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Media Release
For Immediate Release



Nineteen Drowning Deaths in January

There were nineteen drowning deaths in New Zealand during January 2011. The January toll is equivalent to 22% of the entire 2010 drowning toll. Seven of the victims were Maori, nearly half of the total Maori drowning toll for 2010 of 15.

Ten of the drowning incidents are attributed to recreational activity, four while swimming. Diving, boating and angling activities each accounted for two fatalities.

Seven non-recreational incidents have been recorded with six of these fatal events being accidental immersions and one commercial fishing incident.

The remaining two deaths are classified by Water Safety New Zealand as 'Other'. These incidents involved a suicide and the death of a crew member from a passenger ship.

Matt Claridge, General Manager, WSNZ comments, "19 deaths in a calendar month is a terribly high toll for a nation of our size and unfortunately is a reflection of the poor attitude and abilities of many New Zealanders when they are in and around the water. Sadly, the Maori victims represent the classic drowning scenarios for Maori. These include preschool children (lack of supervision), adolescents (risky behaviour) and older males (gathering kaimoana)."

Last year's total drowning toll was the lowest ever recorded by WSNZ but the high number of deaths in January is a horrific start to 2011.

"Continued reductions in the drowning toll will be entirely dependent upon people making the right choices and ensuring they have the ability to undertake water based activity safely. Given the extensive media coverage of drowning incidents over the holiday period it is very disappointing to see many incidents being replayed again and again."

Swimming, angling and diving are again prominently featured in the statistics, but the high number of accidental immersions is also a major concern. In particular, the three incidents involving unsupervised children aged from 0-3 years who have drowned.

"These deaths are the direct result of the children being inadequately supervised; drowning is silent and can happen very quickly. This is common sense and the most basic of



messages. Constant supervision without any distractions is fundamental and the result of not fulfilling this responsibility is sadly predictable.”

WSNZ is continuing to urge parents and caregivers to give the appropriate attention to ensuring children understand basic water safety messages and providing opportunities for their children to learn to swim.

“To develop a positive water safety culture in this country depends upon educating our kids with the skills they need to enjoy the water safely. The most essential of which is being able to swim and survive. Parents and school teachers should visit www.swimforlife.org.nz for more information and help ensure their children won't become a statistic. Perhaps most importantly, they can give them the skills to enjoy New Zealand's waters safely.”

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WATER SAFETY NEW ZEALAND

Formed in 1949, WSNZ is the national organisation responsible for water safety education in New Zealand.

WSNZ manages drowning prevention and water safety in communities through education. WSNZ administers proven, proactive and preventative education interventions.

WSNZ leads the Learn to Swim and Survive sector in New Zealand. The Sealord Swim For Life initiative is WSNZ's major project. WSNZ seeks to address a dramatic decline in swimming ability of our youth. Sealord Swim For Life is a comprehensive national project established to:

- Provide all children with access to the water;
- Facilitate the delivery of quality swim and survive programmes in primary schools;
- Provide the foundations for the development of a culture that produces generations of New Zealand families that are water safe.

