Wagga Wagga City Council

WAGGA WAGGA CITY COUNCIL
INLAND WATER SAFETY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FINAL
APRIL 2019



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Cover Image: Oura Beach Source: Caroline Cattle – Wagga View – Community Strategic Plan 2040

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Introduction

Australia's climate and culture embraces water based recreational activity. The Wagga Wagga Local Government Area's natural and built environments are enhanced by the iconic Murrumbidgee River, Lake Albert and numerous creeks, dams, channels and public and private swimming pools. Every water body has its own specific hazards and risks.

The responsibility for water safety rests with all segments of the community including governments, educators, community groups, service organisations and individual users. Each segment has specific roles to fulfil. Wagga Wagga City Council can make an important contribution by implementing a range of water safety initiatives related to the waterway reserves under Council's management.

Wagga Wagga City Council can also assist in facilitating a cohesive approach to water safety across the LGA by supporting and reinforcing the initiatives of the professional organisations that operate in that space including Royal Life Saving Australia and State Emergency Services. Council will convene an annual meeting comprised of relevant organisation and stakeholder representatives. The aim will be to develop strategies that can be implemented in advance of the peak summer water recreation season.

The Wagga View – Community Strategic Plan 2040 identifies the following Objective and Outcomes.

WE ARE SAFE:

- We create safe spaces and places
- We promote safety and safe behaviours.

WE PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE:

- Recreation is a part of everyday life.

The Recreation, Open Space and Community Strategy and Implementation plan 2040 identifies the following strategic priorities:

- Increasing the activation of community spaces
- Improving community health
- Collaborate where possible.

The Office of Local Governments Updated Practice Note 15 – Water Safety (October 2017) guides NSW councils to strengthen their water safety functions and responsibilities such as providing public swimming facilities, beach patrols, lifesaving services and regulatory activities in public places.

It covers the installation of warning signage, complying with regulations, having suitable equipment available for emergencies and working collaboratively with other water safety groups.



Image: Wagga Beach (Historic) Source: City of Wagga Wagga

Benefits of Water Related Activity

There are a broad range of benefits associated with water related recreational activity. These should be considered when determining the cost effectiveness, consistency and extent of risk control measures.

Benefits include:

- Health and fitness
- Accessing and enjoying the local environment
- Encouraging social interaction and inclusion
- Developing life skills through awareness of risk and ability to respond
- Economic benefits related to the accessing of water spaces.

There are occasions where the application of risk control measures is in conflict with the desired activities of users. The desire to mitigate against the inherent risks associated with water activities for Wagga Wagga City Council and other stakeholders should be balanced against the benefits to be derived from activating the location and any associated activity. The potential impacts of safety gains should be measured against the potential impacts of changing the site or activity in question. Specific site assessment should involve a risk led approach while identifying those groups amongst users that are particularly at risk; however, no activity can be made completely risk free.

Rivers, Creeks and Lakes

A river is a natural waterway that may be fed from other rivers or bodies of water draining water away from a catchment area, to another location downstream. Rivers can vary in water temperature, flow, length, width and depth. A creek is a water body that may be fed by rivers and other creeks. A creek is generally smaller in size than a river and is often characterised by intermittent water flow. Creeks can be prone to more extreme conditions of stasis in drought and flash flooding after rainfall.

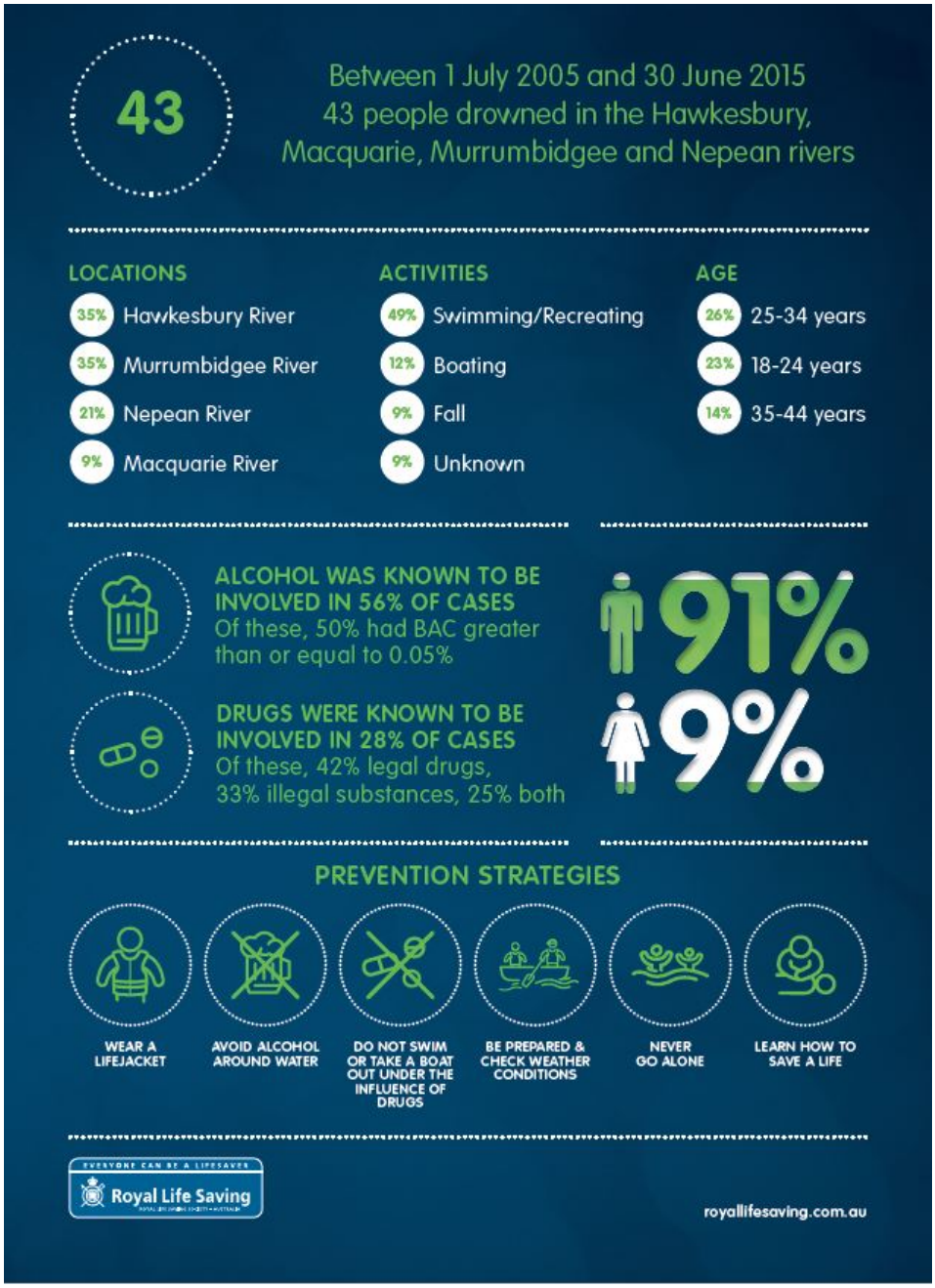
Safety Issues Associated with Rivers and Creeks

Safety issues associated with rivers and creeks that local governments need to be aware of include:

- **Activities:** Rivers and creeks may be used for a number of different activities, including swimming, boating and fishing among others. These each present their own hazards and risks to participants and local governments need to be aware of these.
- **Changing banks:** Crumbling banks, banks that move due to changing water levels and unsafe or uneven beds are safety issues that may exist at both rivers and creeks. Crumbling banks can cause people to accidentally fall into the water and unsafe or uneven beds can make swimming and wading difficult and dangerous.
- **Cold temperature:** Extremely cold water is a common and unexpected hazard associated with rivers and creeks across the LGA Cold water shock can numb limbs and render the strongest swimmer helpless in minutes.
- **Strong or unpredictable currents:** Strong or unpredictable currents are hazards that those using rivers and creeks may encounter. Conditions can change without warning.
- **Submerged hazards:** Submerged hazards such as tree branches and rocks are a safety issue that users may encounter.
- **Turbidity and visibility:** Muddy rivers create turbidity issues that can reduce visibility of children and submerged objects such as rocks, logs and reeds.
- **Variable water levels:** Another hazard that river and creek users may encounter is variable water levels. This can be especially problematic for those areas experiencing low rainfall, drought or flooding or where water is released from storage. In all areas, changeable water levels are an issue that local governments need to take into consideration.
- **Alcohol consumption:** Alcohol severely affects your hazard perception, co-ordination and resistance to the cold.
- **Swimming Competency:** Assumptions around competency gained by swimming in a pool lead swimmers to believe they can deal with the challenges and temperatures of inland waterway swimming.
- **Access:** There may be steep, rocky and slippery access routes to and from fishing and swimming sites, and riverbanks can be eroded very quickly when rivers are running high.

River Drownings and Non- Fatal Drownings - Statistics

Rivers are the primary location for drowning in Australia. Royal Life Saving Australia 2018 research indicates 1,113 individuals have drowned in Australian rivers, creeks and streams over the past 15 years, with males accounting for 81% of drowning deaths. Almost one third of all river related drownings occurred among people aged 25-44 years (30%). Almost 74% of river drownings were locals who drowned within 100km of their place of residence.



Respect the River: NSW Rivers Research Report 2017 Infographic Royal Life Saving Australia and NSW Government

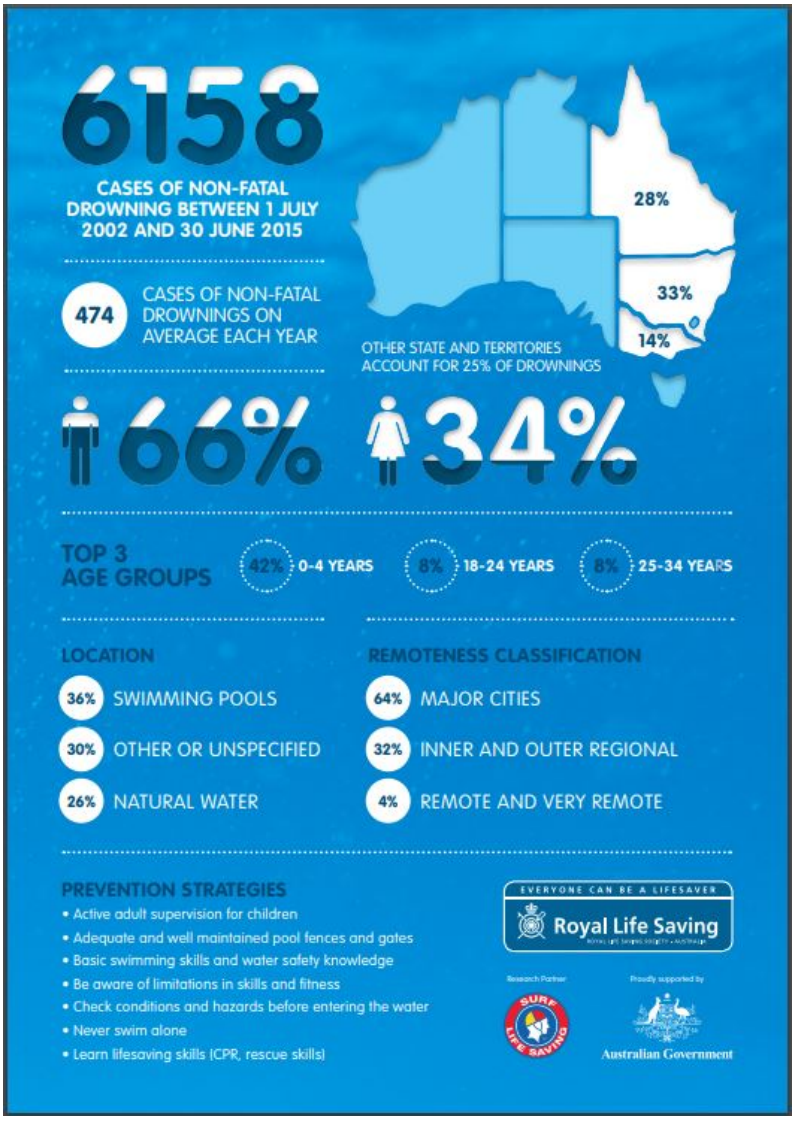
A joint study undertaken by Royal Life Saving and James Cook University identified key at risk groups and behaviours in order to aid prevention efforts. The study found that males when compared to females were three times as likely to drown in a river due to a boating or watercraft related incident and four times as likely to drown as a result of jumping in (commonly from bridges and trees) whilst engaging in risk taking behaviours.

In the 15 years between July 1 2002 and June 30 2017 402 people have drowned in rivers, creeks and streams (77% male) with the leading age group being 35 – 44 years, representing 15% of all river drownings in NSW.

Top 10 National River Drowning Blackspots over the last 15 Years:

1. Murray River (70 deaths)
2. Brisbane River (40 deaths), QLD
3. Yarra River (37 deaths), VIC
4. Hawkesbury River (22 deaths), NSW
5. Swan River (20 deaths), WA
6. Murrumbidgee River (20 deaths), NSW
7. Parramatta River (16 deaths), NSW
8. Georges River (14 deaths), NSW
9. Tweed River (14 deaths), NSW
10. Nepean River (13 deaths), NSW

Many more non-fatal drowning incidents occur each year. The updated definition of drowning incorporates three possible outcomes; death, morbidity and no morbidity, indicating the duration of possible consequences following a drowning event. The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) 2016-2020 acknowledges, "the prevention of fatal drowning is only one part of the sector's role". Between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2015 there were 6158 cases of non-fatal drowning in Australia. This is an average of 474 non-fatal drowning 2017 Infographic incidents each year. Since the beginning of the study, non-fatal incidents have increased by 42.4% with 15.2% occurring in rivers, creeks and streams.



A 13-Year Study of Non-Fatal Drowning in Australia - Royal Life Saving Australia and Australian Government

Respect the River: NSW Rivers Research Project

The Murrumbidgee River is more than 1600kms in length, beginning in the Kosciuszko National park and continues to its junction with the Murray River near Balranald. Royal Life Saving Australia have produced a report that examined all unintentional fatal drowning deaths between 2005 and 2015 in the Hawkesbury, Macquarie, Murrumbidgee and Nepean Rivers.

80% of drownings in the Murrumbidgee River occurred in summer, with a further 13.3% occurring in spring. The highest number of drowning deaths occurred on weekends with the majority of deaths occurring in the afternoon, with 87% of incidents occurring between midday and 6pm. Drowning deaths in the Murrumbidgee River were significantly more likely to occur while swimming and recreating than while undertaking any other activity. Alcohol consumption and drug use were identified as playing a significant contribution to the risk factors associated with these drownings.

Findings

The number of people drowning in each of the four rivers investigated fluctuated over the study period, as did the crude drowning rate. Males are overrepresented in river drowning deaths, with young and middle-aged adults most commonly involved. There were no recorded drowning deaths among children aged 0-4 years or 10-14 years, and only one death among children between the ages of 5 and 9 years. The findings indicate that drowning deaths in rivers in NSW are largely an issue involving adolescents and adults, rather than young children.

Although Australia was the most common country of birth, more than a third of deaths occurred among people born overseas, highlighting the importance of drowning prevention strategies targeting people of all ethnic backgrounds. The most common countries of birth, excluding Australia, were India, Iran and Sudan, with almost all deaths among those born overseas occurring in people from a non-English speaking country. Indigenous people were also overrepresented in drowning deaths, with almost 5% of deaths occurring in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people despite only making up 2.9% of the NSW population.

Australian Water Safety Strategy 2016-2020

In 2008, the Australian Water Safety Council (AWSC) established an ambitious aspirational goal of achieving a 50% reduction in drowning deaths by the year 2020. Since 2008, Australia has experienced an increase in drowning deaths across a range of demographics, locations and activities.

The current 10-year average for fatal drowning in Australia stands at 284 deaths per year, equating to a rate of 1.31 fatal drownings per 100,000 population.

The AWSC conducted a National Drowning Prevention Summit in August 2014. The major recommendations of that summit were:

- Maintain the original aspirational goal to achieve a 50% reduction by 2020
- Maintain the existing framework used within the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2012-15
- Streamline goals and objectives to add focus in critical areas.

The Australian Water Safety Strategy (AWSS) 2016-2020 reflects the recommendations of the summit and provides clear objectives under existing goals to give the drowning prevention and water safety sector the best chance of achieving a 50% reduction in drowning by the year 2020 when this strategy will end. The AWSC 2016-2020 maintains a focus on the three key drivers to achieve the reduction:

Taking a life stages approach:

- GOAL 1: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Children Aged 0-14
- GOAL 2: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Young People Aged 15-24
- GOAL 3: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Males Aged 25-64
- GOAL 4: Reduce Drowning Deaths in People Aged 65+

Targeting high-risk locations:

- GOAL 5: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Inland Water ways
- GOAL 6: Reduce Drowning Deaths in Coastal Waters
- GOAL 7: Reduce Drowning Deaths by Strengthening the Aquatic Industry

Focusing on key drowning challenges:

- GOAL 08: Reduce Alcohol and Drug-Related Drowning Deaths
- GOAL 09: Reduce Boating, Watercraft and Recreational Activity Related Drownings
- GOAL 10: Reduce Drowning Deaths in High-Risk Populations
- GOAL 11: Reduce the Impact of Disaster and Extreme Weather on Drowning Deaths

The AWSC 2016-2020 identifies the following Drowning Prevention Pillars to outline the supporting activities that are to occur in order to achieve the above goals:

- **Advocacy:** The promotion of drowning prevention issues and strategies to the community, policy makers and government in a bid to increase awareness of the issue and further prevention efforts.
- **Research:** Drowning prevention programs, policies and practices must be grounded in evidence-based research that clearly identifies the epidemiology and risk factors associated with a specific drowning prevention issue or area. Monitoring and evaluation is also vital to determine those successful interventions.
- **Collaboration:** Collaboration within and outside the drowning prevention sector is vital, including collaboration across state and territory jurisdictions, and even internationally, to ensure best practice is enacted and efficiencies adopted.
- **Safe Venues:** Safe venues are vital to achieving meaningful and sustained reductions in the Australian drowning death toll. They have a role to play as venues where people of all ages and skill levels can enjoy the aquatic environment in a supervised and controlled setting such as a public pool. They are also appropriate locations for the provision of basic swimming and water safety skills and knowledge providing a lifetime of safer aquatic participation. Safe venues may also encapsulate signage and public rescue equipment.
- **Workforce:** A skilled and passionate drowning prevention workforce is key to the implementation of a range of drowning prevention strategies. Safe venues also rely on a skilled workforce to ensure safety for all users.
- **Policy:** Policy that links to evidence-based research, and is adequately communicated and enforced, can strongly assist in drowning prevention efforts. Examples include swimming pool legislation that has enforced the use of pool fencing that is a known strategy for reducing drowning among young children.
- **Education:** Education is vital to increase awareness, skill and knowledge of controlled and open water environments to reduce the risk of drowning. Education mechanisms that are reinforced throughout the strategy include key life stages, parents, school education, vocational training, and public awareness including local, state and federal government sectors.



Image: Murrumbidgee River Wagga Wagga CBD Source: City of Wagga Wagga

Wagga Wagga Waterways

Wagga Wagga is located on the Murrumbidgee River. Wagga Wagga City Council manages six reserves that provide the community with recreational access to the river.

These reserves include:

- Cabarita Reserve (Wagga Beach)
- Wollundry Lagoon
- Wiradjuri Reserve
- Oura Beach
- Kohlhagens Beach
- Shanty Reserve
- Ashmont Reserve.

There are several additional publicly accessible entry points to the river that are either classified as Crown reserves not managed by Council or are located on privately owned land.

Another significant waterway in the Wagga Wagga Local Government Area (WWLGA) is Lake Albert. The lake, located 10kms south east of the Wagga Wagga CBD, has vast foreshore areas, an associated creek system for inflow and outflow, a number of picnicking and barbeque areas and is traversed by a community walking track that circumnavigates the entire lake. Other waterways within the WWLGA include the stormwater network and associated detention basins, fountains, water features, lagoons and open drainage channels.

Due to Wagga Wagga's warm climate, the community utilises Wagga Wagga's water ways extensively for a wide variety of recreational activities resulting in them being identified as potentially high-risk locations for drowning. Wagga Wagga City Council is therefore eager to work with its partners and link into the Australian Water Safety Strategy and its ambition to at least half the number of deaths by 2020.

Auditing Location Risk

Practical measures can be devised to try to reduce some of the location specific risks however the biggest challenge will be attempting to change behaviour and increasing awareness of the significant risks posed by inland waterways.

In order to guide the risk treatments to be implemented at each of the locations, the following hierarchy of use was established, based upon the frequency of use for each of the waterways.

Immediate Priority

- Cabarita Reserve (Wagga Beach)

High Priority

- Wiradjuri Reserve
- Oura Beach

Medium Priority

- Other Council managed river reserves
- Lake Albert
- Open drainage channels/dams

Low Priority

- Fountains and water features
- Stormwater detention basins.
- Wollundry Lagoon

Discussions with local users indicate issues or concerns with the high incidence of drowning; however, a common thread appears to be related to the uncertainty and/or lack of knowledge around river conditions and the swimming capability of those who have drowned. The Murrumbidgee River is subject to extreme fluctuations in height, flow and temperature, due to the nature of water management activities taking place both upstream and downstream of the reserves.

The overall approach for the development of the Inland Water Safety Plan will be to continue to encourage people to use the water ways for recreation while ensuring the community is educated to do so a safer and more informed way.

WWCC Inland Water Safety Management Plan Principles

In undertaking the development of the WWCC Inland Water Safety Management Plan and in conjunction with community responses regarding the utilisation of inland waterways as accessible sites for aquatic recreation a number overarching principles should be considered. These include:

- No activity can be made completely risk-free and the principle of personal responsibility should apply
- As far as possible restricting access to water spaces should only occur when prevailing conditions warrant exclusion
- Look ahead by assessing the risks that can be foreseen while learning from the past to inform present day decision making
- Benefits of water-related activities should be taken into account when making the balanced judgment of whether risks are acceptable or further risk control measures are necessary. These benefits include health and fitness, access to the local environment, social inclusion, economic development, and realising sporting/recreational objectives
- Costs associated with water-related activities including the provision of rescue equipment and access restrictions, should also be taken into account
- Everyone involved in a water-related activity has some level of responsibility for ensuring their own safety or for those in their care

- Recognise that Wagga Wagga City Council has an important facilitation role to play in the provision of an inland water safety management plan. However it is those organisations and peak bodies with very specific and critical expertise that can provide the detailed strategies in improving community awareness and providing drowning reduction strategies e.g. Royal Life Saving Australia and the State Emergency Service
- It is important to strike a balance between the self-reliance of the individual participant and management interventions. Benefits of water-based activities can be realised by encouraging self-reliance and expanding awareness
- Recognise that communication and education campaigns will rely heavily on community stakeholders to be effective.
- Information and education of participants about the nature and extent of hazards, the risk control measures in place, and the precautions that the participants should take are crucial elements of risk control
- Recognise that some participants may over-estimate their skills and abilities to some degree
- Recognise that children's risk perception skills will not be fully developed. This must be promoted to parents/guardians in the supervision of children.
- Recognise the value of expanding learn to swim, safe boating and waterway understanding programs across all demographics.
- Effective dissemination of water safety messages requires a multi-faceted and age specific approach, with input from a wide-range of professionals and community stakeholders.
- When communicating to actual or potential participants take account of the language, literacy and cultural needs of the target audience.



Image: Lake Albert Source: City of Wagga Wagga

Wagga Wagga City Council Inland Waterway Safety Actions

As the managing body of the reserves that enable community access to water ways, Wagga Wagga City Council has an acknowledged role to play in the reducing the incidences of drowning across our Local Government Areas.

Advocacy:

Wagga Wagga City Council can adopt an advocacy role with regard the NSW State Government to consider the provision of free water safety and/or learn to swim lessons for all state primary students. This initiative has been adopted by the QLD State Government for implementation in 2019. The programs will be compliant with the national standards set by the Australian Water Safety Council, with all schools being audited to see where improvements need to be made.

Wagga Wagga City Council can also explore additional lobbying avenues including the 2019 Local Government NSW Annual Conference and the Riverina Regional Capitals group as each of these cities of Wagga Wagga, Albury and Griffith contain significant inland waterways.

Recommendation 1: Wagga Wagga City Council undertake an advocacy role and explore avenues for lobbying the NSW State Government to introduce free water safety and learn to swim programs in all publically funded primary schools.

Partnership and Collaboration:

Wagga Wagga City Council recognises that positive water safety outcomes that result in a reduction in the number of drownings involving our local inland waterways rely on a whole of community approach under the guidance of experts in the field.

Research:

Wagga Wagga City Council will collect waterway incident data and share with the relevant agencies with a view to increasing the value and usability of the date.

Recommendation 2: Wagga Wagga City Council will undertake to collect and share data related to incidents occurring on Council managed waterways with the relevant agencies.

Safe Venues:

General Water Way Access

The provision of access is a major contributor to the creation of risk, in that the access methods will generally guide people to the water and to any hazards that may be present. Therefore, access treatment, or otherwise is a major contributor to managing aquatic related risks.

Public access should be readily available from car parks or other public transportation areas and should allow emergency services to get as close as possible to the water's edge in the case of a major emergency.

Strategically placed signage should advise of all risks relating to the waterway allowing users to make an informed decision prior to entering the water. In addition, specifically located and appropriately designed emergency services access only points should be considered.

Preliminary audits of Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park), Oura Beach and Wiradjuri Reserve have been undertaken by Royal Life Saving Australia.

Recommendation 3: Wagga Wagga City Council undertake an audit of all Council managed waterway reserves to evaluate the effectiveness of both public and emergency services access points. This audit should be completed in partnership with key stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: In consultation with the State Emergency Services and Volunteer Rescue Association, construct an emergency services only river access point at the western end of Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park).

Water Safety Signage

Appropriate signage, in a range of languages, should allow a waterway participant/visitor to make an informed decision about entering/using an aquatic environment under the control of the Wagga Wagga City Council. A co-ordinated approach to signage, with signs strategically placed, with the content clearly visible, is an important component of waterway risk management through education.

A hierarchy of information displayed on signs is of the utmost importance. All sign structures should include the following components and may include other information depending on the needs of the facility:

- Facility identification data, including Council Logo, Council name and facility name
- General Warning Message, which should be within a red coloured text box with white text
- Prohibition Symbols, all Council Regulations should appear as prohibition symbols
- Warning Symbols, are depicted by a yellow diamond or triangle with a black border
- Other information, information should appear as white image or words on blue background
- Safety or Emergency information should appear as white on green background.



Image: Water Safety Sign – Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park) Source: City of Wagga Wagga

The signage system implemented should follow the Statewide Mutual Best Practice Manual, Signs as Remote Supervision and the Australian Standard AS/NZ 2416.3-2010.Once signs are implemented, a maintenance system should be developed to ensure signs are visually inspected at regular intervals, with immediate action taken to remedy any defects.

The importance of effectively placing safety signage in a reserve cannot be underestimated as a risk management strategy. The location, height and existing visual distractions are major factors that must be taken into consideration regarding the effectiveness of a sign when installed.

Prohibit what you must
Warn what you should
Inform what you wish

This approach has been implemented with regard to signage place at Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park) and should be expanded to other High Priority locations.

Recommendation 5: Wagga Wagga City Council audit all Council managed waterways locations in order of priority for the installation of compliant water safety signage.

Provision of Publically Accessible Safety Equipment

Although it is preferred that incidents do not occur, it is unrealistic to expect that all incidents can be prevented. In order to minimise the potential of a fatality or permanent disability resulting from a drowning incident, the provision of rescue equipment should be considered. The following are examples of rescue equipment that could be made available in a secure location for use by untrained bystanders to render assistance in the event an incident does occur:

- Lifebuoys/rescue tube
- Approved aquatic rescue throwing device with easy to read instructions
- Publicly accessible Automated External Defibrillator may also be considered

For rescue equipment to be of use in the event of an incident, its availability must be known, it must be identifiable and accessible and it must be in functional working order. This may require the installation of appropriate storage in a prominent location, additional signage and regular inspections.

Emergency contact details should also be easily identifiable to the public. If poor phone reception is common in the area, an emergency call box with a direct landline to emergency services should be within close proximity of the Reserve.

While the above listed equipment can help with aquatic rescues, it can be costly to repair or replace if stolen or damaged.

Council will investigate developing units similar to River Rescue Cabinets utilised in locations in the United Kingdom. These cabinets were developed through a partnership between a local council and a fire and rescue group. They are a robust, vandal proof approach to containing lifesaving equipment. With an inbuilt communication device.

A promotional film was developed to show how the cabinets can be used in the event of an emergency: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NM9Hq82PD7w





Images: River Rescue Cabinet Source: Bathnes Council - United Kingdom

Recommendation 6: Wagga Wagga City Council staff undertake an investigation into the development of vandal proof waterway rescue cabinets.

Workforce:

A skilled and passionate drowning prevention workforce culture is key to the implementation of a range of drowning prevention strategies. Safe venues also rely on a skilled workforce to ensure safety for all users. Council staff

> **Recommendation 7: Wagga Wagga City Council staff access the appropriate level of knowledge and training to enable correct monitoring of all water safety treatments, including emerging technologies, with regard to Council managed waterways.**

Waterway Supervision:

The Aquatic Safety Assessment (Cabarita Reserve) also states:

"Whilst the provision of lifesaving services may be considered, particularly during the peak periods of aquatic recreation, for the designated swimming location, it will not exclude the possibility of future drownings within the reserve. Past incident history identifies that incident locations spread too large an area for supervision to be effective without a coordinated campaign promoting a safer swimming location where supervision may reasonably be provided."

On this basis, a permanent lifeguard service at the Wagga Beach area is not recommended. However, occasional event usage of the precinct may demand supervision of the aquatic area during peak periods on a case-by-case basis. The estimated cost of a lifeguard service depends significantly on the type of service, the hours of supervision and number of days supervised annually. A previous investigation undertaken and reported to the May 2012 Ordinary Meeting of Council found that the cost could vary from between $5,000 and $35,000 dependent on the service implemented.

> **Recommendation 8: Based on advice Wagga Wagga City Council should not provide a permanent lifeguard service at Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park).**

Education:

Learn to Swim –

Wagga Wagga City Council's Oasis Aquatic Centre offers the Royal Life Saving's Swim and Survive program is a national swimming and water safety program educating 5 to 14 year olds all over Australia. Since 1982, nearly 10 million Australians have participated in the program. During this time, there has been a 75% reduction in drowning deaths in the 5-14 year age group. Swim and Survive provides a broad, balanced program of swimming, water safety and survival skills in preparation for a lifetime of safe activity in, on or near the water catering for children of all abilities.

The NSW Government has implemented an Active Kids voucher program to encourage children to participate in sport and fitness activities, including swimming lessons. Wagga Wagga City Council's Oasis Aquatic Centre is an Active Kids provider. The $100 vouchers can be used for the Swim and Survive program.

Bush Nippers -

The Bush Nippers program is similar to coast based Nippers programs however, activities take place in inland utilising local waterways, public pools and sand pits.

The Orange Bush Nippers began in 2008 after approaches were made to Surf Life Saving Australia for programs that the community could implement to develop aquatic skills, address inland water safety in response to rising drowning death rates.

Children aged between three and six participate in a swim and survive program, which is run in partnership with Royal Life Saving and focuses on foundation skills in water safety.

The 7-8 years group extend their basic knowledge and work on aquatic activities for recreation and fitness as well as saving lives. Those aged between nine and 14 years work on more advanced skills and transfer them into the large pool. All ages get to do the popular beach sprints and flag races. The Orange Bush Nippers have developed good relationships with Dee Why and Thirroul Surf Life Saving Clubs and travel to coastal locations to participate in competitions.

Recommendation 9: Wagga Wagga City Council continue delivering the Royal Life Saving Australia's Learn to Swim program as an Active Kids Provider.

Recommendation 10: Wagga Wagga City Council staff call for expressions of interest from community stakeholders to gauge interest in establishing a bush nippers program in Wagga Wagga.

Community Awareness:

Wagga Wagga City Council can greatly assist broader community awareness through the promotion of community education and awareness campaigns developed by peak water safety bodies in relation to the waterways reserves under Council's management.

Community education and awareness campaigns should be aimed towards changing people's behaviours and increasing awareness of the risks and hazards associated recreational activities taking place in and around inland waterways.

Community education can be achieved by utilising a variety of information networks including schools, community, service and user groups as well as digital and traditional media. Communication methods may include signage, posters and brochures, websites, information sessions and critically timed general awareness programs.

Specific community awareness initiatives need to be implemented in recognition of the high incidence of drownings amongst English as a Second Language community members as identified in drowning research. These initiatives should include information presented in multiple languages and utilising distribution through support networks.

Wagga Wagga City Council may consider engaging with local media to share the water safety message or assist partners in increasing their earned media exposure by advocating on their behalf to local media. Broad media campaigns should be coordinated with location signage and community awareness initiatives through local schools, tertiary institutions, multicultural council, sporting clubs, tourist information centres, related retailers and community groups.

Given the profile of past drowning incidents special consideration should be given to engagement of senior sporting clubs and licensed premises in the sharing of water safety messages.

Promotion of key water safety messages should coincide with periods of peak usage to have the most impact on influencing behaviours. Education and community awareness should focus on three clear messages:

- Participants in aquatic recreation should have an awareness of their own swimming ability and ensure they are suitably prepared for aquatic recreation including never swimming alone, activities are appropriately supervised based on age and ability and that they are suitably equipped for the activity being undertaken
- Highlighting the specific nature of river water behaviour
- Aquatic recreation should never be undertaken under the influence of alcohol or illicit substances.

Stakeholders to be consulted and utilised as distribution networks include:

- Royal Life Saving Australia
- State Emergency Services
- Wagga Wagga City Council
- Other Relevant Peak Bodies
- Other Relevant Emergency Services
- Primary and Secondary Schools
- Tertiary Institution Student Bodies
- Relevant Retailers
- Tourist Information Centres

- Sporting/Recreational Clubs
- Seniors Organisations
- Associated Event Holders/Managers
- Community Aquatic Centres
- Multicultural Council
- Event Managers
- Print/Electronic and Social Media Channels

Recommendation 11: Wagga Wagga City Council partner with relevant stakeholders to promote Inland Waterway Safety messaging and initiatives annually across the Wagga Wagga LGA in support of relevant peak body organisations. All Water Safety messaging should reflect the multicultural identity of the Wagga Wagga LGA community and visitors to our inland waterways.



Image: River Safety Poster Source: Royal Life Saving Australia

Policy and Management Plans:

Reserves play an important role in our community by providing open space for public recreation and leisure. These plans also make a significant contribution to public safety by identifying permitted usage and infrastructure management. Poorly maintained access points, amenities, and vandalised signage can lead to unsafe environments and contribute to a perception of lack of safety and potentially reckless behaviour. Reserve management plans that include inland waterways should include relevant water safety strategies.

The implementation of Management Plans can provide clear guidance for the effective short term and long-term management of reserve infrastructure and naturalised areas, ensuring appropriate public open space and recreational facilities and services on a daily basis. These plans are developed through a broad consultation process with all relevant stakeholders including relevant personnel from the Wagga Wagga City Council, local authorities and the community.

The Management Plan should include the following:

- Responsibility for inspection and maintenance of infrastructure
- Staff management
- General administration
- General protection
- Communications
- Park programs/interpretation
- Permitted usage
- Approved recreational activity
- Responsibility for data collection and review
- Frequency of aforementioned tasks.

Recommendation 12: During the development and/or revision of Wagga Wagga City Council's Reserve Management Plans incorporate references to relevant water safety strategies.

Establishment of Emergency Action Plans:

While a reactive measure and not a proactive measure, a well-planned and rehearsed Emergency Action Plan (EAP) can greatly minimise the impact if an incident should it occur. The EAP should consider many potential waterway emergency situations including (but not limited to) medical, missing persons, fire, flood, water contamination and severe weather. The EAP should be developed through broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders including relevant personnel from Wagga Wagga City Council, emergency services, and local safety organisations.

The EAP should include the following:

- Details of the location such as map, street names, GPS coordinates
- The date when the plan was developed and approved for implementation and each subsequent review date
- Emergency Personnel Names and Phone Numbers
- Procedures for notifying the Wagga Wagga City Council, name and contact details, plus role and responsibilities
- Emergency Coordinator for the location, roles and responsibilities
- Emergency notification flow chart
- Emergency assembly locations, access and evacuation routes, if gated the names and contact details for all relevant personnel who have access
- Emergency related equipment such as communications (telephones, alarms etc.), rescue equipment, firefighting, etc.

- Emergency service contact details, which may include Fire, Police, Ambulance, Lifesavers, Security, Ranger/land manager, utilities such as water, communications, gas and electricity
- Emergency procedures in particular procedures that establish timely and reliable recognition of emergency events, and procedures for emergency notification, community awareness communication, media management and hierarchy of decision makers.

The EAP should be tested and periodically practiced, and the existence of the plan should be communicated with all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 13: Wagga Wagga City Council staff develop site specific Emergency Action Plans for all Wagga Wagga City Council managed inland waterways.

Appendix 1

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Wagga Wagga City Council undertake an advocacy role and explore avenues for lobbying the NSW State Government to introduce free water safety and learn to swim programs in all publically funded primary schools.

Capital Cost: $0

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 2: Wagga Wagga City Council will undertake to collect and share data related to incidents occurring on Council managed waterway with the relevant agencies.

Capital Cost: $0

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 3: Wagga Wagga City Council undertake an audit of all Council managed waterway reserves to evaluate the effectiveness of both public and emergency services access points. This audit should be completed in partnership with key stakeholders.

Capital Cost: $1500 per location

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 4: In consultation with the State Emergency Services and Volunteer Rescue Association, construct an emergency services only river access point at the western end of Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park).

Capital Cost: $150,000 (Wiradjuri Boat Ramp replacement cost as a guide)

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 5: Wagga Wagga City Council audit all Council managed waterways locations in order of priority for the installation of compliant water safety signage.

Capital Cost: $1500 per sign

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 6: Wagga Wagga City Council staff undertake an investigation into the development of vandal proof waterway rescue cabinets.

Capital Cost: $2000 Initial Investigation

(Implementation capital cost to be determined by the investigation)

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 7: Recommendation 7: Wagga Wagga City Council staff access the appropriate level of knowledge and training to enable correct monitoring of all water safety treatments, including emerging technologies, with regard to Council managed waterways.

Capital Cost: $0

Annual Operational Cost: $5000

Recommendation 8: Based on advice Wagga Wagga City Council should not provide a permanent lifeguard service at Wagga Beach (Cabarita Park).

Capital Cost: $0

Annual Operational Cost: $0

Recommendation 9: Wagga Wagga City Council continue delivering the Royal Life Saving Australia's Learn to Swim program as an Active Kids Provider.

Capital Cost: No additional Cost

Annual Operational Cost: No additional cost

Recommendation 10: Wagga Wagga City Council staff call for expressions of interest from community stakeholders to gauge interest in establishing a bush nippers program in Wagga Wagga.

Capital Cost: $7,000 ($2,000 initial marketing and promotion, $5000 equipment)

Annual Operational Cost: $1,500

Recommendation 11: Recommendation 11: Wagga Wagga City Council partner with relevant stakeholders to promote Inland Waterway Safety messaging and initiatives annually across the Wagga Wagga LGA in support of relevant peak body organisations. All Water Safety messaging should reflect the multicultural identity of the Wagga Wagga LGA community and visitors to our inland waterways.

Capital Cost: $1500

Annual Operational Cost: $10,000

Recommendation 12: During the development and/or revision of Wagga Wagga City Council's Reserve Management Plans incorporate references to relevant water safety strategies.

Capital Cost: $0 (Included in existing costs)

Annual Operational Cost: $0 (Included in existing costs)

Recommendation 13: Wagga Wagga City Council staff develop site specific Emergency Action Plans for all Wagga Wagga City Council managed inland waterways.

Capital Cost: $10,000

Annual Operational Cost: $5000

Appendix 2

Related Wagga Wagga City Council Documents

Wagga View – Community Strategic Plan 2040

Recreation, Open Space and Implementation Plan 2040

Plan of Management Riverside

Lake Albert Management Plan 2009-2015

Plan of Management for Wollundry Lagoon 2208-2913

Victory Memorial Gardens Plan of Management 2006

Generic Plan of Management for Open Spaces

References

Reports

Aquatic Safety Assessment – Royal Life Saving Australia 2017

Australian water Safety Strategy 2016 – 2020 Towards a Nation Free From Drowning - Australian Water Safety Council 2016

Drowning Deaths in Australian, Creeks and Streams: A 10 Year Analysis – Royal Life Saving Australia 2014

RESPECT THE RIVER: NSW Rivers Research Report 2018 – Royal Life Saving Australia and NSW Government

A Guide to Water Safety Essentials for Local Government – Australian Water Safety Council 2008

A 10 Year Study of Overseas Born Drowning Deaths 2005/06 to 2014/15 – Royal Life Saving Australia 2018

State Wide Mutual Best Practice Manual – Signs as Remote Supervision Version 8 October 2014

Practice Note 15

Websites

Royal Life Saving Australia

https://www.royallifesaving.com.au/

Mildura Visitors Centre

https://www.visitmildura.com.au/helpful-links-and-information/Water-safety.aspx

Local Government Association – United Kingdom

https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety/water-safety-toolkit