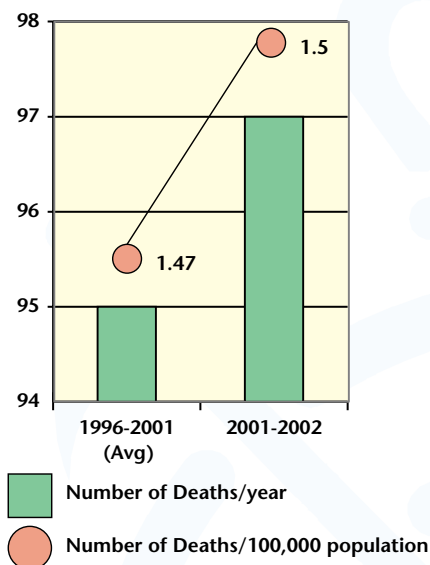


# THE NSW DROWNING REPORT 2002

## 97 People Drowned in NSW last Year!\*

\* This is an interim report based on police and coroner reports received by the 30th September 2001.

**Chart 1 – NSW Drownings –**  
Water Related Deaths and Death Rates 1996 – 2001/02



### NSW Drownings Remain Constant

NSW trends suggest that 97 people drowned in preventable water related activities during the financial year 2001-2002. This figure is in line with the previous five year average of 95. Taking the NSW population growth into consideration, the preventable water related death rate is slightly above the 1996-2001 average at 1.5 deaths per 100,000 population (see Chart 1). Males contribute to over 82% of the total drowning figures.

With the approaching 2002-2003 summer, shaping up to be hot and dry, continued public awareness is essential to avoid the multiple drownings of previous summers. The message from The Royal Life Saving Society Australia NSW Branch is that whenever you are in, on or near a water environment, "Keep Watch" particularly of young children and prevent further lives from being lost.

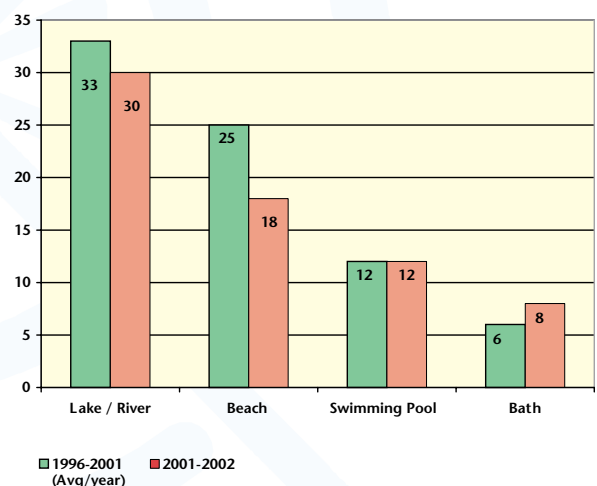
### Lake, River and Dam Account for 30 Drownings in 2001-2002

2001-2002 revealed a significant loss of life in lake, river and dam drownings. The flat, still appearance of lakes and rivers often give a false impression. These locations remain the most dangerous when it comes to drowning. 30 deaths were recorded at these locations during the period, slightly below the 1996-2001 average of 33 (see Chart 2).

The number of beach drownings is significantly lower than the five year average with 18 people drowning (down from 25) and this represents a decrease of 27%.

Backyard private swimming pools claimed 7 lives of which 3 of these were aged under 5. Drowning in the bath accounted for 8 deaths up against the 5 year average of 6. These two locations remain the biggest threat to children aged between 0-5 years. Parents are being asked to be vigilant and "Keep Watch" whenever children are around the backyard pool or in the bath.

**Chart 2 – Inland Waterways Dominate Drownings**  
Water Related Deaths by Location 1996 – 2001/02



This report and the national report are available at [www.rlssa.org.au/nsw](http://www.rlssa.org.au/nsw)

For more information contact: RLSSA NSW Branch on

**1300 7377 63**  
**1300 RESQME**

Supported by:



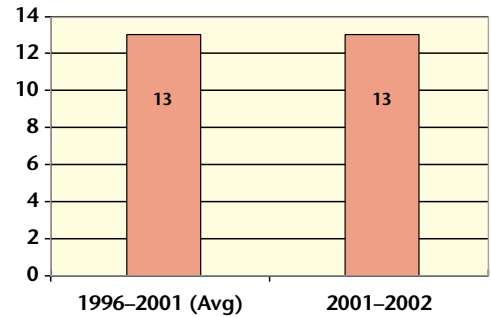
# 0-5 Year Olds – A Continuing Dilemma

**On average every 4 weeks a child under the age of 5 drowns somewhere in NSW!**

Indications for 2001-2002 suggest that 13 children under 5 years of age died as a result of drowning (see Chart 3). This figure is identical to the previous 5 year average and therefore remains a significant problem. Of the 13 child deaths aged 0-5, 4 drowned in lakes (all regional), 1 in a river, 2 in the bath, 5 in pools (both private and public) and 1 at the beach.

For every drowning death there was approximately three children admitted to hospital as a result of an immersion incident. In NSW this equates to about 39 “near-drowned” children. Every one of these incidents is a potential death. Studies have shown that between 5%-20% of children who are admitted to hospital have suffered some form of brain damage, ranging from mild to severe.

**Chart 3 – 0-5 Age Group Drownings**  
The Last 5 Years 1996–2001/02



## Characteristics of Swimming Pool Drownings

The most common factors contributing to swimming pool drowning were a lack of direct adult supervision, combined with faulty safety equipment, such as pool fences and gates. Whilst in some cases the contributing role of fencing related to the equipment itself, such as not being present or being in a state of disrepair, in other cases it was the way in which equipment was handled by adults and other children (i.e. leaving the pool gate open, or leaving objects against barriers allowing footholds etc). Clearly the maintenance and appropriate usage of swimming pool fences and gates are problems which need addressing. The behaviour of adults in not providing adequate supervision was the main contributing factor to all 0-5 deaths.

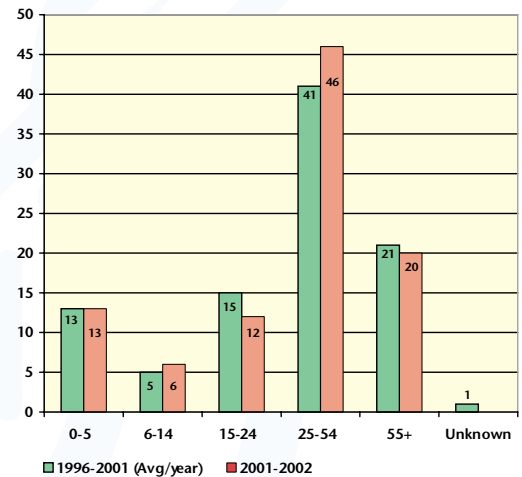
### Who Drowns in NSW (2001/02) “Males Continue to Dominate Statistics” (See Chart 4)

The 2001-2002 figures suggest consistent drowning trends in the early age groups and some continuing problems in the middle and older age groups against the five year average.

Over 82% of all drownings identified are males. Young males in particular continue to participate in risk taking activities that have ended disastrously. 43 of the 46 drownings in the 25-54 age group were males. 11 of these deaths were a result of rock fishing and 5 from boating activity. Drowning is the third most common unintentional injury cause of death in Australia for males, after transport accidents and falls.

Positive results have been recorded in the 15-24 years age group with a decrease against the five year average. The knowledge and skills learnt during the school years, combined with public education campaigns targeting this age group appear to be having an effect.

**Chart 4 – Who Drowns in New South Wales?**  
Preventable Water Related Deaths by Age Group 1996 – 2001/02



### Drowning By Activity (2001/02) (See Chart 5)

Of great concern is the 24 deaths associated with “falling into water”. These individuals had no intention of entering the water at the time of their death. (See Chart 5.)

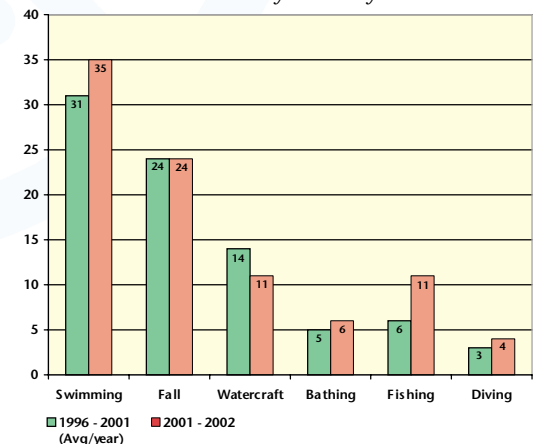
35 deaths resulted from swimming which is higher than the 5 year average of 31.

Watercraft related deaths were slightly below the average with 11 deaths. Recreational boaters need to ensure that their craft is seaworthy, that weather conditions are safe and that they have sufficient PFDs for all those on board.

Diving related drownings remain consistent with the five year average with 4 confirmed deaths over the selected period.

The Royal Life Saving Society is urging parents to take a greater role in the water safety education of their children. Of greatest concern is the high figure associated with rock fishing which is almost double the five year average.

**Chart 5 – Drowning By Activity**  
Water Related Deaths by Activity 1996 – 2001/02



The following websites are very popular and useful sources of information for parents and teachers.

[www.wetnwise.com](http://www.wetnwise.com)  
[www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au](http://www.safewaters.nsw.gov.au)

[www.swimandsurvive.com](http://www.swimandsurvive.com)  
[www.rlssa.org.au](http://www.rlssa.org.au)