

CEO Report

Daniel Gerrard,

Chief Executive - Water Safety New Zealand

Ko Kapukataumahaka te māunga
Ko Whakaherekau te moana
Ko Rimutaka te waka
Ko Gherardini da Tusca tōku iwi
Ko Gerrard tōku hapū
Ko David Gerrard rāua ko Barbara McLean ōku mātua
Ko Daniel Gerrard tōku ingoa
Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa

As I reflect on the journey of Water Safety NZ (WSNZ) throughout 2022/23, I am humbled and proud to present to you the achievements, challenges, and ongoing transformations that have defined our year. The essence of our mission, to ensure every Kiwi can enjoy our country's beautiful waters safely, has never been more critical.

This 2022/23 year was another internally focused, capability-driven year for us. Recognising the importance of strengthening our foundation, we invested significantly in our internal capacities. Our commitment to developing internal talents, tools, and strategies has positioned us to make more impactful and sustainable contributions to water safety in Aotearoa.

At the heart of our accomplishments this year lies the substantial progress made by our Data, Research & Insight team. Simon, Chris, Felicity, and Stella's relentless pursuit of knowledge have enabled WSNZ to be confident in making data-driven decisions, optimising our data to produce meaningful analysis, and ensuring the relevance of our sectors' interventions. Their work has become the bedrock on which we build our future intent, identify the opportunities, and provide better support to more impactful community engagements.

A further shining exemplar of the standard of work being produced has been the outstanding evolution and successful expansion of the Water Skills for Life programme. Esther has single handedly driven remarkable change, and with the support of our partners and communities a far greater understanding of what these lifelong skills can provide to our little New Zealanders. In 2022/23 we've seen more children than ever before acquire the essential life-skills to navigate the waters safely. This

programme's expansion has not just been about numbers, but about creating lasting impacts, weaving the lessons of water safety into the fabric of our nation's young minds and their schools.

WSNZ's stewardship of the Wai Ora Aotearoa 2025, the NZ Water Safety strategy aptly and expertly led by Nina, has been an intricate and rewarding journey – a challenge WSNZ embraces wholeheartedly. Guiding the Wai Ora Aotearoa Leadership team has indeed been an intricate dance of passion and precision. The multifaceted nature and the extreme variability of our nation's waterways demands a strategy that is both robust and flexible, one that acknowledges Whakapapa, embraces Mātauranga and instils Tikanga. We are more committed than ever to this monumental task... Everyone connects to and enjoys the water safely.

I wish to pass on my thanks to the Wai Ora Leadership team for their ongoing commitment to Wai Ora Aotearoa 2025. I also wish to acknowledge the amazing mahi that you and your organisations all do to keep us all safe.

Every year brings with it its own set of challenges, and 2022/23 was no exception. The Ministry of Transport led review into the Recreational Safety and NZ Search & Rescue system reached its conclusion. The review, while focussing upon refining and aligning the "system" also posed interesting questions regarding the leadership of the sector elements. These questions presented the Advisory Group members with moments of introspection. These moments were invaluable, for they provide us all with opportunities to reassess each organisations path, ensuring we are always aligned with the highest standards and best practices. These moments, while challenging, have definitely sharpened WSNZ's focus and commitment to excellence. I wish to acknowledge the work of Bev Driscoll and her team.

Another hurdle that impacted many of our members and community providers was the refocus of the 2022/23 Contestable Funding process. WSNZ acknowledges the challenges faced, by many, due to these changes. We understand there have been teething issues, and we

genuinely appreciate the feedback from our community. We want to assure you that we have taken this feedback on board and have incorporated it into the 2023/24 funding round.

The core purpose of Water Safety New Zealand's contestable funds is to invest in community-led initiatives that directly address the primary causes of drowning in Aotearoa. Our goal is to make a tangible difference in the drowning rate by supporting and investing in water safety-focused community capabilities throughout the nation. Historically, our funding was channelled directly to specific key delivery partners through National Infrastructure Agreements and via a contestable fund named the Drowning Prevention Fund. However, we recognized the need for change.

Given the alarming and disproportionate rate of Māori drownings – where Māori face more than double the risk compared to their representation in the New Zealand population – a pivotal decision was made. With guidance from the Water Safety New Zealand Board, WSNZ re-introduced an additional dedicated fund. This fund, named *Kia Maanu Kia Ora*, is designed to stimulate, and support interventions rooted in Te Ao Māori.

Gavin, Rob, and the wider team are committed to transparency, inclusivity, and effectiveness in our funding processes, and we look forward to seeing the positive impacts these funds will bring to our communities.

I must extend a profound thanks to our outgoing Chairperson, Kate Wareham, and the equally long-serving Board member, Michael Bassett-Foss. They have both committed six years of service to WSNZ and the water safety sector. They have been transformative, especially during our crucial re-shaping stage. Kate has been a beacon of support for me. Her guidance, both as Chair and often offering a fellow CEO perspective, has enriched not just my leadership journey but has greatly benefited our organisation. Both Kate and Michael's legacies will undoubtedly influence Water Safety NZ's trajectory for years to come.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the other members of the Board, Kira Schaffler, Anne-Marie Jackson, Corrina Gage, Anna Tootill, Peter Kara and James Helmore for their unwavering support and stewardship. As I have often mentioned I sincerely appreciate the open and frank discussions we have around the Board table and across the internet.

The evolution of the Water Safety NZ team deserves special mention. Change is the only constant, and our team has demonstrated its capability to adapt, innovate, and grow with every twist and turn. They have been my pillar of strength. With the ebb and flow of challenges, our team has showcased resilience, adaptability, and innovation. Their unwavering dedication has been the basis of our successes. I, of course, could not do what I do without the amazing support and assistance I get from Kerry and Caron. I am deeply grateful for your dedication and hard work.

In wrapping up, I express a heartfelt appreciation to each one of you, the WSNZ membership. Our collective vision, effort, and passion are the catalysts for the progress we all make year after year. Together, we stride forward, envisioning a future where the splendour of water is accompanied by an innate sense of safety and reverence. My deepest gratitude goes out to all of you and the mahi that you do.

Ka pū te ruha, ka hao te rangatahi – The old net is cast aside while the new net goes fishing.

Daniel Gerrard
Chief Executive

