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Media Release

For immediate release



Summer Drowning Fatalities Surge

A sharp rise in drowning deaths through the first two months of 2007 reinforces the need for the ongoing role of water safety education in New Zealand. Monthly statistics released today by Water Safety New Zealand (WSNZ) show there were 15 drowning fatalities in February. The toll for the total drowning deaths for 2007 thus far is 29.

The average monthly drowning toll for February (2002-2006) is 13 deaths. In 2006 there were nine drowning deaths for the month of February.

A record low annual drowning toll was achieved in 2006 with 87 fatalities. 22 of these were in the first two months of that year.

There were five drowning deaths in the Auckland region in February and seven in total for the year to date. This is the highest year to date toll for the Auckland region since 2004.

In February there were seven drowning deaths at surf beaches bringing the year to date toll to 10, compared with four for the same period in 2006. Annually, rivers contribute as the premier site with a third of all drowning deaths occurring in this environment followed by beaches which average approximately 20% per annum. There have been six drowning fatalities in rivers in 2007.

WSNZ Operations Manager, Matt Claridge states "not surprisingly the drowning figures for the year thus far are dominated by recreational activity. The incredibly low toll for last year has well and truly been forgotten as the statistics for February indicate. The need for adherence to basic water safety principles and most importantly the ability to swim and survive are primary interventions for preventing drowning incidents."

Nine Maori have drowned this year with four in February, representing 31% of the toll to date compared with 21% over the five year period 2002-2006. In addition an over representation of Pacific People drowning in New Zealand is prevalent with four drownings to date in 2007 (14%) versus the five year average (2002-2006) of 6%.



The relevance and emergence of the Pacific Peoples Water Safety Strategy is not lost as this important project is validated by typically poor behaviour patterns and perception around water within the Pacific Island communities of New Zealand.

Pacific Peoples Water Safety Strategy Project Manager Ben Taufua believes the initiative will assist “in spreading the word and making sure that the importance of the water to our culture is not misplaced or taken for granted. Too many Pacific people drown as a result of making decisions to go fishing or boating or swimming when they shouldn’t. We need to understand the benefits of learning to swim as well as survival skills and we have to talk about this problem through our churches and networks.”

Claridge continues; “WSNZ is conscious of working to reduce New Zealand’s drowning toll over both; short and long term periods. Strategies such as the Pacific Peoples, Kia Maanu Kia Ora for Maori and Swim For Life are all consistent and reinforce each other. Being able to reach and meet the needs of communities in New Zealand with specific water safety resources is both logical and practical.”

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