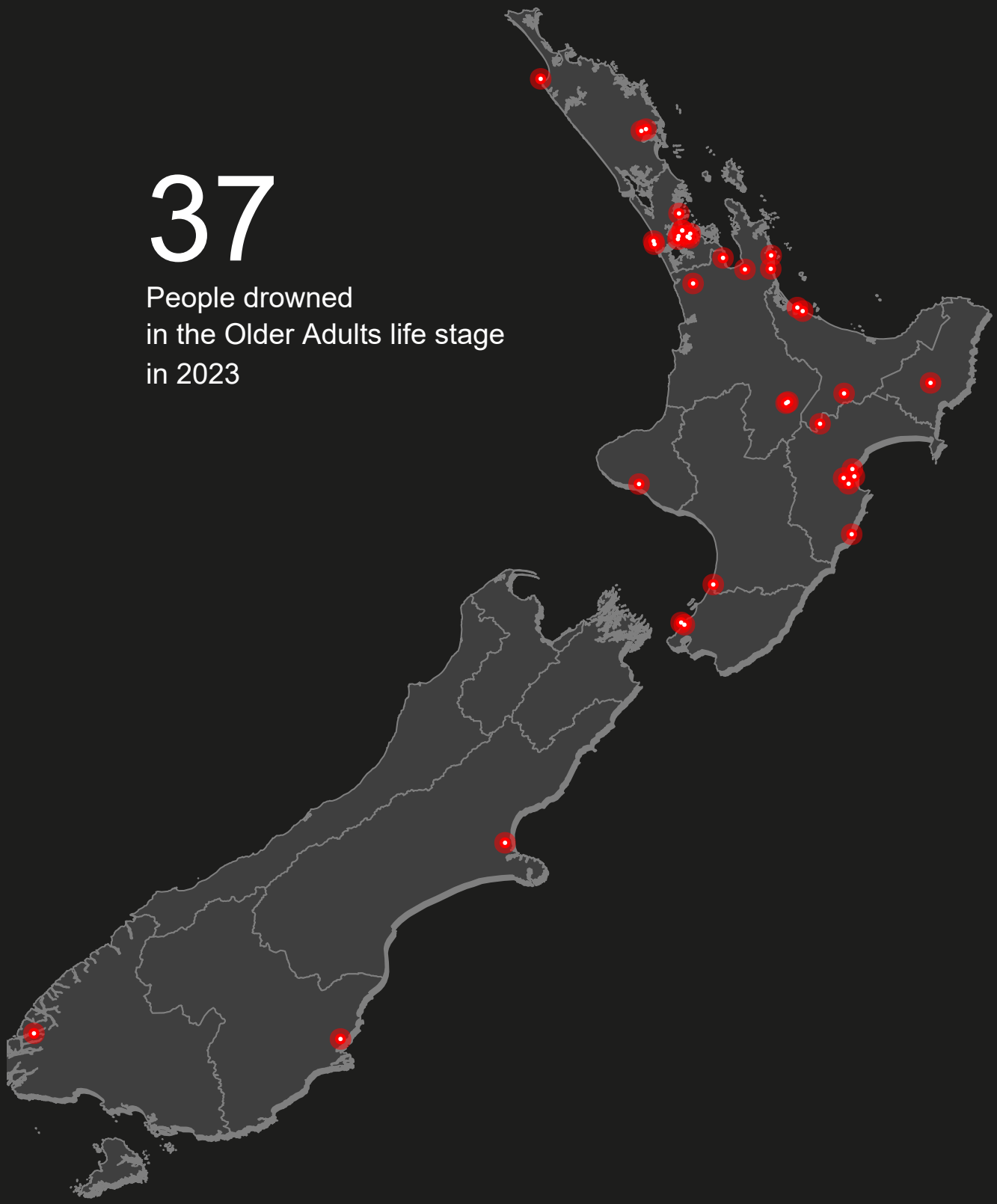


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Life Stages

Older Adults



37

People drowned
in the Older Adults life stage
in 2023

Life Stages

Older Adults

Older Adults

The "Older Adults" category encompasses individuals aged 55 years and older. This demographic may face increased risks of injury and drowning due to various factors. Research suggests that the un-matched pairing of under-estimation of conditions and an over-estimation of ability is a leading factor with this life stage. Physiological changes such as decreased muscle strength, reduced cardiorespiratory fitness, and changes in balance can affect their swimming ability and response to emergencies in the water. Chronic health conditions that often become more common with age, such as heart disease or diabetes, may also increase the risk of drowning. Additionally, medications that affect coordination or judgment may also be a contributing factor.

Snapshot

There has been a significant upward trend in drowning fatalities among older adults over the past ten years, peaking at 37 in 2023, which is 45% higher than the 10-year average of 25.5. This indicates an increasing risk of fatalities in this age group.

In terms of gender, males are disproportionately affected, accounting for 84% of drowning deaths, while females account for 16% in 2023.

When analysed by environment, the highest number of drownings occurs at the coastline (30%) followed closely by rivers (27%), then offshore, pools and home environments (each at) 14 %.

For activities, falls once again accounts for the highest proportion of drownings (49%), followed by swimming (22%), and fishing from the land and underwater at 11%.

The regional analysis shows that 27% occurred in Auckland, Waikato (19%), and flood-related Hawkes Bay (16%) are regions with higher drowning rates, suggesting regional hotspots for drowning incidents.

Ethnicity data reveals a significant number of fatalities among NZ Europeans (24) compared to other ethnic groups, followed by Māori (8) and Asian (3) demographics.

Recommendations

1. Awareness Campaigns: Increase awareness campaigns targeting the older adult population, focusing on the specific risks associated with aging and water activities.

2. Safety Education: Provide education on safe swimming practices (such as floating) and the importance of wearing life jackets, especially when engaging in activities like fishing from land or boating.

3. Environmental Conditions: Improve safety features in home environments, such as pools, and advocate for safer access to rivers and coastlines where a high number of incidents occur.

4. Targeted Interventions: Implement targeted interventions for regions with higher drowning rates to address specific local factors contributing to these incidents.

5. Cultural appropriateness: Ensure that all water safety initiatives are culturally appropriate and inclusive, reflecting the diverse demographics of the older adult population in New Zealand.

These insights and recommendations aim to assist water safety practitioners, policymakers, and community organisations develop strategies to reduce the number of preventable drownings among older adults in New Zealand.

Focus Activity

Kai Gathering

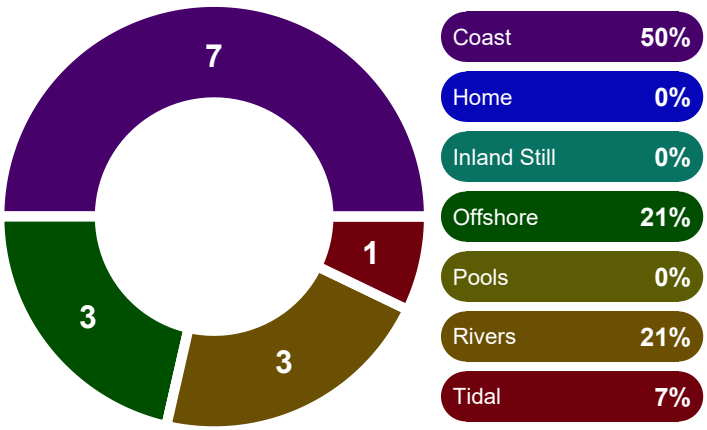
14
Drowning deaths in 2023

↓32%
7 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

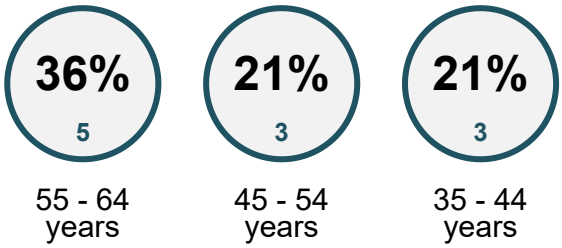
20.7
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

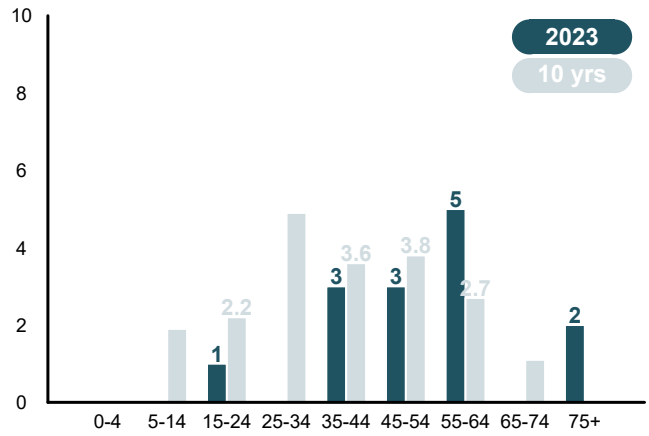
Fatalities by Environment 2023



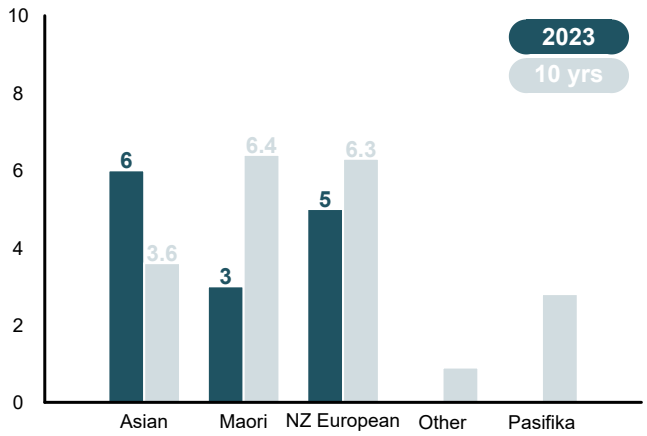
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Focus Activity

Kai Gathering

14

People drowned while gathering kai in 2023

M	55-64	NZ European	Coast	Hawke's Bay
M	55-64	NZ European	Rivers	Otago
M	75+	NZ European	Rivers	Hawke's Bay
M	45-54	Maori	Offshore	Wellington
M	35-44	Asian	Coast	Waikato
M	35-44	Asian	Coast	Waikato
M	35-44	Asian	Coast	Auckland
M	75+	NZ European	Rivers	Manawatū-Whn
M	45-54	Asian	Coast	Southland
M	55-64	NZ European	Coast	Auckland
M	15-24	Maori	Tidal	Northland
M	55-64	Asian	Coast	Auckland
M	45-54	Asian	Offshore	Auckland
M	55-64	Maori	Offshore	Northland

Focus Activity

Kai Gathering

Kai Gathering in New Zealand: A Cultural and Economic Balancing Act

In this report section, we delve into the data, identify patterns, and understand the circumstances leading to drowning incidents in kai gathering. Combining statistical analysis with real-life stories, our goal is to respect those affected while providing actionable insights for safer practices. We aim to honour the tradition of kai gathering by ensuring its safety for all involved.

Kai gathering or collecting one's own food from New Zealand's natural waters, has increased across New Zealand's diverse population. This resurgence is attributed to a mix of cultural revival, recreational pursuits, and critically, the escalating cost of living, which has increased the appeal of freely available natural resources.

Kai gathering, in this report, encompasses the activities of boat fishing, underwater (scuba, snorkelling and free diving/spear fishing), fishing from land (rock fishing), setting nets or gathering shellfish. However, these activities are accompanied by challenges and risks, particularly in water safety. The unpredictable nature of aquatic environments and varying weather conditions, coupled with occasional lack of proper preparation or knowledge, can make kai gathering a risky activity.

The current economic climate, marked by the cost-of-living crisis in New Zealand, may have shifted kai gathering from a recreational activity or established requirement for celebrations to a necessity for many, particularly in communities facing high poverty. The rising cost of living has intensified this reliance on traditional food-gathering methods as a vital response to economic constraints.

The involvement of migrant communities, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, adds another layer of complexity. These communities are disproportionately represented in drowning incidents in particular activities. This could be due to a lack of familiarity with New Zealand's coastal conditions and suitable gathering locations, a knowledge that Māori and NZ European groups might possess generationally. The report emphasises the need for tailored water safety measures that consider these unique challenges faced by new New Zealanders.

Snapshot

The 2023 Drowning Report on Kai Gathering in New Zealand presents an analysis of fatalities associated with aquatic food gathering activities. In 2023, there were 14 recorded drowning deaths or 16 % of all drownings in 2023. This is a 32% decrease from the 10-year average of 20.7 fatalities. These incidents exclusively involved males, with no female fatalities reported. The age demographics indicate that the majority of fatalities occurred among older individuals 71% were over the age of 45 (36% in the 55-64 age bracket, 14% over 75 years, and 21% in the 45-54 age range).

When examining the environments where these drownings occurred, the coastline was the most common, accounting for 46% of the incidents, followed by offshore and river environments, each comprising 23%. Tidal areas were the least represented of the natural environments, with 8% of the fatalities.

Comparing fatalities by ethnicity, the data reveals a significant representation of the Asian community, with 42%. 6 Asian drownings, predominantly rock fishing, exceeded their 10-year average, which indicates a concerning trend given the community's relatively smaller size and potentially lesser experience with local aquatic environments. Both the Māori population and NZ European both showed a lower number of fatalities compared to their relative 10-year average groups.

This analysis underscores the critical need for targeted water safety interventions, especially among high-risk demographics, and the importance of continued efforts to enhance the safety of kai gathering practices for all communities in New Zealand.

Recommendations

1. Understanding Local Conditions: Providing knowledge and education to both local and new New Zealanders about the specific conditions of New Zealand's coastal, river, and lake environments is crucial. This could include understanding tides, currents, weather patterns, and recognising dangerous 'Black spot' areas.

2. Safety Gear: Encouraging the use of appropriate safety gear, such as dive flags, life jackets, wet suits, and floatation devices.

3. Buddy System: Promoting the buddy system where kai gatherers always go in pairs or groups, ensuring that no one is gathering alone, and help is readily available in case of an emergency.

4. Communication Plan: Ensuring kai gatherers inform someone about their plans, including where they are going and the expected return time, and possibly carrying a waterproof means of communication for emergencies.

5. Cultural Respect and Integration: For Māori and others communities where kai gathering is a cultural practice, integrating traditional knowledge and practices with modern safety measures can enhance safety without compromising cultural values.

Key Activities

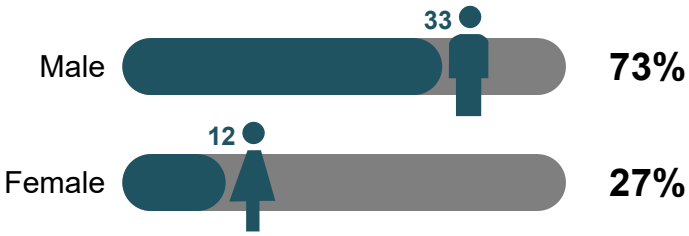
Falls

45
Drowning deaths in 2023

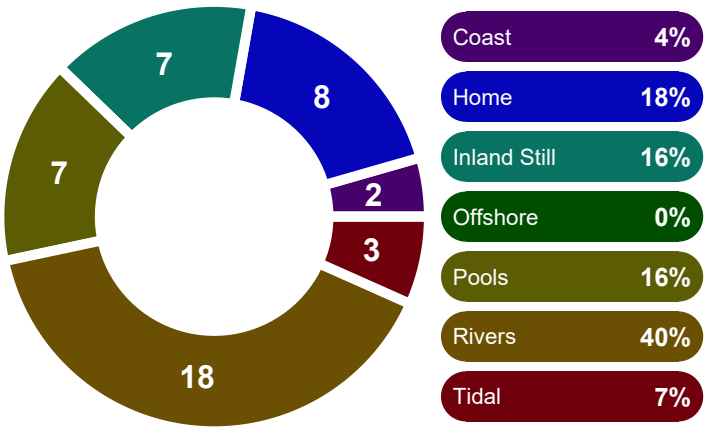
↑64%
18 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

27.4
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023



Fatalities by Environment 2023



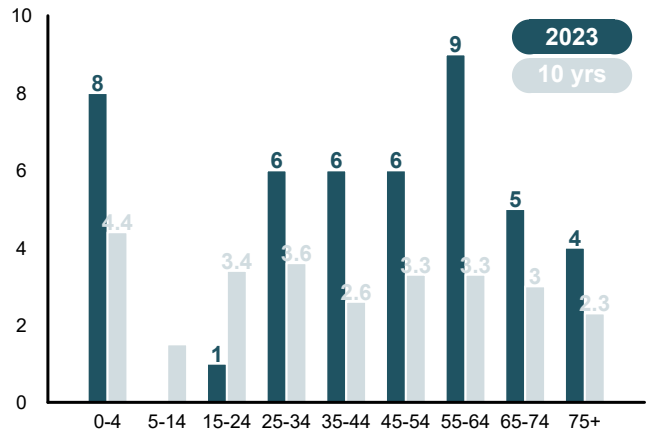
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023

20% (9) — 55 - 64 years

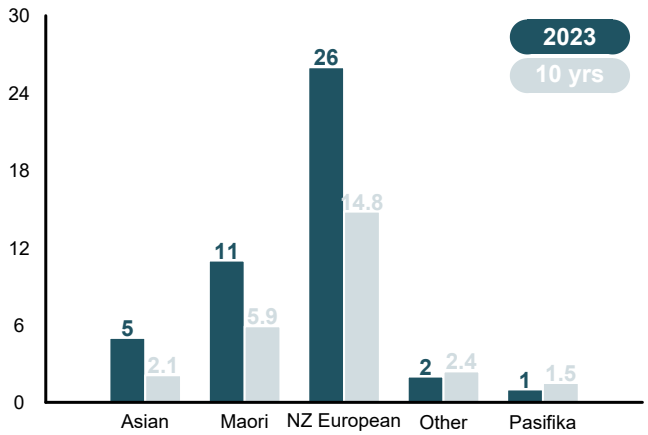
18% (8) — 0 - 4 years

13% (6) — 45 - 54 years

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

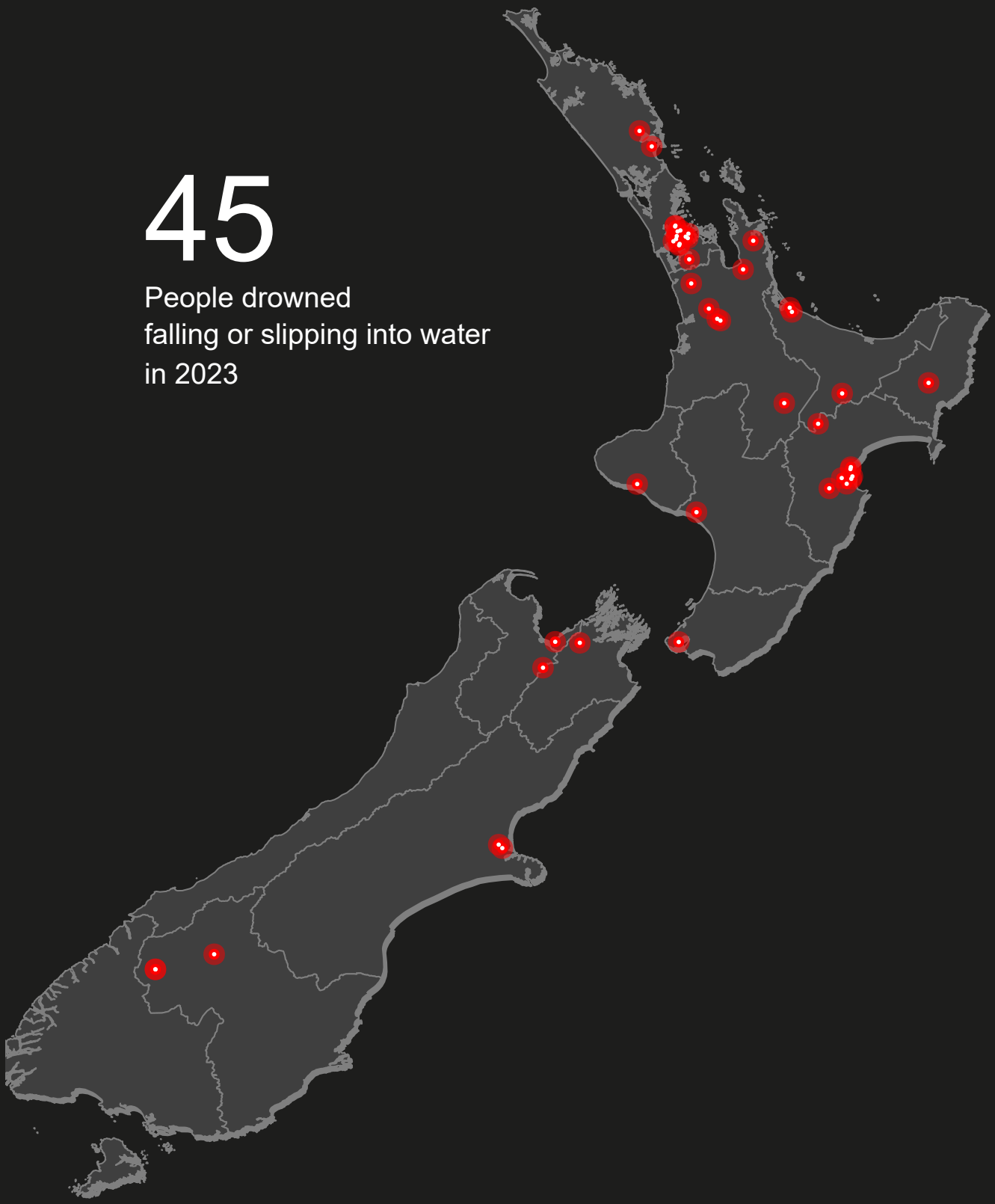


Key Activities

Falls

45

People drowned
falling or slipping into water
in 2023



Key Activities

Falls

Understanding 'Falls' in the Context of Non-Recreational Immersions

The term 'Falls' is often thought to be a simple slip or trip near water. However, within the framework of the 2023 Drowning Report, 'Falls' is a broad term encompassing a range of incidents categorised under Non-Recreational Immersions. This category is a large part of preventable drownings in New Zealand and it's a vital component in our comprehensive analysis of drowning fatalities, offering insights into the complex and varied nature of water-related incidents.

Non-Recreational Immersion incidents are complex, extending over several scenarios:

1. Fall - The deceased was out of the water and fell in. This includes young children falling into pools.
2. Flood/Civil Emergency - Caught in a flood or civil emergency
3. Rescuing Others - The deceased attempted to rescue another in trouble in the water
4. River Crossing -The deceased was attempting to cross a river.
5. Slipped Under - The deceased was in the water but not taking part in any recreational activity. This is usually people in baths/spas or young children placed in a bath/pool.
6. Swept Away - The deceased was on the water's edge, not recreating in the water, and was swept away by a wave or current
7. Unknown Immersion Incident - There is not enough information to conclude how or why the deceased ended up in the water

Snapshot

In 2023, New Zealand experienced a concerning rise in non-recreational immersion-related drownings, with 45 fatalities recorded, significantly exceeding the 10-year average of 28. This increase is partly attributable to a spike in incidents classified as 'Falls' and 'Slipped Under.'

Notably, 'Falls' accounted for 19 deaths, equalling previous peak years within the historical range, and 'Slipped Under' incidents resulted in 12 deaths, doubling the 10-year average, and marking the highest in this category since its reclassification in 2011.

The 'Falls' category saw a particular increase among the very young (0-4 years) and adults (25-34 years). Incidents involving children were universally characterised by a lack of supervision, with the victims falling into various water environments. The adult cases were complex, with many details pending full coronial reports, though alcohol involvement and potential suicides are suspected factors. Historically, medical conditions have been implicated in falls, especially among those aged 55 and over, with heart issues being the most common medical factor. Alcohol involvement in falls is also significant, with recorded blood alcohol concentrations being substantially above the legal driving limit, particularly in the 45-55 age bracket.

'Slipped Under' incidents predominantly affected older individuals, with 2023 witnessing nine fatalities in the 55+ age group, tripling the 10-year average. Bath and spa environments were the most common settings for such drownings, with bath-related fatalities doubling the decade's average and spa-related deaths exceeding it.

This data indicates a critical need for targeted interventions to prevent unsupervised access to water by young children, enhance the supervision of vulnerable adults around water, and address the influence of alcohol in drowning incidents. It also underscores the importance of addressing the specific risks posed to the elderly, such as ensuring safe bath, pool and spa environments, to mitigate the rising trend in immersion-related drownings.

Recommendations

The year 2023 marked a 64% increase in drowning deaths due to immersion incidents from the 10-year average, with a notable rise in the 'Falls' and 'Slipped Under' categories.

Falls were predominantly recorded in the youngest (0-4 years) and 25–34-year age groups, with unsupervised children and complex adult cases contributing to the higher numbers.

'Slipped Under' drownings saw a significant increase in the elderly, especially in bath and spa settings, indicating a need for enhanced safety measures in private water environments.

Alcohol and medical conditions continue to be significant factors in drowning incidents, necessitating focused preventative strategies with new partners such as medical professionals and the hospitality industry.

Key Activities

Swimming

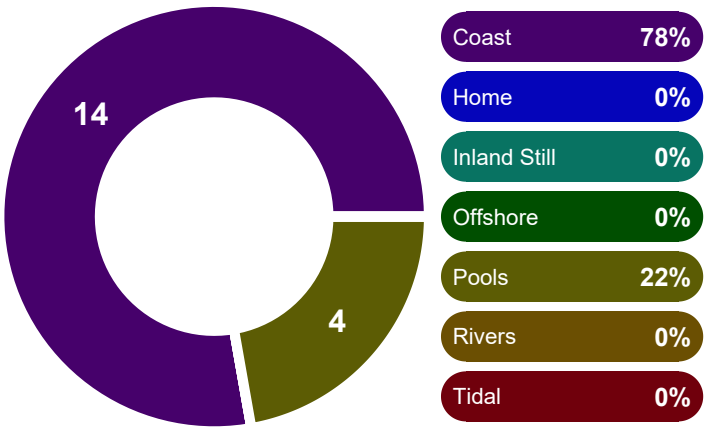
18
Drowning deaths in 2023

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

18.4
10 Year Average

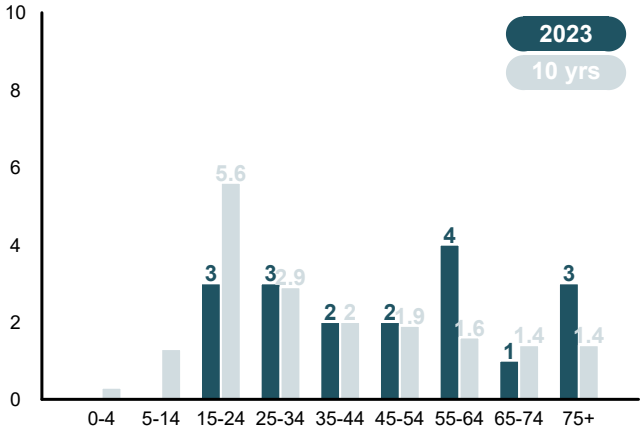
Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Environment 2023

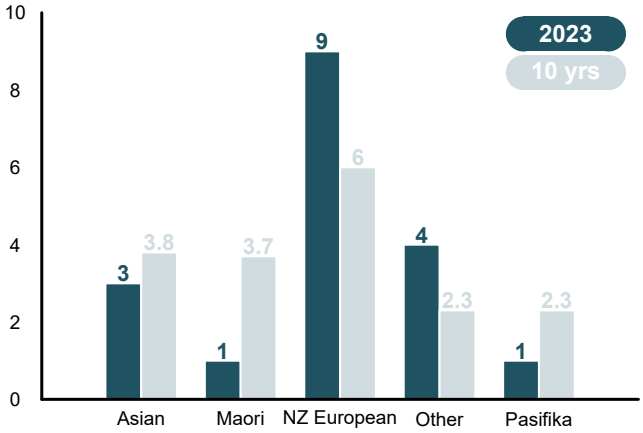


Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Key Activities

Swimming

18

People drowned
swimming or playing in water
in 2023

Key Activities

Swimming

Swimming and 'Playing in water'

Swimming or 'playing in water' typically refers to recreational activities that involve spending time in a body of water, such as a pool, lake, river, or ocean. These activities can include swimming, wading, or playing games.

The joy of swimming, whether it's a leisurely dip in the pool, playing with the kids in the waves, or an adventurous swim in the ocean, is a quintessential element of the New Zealand lifestyle. From the rugged coastline to our deep tranquil lakes or fast flowing rivers, Kiwis have a longstanding tradition of flocking to these natural aquatic playgrounds for recreation, sport, and relaxation. However, this popular pastime bears a sombre undertone due to the tragic consequences of preventable drownings. With 18 lives lost to swimming-related incidents, the data mirrors the 10-year average, highlighting an ongoing challenge for water safety in New Zealand.

The demographic data reflects certain trends – a predominance of male victims, significant risks for older age groups, especially those aged 55-64 and 75+, and a particular vulnerability at the coastline. These patterns emphasize the need for targeted safety measures and raise questions about the factors contributing to the higher risks among these groups.

The ethnic breakdown also sheds light on the impact of drownings across different communities, signalling the importance of culturally responsive water safety education and prevention strategies.

As we delve deeper into the nuances behind these figures, it becomes clear that New Zealand's love for aquatic leisure must be tempered with vigilance and a commitment to water safety.

Snapshot

There were 18 drowning deaths related to swimming in 2023, which is consistent with the 10-year average of 18.4 fatalities.

A significant majority (83%) of the fatalities were male, with 15 male victims compared to 3 female victims.

The age groups most affected were 55-64 years and 75+ years, each accounting for 22% of the fatalities, followed by the 25-34 years age group, making up 17%.

When examining the environments where the drownings occurred, the coastline was by far the most common, with 78% of the incidents. Pools accounted for 22%, while other environments like inland still water, offshore, rivers, and tidal waters had no incidents in 2023.

Comparing fatalities by age group to the 10-year average, there is a noticeable increase in the 55-64 and 75+ age groups, while other age groups have seen a decrease or no change.

In terms of ethnicity, the data show fatalities in 2023 compared to the 10-year average with higher incidents among NZ Europeans, followed by Māori, Asian, Pasifika, and 'Other' ethnicities.

Recommendations

1. Water Safety Education in Schools: Integrate basic aquatic skills and aquatic literacy/water safety education into school curriculums, to instil safe water habits from a young age. For example, Water Skills for life™-Pool, Beach, and River programmes.

2. "Black Spot" Targeted Action Plans: Develop and implement action plans specifically designed for specific "Back Spot" swimming locations. These plans should target the overrepresented demographic, focusing on the activities with the highest risk.

3. Educational Outreach for High-Risk Age Groups: Provide educational programs tailored to the high-risk groups, emphasising risk awareness and good decision making, floating practices, and emergency preparedness.

4. Data-Driven Resource Allocation: Allocate resources and investment based on data trends, focusing on regions and demographics that are most at risk.

5. Alcohol and Water Safety: Commit resources to better understand the impact of alcohol consumption when engaging in water activities, in the New Zealand context.

Key Activities

Craft

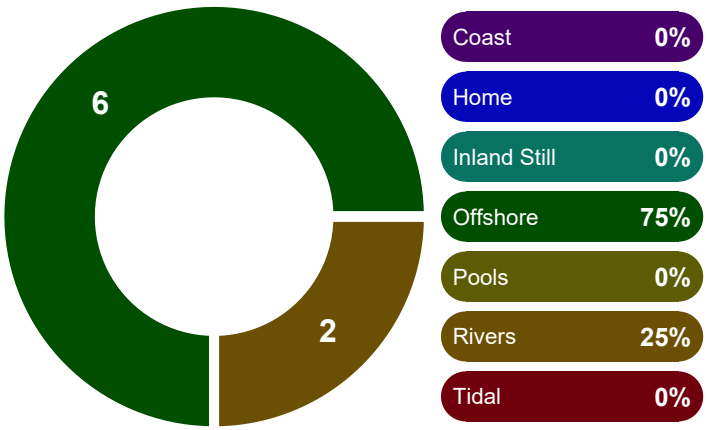
8
Drowning deaths in 2023

↓54%
9 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

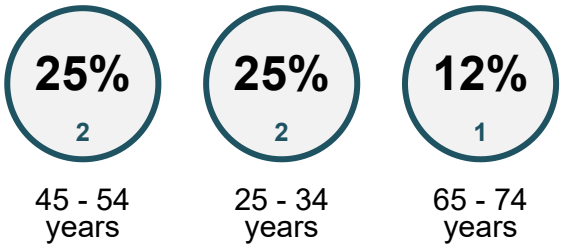
17.4
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

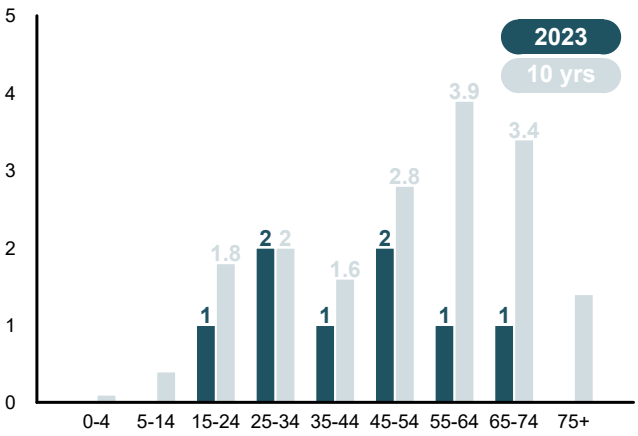
Fatalities by Environment 2023



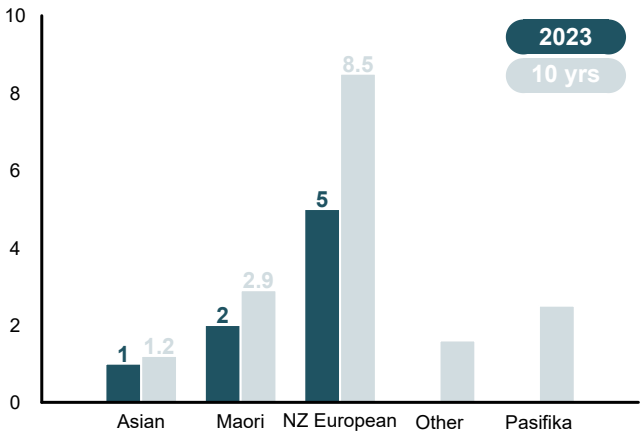
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Key Activities

Craft

8

People drowned while on boats or craft in 2023

Key Activities

Craft

Craft

The craft category encompasses a variety of water-based activities and vessels, reflecting the diverse ways people interact with New Zealand's waters. The category includes powered boats, such as motorboats, jet boats and jet skis. Non-powered boats are also a significant part of this category, including dinghies, canoes, kayaks, rafts, and stand-up paddleboards. Ailing craft vary from fixed keel boats to offshore sailing vessels, trailer sailers, small sailing dinghies, and windsurfing boards.

People use craft for a wide variety of reasons; from work, Transport, putting kai on the table, and for relaxation. However, safe use of craft requires training and skill development, awareness of water conditions, a commitment to safe practice, suitable equipment and good decision making.

Snapshot

The infographic details the fatal implications of watercraft-related activities in 2023. It indicates a total of 8 drowning deaths associated with craft, which is a 54% decrease from the 10-year average of 17.4 deaths and a significant reduction on the truly tragic figure of 29 in 2022, resulting from two sperate multiple fatality events. All fatalities were male, with most age groups being affected. This is different to normal pattern showing over representation of older (45+) age groups (80% in 2022). Most incidents occurred offshore, accounting for 75% of the fatalities.

Recommendations

The data from the 2023 report indicates a reduction in drowning deaths associated with the use of craft, which suggests that current safety campaigns and initiatives may be contributing positively to water safety outcomes.

1. Lifejacket Usage: Continued promotion of lifejacket usage, like the current joint Water Safety New Zealand and Coastguard New Zealand lifejacket campaign "Just Wear It", should remain a priority. Recommending further research into lifejacket wear-rates and their correlation with survival in drowning incidents could provide valuable data to reinforce the importance of lifejacket use.

2. Compulsory Lifejacket Use: Advocacy for compulsory lifejacket use in boats under 6 metres should continue. The data clearly supports the argument that such regulations could prevent drowning deaths. While central government legislation is important, local council bylaws may be quicker to implement and could serve as a model for national standards.

3. Targeted Awareness Campaigns: Initiatives like Maritime NZ's Kia Mataara and the Boating Safety Code have likely raised awareness among watercraft users of what safe practice looks like. Ensuring that these awareness campaigns are reaching the most at-risk groups, such as older males, is crucial.

4. Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation: It is important to monitor the impact of these interventions on drowning statistics continually. This will not only measure effectiveness but also provide data-driven insights for future campaigns.

5. Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging with stakeholders such as fishing clubs, marinas, and boating clubs to promote safety measures and education can create safety advocates within the community. Stakeholders can also provide valuable feedback on barriers to compliance and help tailor more effective safety messages.

6. Enhanced Enforcement: There should be a balanced approach between advocacy and enforcement. Where advocacy ends, enforcement should take over to ensure compliance with safety measures. Collaborating with Harbour Masters to ensure they have the resources and authority to act is essential.

These recommendations serve to build upon the positive trends indicated by the reduction in drowning deaths associated with crafts. By focusing on these areas, it is hoped that the downward trend in fatalities will continue, making New Zealand's waters safer for all.

Key Environments

Coast

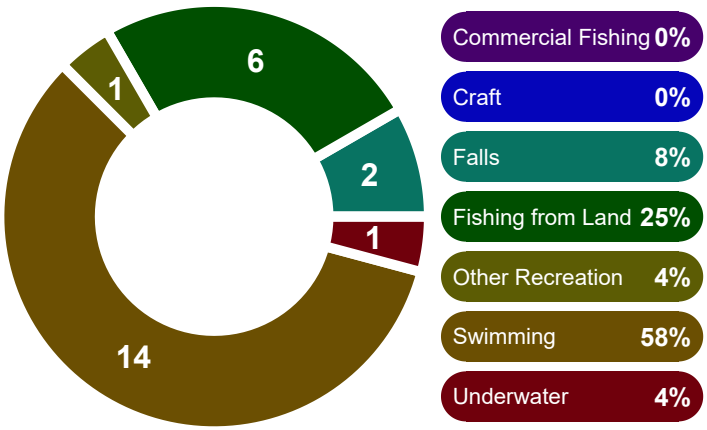
24
Drowning deaths in 2023

↑13%
3 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

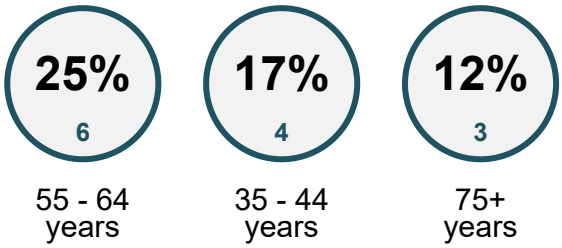
21.2
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

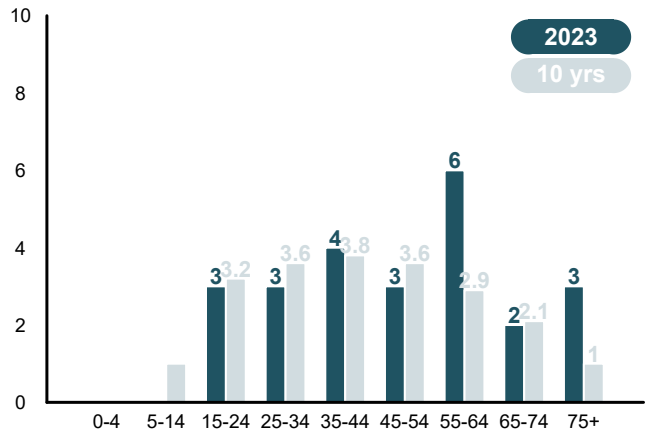
Fatalities by Activity 2023



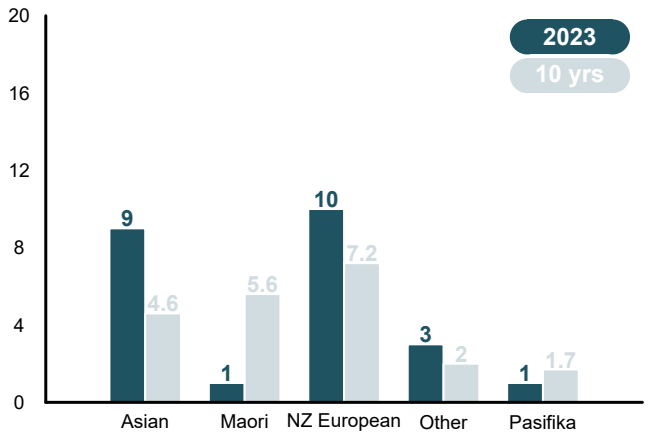
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Key Environments

Coast

24

People drowned on the coast in 2023

Key Environments

Coast

Coast

New Zealand, is a nation renowned for its extensive and diverse coastline. Stretching over 15,000 kilometres it is the tenth longest in the world. Encompassing a wide array of coastal environments – from the golden sands of the Coromandel Peninsula to the rugged, wild shores of Fiordland. The coastline's sheer length and varied nature supports a wide range of interests, but this variety of conditions also presents a complex challenge in terms of water safety.

A significant characteristic of New Zealand's coastline is the ability of New Zealanders to access it easily and freely. Despite this ease of access, it is largely unmanaged and unpatrolled. While popular beaches near urban centres like Auckland's Takapuna beach or Wellington's Oriental Bay may have lifeguard services, especially during peak summer months, most of the coastline remains without regular patrols. This lack of support extends to remote beaches, secluded coves, and vast stretches of the shoreline that are popular for activities like fishing, boating, and coastal walks.

This section looks at the challenges and risks associated with New Zealand's coastline. We will highlight drowning 'black spots' along these shores, analysing patterns and identifying key areas of concern. In doing so, we respect the delicate balance between enjoying New Zealand's coastal treasures and safeguarding lives against the unpredictable nature of its waters.

Snapshot

Drowning Fatalities Increasing: There were 24 drowning deaths reported along the coastline in 2023, which is a 13% increase from the 10-year average of 21.2. Almost all coastal fatalities (22) occurred in the North Island reflecting where most of the coastal activity is undertaken.

Disproportionate Gender Impact: The data shows a stark gender disparity, with males accounting for 96% (23) of the fatalities. This could suggest that men may be more likely to engage in riskier behaviours or activities along the coastline.

Age Group Vulnerabilities: Despite common opinion, young people tend not to be those most at risk when undertaking activities at the coast. The most affected age groups are 55-64 years (25%), 35-44 years (17%), and those over 75 years (12%). This indicates that middle-aged to older individuals are at higher risk. This could be due to a range of factors including overestimation of personal ability or underestimation of the risks posed by the marine environment.

Activities Leading to Drowning: Swimming (playing in the water) is by far the leading activity during which drownings occur, representing 58% (14) of the incidents. This is followed by fatalities associated with fishing from land at 25% (6).

The high incidence of swimming-related drownings amongst male adults highlights the need to focus safety interventions on helping improve the decision making of males whilst at the coast.

Ethnic Disparities in Drowning Fatalities: Comparing fatalities by ethnicity for 2023 against the 10-year average, we observe that more than a third (37.5%, 9) were of Asian ethnicity. This is a notable increase in drowning deaths, linked predominantly to rock fishing. The overall increase warrants further investigation and localised "black spot" targeted action plans.

These insights should be considered by water safety practitioners, government officials, and the general public to understand the specific risks associated with the coastline and to develop targeted, evidence-based interventions to reduce drowning incidents. Regular surveillance, public education campaigns, and specific warnings for high-risk groups and or "black spots" planning could be measures to mitigate the risks highlighted by the 2023 data.

Recommendations

1. Targeted Safety Campaigns: Develop and implement safety campaigns specifically designed for the male demographic, particularly focusing on the activities with the highest risk, such as swimming and fishing from land.

2. "Black Spot" Targeted Action Plans: Develop and implement action plans specifically designed for specific "Back Spot" locations. These plans should target the overrepresented demographic, focusing on the activities with the highest risk.

3. Educational Outreach for High-Risk Age Groups: Provide educational programs tailored to the 35+ males, emphasising risk awareness and good decision making, floating practices, and emergency preparedness.

4. Targeted Cultural Competency in Water Safety: Engage with targeted Asian communities where there has been an increase in drowning incidents to understand cultural practices and beliefs around water activities. This engagement will help in crafting culturally sensitive and effective safety messages.

5. Emergency Response Strategies: Improve emergency response times and strategies in coastal areas, ensuring that lifesaving equipment and trained personnel are readily accessible, especially in remote locations. For example, supporting Coastguard NZ resource high risk locations.

6. Data-Driven Resource Allocation: Allocate resources and investment based on data trends, focusing on regions and demographics that are most at risk.

7. Water Safety Education in Schools: Integrate basic aquatic skills and aquatic literacy/water safety education into school curriculums.

Key Environments

Rivers

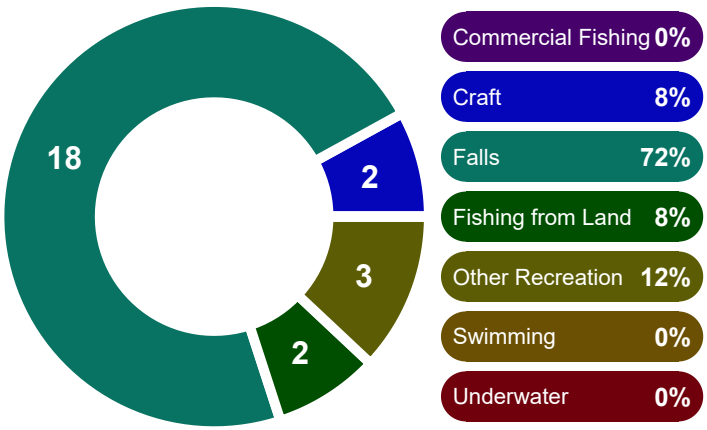
25
Drowning deaths in 2023

↑34%
6 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

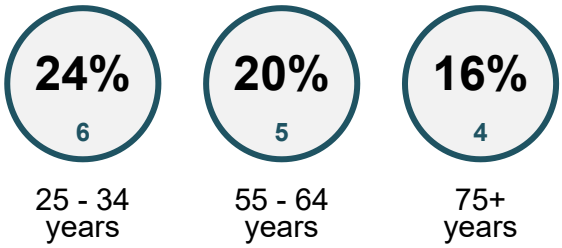
18.7
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

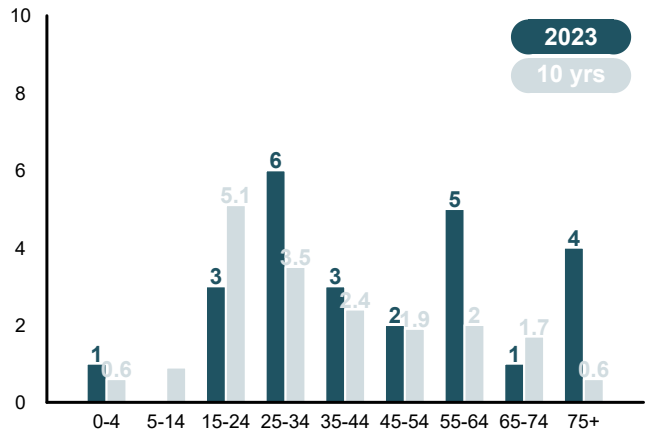
Fatalities by Activity 2023



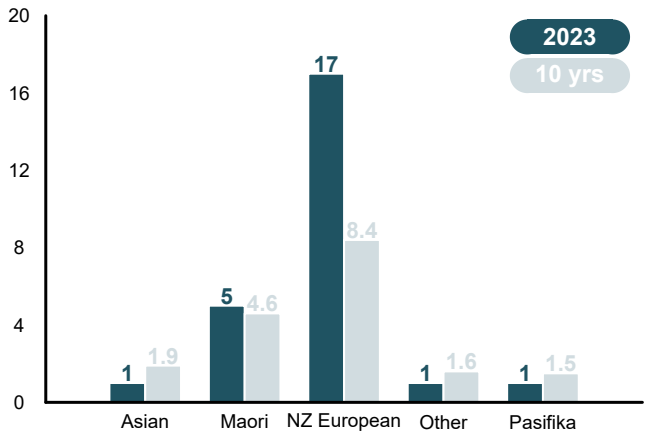
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

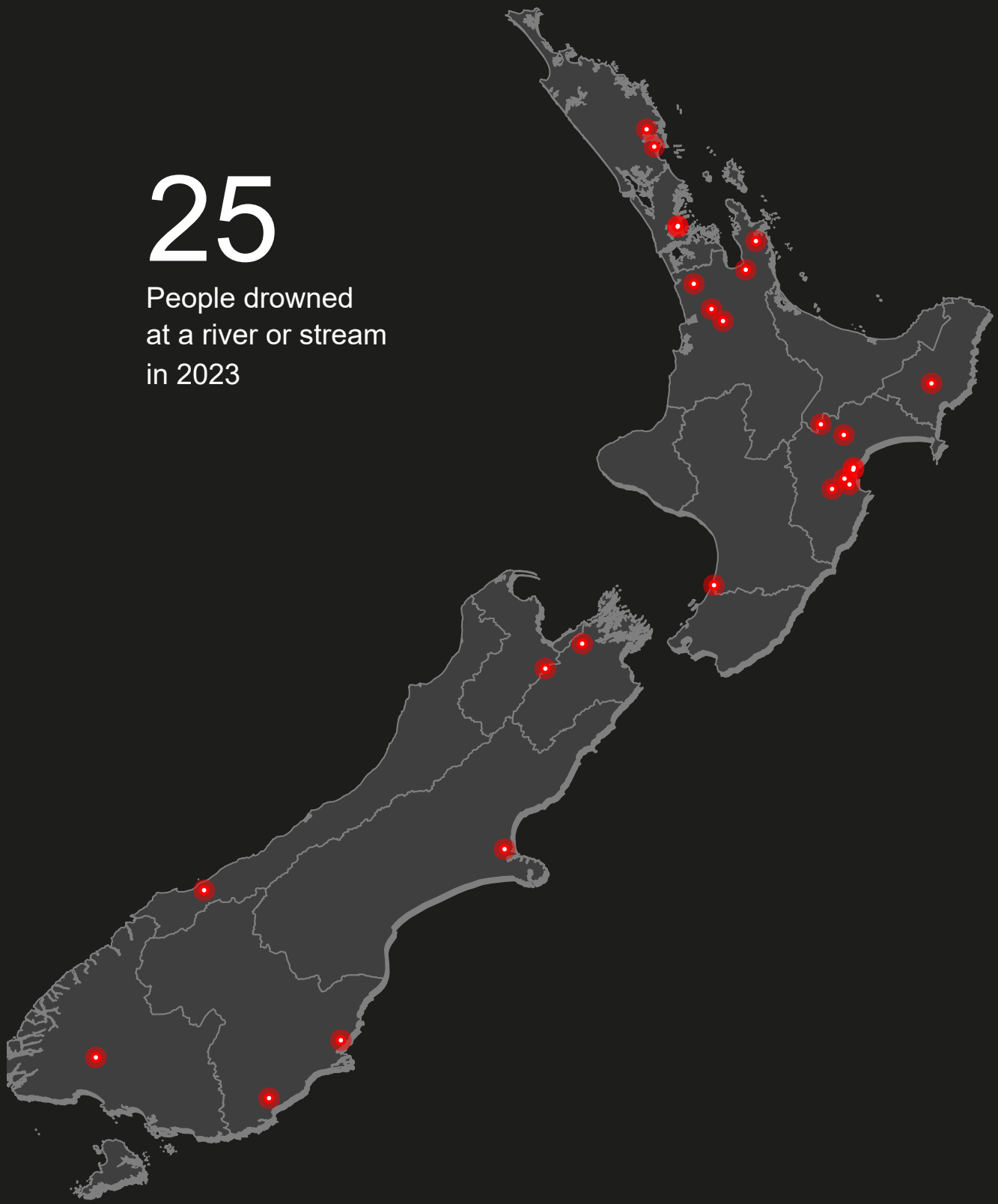


Key Environments

Rivers

25

People drowned
at a river or stream
in 2023



Key Environments

Rivers

Rivers

New Zealand's rivers, with their breathtaking beauty and cultural significance, are an integral part of the nation's identity and heritage. These waterways, coursing through the heart of Aotearoa, range from the majestic Waikato in the North Island, renowned for its length and historical significance, to the swiftly flowing Clutha in the South Island, known for its gold and hydroelectric power generation.

The significance of rivers to all New Zealanders cannot be overstated. But for Māori, rivers are viewed as taonga (treasures), embodying both spiritual and physical sustenance. They are seen as ancestors, with many iwi tracing their lineage and identity back to these waterways. The Whanganui River, for example, is central to the Whanganui iwi, who regard it as Te Awa Tupua – an ancestral river. This river is not only a source of physical nourishment but also a spiritual guide and guardian.

Historically, rivers in New Zealand have posed both opportunities and challenges. They have been vital for transportation, food sources, and places to recreate and renew oneself However, they have also been sites of conflict and struggle. The importance of rivers in strategic and economic terms often made them focal points for disputes and significant historical events.

As we delve into the specific data and narratives surrounding drownings in New Zealand's rivers in 2023, it is crucial to remember the profound cultural and historical importance these waterways hold. They are not just geographical features but are deeply intertwined with the lives and histories of us as Kiwis. This report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the safety challenges associated with these rivers, in the hope of better preserving both their natural beauty and the lives of those who interact with them.

Snapshot

Important context - Significant storm events in late summer 2023, principally the Auckland Anniversary Weekend Floods and Cyclone Gabrielle, resulted in the tragic loss of nine lives. All of these occurred in rivers and streams which has a big influence on the information presented below.

Total Fatalities: There were 25 drowning deaths in rivers in 2023. More than one in four drowning fatalities last year involved rivers making these our riskiest water environment in Aotearoa.

Drowning Fatalities Increasing: This number signifies a 34% increase from the 10-year average, with an additional 6 people having lost their lives compared to the average. But this result was significantly impacted by the 9 deaths associated with significant storms. If these are excluded, the result is consistent with the average over the past decade.

Gender Distribution: The vast majority were male (22 deaths, 88%). The three female fatalities (12%) were all connected to summer storm events.

Age Groups Most Affected:

- 25-34 years: 24% (6 deaths)
- 55-64 years: 20% (5 deaths)
- 75 years: 16% (4 deaths)

Most drownings were due to “falls” into and around rivers (18 incidents, 72%). This includes nine people being swept away in flood waters.

Other activities such as 'Craft' and 'Fishing from Land' were also noted but to a much lesser extent (8% and 12% respectively).

In terms of ethnicity, most of these fatalities involved NZ European (17) but this is significantly influenced by storm related loss of life. This number is more than double the 10-year average (8).

Recommendations

1. Water Safety Education in Schools: Integrate aquatic literacy into the school curriculum, focusing specifically on river safety for any school where children are likely to be engaging with rivers The forthcoming Water Skills for Life-River programme, set to launch in 2024, is a step in the right direction. This programme aims to equip students with practical skills and knowledge about river dynamics, risks, and safe practices. By embedding such education early on, children and young adults can develop a respect for water bodies and an understanding of the precautions needed to enjoy New Zealand's rivers safely.

2. “Black Spot” Targeted Action Plans: Develop and implement action plans specifically designed for specific “Back Spot” locations. These plans should target the overrepresented demographic, focusing on the activities with the highest risk.

3. Data Enhancement: Improve data collection on river-related activities to better categorise and understand the circumstances leading to drownings.

4. Safety Infrastructure and river wardens: Improve safety infrastructure along riversides, including barriers, signage, and designated safe crossing points to prevent falls. Shift high use walkways away from the immediate river edge to reduce the chance of users falling into water. Consider River Wardens at high-risk locations e.g. Waikato River swimming and jumping spots.

5. Activity Safety Guidelines: Review, refresh and promote clear safety guidelines. Guidelines such as those produced by the NZ Mountain Safety Council “Stop before you cross” and their “How to handle rivers like a pro” interactive tool are a great river safety resource.


MAGNE-LATCH

Key Environments

Pools

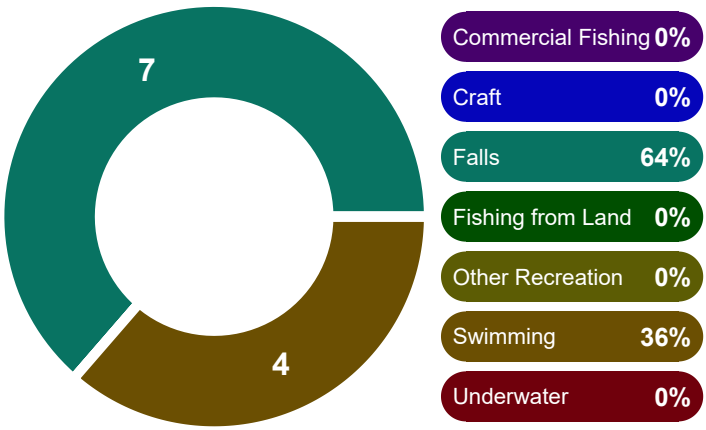
11
Drowning deaths in 2023

↑90%
5 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

5.8
10 Year Average

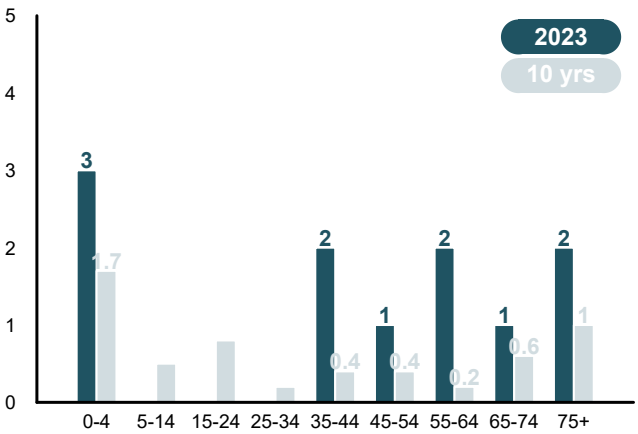
Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Activity 2023

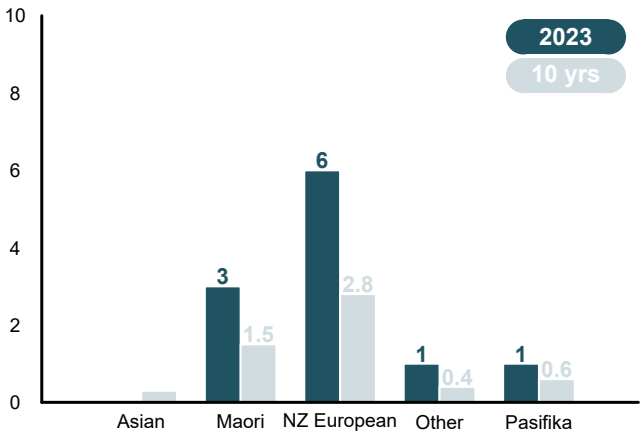


Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023

Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Key Environments

Pools

11

People drowned
in a pool
in 2023

Key Environments

Pools

Pools

New Zealand's love for water is as deep as the Pacific, with pools playing a central role in our recreational and family activities. However, pools also present unique risks, particularly when it comes to drowning incidents. As we delve into the pool-related drowning data in the 2023 Drowning Report, it is crucial to differentiate between the types of pools prevalent in New Zealand

In the comprehensive dataset provided by DrownBase™, the categorisation of pool-related drownings is meticulously detailed, reflecting the diverse environments in which these incidents occur in New Zealand. Pools are segmented into eight distinct categories, each representing a unique setting and associated risk factors. These categories include:

Home Pools, Portable Pools, Hotel/Motel Pools, Institution Pools, Public Pools, School Pools, Spa Pools, and Thermal Pools

Each of these categories presents distinct challenges and considerations in terms of water safety and drowning prevention. Understanding these differences is crucial in developing targeted strategies and interventions to reduce the incidence of drownings in these diverse pool environments.

The Critical Factor: Supervision of Little New Zealanders

In our analysis, supervision emerges as a pivotal factor in preventing pool-related drownings, especially among young New Zealanders. The stark difference in supervision levels between home and public pools significantly influences the risk factors associated with each environment. In home pools, the responsibility of supervision falls primarily on family members or guardians, where lapses can tragically lead to drowning incidents. The presence of distractions, lack of formal training in water safety, and overestimation of a child's swimming ability are common contributors to such tragedies.

On the other hand, council-run/public pools benefit from structured supervision by trained professionals. Lifeguards not only actively monitor swimmers but also enforce safety rules, thereby reducing the risk of drowning. However, it is essential to remember that even in these controlled environments, parental supervision is still required for young children.

In the following sections, we will explore the data and narratives behind pool-related drownings in New Zealand, emphasising the critical role of supervision in safeguarding our young population. Our goal is to provide insights that will not only inform but also empower families, communities, and policymakers to strengthen water safety practices around pools, ensuring that these spaces remain sources of joy and not of tragedy.

Snapshot

Drowning Fatalities Increasing: There were 11 drowning deaths in pools in 2023, almost double (90%) the 10-year average. This is a concerning result after a long period of decline in pool related fatalities across Aotearoa.

Gender Impact: Uncharacteristically females accounted for 55% (6) of the deaths, while males were 45% (5). This result differs from all other environments where male fatality rates far exceed female rates. It is likely that the perceived safety and security of pools attract greater use by females, particularly older females.

Age Groups Vulnerabilities: The age groups most affected were "0-4 years"(3) and "75+ years," (2) indicating that the most vulnerable age groups are the very young and the elderly (54%) where they are most at risk when using pools without others close at hand.

Activities leading to Drowning: The fatalities by activity show that 64% (7) of the incidents were associated with Falls,"while 36% (4) involved "Swimming,".

Ethnic Disparities: The 2023 ethnicity breakdown exhibits a notable disparity, with Māori (3) and NZ European (6) ethnicities witnessing a significant increase in drowning deaths compared to the 10-year average.

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Supervision and Barriers: For "0-4 years" and "75+ years" age groups, ensuring constant, vigilant supervision and physical barriers to prevent unsupervised access to pool areas are vital life-saving measures in the pool context.

2. Discourage using pools alone: Encourage pool users to always have others nearby to assist if something goes wrong.

3. Water Safety Education in Schools: Integrate basic aquatic skills and aquatic literacy/water safety education into school curriculums to instil safe water habits from a young age. For example, Water Skills for life-Pool, Beach and River programmes.

4. Fall Prevention Programs: Implement comprehensive fall prevention strategies, including non-slip surfaces, adequate lighting, and clear signage around pool areas to reduce the risk of falls leading to drowning focussing on older adults and parent/supervisor of little New Zealanders.

5. Regular Safety Audits for Pool Environments: Conduct regular assessments of both private and public pool facilities (including aged care facilities) to ensure compliance with safety standards and identify potential hazards.

6. Data-Driven Policy and Resource Allocation: Direct resources and interventions to high-risk groups and activities, informed by demographc data.

Key Environments

Offshore

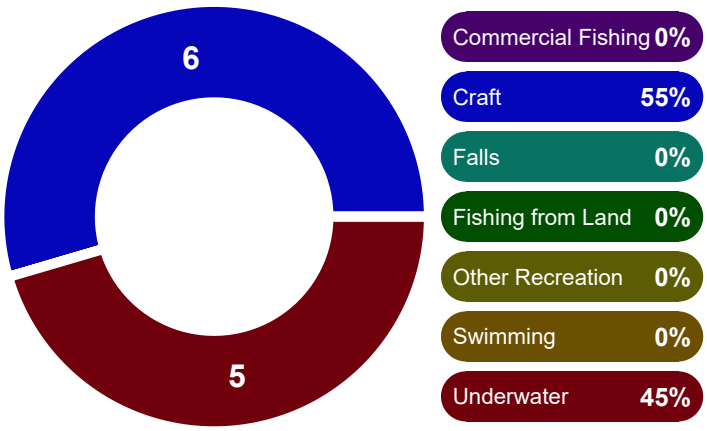
11
Drowning deaths in 2023

Same number of lives lost compared to the 10 year average

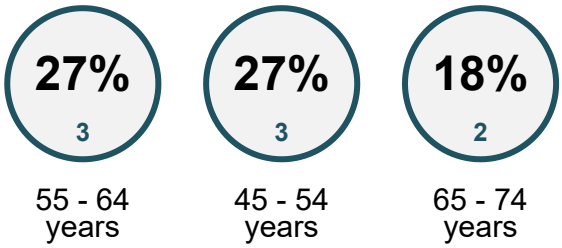
11.3
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

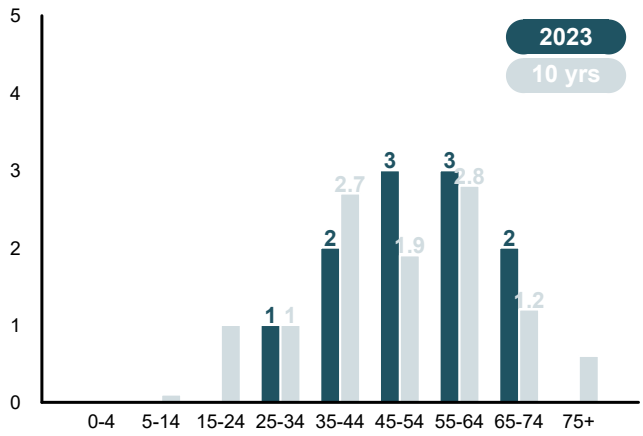
Fatalities by Activity 2023



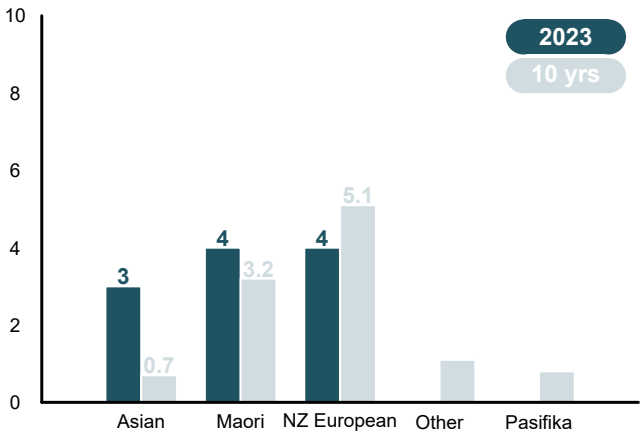
Fatalities by Age Group (Top 3) 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Key Environments

Offshore

11

People drowned while offshore in 2023

Key Environments

Offshore

Offshore

New Zealand, an island nation with an extensive coastline, is surrounded by a vast and often changeable maritime environment. In the 2023 Drowning Report, we explore these offshore zones, which are categorized based on their distance from the shore and the unique challenges each presents.

0 - 1 Km from Shore: This near offshore zone extends beyond the Coast 'to approximately 200 metres out. This is a transitional area where recreational activities begin to intersect with the risks of open waters.

1 - 5 Km from Shore: Activities occurring within this middle offshore zone are significant in that they represent a shift from casual, inshore recreation to more purposeful offshore excursions. These waters demand heightened preparedness and respect due to their increasing distance from immediate help and their potential for rapid environmental changes.

5 Km + from Shore: The outer offshore zone, stretching from 5 kilometres to the 200-kilometer search and rescue boundary, encompasses deep waters that are often the domain of professional mariners and serious sea-faring enthusiasts. Here, the isolation and exposure to the elements increase, and the margin for error decreases.

Each of these offshore zones requires different levels of expertise, preparation, and caution due to varying conditions such as water depth, weather patterns, and the time it may take for rescue services to respond to an emergency. The 2023 Drowning Report examines the incidents within these offshore categories, providing insights into the activities that led to drownings, the demographics of those affected, and the circumstances surrounding these tragic events.

In this section, we will delve into the data and analyses of offshore drownings with the aim of not only remembering those who have lost their lives but also learning how we might prevent such losses in the future. Through a geographical lens, we will uncover the patterns and risks associated with New Zealand's offshore environments and offer recommendations to enhance the safety of all who venture into these waters.

Snapshot

Drowning Fatalities Stable: There were 11 offshore drowning deaths in 2023. This is in line with the 10-year average of 11.3 fatalities, indicating a consistent risk level over the past decade. The result in 2023 is significantly less that the from a dramatic loss of 24 lives in 2022 which was influenced by two separate multiple fatality events

Gender Disparity: All offshore drowning victims were male, which again points to a potential gender-specific risk factor or behavioural pattern needing to be addressed.

Age Groups at Risk: In 2023 the age groups 45-54 years and 55-64 years accounted for 54% of the fatalities, and the 65-74 years age group for 18%, further highlighting that middle-aged to older adults are at greater risk in offshore environments.

Activities Leading to Drowning: The activities with the highest fatalities were related to using craft (55%, 6) and underwater activities (45%, 5).

Ethnicity Considerations: When comparing fatalities by ethnicity against the 10-year average, there is an increase in the fatality rates among certain ethnic groups, Asian (3) and Māori (4) were both above their associated 10-year average.

Recommendations

1. Mandatory Lifejacket Use: Continue to advocate for mandatory lifejacket use whilst on small craft (under 6m) to increase the chance of survival when something goes wrong.

2. Boating Safety Education: Strengthen boating safety education, emphasising the importance of life jackets, communication equipment, adherence to weather advisories, and good decision making given the high percentage of fatalities associated with craft usage. Target older males.

3. Dive Safety: Continue to support localised approaches to enhance training and awareness of safe diving practices, considering the significant number of fatalities related to underwater activities.

4. Monitoring and Enforcement: Increase monitoring and enforcement of safety regulations in offshore activities, including random safety checks and strict penalties for non-compliance.

5. Research on Gender-Specific Behaviours: Conduct research to understand why males are the sole victims in offshore drownings and develop preventive measures that address these findings.

6. Emergency Response Preparedness: Increase emergency response capabilities and training specific to offshore incidents, ensuring rapid and effective rescue operations within the 0-5 km offshore zone and beyond.

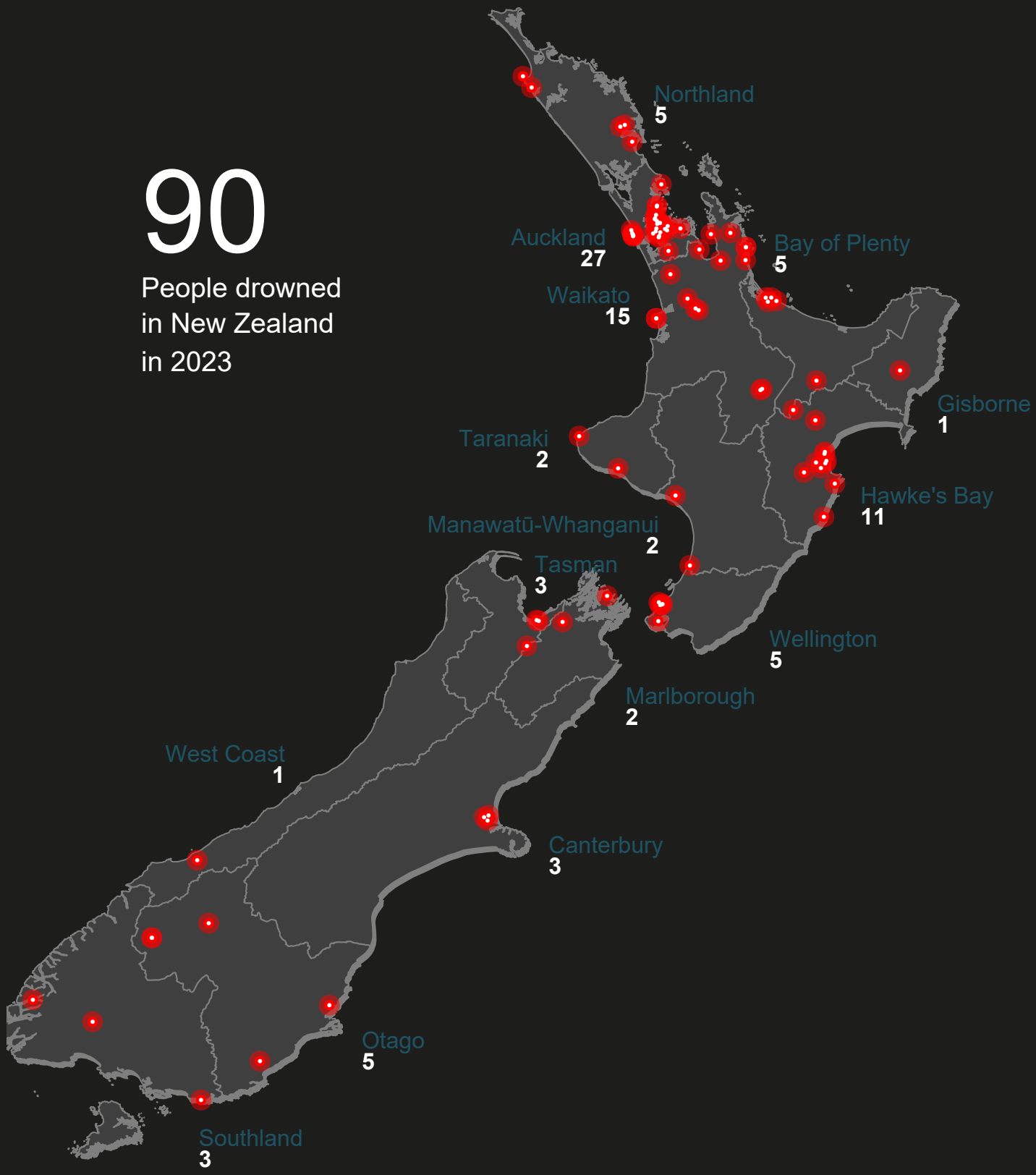
By focusing on these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards mitigating the risks associated with New Zealand’s offshore waters and reducing the number of preventable drowning deaths.

Regional

Where are People Drowning?

90

People drowned in New Zealand in 2023



Regional

Northland

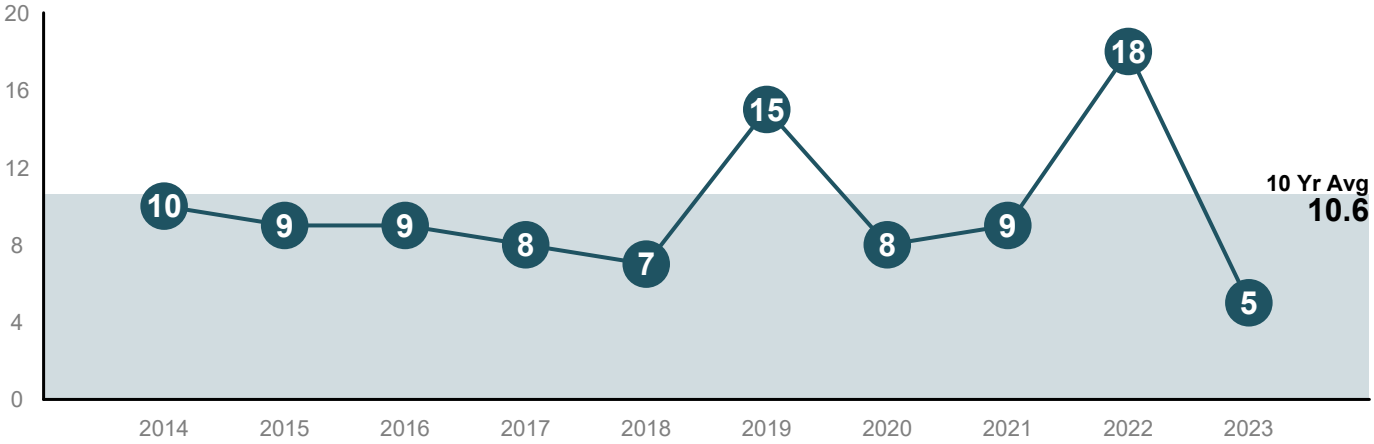
5

People drowned
in the Northland region
in 2023

M	35-44	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	75+	Maori	Other Recreation	Rivers
M	55-64	Maori	Falls	Home
M	15-24	Maori	Underwater	Tidal
M	55-64	Maori	Underwater	Offshore

Regional

Northland



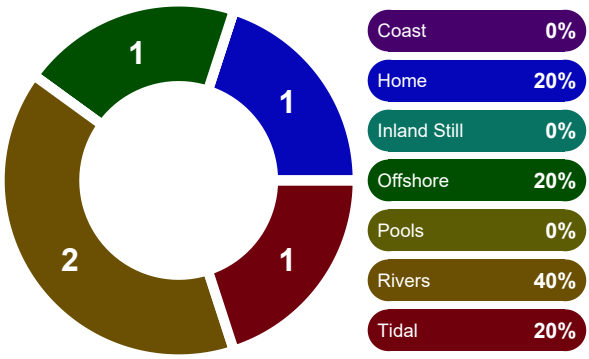
5
Drowning deaths in 2023

53%
6 less people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

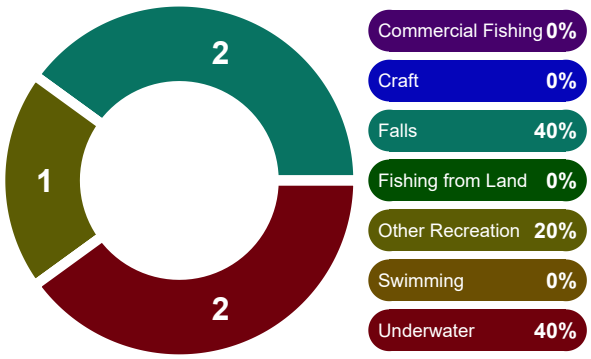
10.6
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

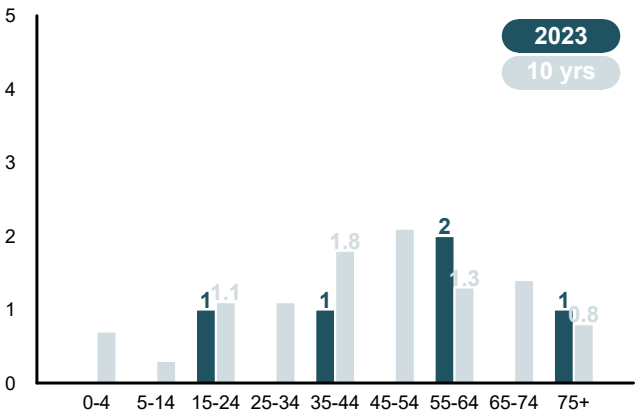
Fatalities by Environment 2023



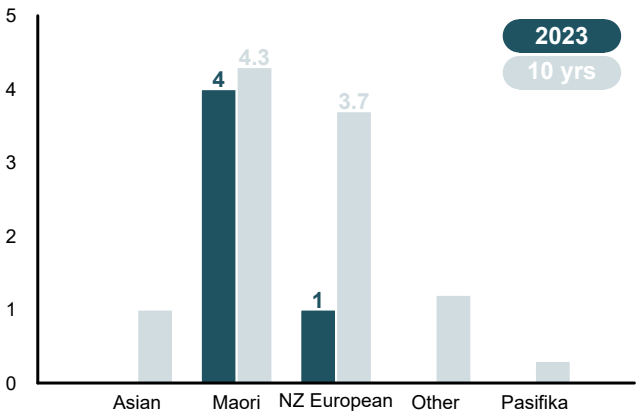
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

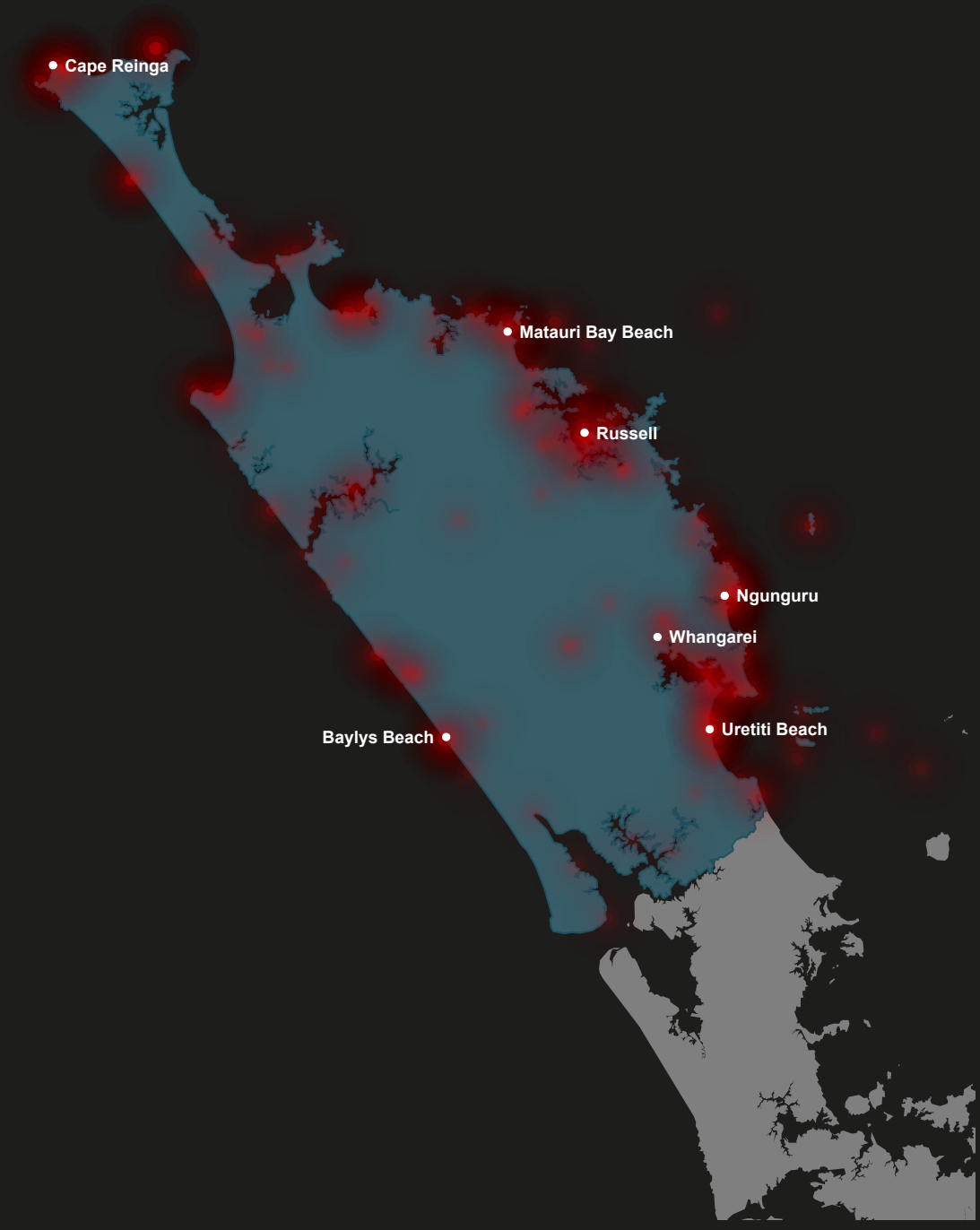


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Northland



Regions

Northland

Northland

This section delves deeper into the statistics, stories, and systemic changes underway in Northland, aiming to provide actionable insights for water safety practitioners, policymakers, and the community at large, in the quest to prevent future tragedies on the water.

Northland is a region that extends from Mangawhai in the southeast, through the Kaipara Harbour, to Cape Rēinga at the northern tip. Known as the 'winterless North,' it enjoys a mild, subtropical climate thanks to its low elevation and proximity to the sea. The region's natural treasures include over 3,000km of coastline, ancient forests, and abundant wildlife, all within 1.25 million hectares of land.

There are 12 Iwi whose tribal boundary falls either partially or entirely within Te Tai Tokerau. These include Ngati Kuri, Ngai Takoto, Te Aupouri, Ngati Kahu, Ngati Kahu ki Whangaroa, Ngati Kahu/Ngāpuhi ki Whangaroa, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Te Roroa, Ngatiwai, Te Uri o Hau, and Ngati Whatua. Each of these iwi holds a unique place in the cultural and historical tapestry of New Zealand, contributing to the rich diversity of Māori heritage and traditions. Each Iwi hold strong ties to the water through ancestral and contemporary practices.

Northland is currently experiencing swift growth with a population of over 190,000 people with Whangārei boasting 96,000 residents. In terms of ethnicity, the region is diverse: 133,095 identify as NZ European (70%), 64,458 are Māori (34%), 7,542 are Pasifika (3.9%), and 7,041 are Asian (3.7%). Its demographic spans from the very young to the elderly, with all age groups engaging in the aquatic lifestyle that Northland offers.

Snapshot

The infographic paints a cautiously optimistic picture for Northland in 2023. There were five reported drowning fatalities, which is a dramatic 53% decrease from the previous year (18) still lower than the ten-year average of 10.6 drownings. This year's fatalities were exclusively male.

Drowning deaths occurred in a variety of environments, with home, offshore and tidal waters being the most significant contributors in 2023 (20%). The most common activity leading to drowning was falls, underwater (40%) and other recreation (20%), The age groups most affected were the 55-64 and 65+ brackets, highlighting an “older” age-related risk factor. In terms of ethnicity, the data indicates fatalities across Māori, NZ European, with Māori being notably affected.

Recommendations

1. Locally Targeted Initiatives: The drop in drownings from 18 in 2022 to five in 2023 suggests that local water safety initiatives and behavioural change campaigns are beginning to take effect. This promising trend underscores the importance of continued and enhanced local water safety programmes, particularly those that have arisen from community hui in Hokianga, Kaitāia, and Whangārei.

2. Targeted Education and Training: The implementation of bar-crossing and day skipper courses such as those delivered by Coastguard NZ will be a significant step forward in improving boating knowledge and safety. Expanding such educational initiatives could further reduce the risk of drowning.

3. Life Jacket Utilisation and Safety Equipment: Normalising the use of life jackets and the strategic placement of personal rescue equipment will be beneficial. Increasing awareness and availability of such safety equipment can be a drowning prevention measure, especially in popular swimming (Manu locations) and boating areas.

4. Gender-Specific Strategies: With all 2023 fatalities being male, it is crucial to develop gender-specific safety strategies that address the behavioural patterns and risk-taking activities prevalent among men in the region.

5. Cultural Engagement and Respect: Given the significant Māori population and the cultural connection to water, it is vital to engage with Iwi leadership to co-develop culturally respectful and effective water safety strategies.

6. Behavioural Change as a Norm: Encouraging a shift in community norms towards safer water practices, such as the conscious decision to wear life jackets, and recognise the dangers of certain water activities (e.g. Bar crossing), is essential.

Regional

Auckland

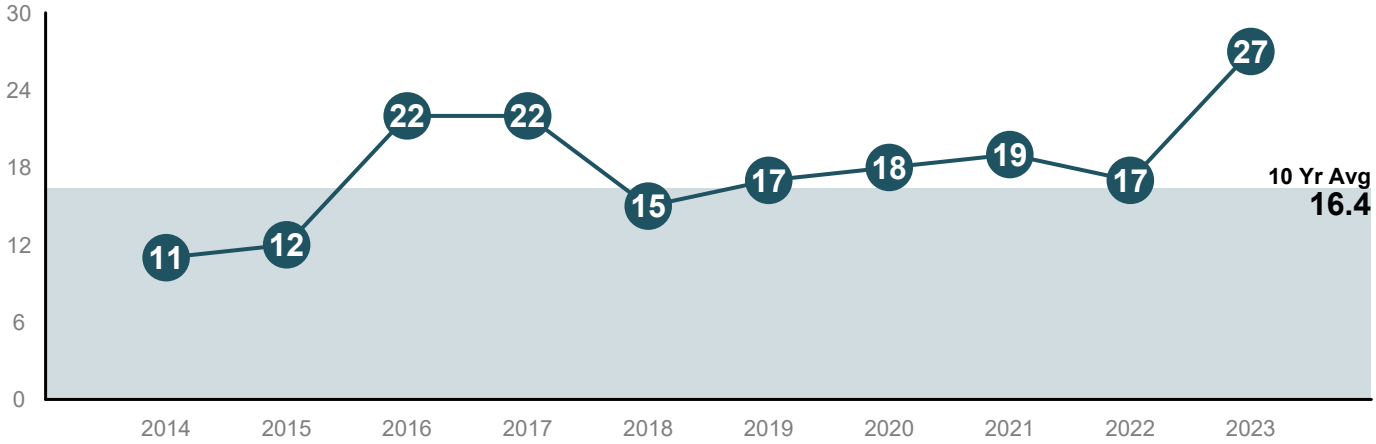
27

People drowned
in the Auckland region
in 2023

M	00-04	NZ European	Falls	Inland Still
M	65-74	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
F	75+	Other	Swimming	Coast
M	45-54	Other	Swimming	Pools
M	25-34	Asian	Swimming	Coast
M	25-34	Asian	Swimming	Coast
M	45-54	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
M	25-34	Maori	Falls	Rivers
M	25-34	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	65-74	NZ European	Falls	Home
F	00-04	Pacific Peoples	Falls	Pools
F	35-44	NZ European	Swimming	Pools
M	35-44	NZ European	Craft	Offshore
M	75+	NZ European	Falls	Pools
F	00-04	Maori	Falls	Home
M	75+	Asian	Falls	Coast
M	35-44	Asian	Fishing from Land	Coast
M	55-64	NZ European	Fishing from Land	Coast
M	55-64	NZ European	Falls	Home
M	55-64	Maori	Falls	Pools
M	55-64	Asian	Fishing from Land	Coast
M	00-04	Maori	Falls	Pools
M	15-24	Pacific Peoples	Swimming	Coast
M	45-54	NZ European	Falls	Tidal
M	45-54	Asian	Craft	Offshore
M	65-74	NZ European	Falls	Coast
M	15-24	Other	Swimming	Coast

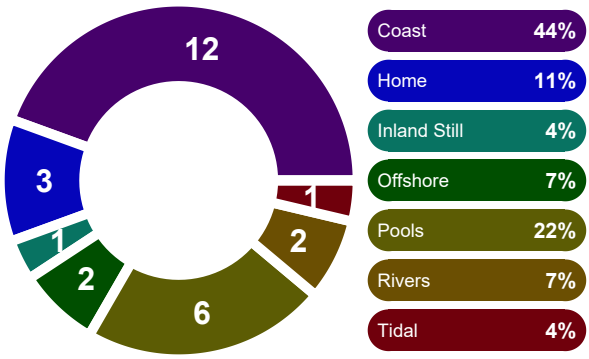
Regional

Auckland

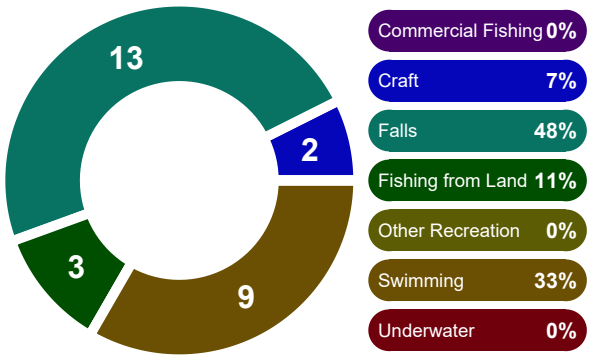


Fatalities by Sex 2023

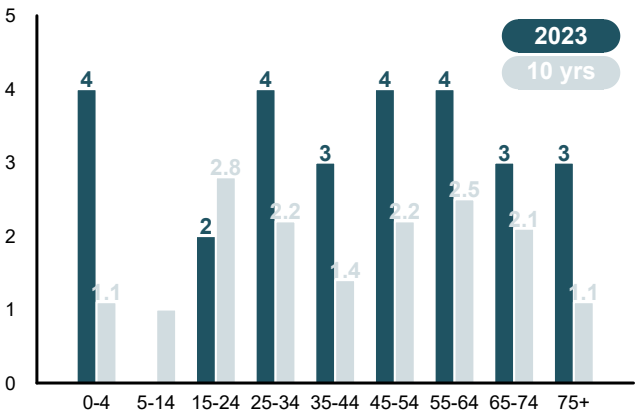
Fatalities by Environment 2023



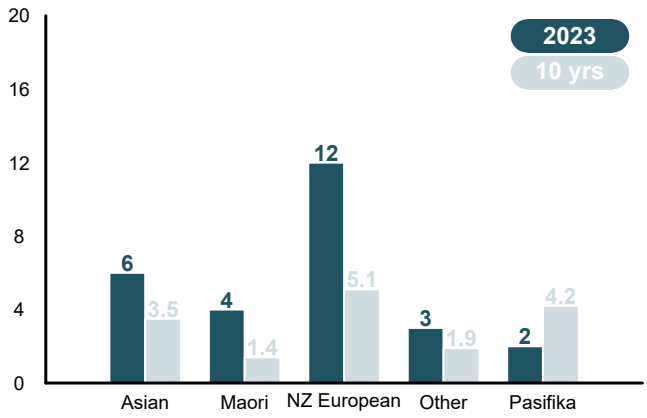
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

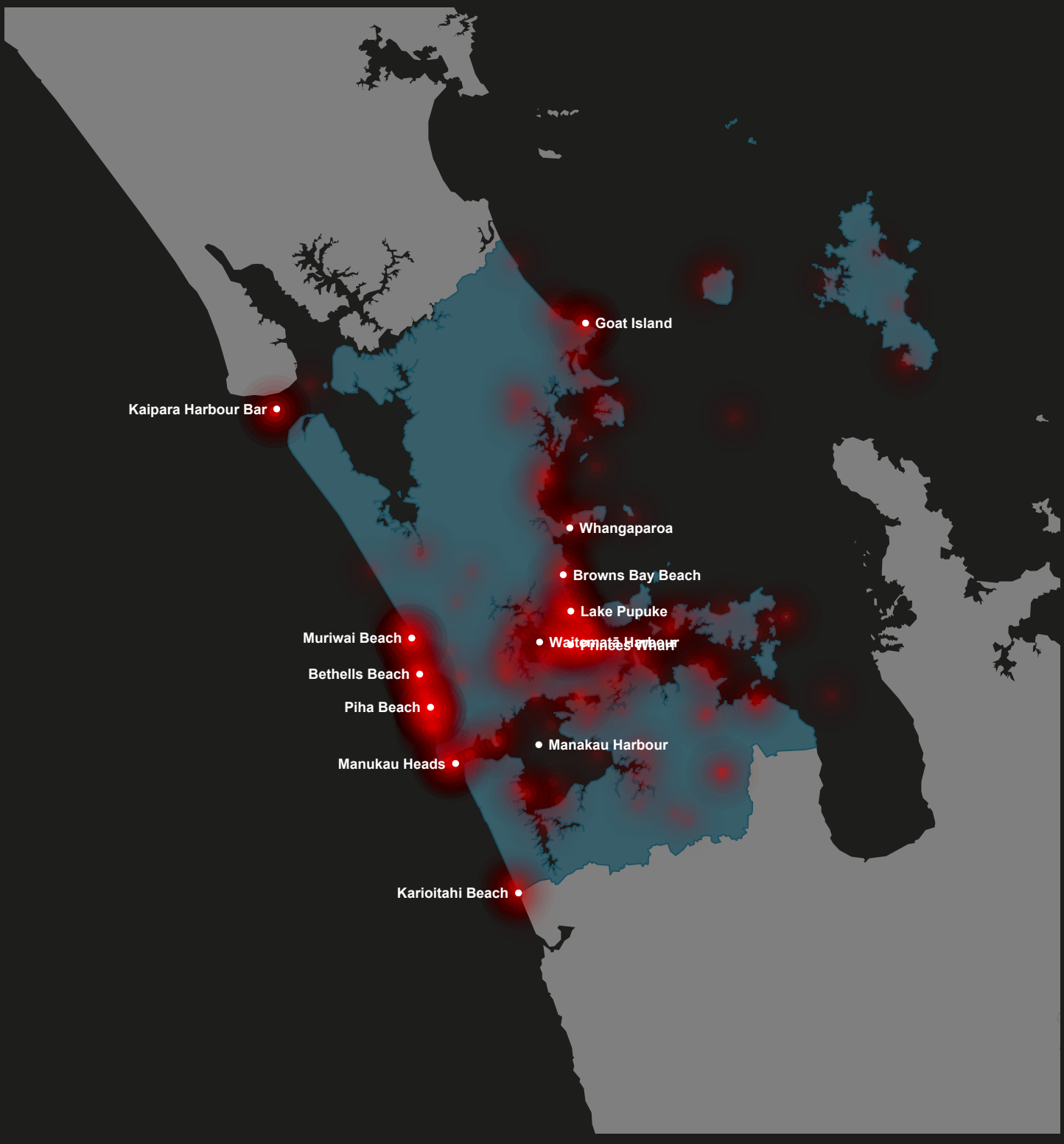


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Auckland



Regions

Auckland

Auckland

The Auckland region boundaries encompass the Auckland metropolitan area as well as rural areas, forests, and parks. To the north, it reaches to the top of the Northland Peninsula, near Wellsford. To the south, it extends to the fringes of the Waikato region, including the Bombay Hills. On the west, it is bordered by the Tasman Sea, and to the east, the boundary is marked by the Pacific Ocean, including the Hauraki Gulf and its myriad of islands.

Auckland is New Zealand's most populous city (1,739,300 at 30 June 2023). It is a region of significant diversity and complexity. The population is a vibrant tapestry of ethnicities, approximately 180 ethnic identities were recorded among Aucklanders, and over one third (39.1%) of residents were born overseas. There is a substantial representation of Māori (11.5%), well as communities of NZ European (53.5%), Asian (28.2%), Pasifika (15.5%), and other ethnic groups. Understandably, the age demographics of the region are broad with an average age of 36.1 years. It has a substantial younger population (19%, under 14) Auckland's age structure is markedly different than the rest of New Zealand, reflecting its role as a large centre of employment and education.

Iwi are an integral part of the region's identity. According to Auckland Council, several Iwi groups having a strong presence, these include Ngāti Manuhiri, Ngāti Rehua Ngāti Wai ki Aotea, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whātua, Te Uri o Hau, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Te Kawerau ā Maki, Ngāti Tamaoho, Te Ākitai Waiohua, Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Te Ata Waiohua, Te Ahiwaru Waiohua, Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Paoa, Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Tamaterā, and Te Patukirikiri. Their connection to the water is both cultural and spiritual, making water safety a matter of particular significance.

The 2023 Auckland infographic provides a stark visual summary of the drowning incidents within the region. In 2023, Auckland experienced 27 fatal drownings, a significant and notable increase from previous years surpassing the 10-year average of 16.4 drownings. This surge represents a 65% increase from the past year's numbers (17 in 2022), signalling a pressing need for intervention.

Men comprised a substantial majority of the fatalities, with 85% being male. A closer examination of the environments where these incidents occurred shows that the coastline was the most common site, followed by pools and offshore areas. Activity-wise, falls (48%) dominated as the leading cause, followed by swimming or playing in the water (33%), and Fishing from land (11%).

When considering age demographics, the data indicated a distribution across all age groups, underscoring the universal risk of drowning. However, it is important to note that half of all under 5 drownings (4) occurred in Auckland. Ethnically, the trend in drownings reflected the region's ethnic diversity, with increased representation from Māori, Asian and NZ European groups compared to 2022.

Snapshot

The Auckland region has seen a concerning upward trend in drowning statistics. In 2023, there were a total of 27 drownings, a significant increase from the 17 drownings in 2022 and more than double the 11 drownings in 2014, only a decade ago. This trend indicates a worsening situation regarding water safety and drowning prevention in Auckland.

The majority of those who drowned were male, accounting for 85% of the total, while females accounted for 15%.

Coastal areas were the most common environment for drownings, representing 44% of the incidents. This was followed by pools at 22%, highlighting a risk in both natural and artificial water bodies. Offshore areas were the environment for 7% of the drownings.

The most common activity leading to drownings was falls, which accounted for 48% of the incidents. This was followed by swimming, at 33%, and fishing from land at 11%.

Recommendations

The dramatic and trending increase in drownings in Auckland is alarming and requires immediate, targeted action. The following recommendations are proposed to enhance water safety in the region:

1. Focused and Targeted Resource Allocation: In response to the escalation in drowning incidents, there's an imperative to develop and implement action plans that are laser-focused on locations with the highest risk. These plans should channel resources efficiently towards notorious drowning "blackspots". Priority areas demand meticulous attention, particularly those like Auckland's West Coast beaches and the treacherous waters of the Manukau Harbour bar.

2. Enhanced Public Education: Focus on under 5's active supervision pool safety, with ongoing and expanded messages for at-risk and under-served demographics.

3. Community Engagement: Work with Iwi and ethnic community leaders to develop culturally sensitive water safety programmes, in targeted underserved communities.

4. Research and Data Analysis: Continue to refine data collection and conduct research to understand the nuances of why drowning rates are increasing, especially among specific activities like "falls" and analysis of residential address compared to fatality location.

Regional

Waikato

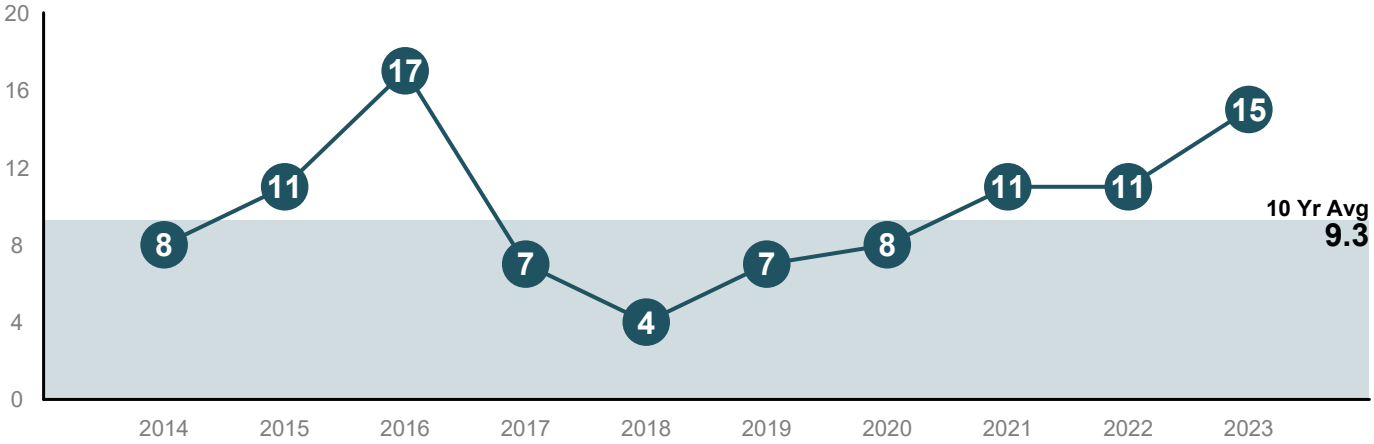
15

People drowned
in the Waikato region
in 2023

M	75+	Other	Swimming	Coast
M	55-64	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
M	15-24	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
M	15-24	Maori	Falls	Rivers
M	55-64	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	55-64	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	35-44	Asian	Falls	Rivers
F	45-54	NZ European	Falls	Inland Still
M	55-64	Maori	Craft	Offshore
M	35-44	Asian	Fishing from Land	Coast
M	35-44	Asian	Fishing from Land	Coast
M	25-34	NZ European	Craft	Offshore
M	65-74	NZ European	Falls	Home
M	45-54	Maori	Falls	Rivers
F	55-64	NZ European	Swimming	Pools

Regional

Waikato



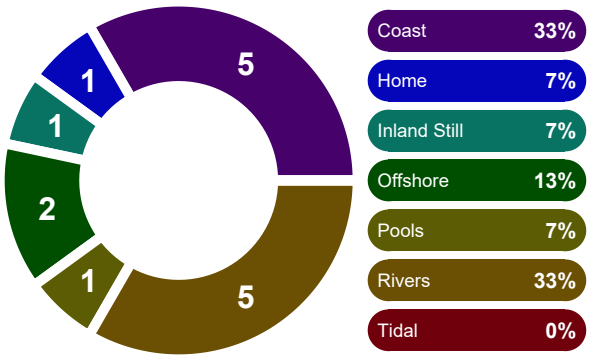
15
Drowning deaths in 2023

61%
6 more people lost their lives compared to the 10 year average

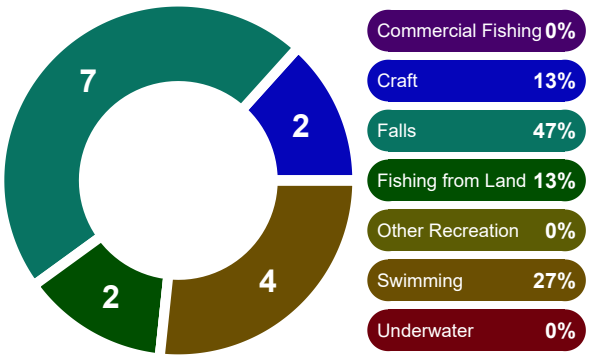
9.3
10 Year Average

Fatalities by Sex 2023

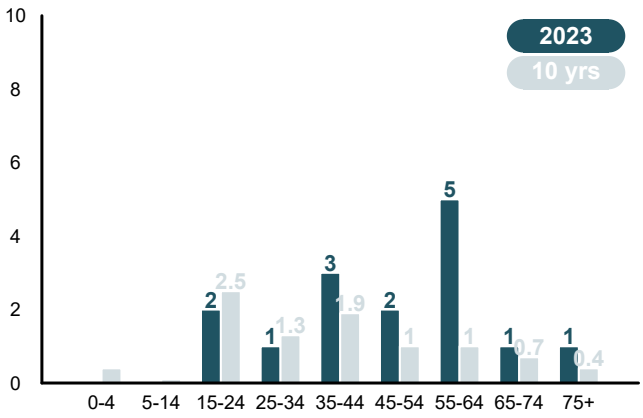
Fatalities by Environment 2023



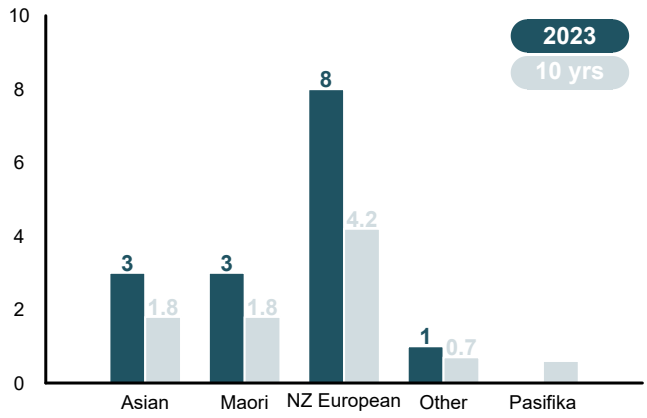
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

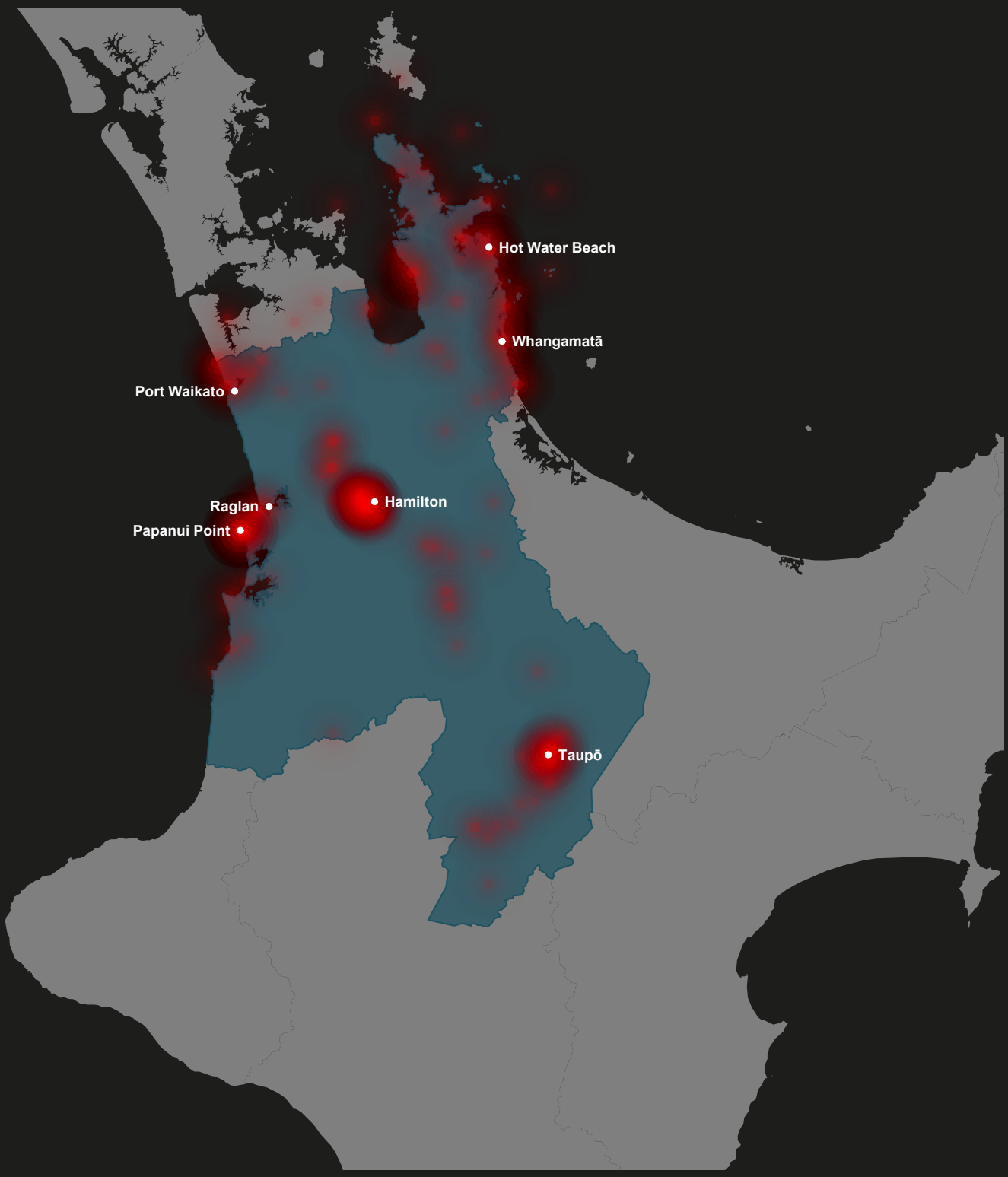


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Waikato



Regions

Waikato

Waikato

Spanning 25,000 square kilometres, Waikato claims its place as New Zealand's fourth-largest region. Its boundaries to the north lie at the Bombay Hills and Port Waikato, it reaches down to the Kaimai Ranges and the majestic Mt Ruapehu to the south, to Mokau on its western front, and stretches across to the Coromandel Peninsula in the east. A substantial coastline accompanies this geographic diversity, with 1,138 kilometres of coastal terrain.

It is home to 9.5 percent of the nation’s populace and cradles the country’s longest river, the Waikato River. The region also lays claim to Lake Taupō, New Zealand's largest lake, alongside wetlands that are recognised for their global ecological importance.

The region is characterised by its diverse population with a total population of 458,202. NZ European make up the majority at 74%, along with a total of 109,488 Māori (24%). The principal iwi groups in the region are Waikato-Tainui, Ngaati Maniapoto, Ngaati Raukawa, Hauraki. There is a smaller representation of other communities including Asian (10%), Pasifika (5%), and other ethnic groups. The average age for the Waikato region is 34 years and for Māori its 25 years. The age distribution ranges from young families to a substantial older population.

Snapshot

In 2023, the Waikato region experienced a significant 61% increase in preventable drownings, with 15 deaths reported, compared to the 10-year average of 9.3 fatalities. This is up from 11 in 2022. Most of these tragedies involved men, constituting an overwhelming 87% of the total, reflecting a concerning gender disparity in drowning incidents.

The infographic snapshot reveals that the Waikato River systems, along with coastal areas, are particularly perilous environments, accounting for a third (5) of the incidents each. Activities leading to drownings included “falls” and swimming (playing in the water). The 55-64 age group made up 47% of total Waikato drownings (7). There were no drownings reported in the 0-4 or 5-14 age groups.

Recommendations

1. Focused and Targeted Resource Allocation: In response to the escalation in drowning incidents, there is an imperative to develop and implement action plans that are laser-focused on locations with the highest risk. These plans should channel resources efficiently towards notorious drowning "blackspots". Priority areas demand meticulous attention, particularly those like popular rock fishing spot at Papanui Point and along key parts of the Waikato River between Hamilton and Cambridge.

2. Gender and Age Specific Initiatives: The disproportionate number of older male fatalities calls for targeted safety campaigns and educational programs addressing risk-taking behaviours and promoting safe practices among older men.

3. Cultural Appropriateness: Drowning prevention planning should incorporate cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, ensuring that messages resonate across the ethnically diverse population of Waikato.

4. Expanding the Collaborative Efforts: The formation of the Waikato Regional Water Safety Strategy is a commendable step. Continued collaboration between councils, water safety groups, and community organisations is vital to strengthening water safety culture.

5. Zero Drowning Goal: With the Regional Strategy aim of zero preventable drownings by 2030, it is imperative to maintain and increase the momentum of current safety measures, ensuring they are well-publicised, accessible, and robustly supported.

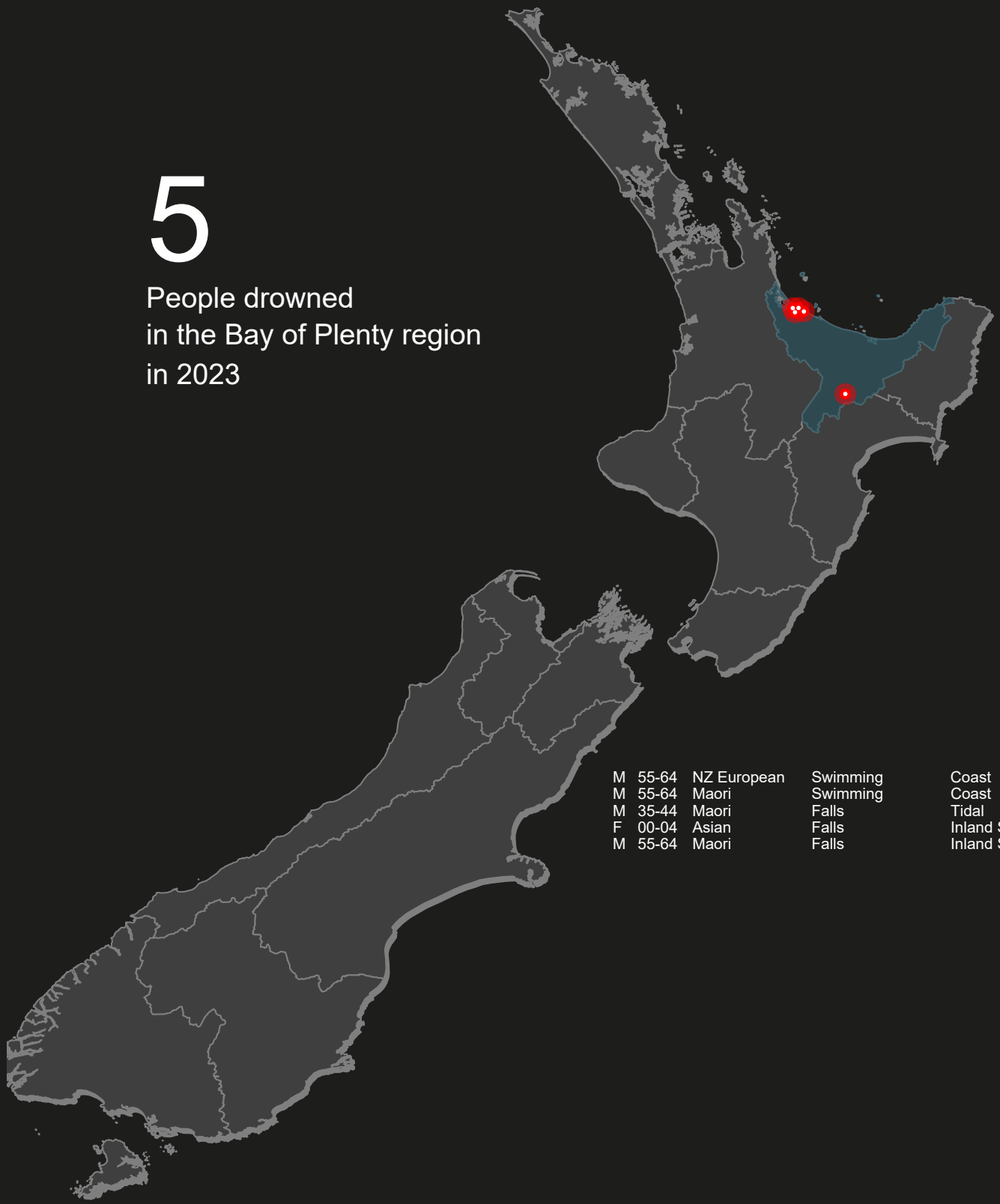
The stark rise in drownings in Waikato is a call to action for all stakeholders involved in water safety. The insights from 2023 must serve as a catalyst for innovation and rededication to drowning prevention in the region.

Regional

Bay of Plenty

5

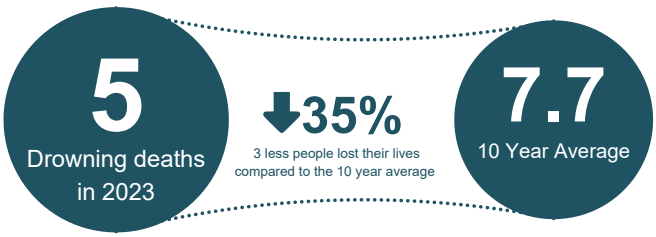
People drowned
in the Bay of Plenty region
in 2023



M	55-64	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
M	55-64	Maori	Swimming	Coast
M	35-44	Maori	Falls	Tidal
F	00-04	Asian	Falls	Inland Still
M	55-64	Maori	Falls	Inland Still

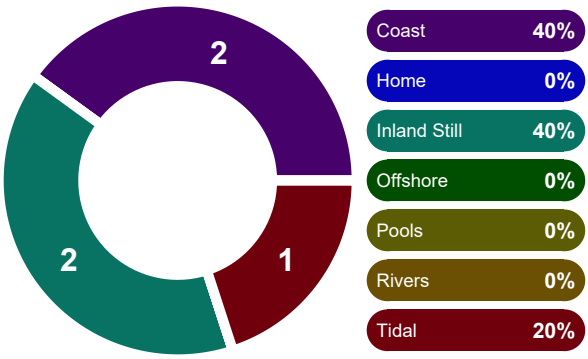
Regional

Bay of Plenty

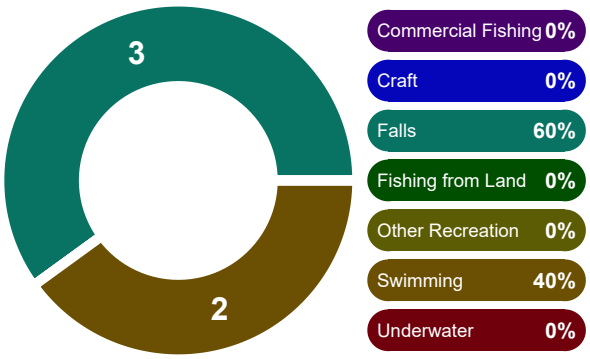


Fatalities by Sex 2023

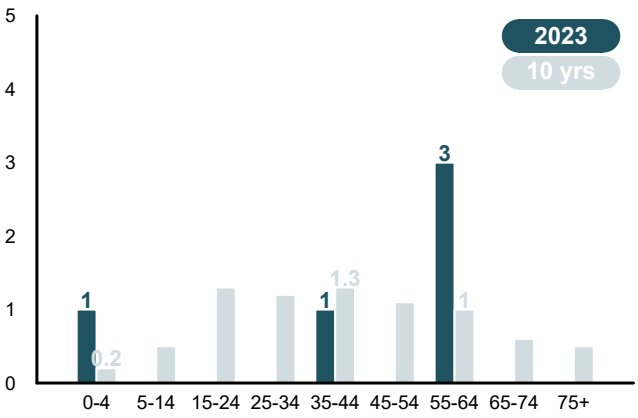
Fatalities by Environment 2023



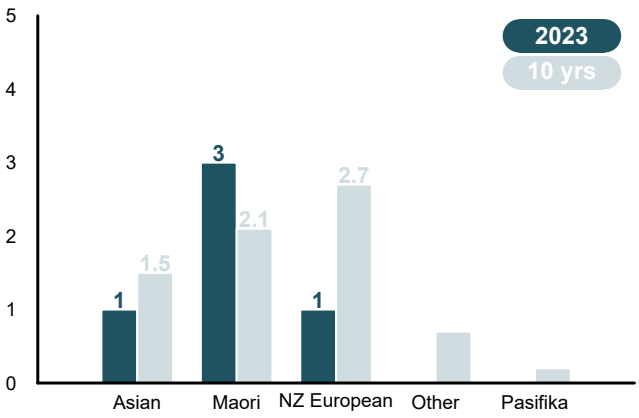
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

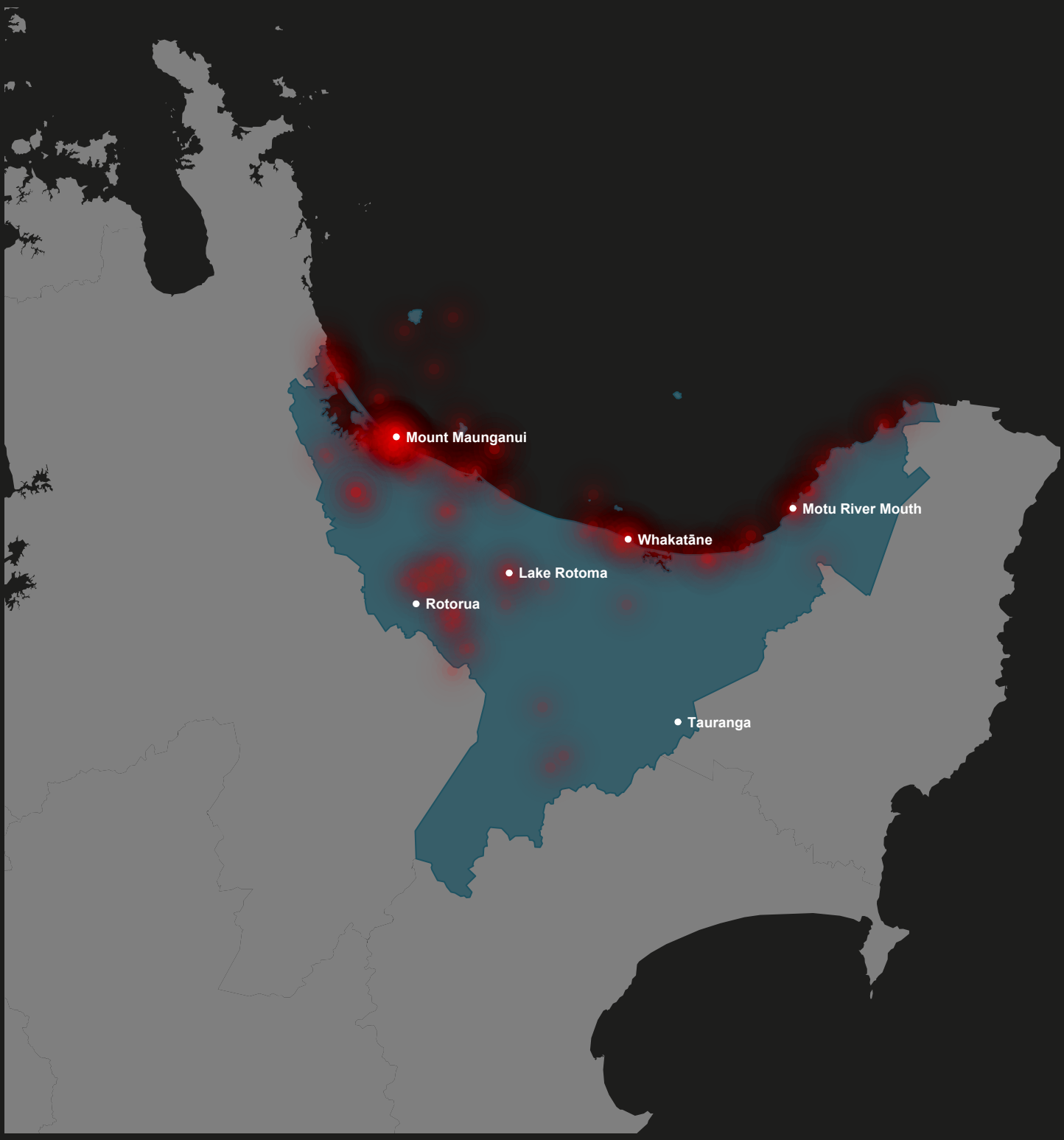


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Bay of Plenty



Regions

Bay of Plenty

Bay of Plenty

The Bay of Plenty is a coastal region on the North Island of New Zealand characterised by its expansive shorelines, agricultural land, and geothermal areas. It is known for its significant Māori population and has several iwi traditionally associated with the region. The demographics of the Bay of Plenty feature a blend of urban and rural populations, with Tauranga as the largest city. The ethnicity breakdown includes a substantial proportion of NZ European and Māori, with growing communities of Asian and Pasifika descent. The age demographics are varied, but there is a noticeable younger population in urban areas and a slightly older demographic in rural zones.

Snapshot

There were 5 drowning deaths in the region, which is 35% less compared to the previous year and below the 10-year average of 7.7.

Most victims were male, accounting for 80% of the fatalities.

The environments where drownings occurred include the coastline (40%), rivers (20%), and tidal waters (20%). There were no fatalities in pools or offshore areas.

Drowning activities were mainly swimming (40%) and other recreation (60%), with no incidents reported for commercial fishing, boating, or underwater activities.

In terms of age groups, there is a significant deviation from the 10-year average, particularly in the 25-34 and 65+ age brackets.

The ethnicity data indicates that fatalities are predominantly among NZ European and Māori populations, with a noteworthy decrease in incidents compared to the 10-year average.

Recommendations

1. Targeted Water Safety Education: Initiatives should be aimed at males, given they represent most drowning victims. Programmes could focus on adult aquatic literacy, including floating skill development, and awareness of risks associated with river and tidal water activities.

2. Community Engagement: Engage with local iwi and community leaders to develop culturally appropriate water safety campaigns, especially considering the significant Māori population and their connection to local waterways.

3. Youth and Adult Swimming Proficiency: Special attention should be given to improving basic aquatic skills among the 25-34 age group, where deviation from the average is noted.

4. Monitoring and Response: Enhance monitoring of coastal, river, and tidal water areas and ensure rapid response capabilities are in place, including clear signage and where appropriate, rescue equipment.

5. Data-Driven Approach: Continue to analyse data yearly to identify trends and adjust targeted campaigning and safety measures accordingly.

Through these recommendations, the aim would be to continue the downward trend in drowning incidents in the Bay of Plenty, making the waters safer for all.

Regional

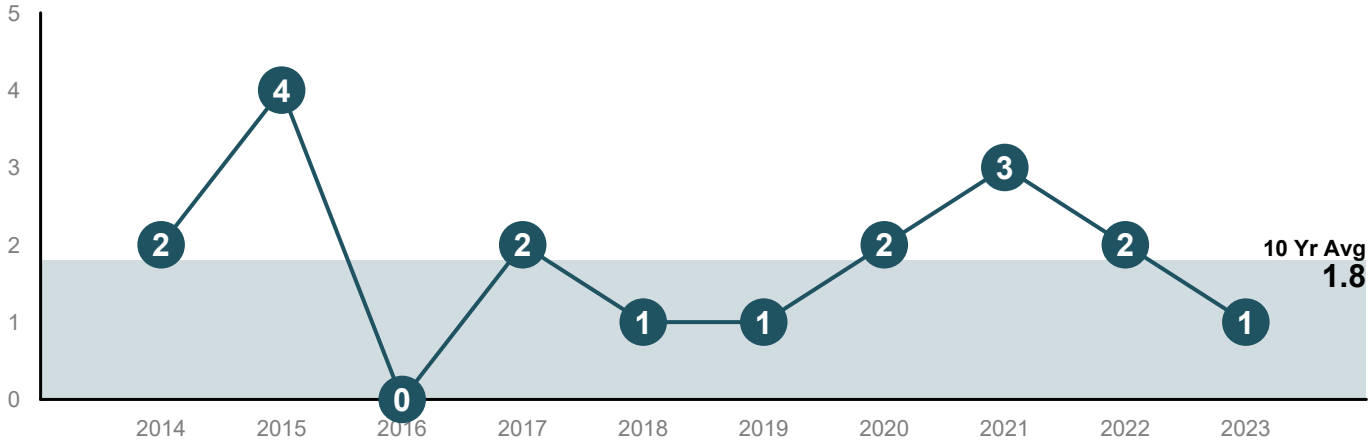
Gisborne

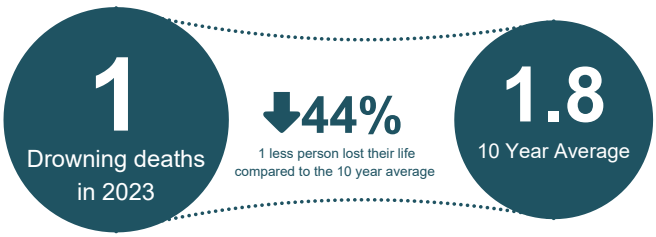
1

Person drowned
in the Gisborne region
in 2023

Regional

Gisborne

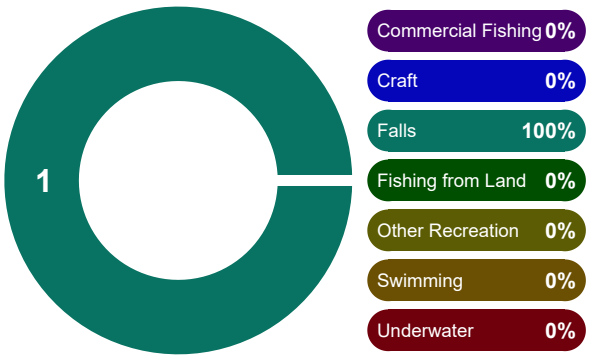




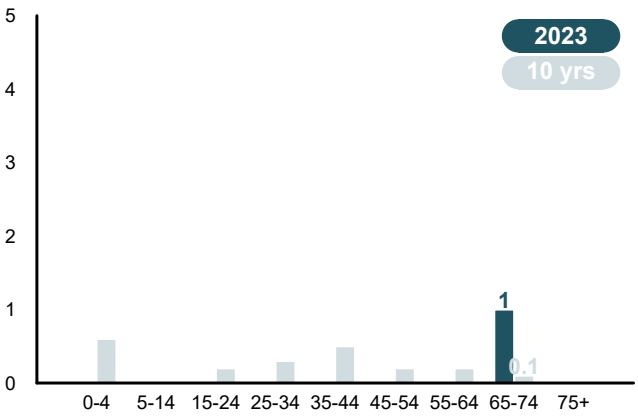
Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Environment 2023

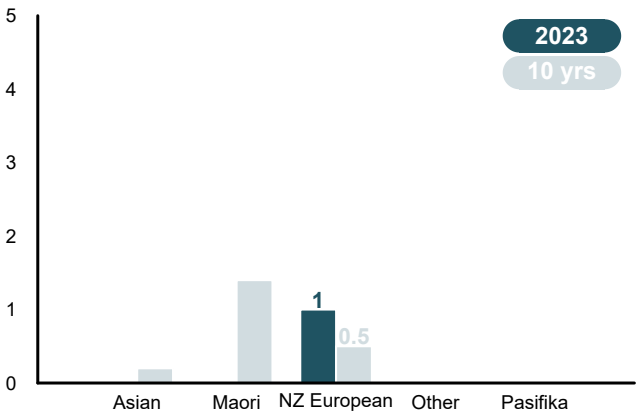
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Gisborne

Regions

Gisborne

Gisborne

Gisborne (Tairawhiti), located on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, is known for its picturesque landscapes that include long, sweeping coastlines. It is bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the east, making it the first city in the world to greet the sun each day. To the west, it borders the Hawke's Bay region, and its northern and southern boundaries are defined by the rugged Waioeka and Waimata ranges. The region's coastline is defined by numerous rivers and streams, such as the Waiapu and Turanganui rivers, flowing into the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Gisborne is home to a population of approximately 52,600 as of June 2023. The region is marked by a higher than national average proportion of Māori, over 50% in some areas, and the predominant Iwi include Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata, Ngāi Tāmanuhiri, and Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki. The area is characterised by a youthful demographic, with a significant proportion of its population under the age of 30, which is higher than the national average.

Snapshot

There was one drowning death in the Tairawhiti region, which is consistent with the 10-year average of 1.8. The incident is classified as a fall, associated with a river by a NZ European male aged 65-74.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

2. Ongoing and Expanded Delivery of Aquatic Literacy in Schools: Collaborate with schools to integrate Water Skills for Life™ into their school curriculum. Facilitate regular water safety workshops and aquatic literacy sessions for teachers, emphasising the importance of basic aquatic skills and recognising water hazards. A localised approach to growing resources (commercial, charitable, local and central government) so that schools have the means to deliver Water Skills for Life™.

3. Council Bylaws for Mandatory Lifejacket Usage: Support local Councils to enact bylaws that require the compulsory wearing of lifejackets on boats less than 6 meters in length. Promote public awareness campaigns on any new bylaws and the safety benefits of lifejacket use. Establish local partnerships to ensure that those without the means to purchase lifejackets can get access to them.

4. Behaviour Change Approach to Older Males: Develop targeted campaigns addressing the specific attitudes and behaviours of older males who may underestimate water risks. Utilise appropriate local community leaders and influencers to convey safety messages and encourage peer-to-peer education. Where appropriate offer tailored water safety courses that address the unique challenges and physical limitations that may come with age.

5. Enhanced Safety Communication and Technology Use: Use technology to better understand drowning challenges. Utilise technology to establish participation trends around drowning “blackspots” or data to support notifications or water safety alerts through mobile apps ensuring good reach. Use real-time weather and water condition monitoring systems to inform the public of potential or pending hazards.

These recommendations are designed to address the multifaceted nature of water safety and drowning prevention. They combine proactive policymaking, community education, technological support, and targeted intervention to create a comprehensive safety net for regions with historically low drowning figures. By addressing the specific needs and behaviours of the population, particularly at-risk groups such as older males, and ensuring robust safety measures at identified risk areas, these strategies aim to sustain and improve upon the regions' current safety records.

Regional

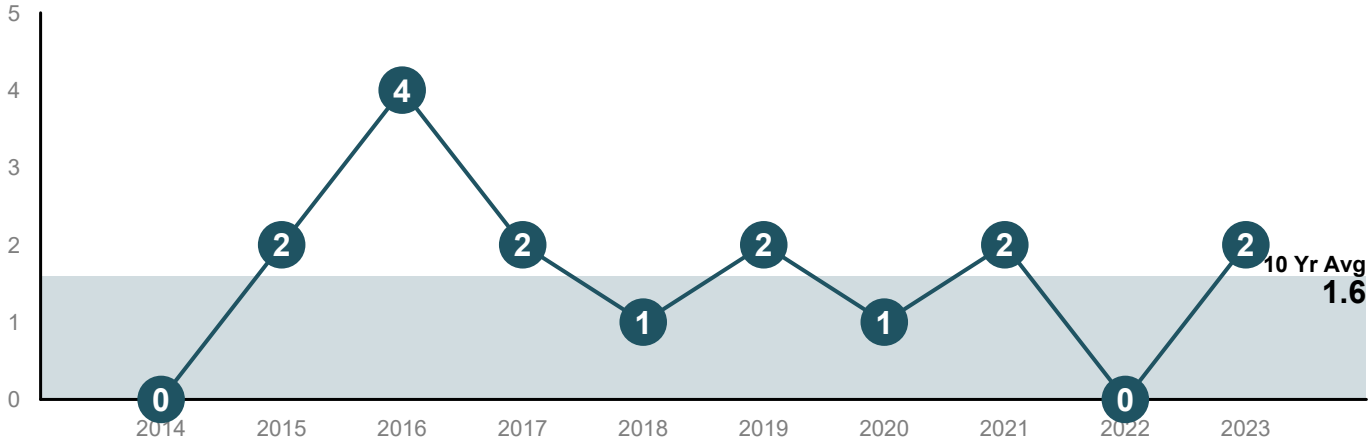
Taranaki

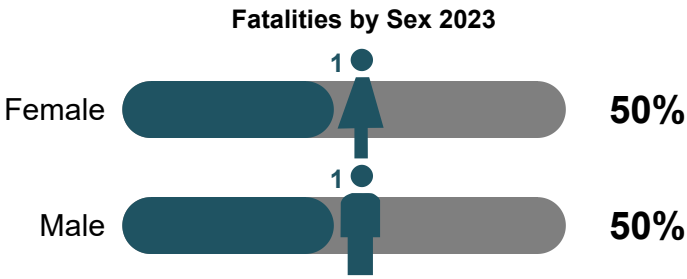
2

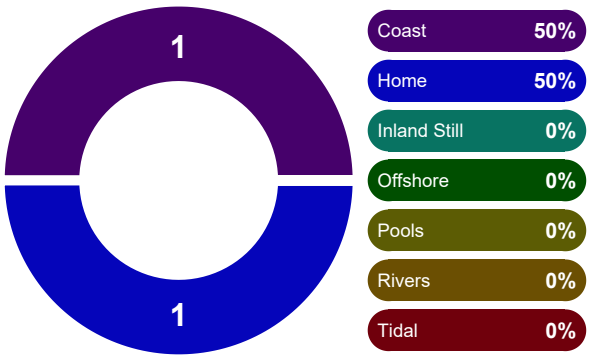
People drowned
in the Taranaki region
in 2023

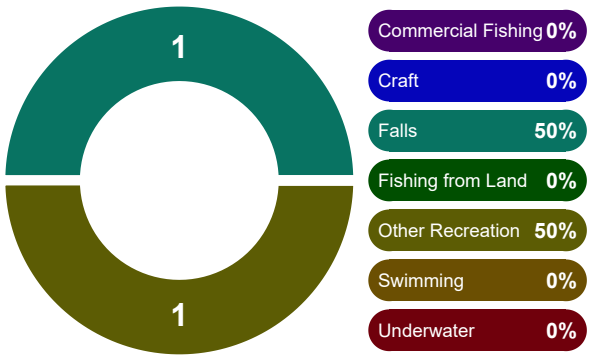
Regional

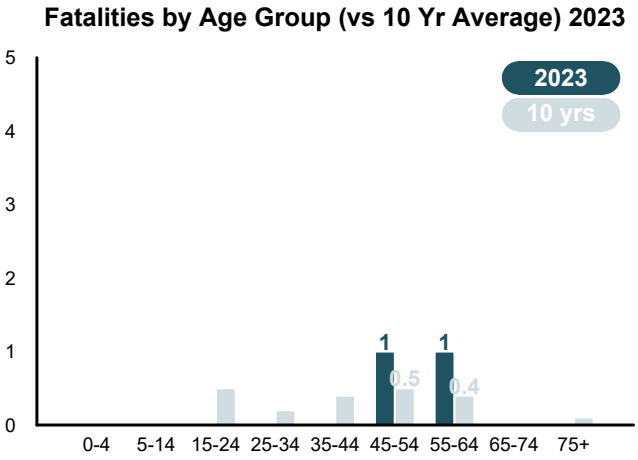
Taranaki

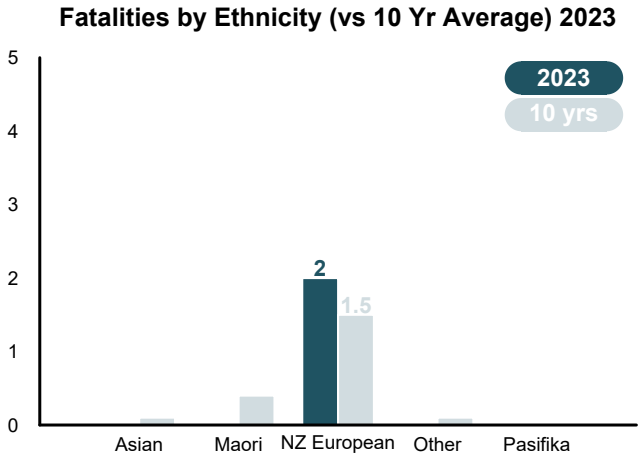












Regional

Taranaki

Regions

Taranaki

Taranaki

Taranaki, a region named after its main geographical feature, the stratovolcano Mount Taranaki, has a diverse landscape that includes coastal terraces, hill country, and the fertile ring plain around the mountain. It covers an area of 7,254.51 square kilometres and boasts a mix of urban and rural communities, with a population of 128,700 as of June 2023, accounting for 2.5% of New Zealand's population. The demographic spread of Taranaki shows a balance between younger and older populations, with a higher proportion of children under 15 and adults aged 65 and older than the national average. The median age in the region is 40.0 years.

Ethnically, Taranaki has a strong Māori presence, with iwi such as Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Ruanui, Taranaki, Te Āti Awa, Ngā Rauru, and Ngāruahinerangi having a significant influence in the region.

The coastal environment provides many excellent surfing some of which are considered world-class due to the land mass projecting into the Tasman Sea with northerly, westerly, and southerly exposures.

Snapshot

Taranaki experienced 2 drowning deaths in 2023. These incidents are in line with the 10-year average of 1.6 drownings per year. The fatalities involved 1 female and 1 male.

These drownings involved a 45–54-year-old NZ European male, at the beach whilst involved in "other recreation"; a 55–64-year-old NZ European female involved in a "fall" at home.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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Regional

Hawke's Bay

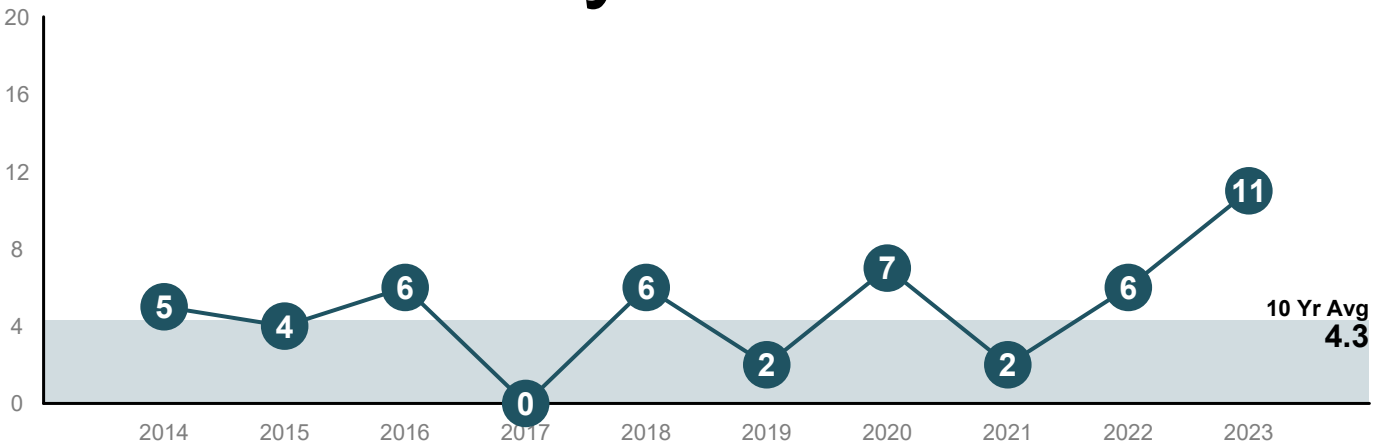
11

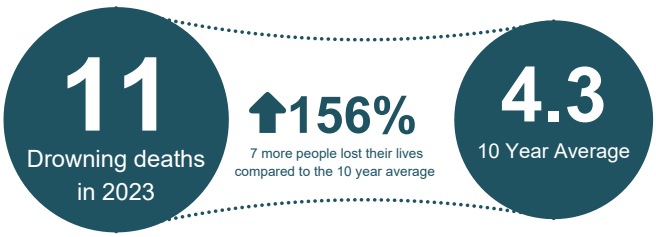
People drowned
in the Hawke's Bay region
in 2023

M	55-64	NZ European	Underwater	Coast
F	55-64	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	35-44	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
F	00-04	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
F	55-64	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	75+	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
F	00-04	Maori	Falls	Pools
F	65-74	NZ European	Falls	Pools
M	75+	NZ European	Falls	Rivers
M	25-34	Asian	Swimming	Coast
M	25-34	NZ European	Craft	Rivers

Regional

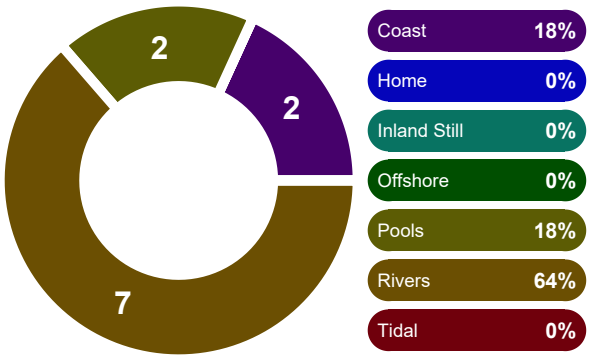
Hawke's Bay



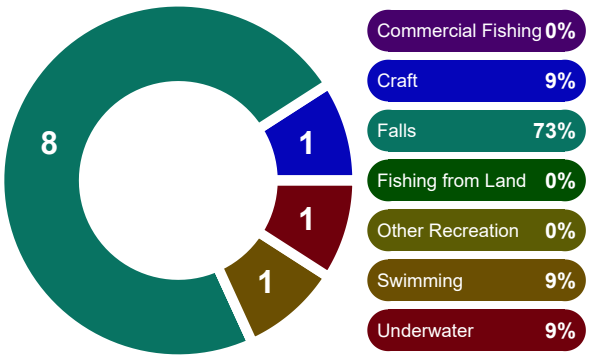


Fatalities by Sex 2023

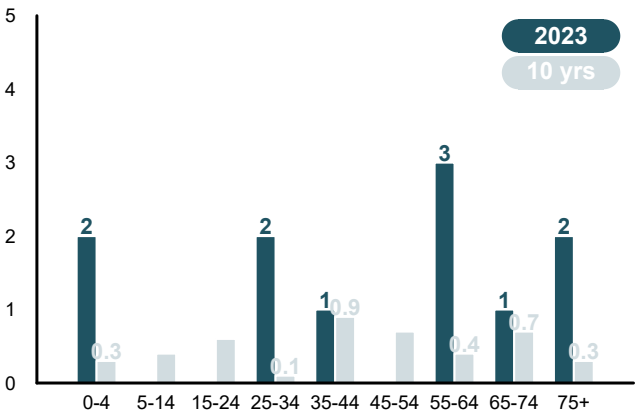
Fatalities by Environment 2023



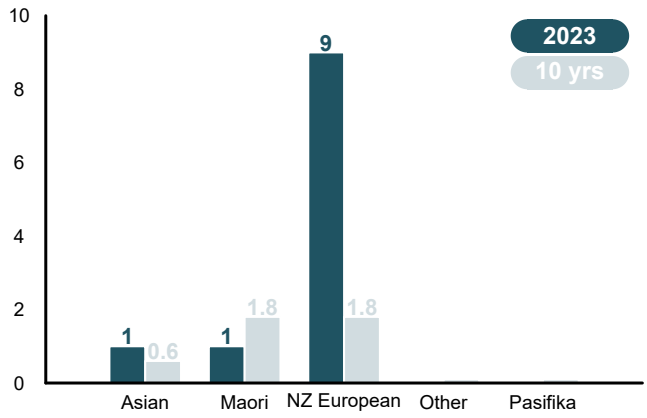
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

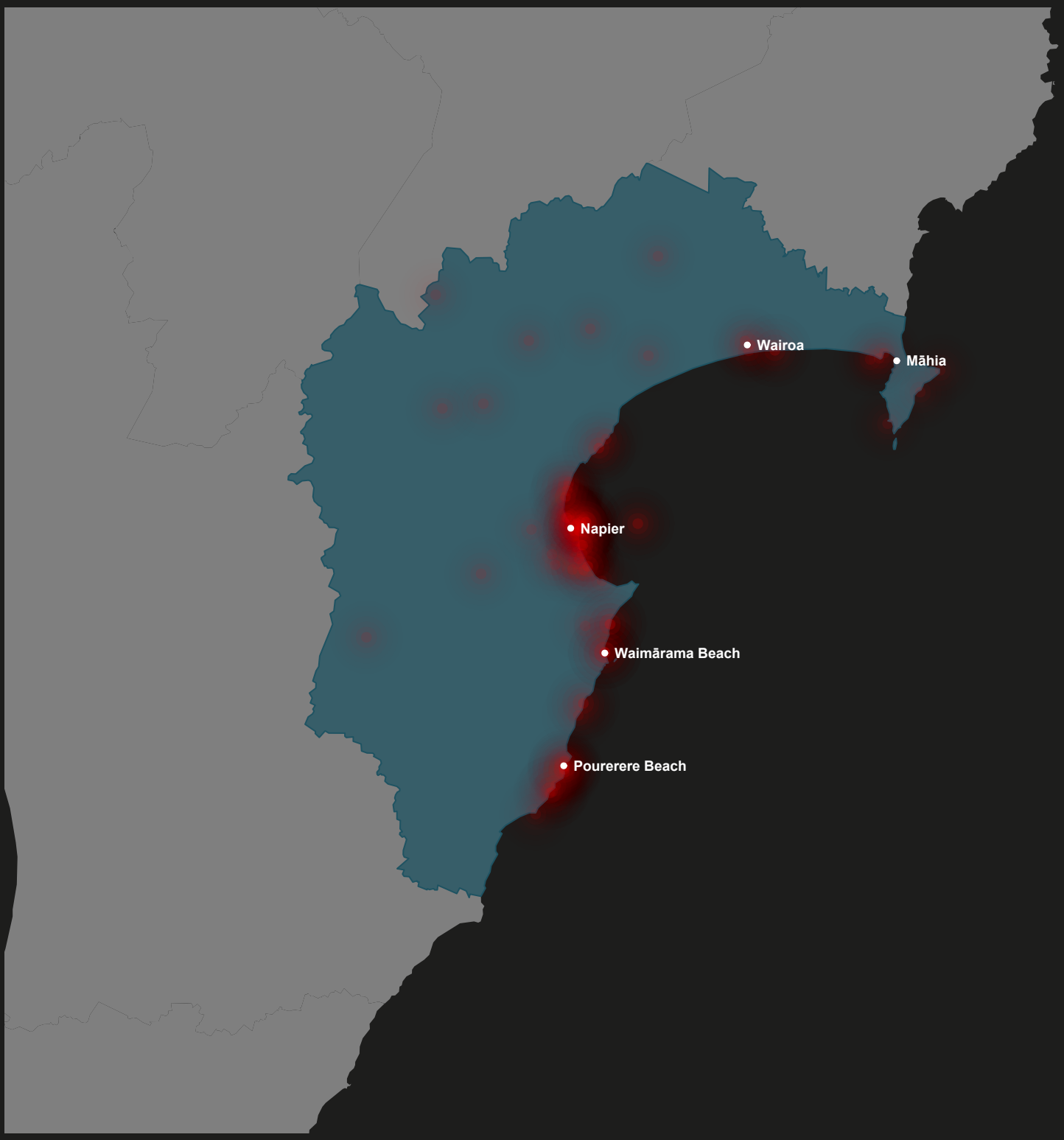


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Hawke's Bay



Regions

Hawke's Bay

Hawke's Bay

Hawke's Bay, a region on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, is characterised by its distinctive geographic boundaries. To the south, it is bordered by the Tararua District, and to the west, it meets the Central Hawke's Bay and Rangitikei districts. The Pacific Ocean defines its eastern boundary, with a coastline that features beautiful beaches and rugged cliffs. Key waterways include the Tutaekuri, Ngaruroro, and Tukituki rivers, which meander through the landscape before flowing into the ocean. The region's population is diverse, with a significant presence of Māori, reflecting its rich indigenous heritage. The Ngāti Kahungunu is the principal iwi in the area, alongside other smaller iwi groups. The ethnic breakdown of Hawke's Bay shows a mix of European, Māori, Asian, and Pacific peoples, contributing to a multicultural tapestry.

In terms of demographics, the region has a mix of age groups, with a slightly higher proportion of older residents compared to national averages.

The region has faced significant environmental challenges, particularly notable in the current year with severe flooding. These floods have impacted both urban and rural areas, causing damage to infrastructure and disruptions in daily life and economic activities. This emphasises the importance of effective environmental management and disaster preparedness in the region.

Snapshot

There were 11 drowning deaths in 2023, which is a massive 156% increase from the 10-year average of 4.3 deaths. The large increase in drownings against the 10-year average is attributed to tragedies associated with flooding that occurred in the year. Specifically, drownings linked to falls and rivers are associated with flood victims, indicating that the environmental disaster had a significant impact on the safety of the individuals involved.

Of the total fatalities, 55% were male (6) and 45% were female (5). Most fatalities occurred in Rivers (63%, 7), followed by the Coastline (2) and Pools (2) (both at 18%).

The activities during which drownings occurred were predominantly falls (73%, 8). There was one fatality associate with swimming, underwater and craft activities.

More than half the number of drownings in 2023 were over the age of 55 (6).

The ethnicity data shows that NZ European (9) represented 82% of all drownings.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

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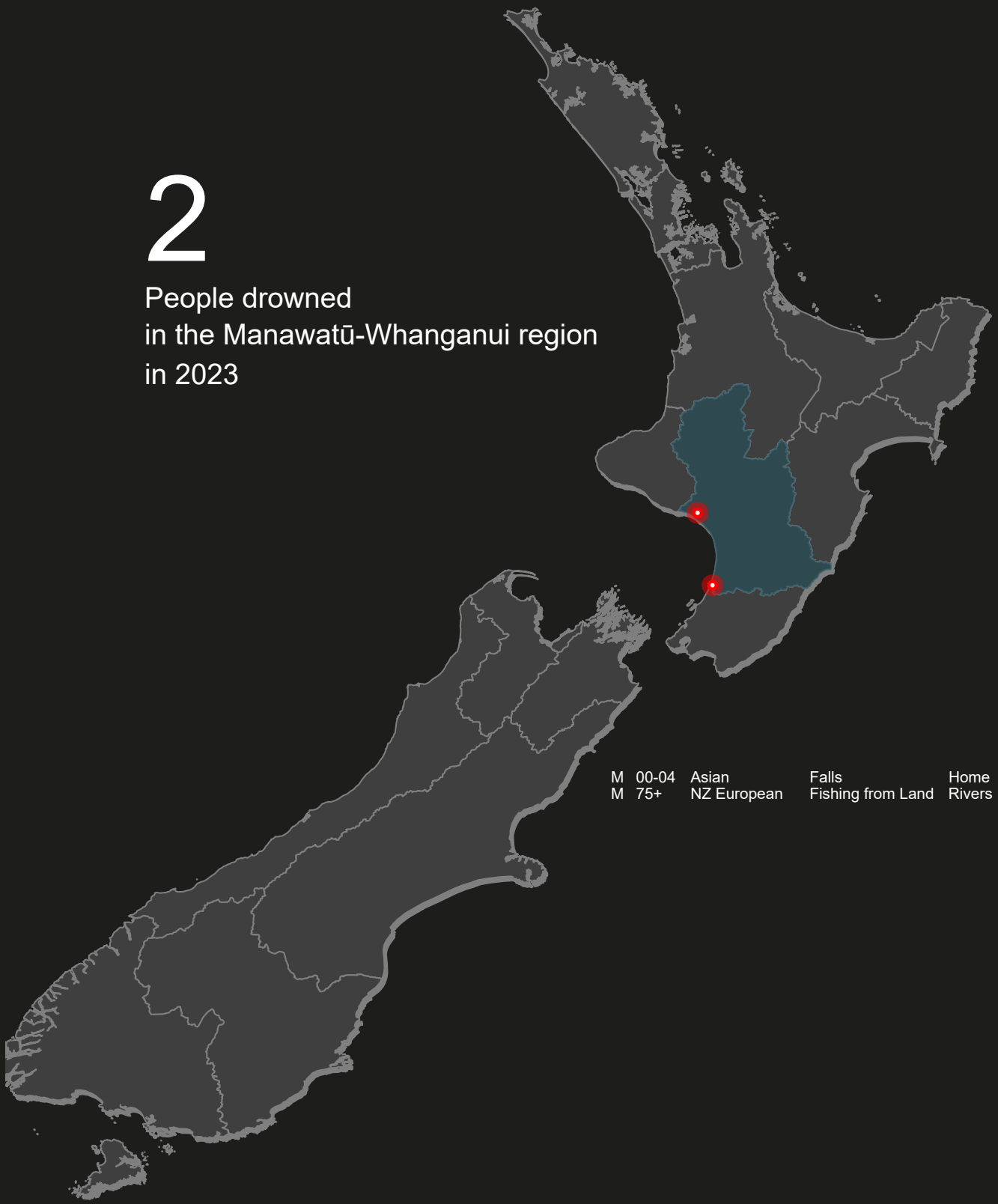
Regional

Manawatū-Whanganui

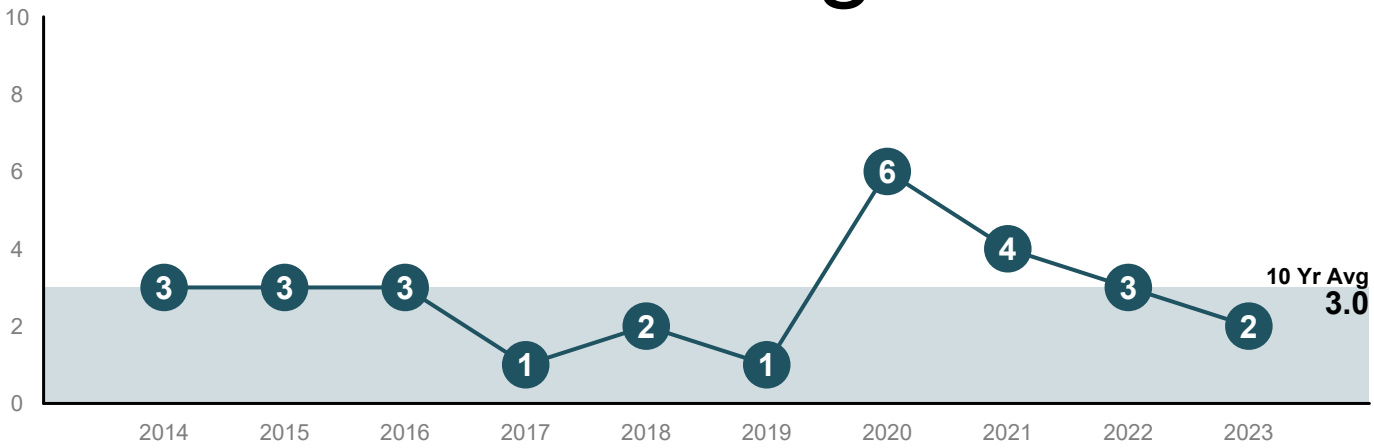
2

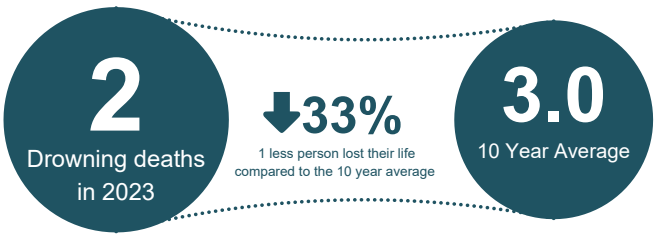
People drowned
in the Manawatū-Whanganui region
in 2023



Regional

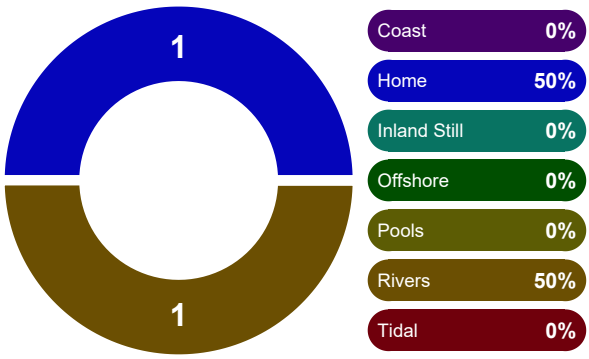
Manawatū-Whanganui





Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Environment 2023



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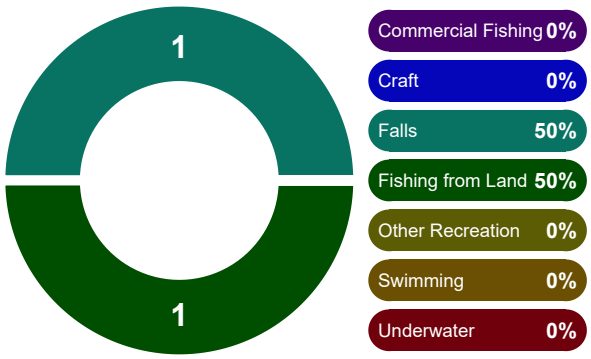
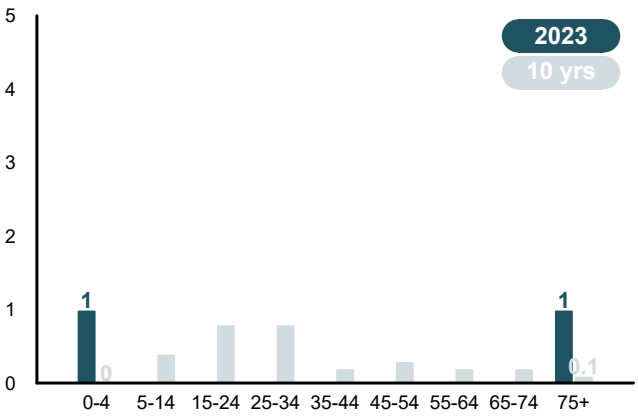
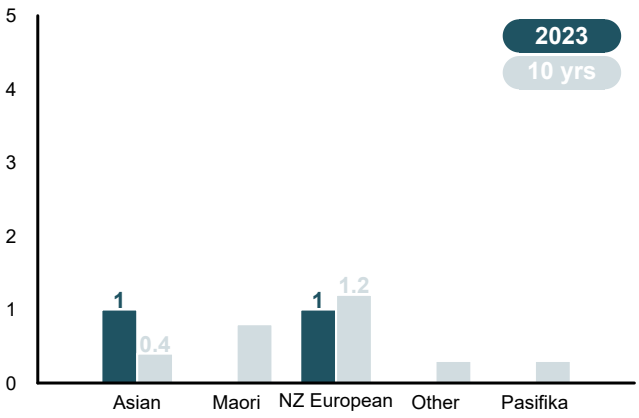


Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Manawatū-Whanganui

Regions

Manawatū-Whanganui

Manawatū-Whanganui

The Manawatū-Whanganui region, located in the lower half of New Zealand's North Island. Geographically, the region features a diverse range of water environments. The Manawatū River, which flows through the city of Palmerston North, and the Whanganui River, New Zealand's longest navigable river, are prominent water bodies in the area. These rivers, along with the region's coastline, various smaller streams, and man-made water facilities, offer numerous recreational opportunities but also pose potential risks for water-related accidents.

In terms of demographics, Manawatū-Whanganui is a region of mixed urban and rural localities, with populations in main centres like Palmerston North and Whanganui. The area is home to a mix of ethnic groups which mirrors the diverse cultural landscape of New Zealand.

Snapshot

The Manawatū-Whanganui region experienced 2 drowning deaths in 2023. These incidents are slightly lower than the 10-year average of 3 and continue a year-on-year downward trend since 2020 (6). These fatalities were both male.

These drownings involved a 0–4-year-old Asian child involved in a “fall” at home; and a 75+ year old NZ European fishing from land at a river.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

2. Ongoing and Expanded Delivery of Aquatic Literacy in Schools: Collaborate with schools to integrate Water Skills for Life™ into their school curriculum. Facilitate regular water safety workshops and aquatic literacy sessions for teachers, emphasising the importance of basic aquatic skills and recognising water hazards. A localised approach to growing resources (commercial, charitable, local and central government) so that schools have the means to deliver Water Skills for Life™.

3. Council Bylaws for Mandatory Lifejacket Usage: Support local Councils to enact bylaws that require the compulsory wearing of lifejackets on boats less than 6 meters in length. Promote public awareness campaigns on any new bylaws and the safety benefits of lifejacket use. Establish local partnerships to ensure that those without the means to purchase lifejackets can get access to them.

4. Behaviour Change Approach to Older Males: Develop targeted campaigns addressing the specific attitudes and behaviours of older males who may underestimate water risks. Utilise appropriate local community leaders and influencers to convey safety messages and encourage peer-to-peer education. Where appropriate offer tailored water safety courses that address the unique challenges and physical limitations that may come with age.

5. Enhanced Safety Communication and Technology Use: Use technology to better understand drowning challenges. Utilise technology to establish participation trends around drowning “blackspots” or data to support notifications or water safety alerts through mobile apps ensuring good reach. Use real-time weather and water condition monitoring systems to inform the public of potential or pending hazards.

These recommendations are designed to address the multifaceted nature of water safety and drowning prevention. They combine proactive policymaking, community education, technological support, and targeted intervention to create a comprehensive safety net for regions with historically low drowning figures. By addressing the specific needs and behaviours of the population, particularly at-risk groups such as older males, and ensuring robust safety measures at identified risk areas, these strategies aim to sustain and improve upon the regions' current safety records.

Regional

Wellington

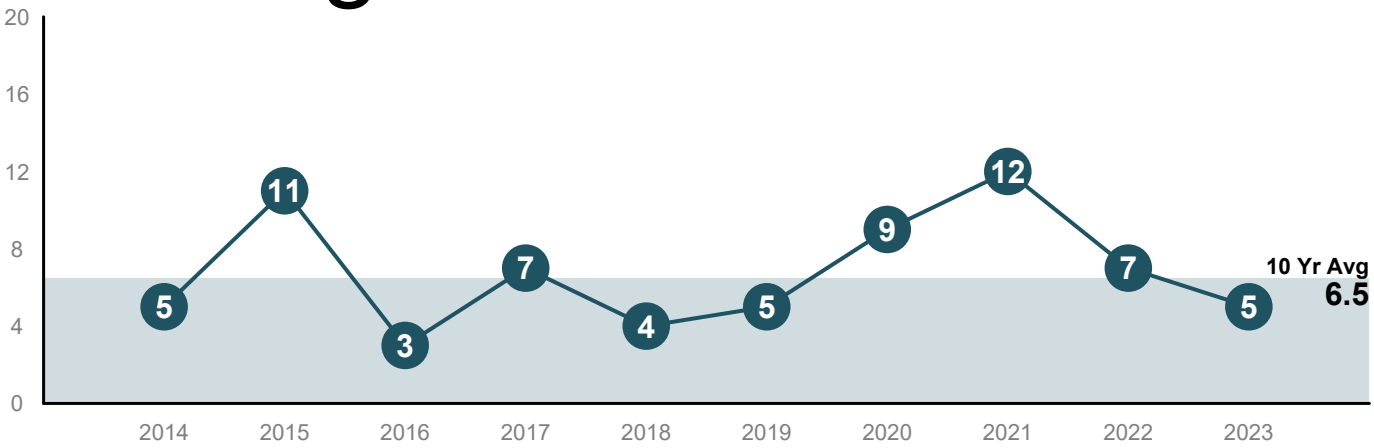
5

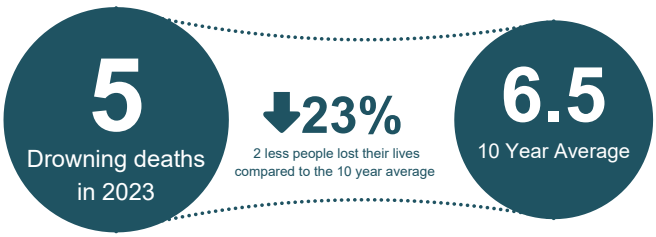
People drowned
in the Wellington region
in 2023

M	55-64	Asian	Underwater	Offshore
M	25-34	NZ European	Falls	Tidal
M	65-74	Maori	Craft	Offshore
M	45-54	Maori	Underwater	Offshore
M	35-44	Asian	Underwater	Offshore

Regional

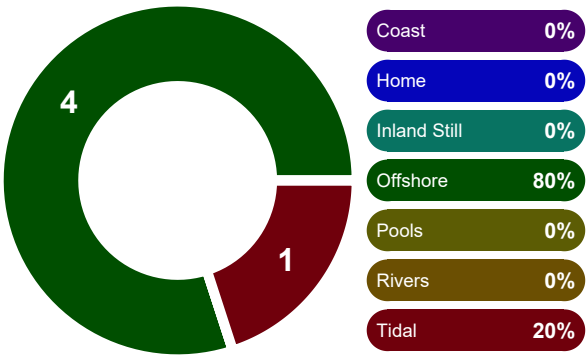
Wellington



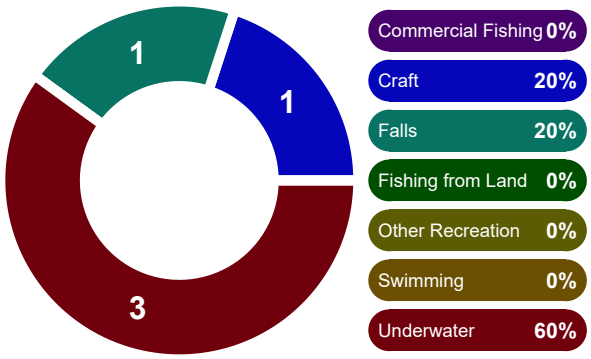


Fatalities by Sex 2023

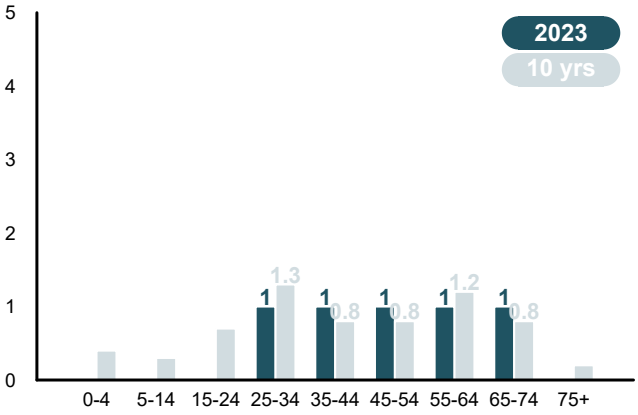
Fatalities by Environment 2023



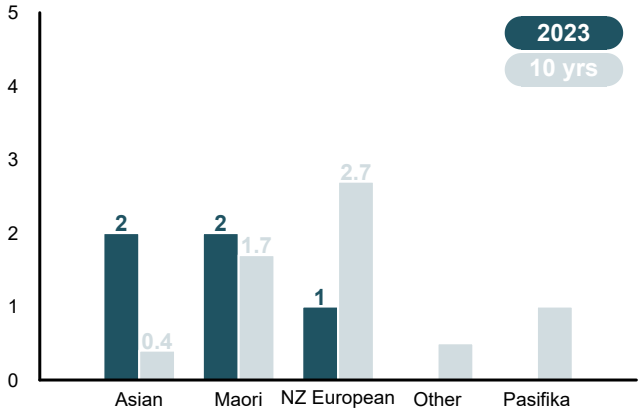
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Wellington

Regions

Wellington

Wellington

Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand, is located at the south-western tip of the North Island. The Wellington urban area has an estimated population of 215,200 as of June 2023, with a wider metropolitan area population of 440,900, which includes the cities of Lower Hutt, Porirua, Upper Hutt and the Kapiti Coast. This reflects the dense urban core of the city as well as the spread of suburban and rural communities within the region. The demographic spread in Wellington showcases a youthful and diverse population, with a significant proportion in the productive age group of 15-64 years. The region has a balanced gender ratio and a considerable number of residents aged 65 and above, reflecting a mature population alongside its youth.

Ethnically, Wellington is multicultural, with significant European, Māori, Pacific, and Asian populations. The Māori ethnic population, as per the last census, was 55,434. The local iwi includes Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Raukawa, and Te Āti Awa, underlining the importance of Māori culture in the region.

Snapshot

There have been 5 drowning deaths in the region, which is consistent with the 10-year average of 6.5. All victims were male. The drownings occurred in the Offshore (80%, 4) and tidal waters (20%, 1) environments.

Drowning activities were mainly underwater (3) along with falls (1) and craft (1) (60%).

In terms of age groups, there is a no significant deviation from the 10-year average, with 1 fatality occurring from each of the 25 to 74 age brackets.

The ethnicity data indicates that fatalities occurred among Asian (2), Māori (2) and NZ European (1) populations, with a noted increase in Asian incidents and an associated decrease in NZ European incidents compared to the 10-year average.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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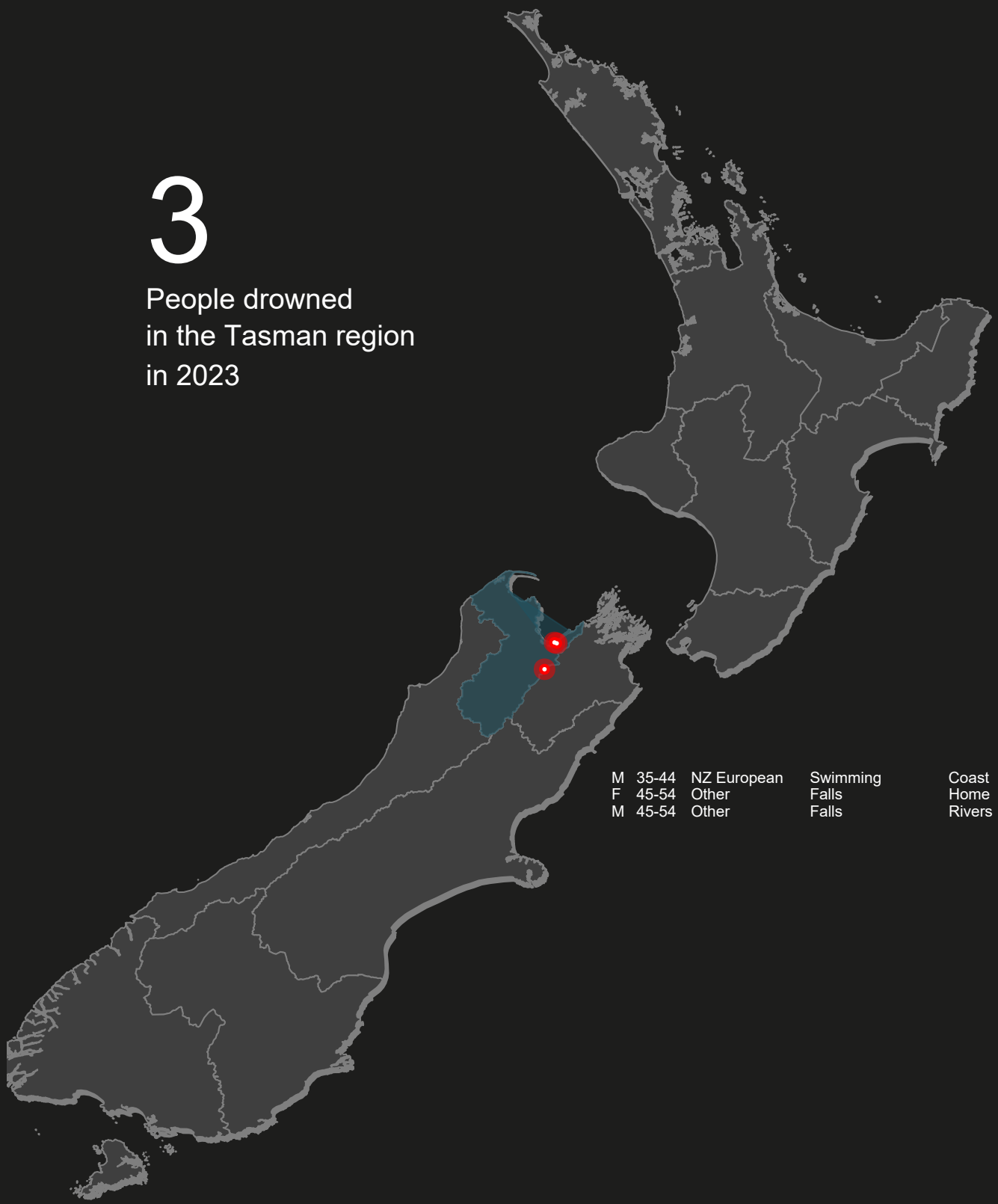
Regional

Tasman

3

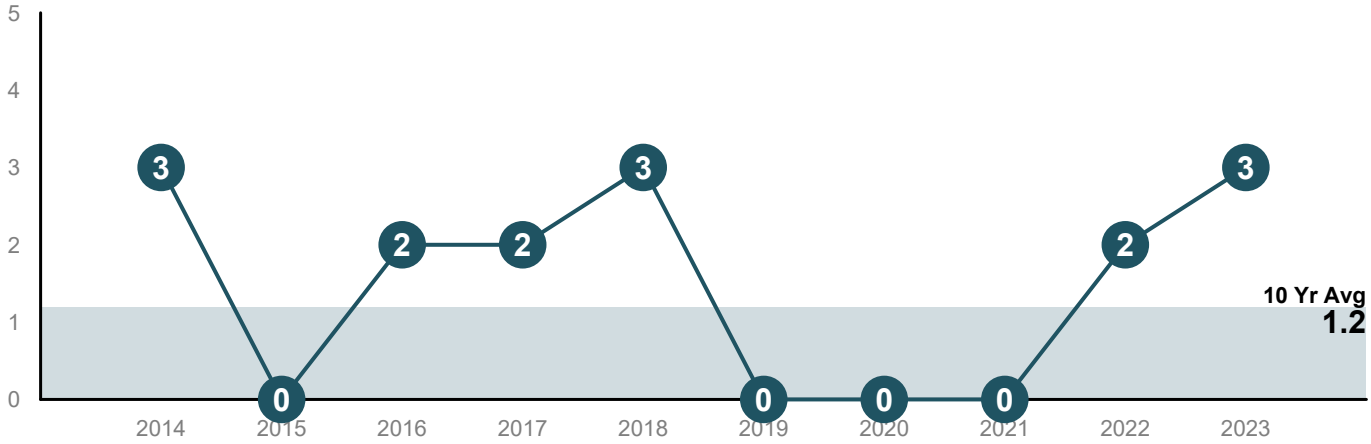
People drowned
in the Tasman region
in 2023

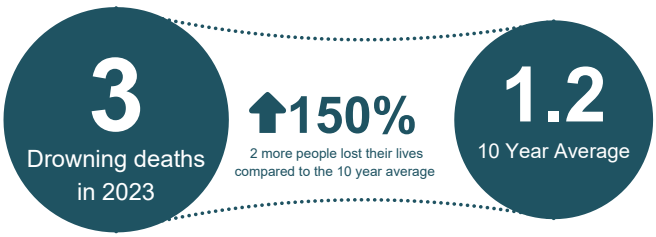


M	35-44	NZ European	Swimming	Coast
F	45-54	Other	Falls	Home
M	45-54	Other	Falls	Rivers

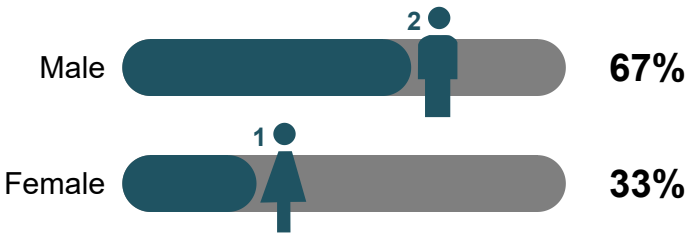
Regional

Tasman

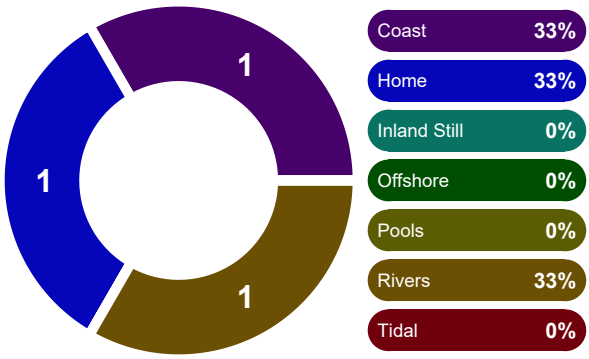




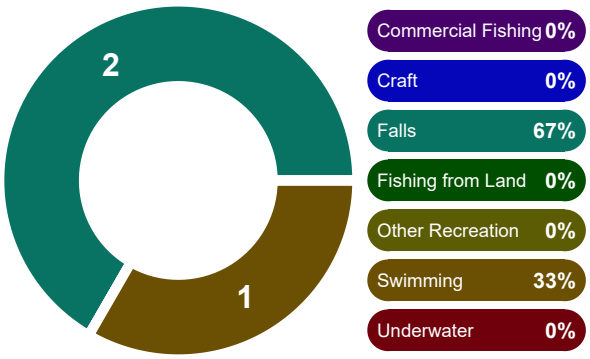
Fatalities by Sex 2023



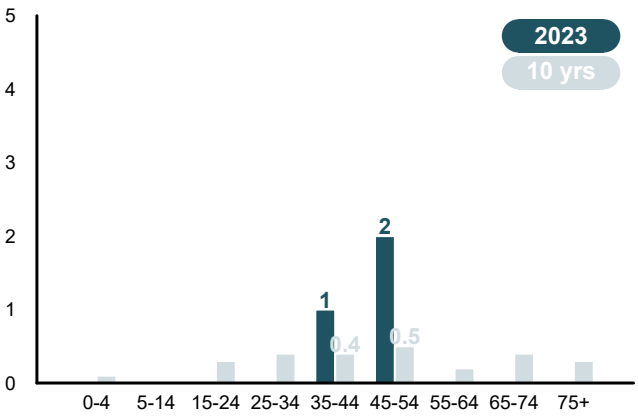
Fatalities by Environment 2023



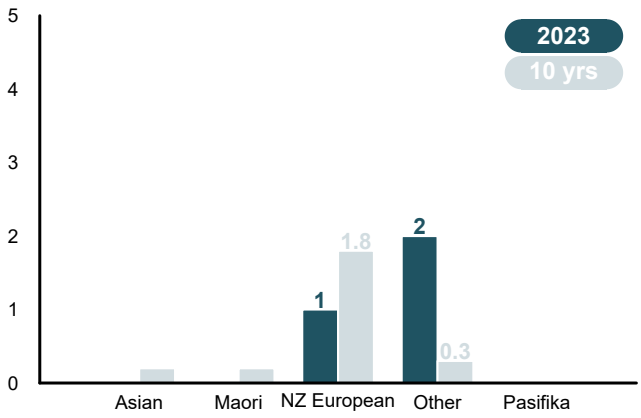
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

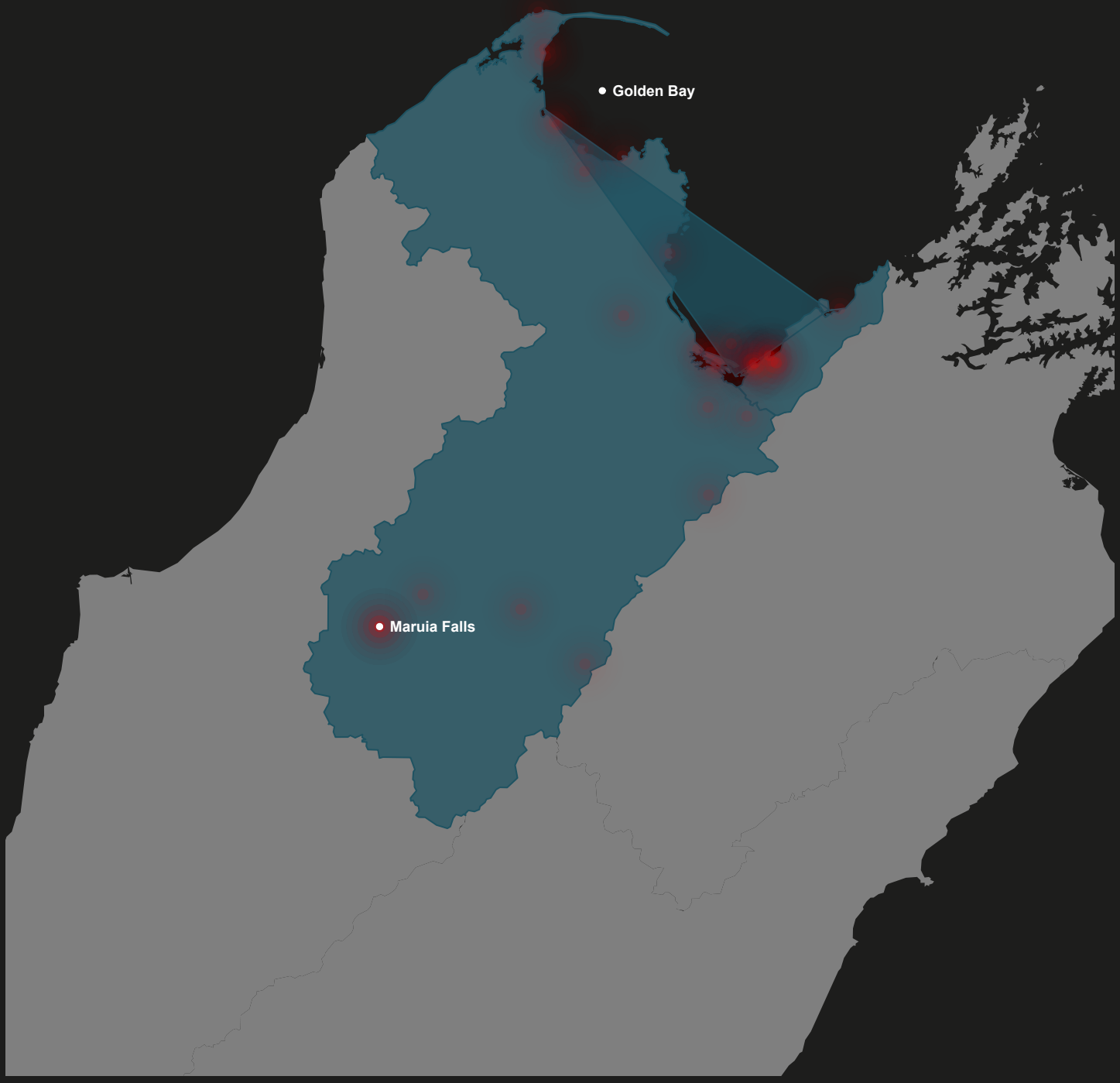


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Tasman



Regions

Tasman

Tasman

Geographically, Tasman, located in the northern part of the South Island of New Zealand, is known for its diverse landscapes that include national parks, golden beaches, and clear inland waterways. This natural beauty, especially in areas like Abel Tasman National Park, attracts numerous outdoor enthusiasts and tourists, increasing the interaction with water environments. The region is characterised by a variety of water bodies, including beaches, rivers, and lakes, which are popular for recreational activities such as swimming, boating, and fishing.

In terms of drowning fatalities, the data shows that there were 3 incidents in the Tasman region. This figure, while relatively low, underscores the importance of continuous vigilance and safety measures in water-related activities. It's important to interpret these numbers within the context of the region's population and the prevalence of water-based recreation. Tasman's population is diverse, with a mix of local residents and tourists, and includes a range of age groups and ethnicities.

Demographically, Tasman is a region with a relatively small but growing population, primarily of New Zealand European descent. The region also has a significant Māori population, with iwi such as Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Rārua, and Te Ātiawa. The population is spread across various age groups, with a notable proportion of residents being families and older individuals, reflecting a demographic trend towards a more mature population.

Snapshot

Tasman experienced 3 drowning deaths in 2023. These incidents are above the 10-year average of 1.2 drownings per year.

These drownings involved a 35–44-year-old NZ European male, swimming at the beach, a 45-54 female of “other” ethnicity involved in a “fall” at home; and a 45-54 male of “other” ethnicity involved in a “fall” at a river.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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Regional

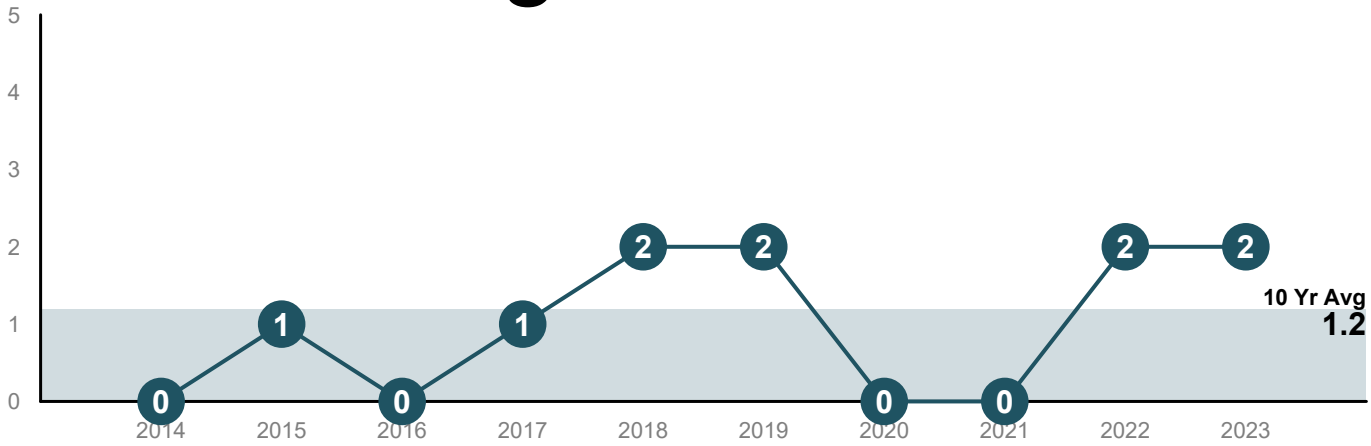
Marlborough

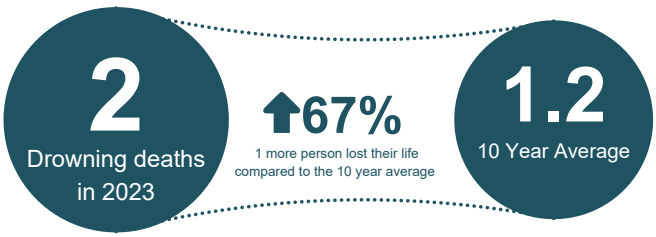
2

People drowned
in the Marlborough region
in 2023

Regional

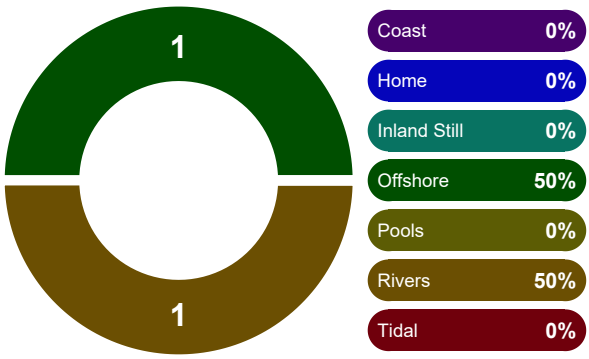
Marlborough



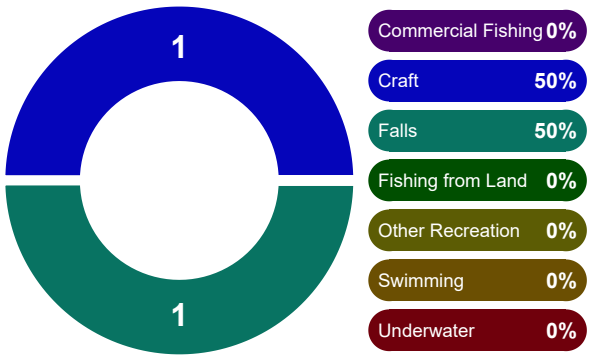


Fatalities by Sex 2023

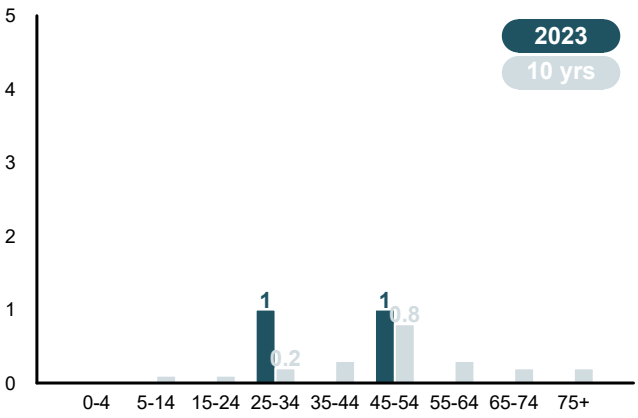
Fatalities by Environment 2023



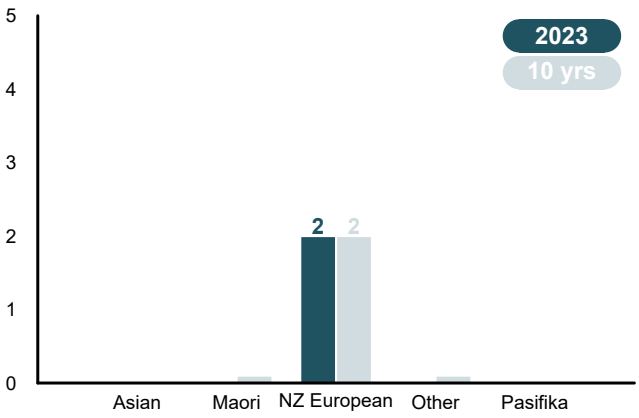
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

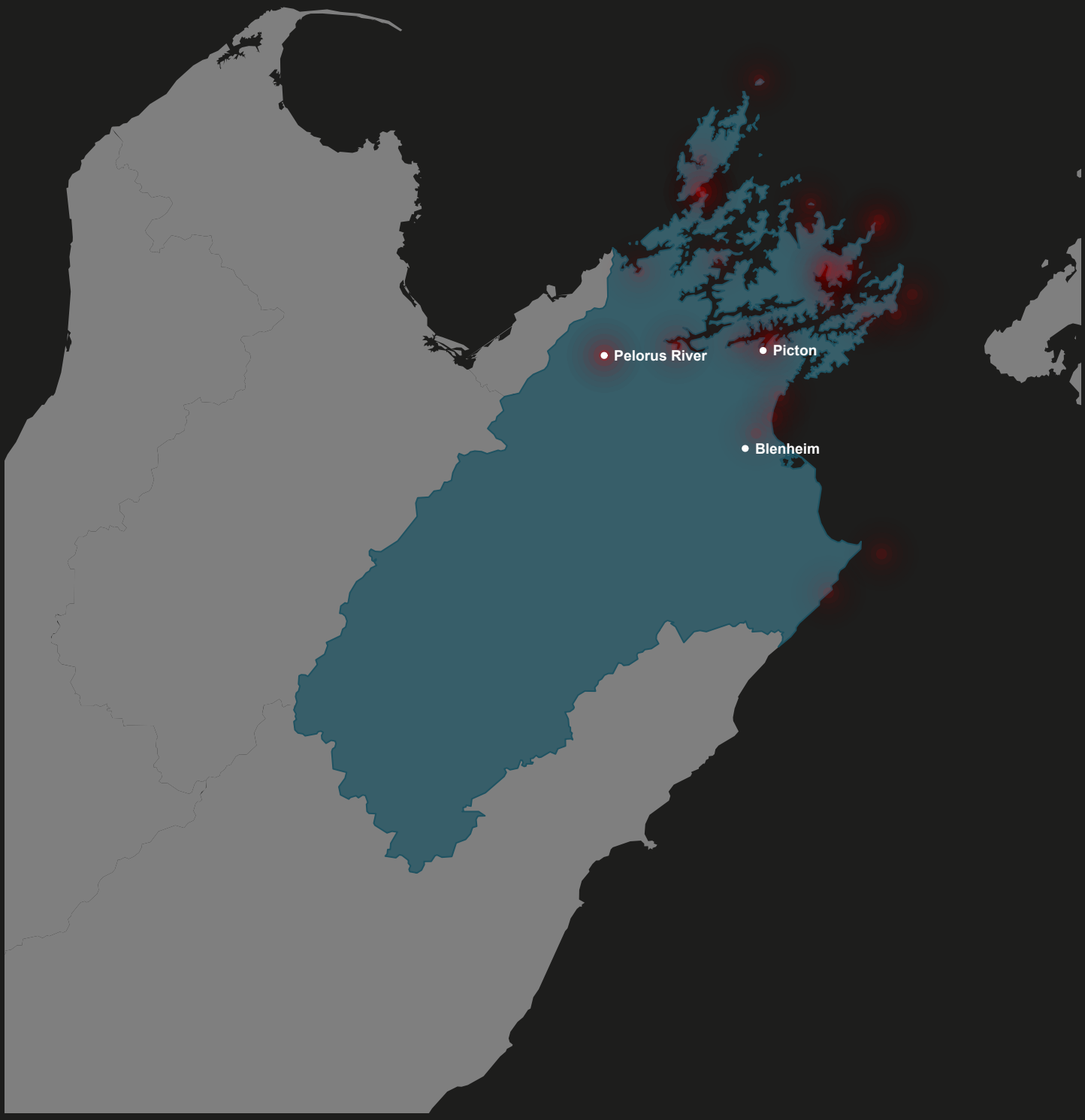


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Marlborough



Regions

Marlborough

Marlborough

Marlborough, a region in New Zealand, is distinct for its rich geographical features and demographics, which are vital to understanding the context of water safety and preventable drowning incidents in the area. Geographically, Marlborough is located in the northeast of the South Island, renowned for its extensive coastline along the Marlborough Sounds, an intricate maze of waterways formed by sunken river valleys. This area is a hub for various water-related activities, including boating and fishing, due to its sheltered inlets and bays. The region also includes significant rivers like the Wairau and Awatere, adding to its diverse aquatic landscape. Marlborough's proximity to the Cook Strait further influences its marine environment, making water safety a crucial aspect of the region.

Demographically, Marlborough is characterised by a blend of urban and rural communities, with Blenheim as its main urban centre. The population (52,200, June 2023) primarily consists of New Zealand European descent, along with a significant Māori population, including iwi such as Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Rangitāne o Wairau, and Ngāti Kuia. Marlborough's demographic structure has a notable presence of both younger families and an older population.

Understanding how demographic factors and the unique water environments in Marlborough interact is crucial for developing targeted water safety initiatives and educational programs aimed at reducing preventable drownings in the region.

Snapshot

Marlborough experienced 2 drowning deaths in 2023. These incidents were in line with the 10-year average of 1.2 drownings per year.

These drownings involved a 25–34-year-old NZ European male, involved in a “fall” at a river; and a 45-54 NZ European male in a craft related incident offshore.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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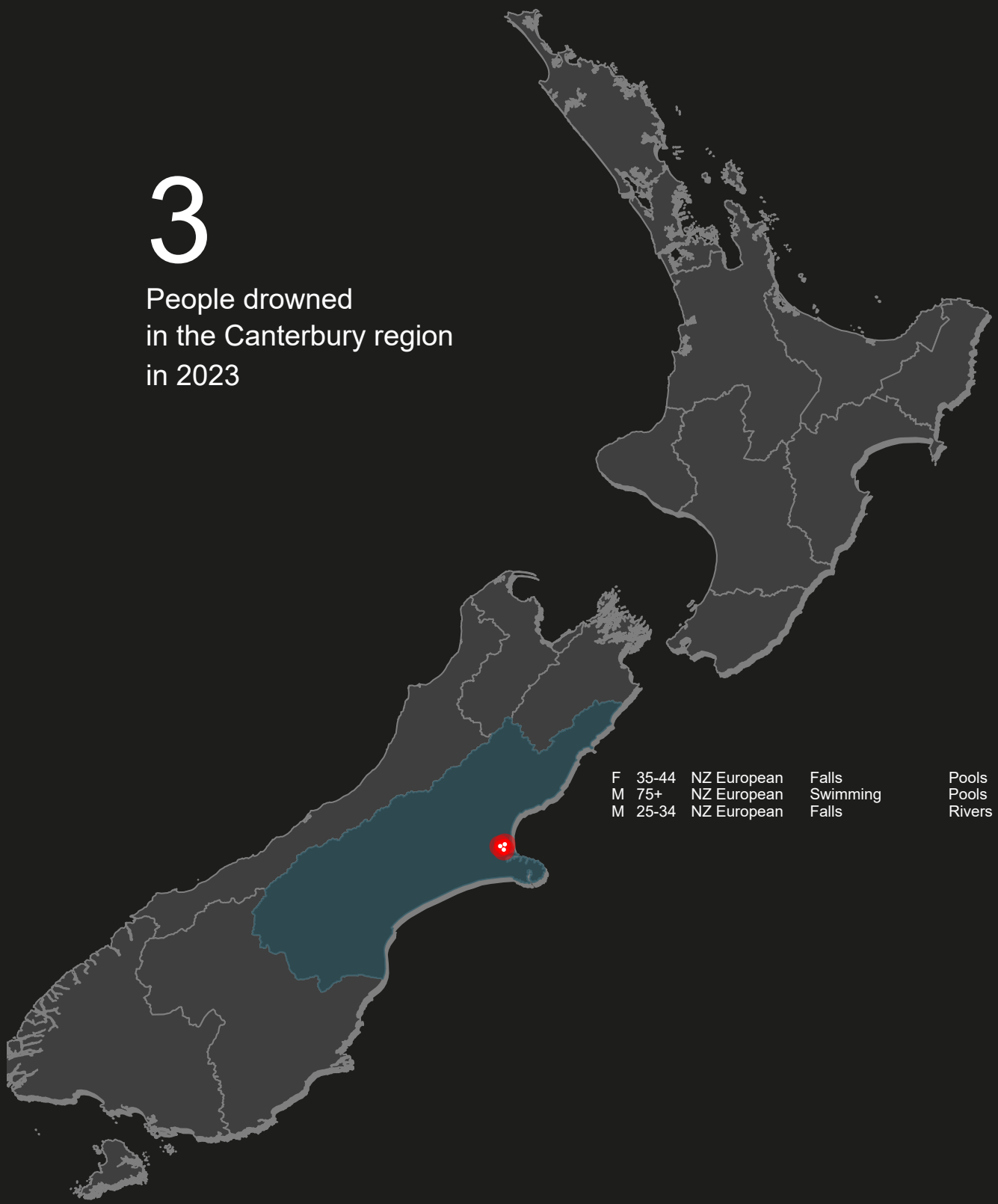
Regional

Canterbury

3

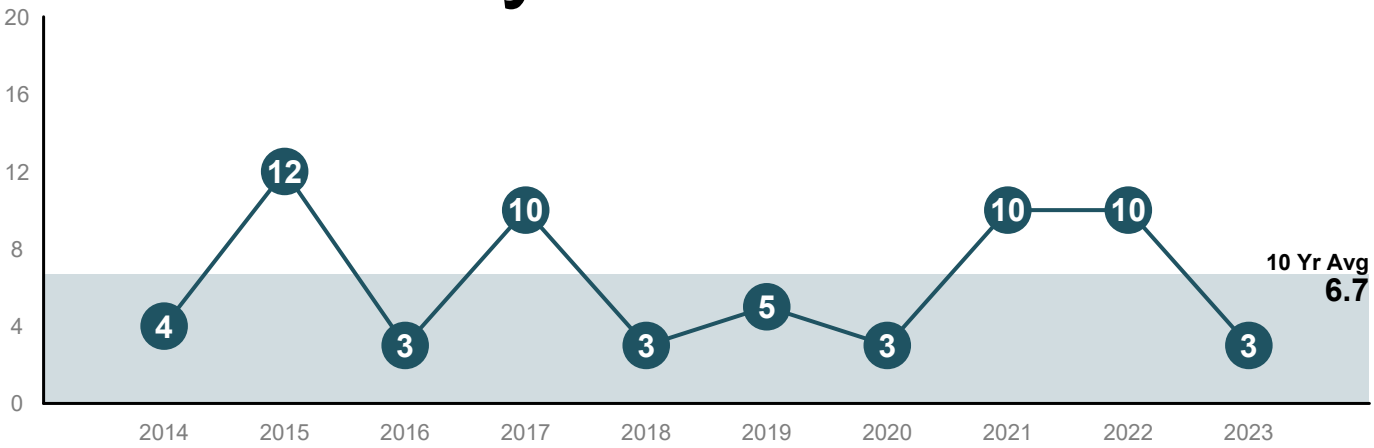
People drowned
in the Canterbury region
in 2023

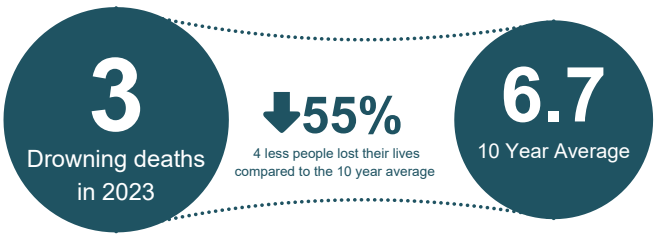


F	35-44	NZ European	Falls	Pools
M	75+	NZ European	Swimming	Pools
M	25-34	NZ European	Falls	Rivers

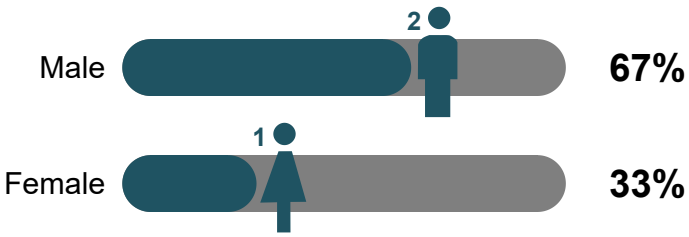
Regional

Canterbury

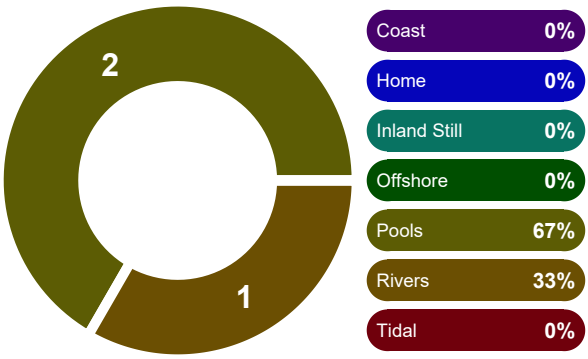




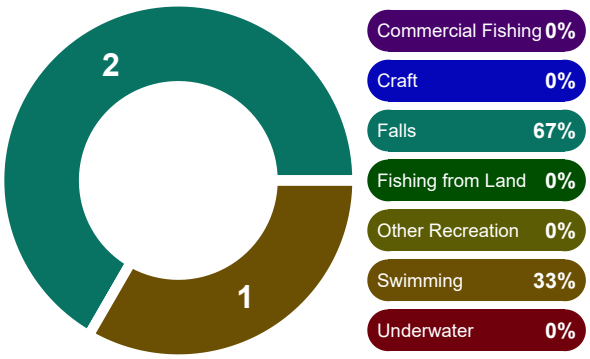
Fatalities by Sex 2023



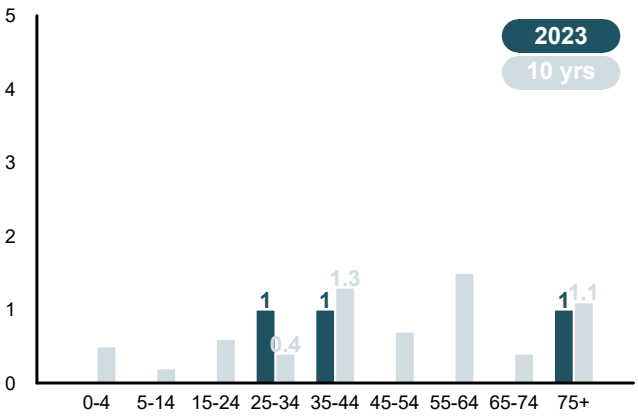
Fatalities by Environment 2023



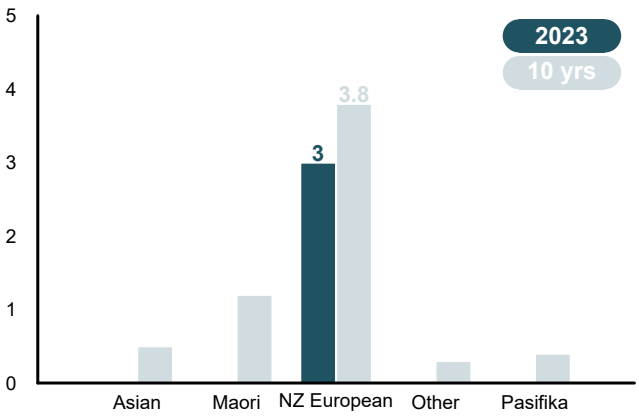
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

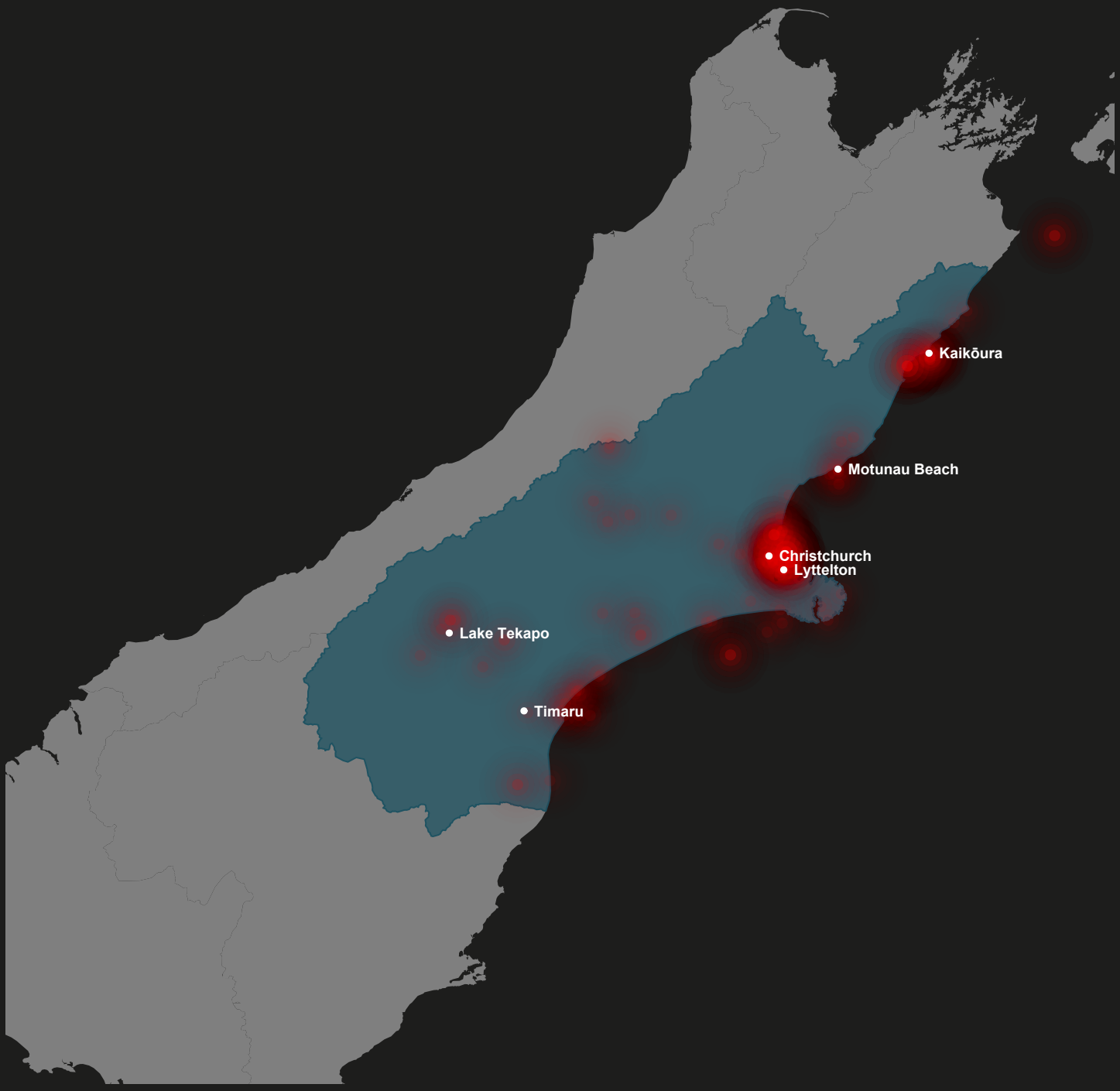


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Canterbury



Regions

Canterbury

Canterbury

Canterbury, a region in the central-eastern part of New Zealand's South Island, presents a unique set of geographical and demographic features relevant to water safety and drowning prevention.

Geographically, Canterbury is marked by its expansive coastline on the Pacific Ocean, offering a variety of beach environments. The region is also home to significant rivers such as the Waimakariri and Rakaia, which flow from the Southern Alps to the sea, creating a diverse range of water-based environments. This variety includes everything from mountain-fed rivers and lakes to coastal beaches and estuaries. These areas are popular for recreational activities like swimming, fishing, and boating, making water safety an essential concern.

In terms of demographics, Canterbury is one of the more populous regions in New Zealand, with Christchurch as its main urban centre. The population is predominantly of New Zealand European descent, but it also includes a notable Māori community, as well as a mix of other ethnic groups, reflecting New Zealand's multicultural society. The demographic profile is diverse, with a range of age groups including a significant proportion of young families, working-age adults, and an older population.

Snapshot

In 2023, there were 3 drowning deaths, which is a significant 55% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 6.7 fatalities. This decline suggests an improvement in water safety measures and awareness within the region. Over the last two years, there has been a total of 10 drowning incidents year on year, with 2023 marking a notable deviation from this trend. This continuity over the years signals a persistent risk factor associated with water activities in the Canterbury region that requires ongoing attention.

In 2023, these drownings involved a 25-34 year- old NZ European male involved in a “fall” at a river; a 35–44-year-old NZ European female involved in a “fall” at a pool; and a 75+ year old NZ European swimming at a pool.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

2. Ongoing and Expanded Delivery of Aquatic Literacy in Schools: Collaborate with schools to integrate Water Skills for Life™ into their school curriculum. Facilitate regular water safety workshops and aquatic literacy sessions for teachers, emphasising the importance of basic aquatic skills and recognising water hazards. A localised approach to growing resources (commercial, charitable, local and central government) so that schools have the means to deliver Water Skills for Life™.

3. Council Bylaws for Mandatory Lifejacket Usage: Support local Councils to enact bylaws that require the compulsory wearing of lifejackets on boats less than 6 meters in length. Promote public awareness campaigns on any new bylaws and the safety benefits of lifejacket use. Establish local partnerships to ensure that those without the means to purchase lifejackets can get access to them.

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5. Enhanced Safety Communication and Technology Use: Use technology to better understand drowning challenges. Utilise technology to establish participation trends around drowning “blackspots” or data to support notifications or water safety alerts through mobile apps ensuring good reach. Use real-time weather and water condition monitoring systems to inform the public of potential or pending hazards.

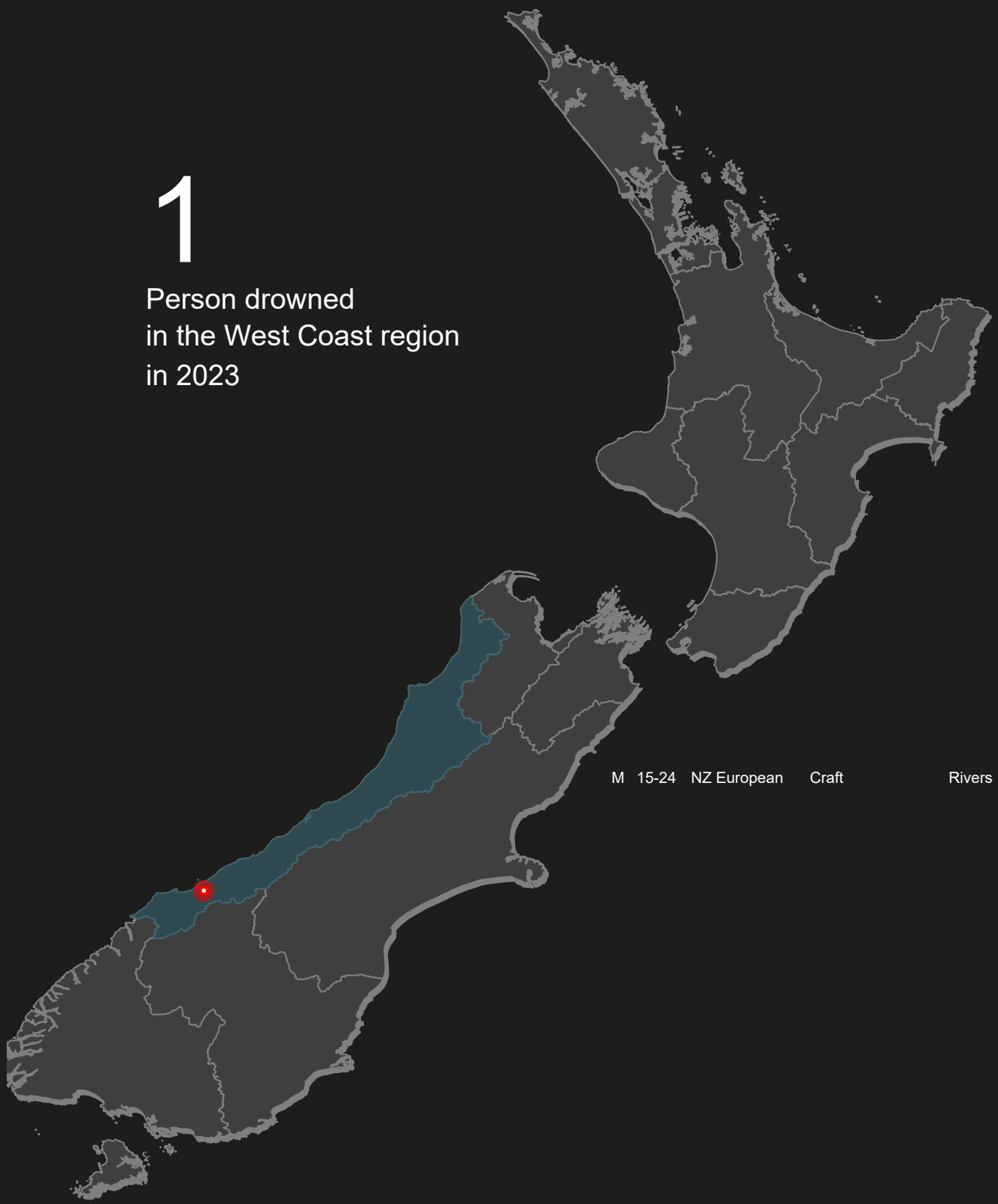
These recommendations are designed to address the multifaceted nature of water safety and drowning prevention. They combine proactive policymaking, community education, technological support, and targeted intervention to create a comprehensive safety net for regions with historically low drowning figures. By addressing the specific needs and behaviours of the population, particularly at-risk groups such as older males, and ensuring robust safety measures at identified risk areas, these strategies aim to sustain and improve upon the regions' current safety records.

Regional

West Coast

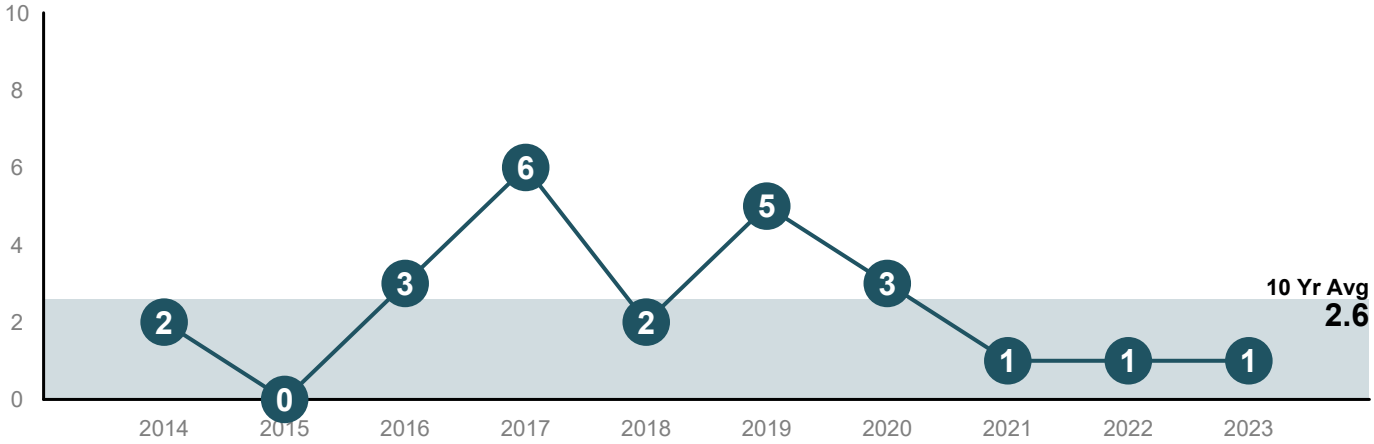
1

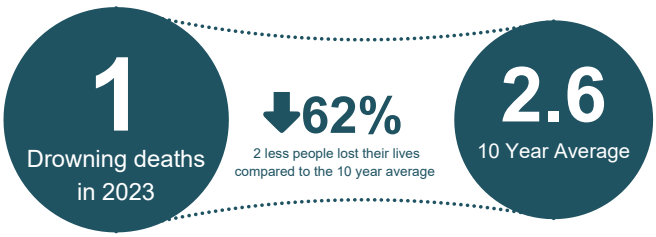
Person drowned
in the West Coast region
in 2023



Regional

West Coast

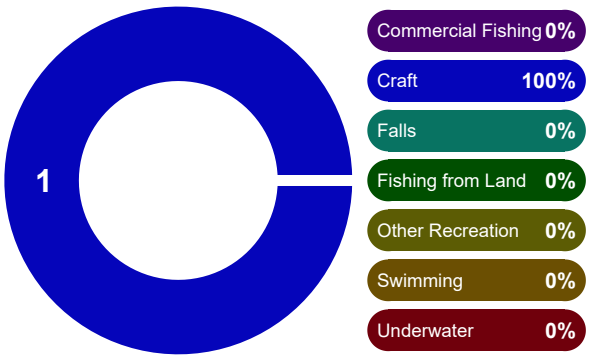




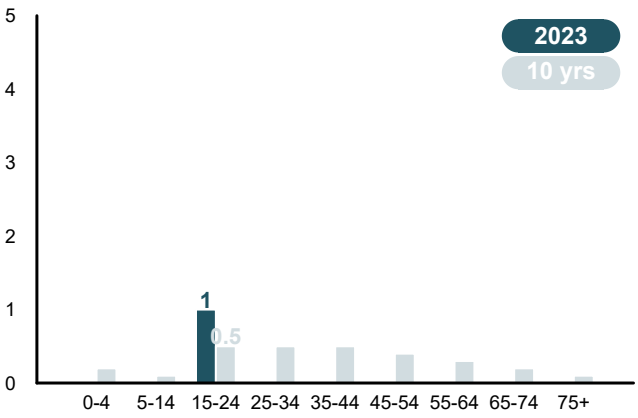
Fatalities by Sex 2023

Fatalities by Environment 2023

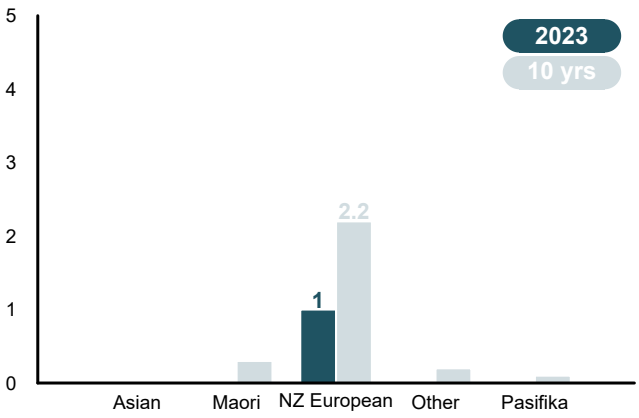
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

West Coast

Regions

West Coast

West Coast

The West Coast region of New Zealand, known for its rugged terrain and dramatic landscapes, is bordered by the Tasman Sea to the west and the Southern Alps to the east. This creates a distinct region with a long and often remote coastline, as well as numerous rivers that flow from the mountain ranges to the sea, such as the Buller and Haast Rivers. The natural environment includes dense rainforests, glaciers, and coastal plains, which are all part of the area's charm but also contribute to the complexity of water safety management.

In terms of demographics, the West Coast has one of the lowest population densities in New Zealand. The population is primarily composed of NZ European descent, but it also includes indigenous Māori communities and a variety of other ethnic groups. The region's population includes a notable proportion of older residents due to younger people often moving to larger cities for opportunities.

Given the West Coast's diverse and challenging environments, from fast-moving alpine rivers to the wild Tasman coastline, water safety efforts must be tailored to address the specific risks present in this region.

Snapshot

In 2023, there was 1 drowning death on the West Coast, which is a significant 62% decrease compared to the 10-year average of 2.6 fatalities. This decline, which has been trending down since 2017 (6) suggests an improvement in water safety measures and awareness within the region.

This drowning was of a 15–24-year-old NZ European male involved in a craft incident in a river.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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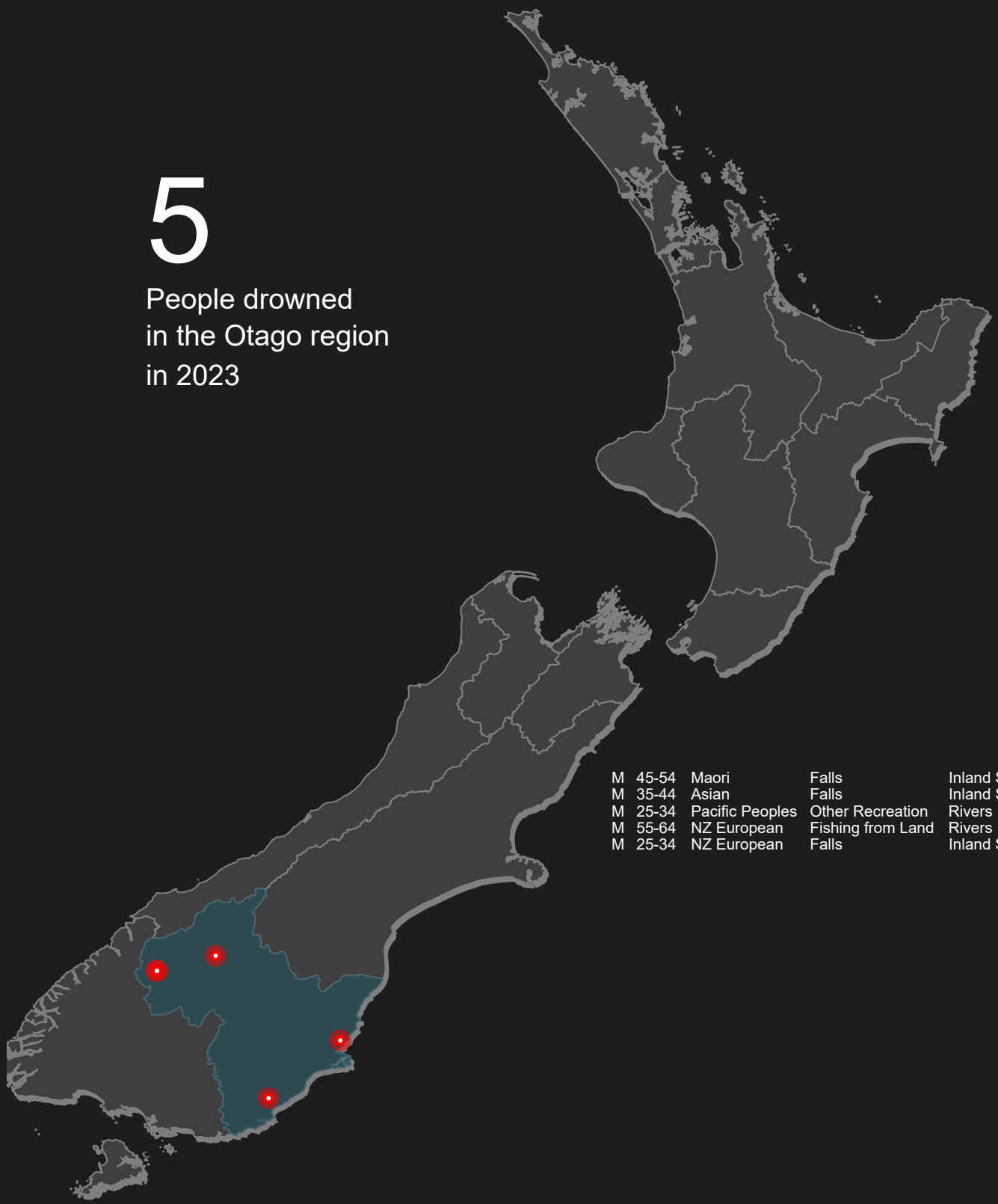
Regional

Otago

5

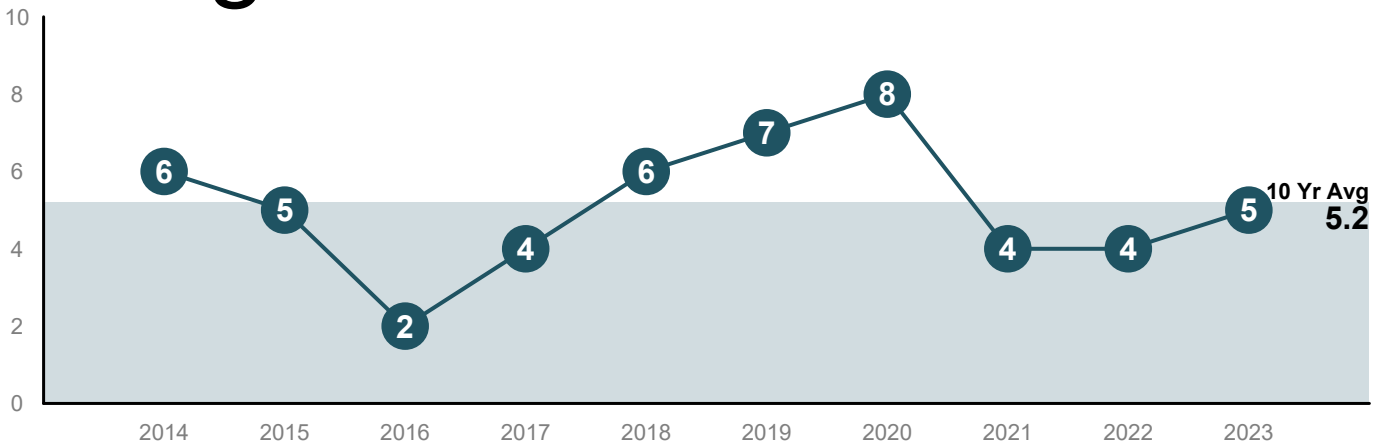
People drowned
in the Otago region
in 2023



M	45-54	Maori	Falls	Inland Still
M	35-44	Asian	Falls	Inland Still
M	25-34	Pacific Peoples	Other Recreation	Rivers
M	55-64	NZ European	Fishing from Land	Rivers
M	25-34	NZ European	Falls	Inland Still

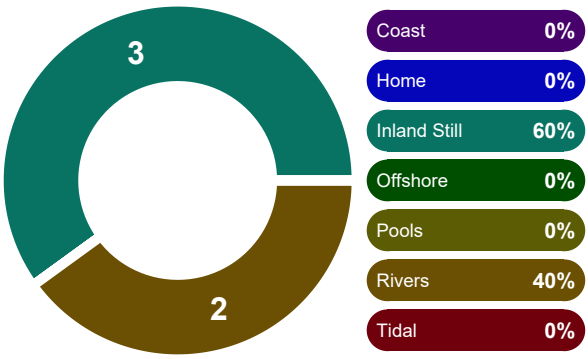
Regional

Otago

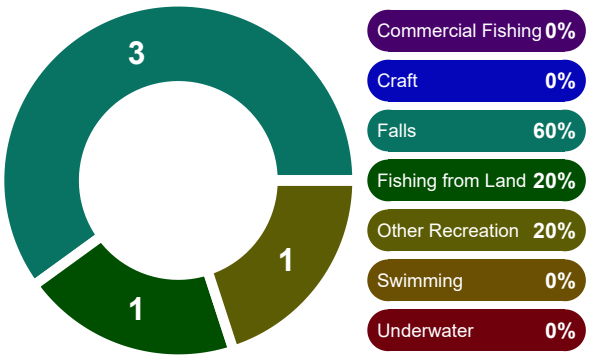


Fatalities by Sex 2023

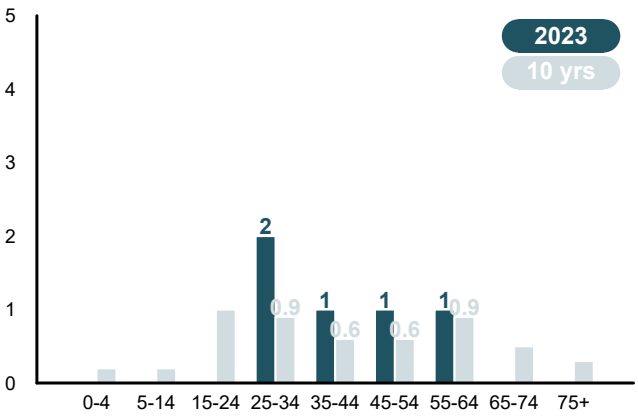
Fatalities by Environment 2023



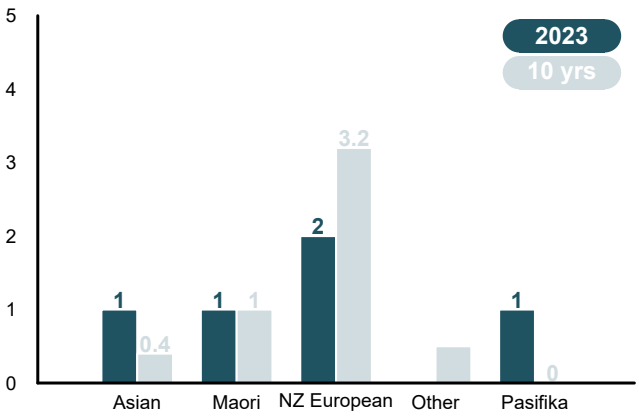
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

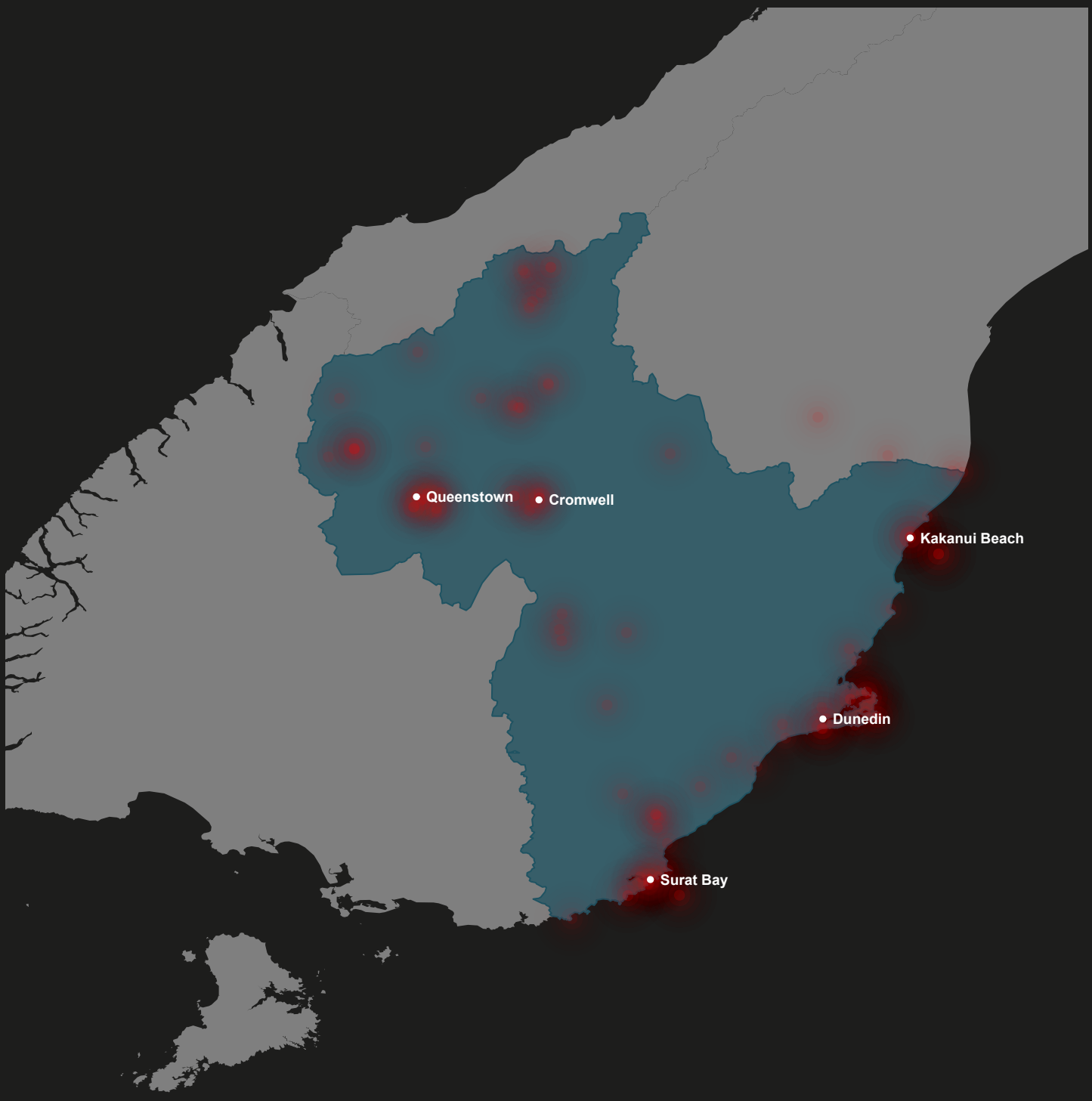


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Otago



Regions

Otago

Otago

The Otago region, situated in the southern part of New Zealand's South Island, is a locale with varied geography that includes coastal areas, inland waters, and rugged terrain. The region stretches from the Pacific Ocean on the east to the high mountains of the Southern Alps in the west. It is characterized by prominent water bodies such as Lake Wakatipu and Lake Wanaka, as well as the Clutha River, the longest river in the South Island, which pose both recreational opportunities and risks.

Demographically, as of June 2023, the Otago region has a population of approximately 254,600, which constituted about 4.7% of New Zealand's total population. Otago has a diverse population with a significant proportion of younger residents, partly due to the presence of the University of Otago in Dunedin, the region's main city. The area also has a rich cultural heritage with historical Māori settlements and a mix of ethnicities contributing to the regional identity.

Snapshot

There is a notable fluctuation in numbers with a 10-year average of 5.2 drowning deaths per year. In 2023, there were 5 drowning deaths. All fatalities in Otago were male.

The environments where the drownings occurred are categorized with the majority happening in inland still waters (3 deaths), followed by rivers (2 deaths).

In 2023, three deaths were associated with “falls”, one with fishing from land, and one with “other recreation”.

The age groups affected were all in the age range 25-64 years, with each age group experiencing one death. The 25-34 age group experienced two deaths. From an ethnicity perspective, 2 deaths were NZ European, along with 1 Māori and 1 Asian ethnicity.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

1. Targeted Interventions at "Black Spot" Drowning Locations: Conduct thorough investigations to identify "black spots" or areas with a history of drownings. Invest in safety infrastructure at these locations, such as appropriate warning signage, suitable rescue equipment, and emergency response training for local residents. Implement regular surveillance during peak seasons and times, especially in remote areas where delayed emergency responses may occur.

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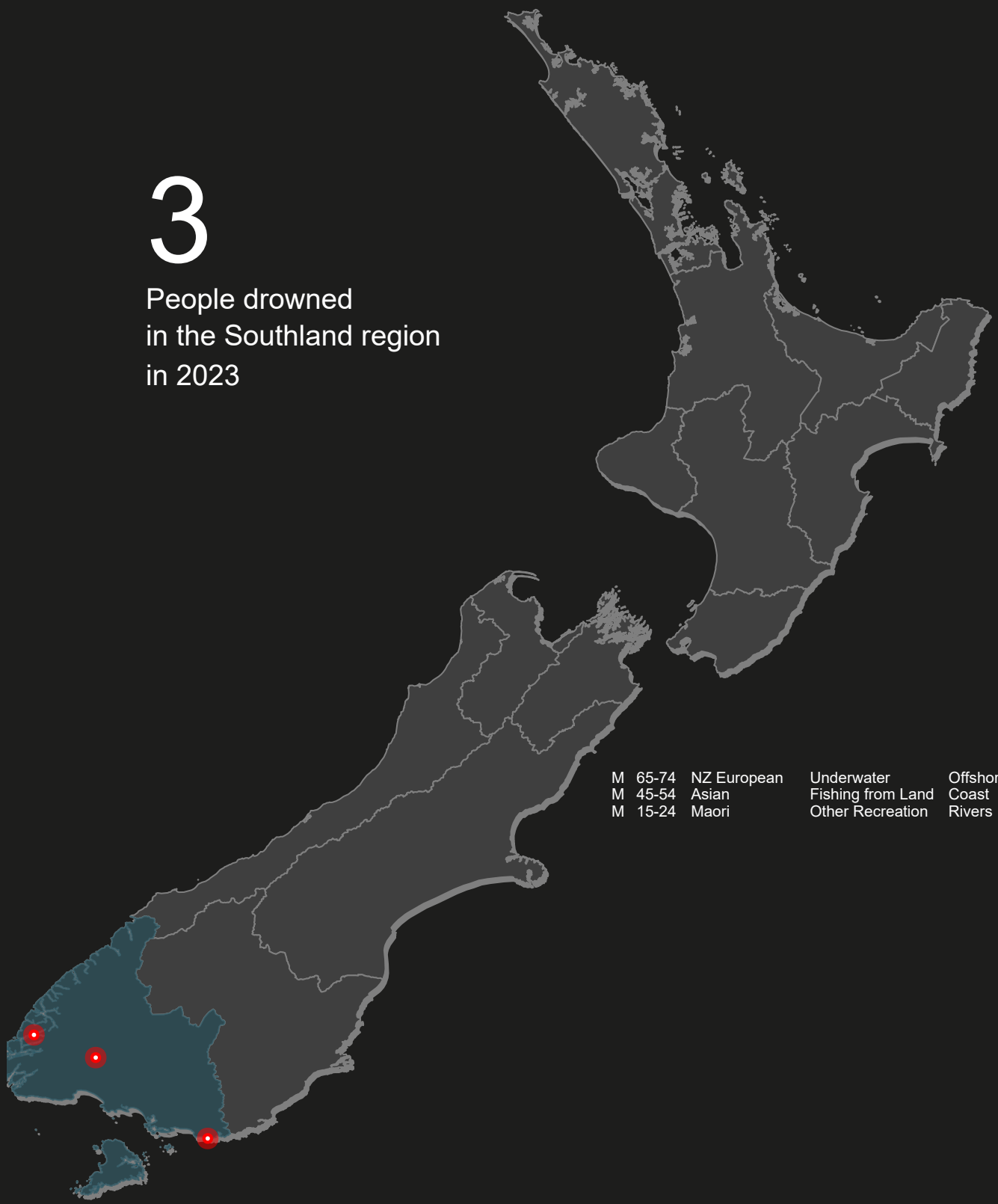
Regional

Southland

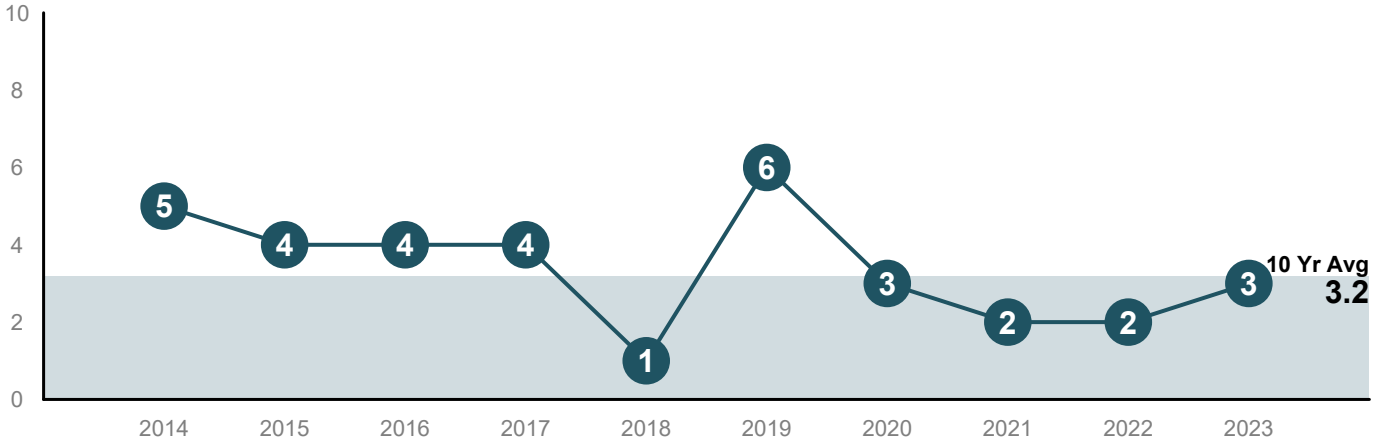
3

People drowned
in the Southland region
in 2023



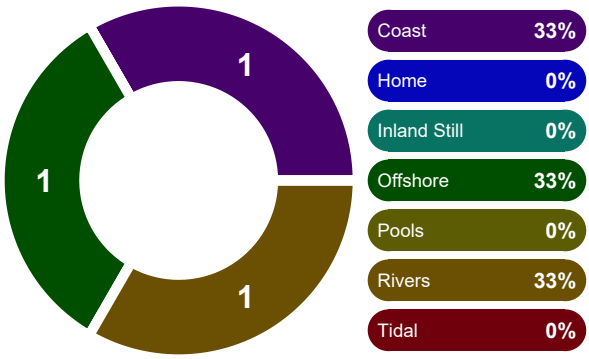
Regional

Southland

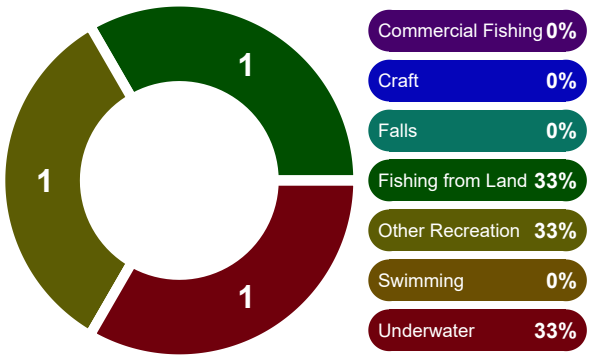


Fatalities by Sex 2023

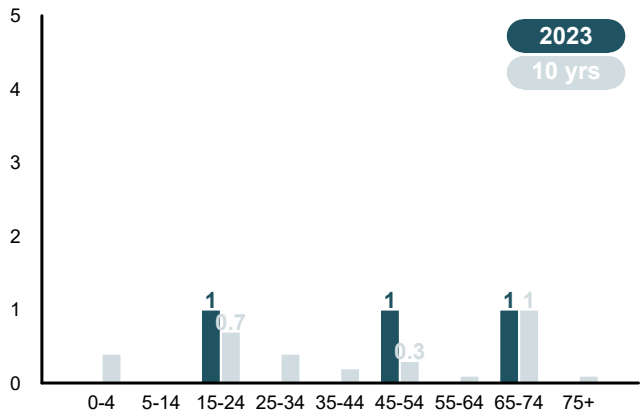
Fatalities by Environment 2023



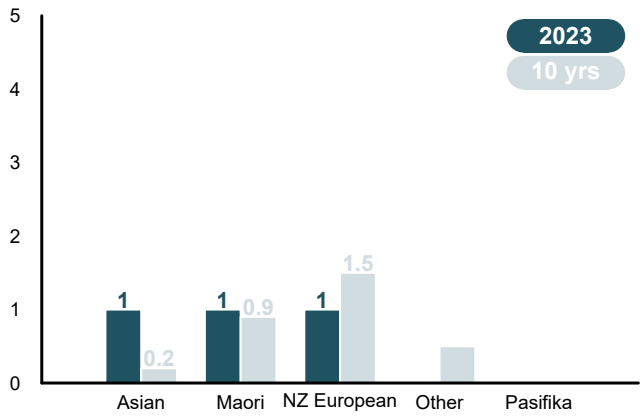
Fatalities by Activity 2023



Fatalities by Age Group (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023

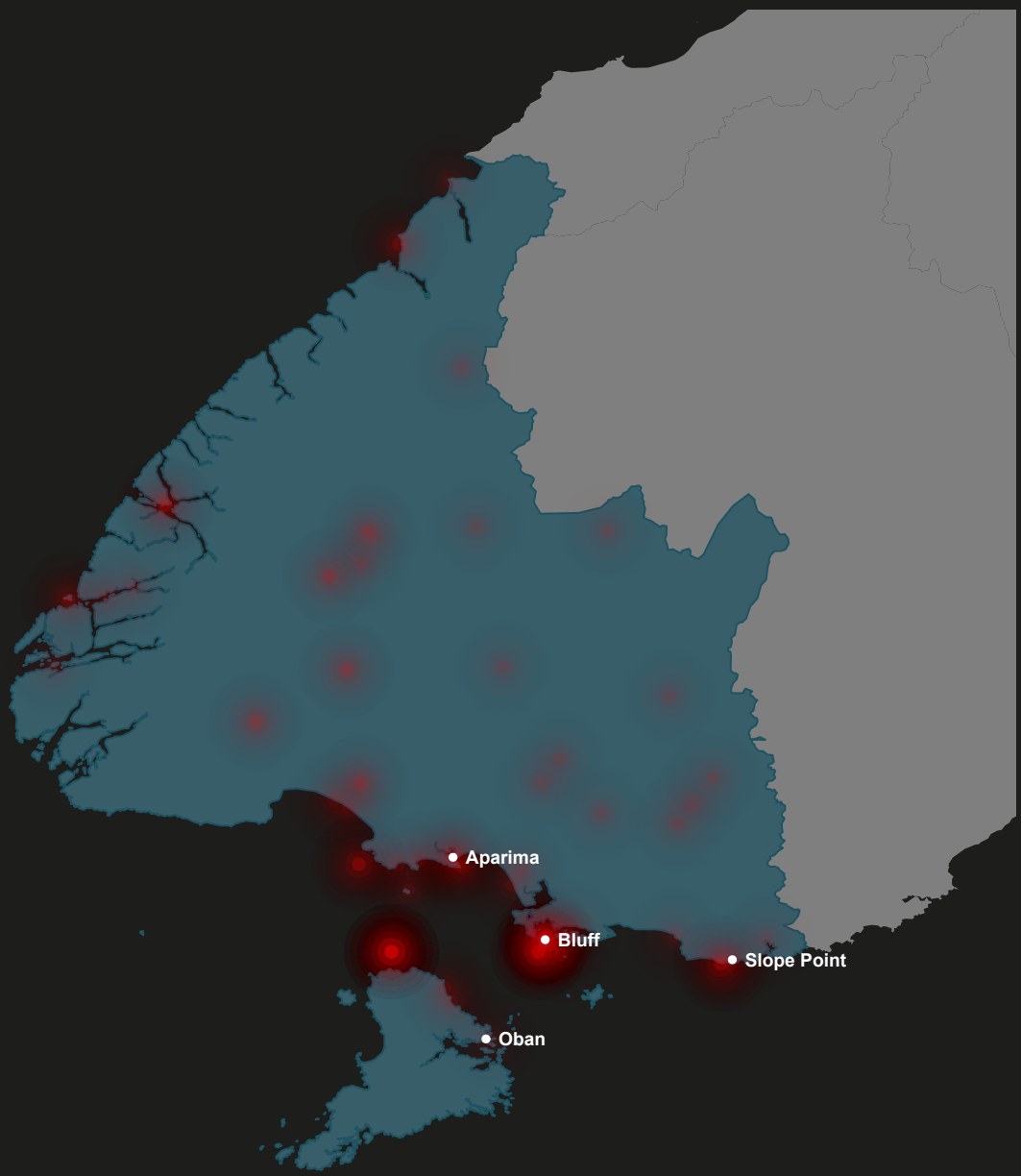


Fatalities by Ethnicity (vs 10 Yr Average) 2023



Regional

Southland



Regions

Southland

Southland

Southland, located at the southern tip of New Zealand's South Island, is characterised by its extensive and diverse geographical features. It is bordered by the Tasman Sea to the west, the Southern Ocean to the south, and Otago to the northeast. The region includes Stewart Island and several smaller surrounding islands. Southland's landscape is marked by rugged coastlines, fiords, and large inlets, such as Fiordland and Foveaux Strait. The region is also home to major rivers like the Waiau, Mataura, and Oreti, which play significant roles in both the ecosystem and the local economy.

Southland is known for its relatively small population size, which is predominantly of European descent, followed by the Māori community, representing the Ngai Tahu iwi primarily. The demographic profile of Southland tends to skew towards an older age group compared to the national average, partly due to urban migration trends among younger individuals.

Snapshot

Southland experienced 3 drowning deaths in 2023. These incidents are in line with the 10-year average of 3.2 drownings per year. All fatalities were male.

These drownings were a 65–74-year-old NZ European male, offshore whilst diving; a 45–54-year-old Asian male fishing from land on the coast and a 15–24-year-old Māori male in a river.

General Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maintain low drowning rates, using targeted interventions and strategies.

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Water Safety New Zealand

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