

# **WATER ACTIVITIES**

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## 1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings from three focus groups, each comprising five to six participants who discussed their habits and opinions regarding activities in and around water, including social activities that involved the use of alcohol. Across each of the groups, eight questions were asked by the facilitator, and each participant had an opportunity to respond in relation to their own experiences and opinions.

## 2. Activities in and around water

Participants were asked what activities in or around water they have participated in. There was a wide range of aquatic activities identified in the research. These included:

- Swimming (non-competitive)
- Swimming (competitive)
- Fishing
- Surfing
- Kayaking/canoeing
- Wake boarding/wave boarding
- Boating/sailing
- Body boarding/boogie boarding/body surfing
- Bonfires at the beach
- Working
- Sea biscuiting/donuting
- Jumping/‘bombing’
- Rowing
- Windsurfing
- Skim boarding
- Underwater hockey.

## 3. Locations of activities around water

The research explored the environments in which participants had engaged in activities in and around water. A range of environments were identified including both public and private, as well as open and closed water environments. Examples of these are listed below.

### ***Closed water***

- Public swimming pool
- Private swimming pool
- Spa pool

### ***Open water***

- Beach/ocean
- Lake
- River/estuary

## 4. Locations where people socialise in and around water

The research identified a range of environments in which participants socialise around water, including:

- Swimming pool

- Beach
- Spa pool
- River
- Lake
- Surf or other club room.

Socialising around water was talked about much more commonly in relation to swimming and spa pools (usually private) and beaches, compared with other locations. Some participants talked about pool parties, at either their own homes, or the homes of friends:

*Everyone seems to have a good time, once everyone realises how big his pool is everyone comes over and starts creating pool parties out of it.*

*Been to a few pool parties, a few of them involving spas as well.*

Parties on the beach and beach bonfires were identified as social activities around water that participants had engaged in. Socialising with fellow members of sports teams or clubs was also mentioned and included, for example, a rugby team trip to the beach, or socialising at a surf club:

*When I was in a swimming club, we'd have like, a chance to meet new people, and sometimes we'd have a little 'bring a plate' get together after a meet, or something like that.*

*Going on rugby trips to the beach or the lake and spending the day out there with barbecues and stuff.*

One participant talked about jumping off platforms into water as a social activity:

*Like jumping off jetties and jumping off bridges into water, so that can be quite a social event where a few people go down and just yeah, jump off and do silly things.*

For participants, socialising in or around water took place more commonly with friends than with family members:

*Socialising and just hanging around the pool based with friends.*

*Our friend has a pretty big pool and we generally go there and have a barbecue, drinks, swim.*

*Especially when you're on holiday, like your friends, you might go to the beach during the day, and then at night you might sort of socialise.*

However, some participants did discuss socialising at a beach or pool with family members, particularly while on holiday:

*Going to the beach is like going with the family.*

*So a lot of the surfing and that's based around family.*

*We're like in winter we go down to the mountain, and my family has a holiday home there with a spa, so we always end up socialising in the spa.*

## 5. Risks associated with social activities in and around water

Participants were asked to talk about the types of risks that they associate with socialising around water. A range of risks was mentioned, generally relating to things that might go wrong when poor judgement was used. The risk of injury while attempting to jump into water from decks, walls, cliffs or other high platforms was commonly talked about, as was the danger associated with doing 'flips' into pools:

*Jump off the highest thing, or...try to like do flips, like we've got this little swing under the deck, and it's like people end up landing on each other, get those sort of things happening as well. We've got a rock wall that's about a metre and a half above the pool, people jump off that, it's good fun but yeah, it can go wrong sometimes.*

*At home in the pool the only real risk is people that think they are brave enough to jump off the deck or something which isn't a good idea.*

*Climbing up the things to jump off, those are the things I need to take caution of, at the time you don't really think about oh is there gonna be a log or something under there you're gonna jump on?*

*We've got a rock wall that's about a metre and a half above the pool, people jump off that, it's good fun but yeah, it can go wrong sometimes.*

The risk of falling while climbing up slippery rocks, or being washed off rocks, was also mentioned as a risk:

*With fishing, used to go to this place, um, which is sort of on a cliff so quite often you'd hear about people who would fall in...they'd just fall over or get hit by a wave or something in the water, and it's pretty rough there so they normally don't come back.*

A lack of sun protection, and the associated risks of sunburn or sunstroke, was identified in the research, as were a range of other risks associated with socialising in or around water, including injury or drowning. The latter were generally associated with a lack of experience, expertise, or awareness of potential risks.

## 6. Alcohol use when involved in activities in and around water

Many participants talked about alcohol being consumed during activities that take place in and around water, and its consumption was more common when socialising with friends, rather than with families.

*One of the boys has quite a large pool, so a lot of drinking activities around there.*

*Got a pool and spa at home, get some mates around and just do whatever, whether it is to have a few drinks.*

*Either beach parties or pool parties where alcohol is involved.*

*Nine out of ten trips to a beach or a pool involves alcohol so pretty much where there's water there's always alcohol.*

Some participants talked about using alcohol to the point of intoxication, during activities in and around water:

*Whenever we're like at the beach, or New Year's, or someone's house...no-one's sober I guess?*

*I've been on a few fishing trips when it's been like hard out drinking.*

In terms of why participants used alcohol during activities in or around water, the fact that alcohol consumption made activities more exciting was mentioned by two participants:

*With quite a lot of teenagers, like with pool parties and going to the beaches with friends is always exciting, and when alcohol is involved it gets more exciting for them.*

*Coming from a background where we do floundering, or we're going to the rocks to pick mussels and stuff, um tends to be a boring job so stick a couple of bottles down you and then you know, it becomes a little bit more exciting.*

In conveying how common alcohol consumption was, in and around water, one participant said:

*On Sundays we have Sunday sessions in the sun which is like beers on the beach, or like one of our friends has a pretty big pool and we generally go there and have a barbecue, drinks, swim, um...just about every patrol, we go up to the surf club and have a couple of beers afterwards, um with underwater hockey we have like team building nights. Like once a month, or once a rotation within the club, and that's at a bar.*

Although discussed less often, consuming alcohol during activities in and around water with family was also mentioned:

*Just like family brunches around the pool, like no-one plays up or anything 'cos you can't 'cos it's your family. So yeah drinking in there is low risk, like at hotels and on holiday, and when you're drinking with your parents on the beach like on holiday.*

## **7. Risks associated with alcohol consumption in and around water**

Many participants acknowledged that alcohol use during social activities in and around water added to the risks involved, in terms of the potential for injury or death. Key factors identified in this regard included an increased sense of confidence, impaired judgement, and impaired physical ability. These are discussed further below.

### **7.1 Increased sense of confidence**

A number of participants highlighted that alcohol consumption can lead to an increased sense of confidence, which often resulted in people pushing their personal limits or showing off to others.

*Just jumping, like jumping off, like pool parties and stuff, people have been drinking and like confidence grows.*

*When you drink your confidence kind of grows, and you've got your mates there who are egging you on and they're trying to outdo each other, and things are going from bad to worse, but your confidence is rising kind of thing and so you're doing stuff you wouldn't usually do.*

*Going to a pool or going to a beach is...really, really exciting 'cos they don't get to do it all the time and then I think that's where the whole 'I want to test my limits' kind of thing comes in. 'cos it's a new exciting thing and they want to see how far they can go with it, and then you add booze on top of that and then you think you're ten foot tall and bullet proof, and then it becomes like it just escalates out of control.*

*When alcohol is involved it gets more exciting for them I guess and then just like showing off, or trying to prove you can do this, or you can do that, sort of thing and then I think that's when it gets quite a bit out of hand.*

## **7.2 Impaired judgement**

The research identified that a number of participants were aware that alcohol consumption could impair judgement, and that this can add to the risk associated with activities in or around the water. One participant mentioned that judging heights is problematic after having consumed alcohol, while another pointed out, *"you're doing stuff you wouldn't usually do and your common sense kind of goes out the door"*. Other comments included:

*Alcohol plays a big part 'cos you just kind of look past the small things that could go wrong and...end up like having something bad happen. The alcohol just kind of blurs up everything, and you've just got you on your cliff and the water down there and it's all you really think about.*

*The lapse of judgement when you're going out, and the tides are out, becomes like it can go from an extremely low um risk to actually being out there, being intoxicated and forgetting times, forgetting that tides are coming in and it's slowly creeping up on you.*

## **7.3 Impaired physical abilities**

Delayed reaction times and poor coordination were identified as ways in which alcohol consumption can interfere with physical abilities, and it was acknowledged that this could heighten risks while in or around water:

*Same goes for wharf jumping and things like that, you know if you've been drinking enough, your balance is gone, and your co-ordination, so it can be pretty dangerous.*

*I've been in quite a few cases where the alcohol in a person has taken its toll; their reaction time hasn't kicked in as it should have.*

One participant identified this as being potentially hazardous when children are around:

*Going to the beach with friends, or having a barbecue with friends, and if you're drinking and if you have younger children with you I think that becomes high risk because your reaction times aren't 100%.*

## **8. Factors affecting level of risk**

When considering the level of risk involved in various activities that include the use of alcohol in or around water, some participants felt that this varied, and that there were two key factors that would influence risk: the amount of alcohol being consumed, and the environment or context in which the activities were taking place.

### **8.1 Quantity of alcohol**

For some participants, the level of risk associated with alcohol consumption during social activities in or around water, was determined by the quantity of alcohol being drunk, rather than the drinking of alcohol per se:

*Yeah like I mean it depends as well I suppose on how much alcohol you're consuming, like I mean if it's just a casual couple of beers um you know wharf jumping and stuff it doesn't really change a thing. It's when you know you're drinking a whole box to one person and then things can get – yeah – nasty.*

Some participants mentioned the focus of the activity as being pertinent to how much alcohol might be consumed, and therefore impact on the level of associated risk:

*I think low risk sort of has something to do with whether the drinking is the focus point of the situation or extra to what the actual activity is...For example, fishing: if you're going to fish and have a few drinks that's fine but if you were going to drink and while you were drinking, fish, it's kind of like what the point of the occasion is.*

*If you go to the beach to go for a swim and to hang out with your friends and you happen to have one or two beers and you happen to go on a boat fishing and you're going there to get fish, you're not going there to get pissed, I think that's when the risk will change.*

### **8.2 Environment**

Some participants felt that the level of risk associated with consuming alcohol around water varied, depending on the environment in which it was occurring and its proximity to water.

In relation to the environment and its impact on the level of risk, one participant noted that:

*I believe any situation can become high risk based on the environment you're in...if it's Mission Bay where it's sort of historically no waves, then it's kind of low risk yet if the party moved to Piha where sort of conditions are extremely changeable that would become high risk. So not only the amount of alcohol consumed, but the environment it's consumed in with the varying factors that can influence somehow.*

Another participant pointed out that being in water, as opposed to around water, constituted a different level of risk:



*I think that drinking necessarily around water it's not the end of the world, but I think that drinking like if you're already in the water like sitting in a spa pool or sitting in a pool drinking I think can raise more issues than if you're sitting like on a deck and there's a pool over there, there may not necessarily be the same amount of risk.*

## 9. Low risk activities

Activities that involved alcohol use in closed water situations, in particular private pools and spa pools, were more often considered low risk, compared with activities that took place in open water. For example, one participant spoke about the predictability of water conditions in a pool, compared with open water, as a factor when considering this. Other comments included:

*Something like a spa pool where you're just hanging around with mates and no-one's fooling around, that's quite safe, but just low risk activities which would be just be low sort of intensity.*

*So just like go home from work and having a barbecue around the pool or something there's always like some risk but not really high risk.*

*I think if you're in the situation that you can control more easily like if you're at home, like in the spa pool or something, if something does go wrong then you've got people around you which kind of lowers the risk...the water like doesn't sort of move, it doesn't have different currents and things, just sort of stays the same.*

In addition, one participant identified fishing as something that they considered low risk because "nobody really drinks much when they're out fishing".

## 10. High risk activities

Participants were asked what they considered to be high risk activities involving alcohol use in and around water. A range of activities were identified by participants, with one pointing out that risk increased in unpredictable environments. High risk activities mentioned included being on boats, kayaking, jumping off things, and parties at pools or beaches. Some illustrative excerpts from interviews are displayed below:

*What I consider to be the highest risk is pool parties, but when there's quite a lot of people. And um so it's not just alcohol, it's peer pressure and stuff. Like, jump off the highest thing, or...try to like do flips, like we've got this little swing under the deck, and it's like people end up landing on each other.*

*Jumping off a two storey building into a pool that's not exactly a deep one isn't the most intelligent thing to do.*

*Massive beach parties...just on the beach...there was just drinks everywhere and people everywhere doing everything and in and out of the water and yeah, um, I think that's high risk because there's lots of people and there's lots of drinks and it's a beach.*

In addition, the dangers of drinking alcohol in the sun were highlighted:

*We go to the Devonport food and wine festival every year, and like every year it's drinking in the sun all day and then the beach is like 10 steps away from where you are, and I think that's potentially really, really high risk, and yeah I think that's not what you would consider a dangerous beach but it's still a beach, there's still boats, there's still rocks, there's still tides.*

## **11. Factors perceived to increase risk**

A number of factors were identified in the research as potentially increasing the risks involved when participating in social activities in and around water. These included: a lack of awareness, knowledge, or expertise; poor preparation; and, involvement of children.

### **11.1 Lack of awareness, knowledge, or expertise**

Key factors that were considered to increase potential risks associated with various activities in and around water, were a lack of knowledge, experience, or skill:

*People going out fishing who are inexperienced, they don't know the tides and stuff and when they should come back in.*

*When we go wake boarding, and you turn around and pick up the person who's fallen off and things like that there's always a risk I guess that someone doesn't know how to turn the boat properly.*

*And also in another social context people in groups using equipment that they don't have knowledge about, prior knowledge, so, for example a group of young people taking their dad's boat out or something. And they don't know how to read the tide or the wind and they*

*In terms of water safety and flags and boys and water and how far you can go towards or outside where in the sea and then you get to a buoy and you're not allowed past that point because of jet skis and so on, my family's not educated about that stuff.*

### **11.2 Poor preparation**

Being ill-equipped or ill-prepared, or forgetting essential safety steps, were identified as factors that could increase the risks involved in social activities in and around water, and for some this was more likely when alcohol was involved.

*In most instances being ill-equipped or ill prepared or whether it's um having too many people on boats, not enough life jackets.*

*Just get into trouble. I've seen that on quite a few occasions, so all the excitement of getting together and they skip safety steps, basic things which in turn leads them into trouble.*

### **11.3 Involvement of children**

The risks associated with social activities, particularly those involving alcohol consumption, in or around water were considered by some to increase in situations in which children were involved, due to caregiver supervision potentially not being as vigilant:

*Barbecues at the beach, or at a lake or at a bach where you're on the water, or anything like that where there could be family situations where younger children would be at risk without competent supervision.*

## **12. Gender differences**

The research identified that participants considered males to be higher risk takers during activities in and around water. The majority of incidents described, involving the use of alcohol around water that either resulted in injury, or were considered risky, involved males. For example, participants described males being 'macho' or trying to be the 'alpha male' around their mates. Excerpts from interviews that illustrate this are presented below:

*Most of my guy friends don't wear sun block and they always get burnt.*

*With alcohol and around water, one thing I've observed is that males kind of get the macho thing, when they're drunk around water...mainly males do dumb things around water, just because they're drunk, and they want to impress someone watching.*

*Your common sense kind of goes out the door and you just really want to really impress, be the alpha male and do what no-one else can do kind of thing, and sometimes the risk is a risk ignored, or not thought of kind of thing, so you kind of get peer pressured into it but you kinda want to do it yourself.*

*I'm not being sexist, but it's generally pissed as boys, or groups of boys, that then cause trouble.*

## **13. Incidents involving alcohol use in and around water**

When asked about the type of risk they associate with social activities involving alcohol around water, a number of participants mentioned specific incidents resulting in injury, or in one case, death. Some of these were firsthand accounts and some were incidents which participants had been told about by others. Several 'near miss' stories were also recounted, where participants seemed to be aware that things could have gone wrong and resulted in injury to those involved, but that, on the particular occasion being described, the person had been 'lucky'. Some excerpts from interviews follow:

*Just recently we've had a bit of that stupidity from mates on jet skis as well. One of them got killed, about a month and a half ago. I was quite close to the person who passed away as well, so...I think a common risk for me is stupidity with water, where alcohol isn't involved as well.*

*I've known some people to like dive in at the shallow end and like break their nose and stuff but they were too drunk to realise they could be a risk.*

*I've actually worked at a private party and seen a guy slip hopping out of a pool like and fall about 6 feet onto some concrete and knock himself out, and also the girl who had the party*

*she um she dropped her bottle of wine and sort of stepped all over it, so she had to go to A&E as well.*

*A couple of times I've gone out um on the town and then brought a few people home and decided to go for a swim. Yeah, in the pool, and a few more drinks, and go in the spa and have a few more drinks, and um yeah um one guy had had sort of too much to drink and um he sort of passed out unconscious.*

*In terms of pools it can be quite dangerous, not so much once they get in but actually the way they dive in, or they can slip getting in and they think they can – one guy, I've actually seen it, he tried to back flip going into the pool. He did miss, he missed the side but he was so close to smashing his head.*

## **14. Strategies used to keep safe around water**

Participants were asked about the strategies they use to keep themselves safe when socialising with alcohol around water. A wide range of strategies were identified by participants, and are outlined below.

### **14.1 Sober 'minders'**

The most commonly discussed strategy for limiting risk associated with drinking alcohol while socialising around water was the presence of a sober person, or people, who could act as minders for those consuming alcohol. For example, having sober people outnumber drunk people was highlighted as something that would increase safety. Some mentioned that vehicle transport was often required to get to a location where socialising around water would take place, and that the natural person to fulfil this role was the 'sober driver'. Participants also talked about the advantages of having someone present, whose judgement was unimpaired by alcohol, to be able to point out when behaviour was becoming dangerous, or to perform CPR in the case of an emergency:

*If you've got a sober person who either has CPR or was a life guard, or is a good swimmer and knows what they're doing, it can reduce the risk as well.*

*If there was someone responsible that can rather take charge of everyone, like say if someone has had enough, right you have had enough.*

*I also think that if everyone has wasted and all at the water it's a really bad outcome...if the people that are dinking are outnumbered by people that aren't drinking...I think it would become a lower risk.*

*Someone isn't drinking, you've got that sort of safety net that's there.*

*When we're going wake boarding, like we sometimes have a few drinks and stuff on the beach...but because we've got a boat or a jet ski there's always a sober driver to take the boat and jet ski home ...so there's always a few sober people around.*

## 14.2 Life jackets

The use of life jackets was commonly mentioned as a safety strategy for activities on the water such as jet skiing, wake boarding, or boating:

*When we're wake boarding obviously just got to be a bit careful, the person wake boarding always has a life jacket on.*

*I think life jackets is a huge one, I've seen the same people that don't wear life jackets, I think like it's not that uncomfortable to have one on, you have to wear a seat belt so you may as well wear a life jacket.*

*Fishing on a boat...we're the kind of people that wear a life jacket anyway, we always wear a life jacket, so if we're drinking, it's sort of, you know...*

## 14.3 Personal safety rules

A number of participants talked about personal rules that they have for activities involving alcohol around water. Some said that they limit the amount of alcohol they will drink around water, including not drinking at all, while others reported that they choose not to swim after consuming alcohol, or engage in water activities more carefully (e.g., "I'll just be wary of how far to go out"). Other comments included:

*If you're going to do something in or around water not actually have too many drinks? Not go over the top?*

*If I am around water and drinking I will try I will avoid water...So I wouldn't go anywhere near water if I was intoxicated. That was my rule, I've always done that.*

*I can swim, but I definitely would not trust myself drinking near water like I wouldn't want to put myself in that situation sort of thing.*

## 14.4 Limits on alcohol available

Another strategy identified in the research was limiting the amount of alcohol available during the activity, for example:

*If me and my friends go to the beach generally I'll only have one or two beers...generally we'd only buy a 12 pack between the ten of us...which is like one, maybe two [each].*

*There was alcohol consumed on a boat while fishing, however before the boat departed ... [they] put only enough beer on the boat for two drinks each, which means they made the decision when they were sober on how much they could drink. So while they were fishing they could only have so much.*

## 14.5 Awareness of conditions

Knowledge of tide movements, being aware of rips or currents, and/or familiarity with the environment were also highlighted by participants as ways in which safety can be maximised when socialising with alcohol around water:

*I think if you know the area that you're swimming in makes it a lot more safer 'cos then you know the safe areas and you know the depth or something if it's in open waters, if it's like rivers, you know the currents, you know...where to swim to if you're in trouble that would definitely make it safer.*

#### **14.6 Other strategies**

Other strategies identified were swimming in patrolled areas of beaches, being aware of the abilities of those who you are with, and having the supervision of a responsible parent or other adult. One participant mentioned that they had attended a party with a swimming pool where the parental rule was for guests to keep away from it. Another participant stated, *"there's always one idiot or two who want to jump off the deck when that happens, you know, just throw them out"*.

### **15. Alcohol consumption on public beaches**

Participants were asked their opinion regarding bans on alcohol consumption on public beaches ('booze bans'). Some participants were aware of this legislation, and some were not.

A number of participants had been involved in drinking alcohol on beaches, often during festivities and parties, notably New Year's Eve celebrations or at a Guy Fawkes event. Some participants noted that they had not come into contact with law enforcement officials, nor been asked to refrain from drinking while at beaches. On the other hand, some participants mentioned incidents of being stopped and searched for alcohol by police officers at beaches, including having cars searched and alcohol confiscated.

Opinions varied widely on whether 'booze bans' were a good idea or not. Benefits to the environment were mentioned, in terms of fewer bottles and other rubbish left on beaches, and safety-related advantages were highlighted by one participant. Some participants also pointed out that having 'rowdy' or drunken people on beaches can compromise the enjoyment for others:

*I can't stand going to the beach and if I'm just going for a swim and lying on the beach I can't stand to see groups of rowdy people um being noisy when you're just trying to have a peaceful day.*

Few participants were prepared to say definitively whether they were 'pro' or 'anti' a blanket ban on alcohol consumption on beaches. Many highlighted the fact that a complete ban would be unfairly restrictive for those who might choose to drink moderately, and responsibly, on beaches:

*If you were to ban alcohol it kind of wrecks it for the other half of the people that just take two or three down, lie there, just sit in the sun, and have a couple of cold drinks, enjoy themselves. Or you see people surf casting, the husband's fishing, the wife's having a glass of wine on the beach.*

*I think that there's people that have spoiled like the few of us that want to go to the beach and have a couple of beers with our friends, or like say go and watch the sunset with friends and have like a glass of wine or whatever, I think there's people that have ruined it for people that like to do that kind of thing.*

Some expressed a preference for a less heavy-handed approach, with, for example, limits on the amount of alcohol allowed to be taken to a beach:

*I think that there needs to be a balance, like pretty much the comment I made before about the Mount, there's zero tolerance but...it ruins it for families, um someone that might just take a couple, it ruins it for them so I think that the two extremes kind of need to meet and make a limit on what you can take per person.*

Other participants stated a preference for a selective approach to liquor bans on beaches. For example, it was highlighted that some beaches which are known to be 'party beaches' and attract large crowds might be appropriate locations to enforce alcohol bans, whereas for relatively unpopulated, remote beaches, it might be unnecessarily restrictive. For others, selective banning was considered appropriate for certain times of the day, or on specific dates:

*Just like they can the alcohol bans can be really productive sometimes like I know when Guy Fawkes on Narrow Neck Beach and Cheltenham Beach no man no its awesome fun but the problem is like you get the riots there...I think rather than having just a complete liquor ban it should be like from 8 o'clock to 5 in the morning, say, 'cos that way you're just targeting people who are going to the beach just to get pissed, rather than people having quiets.*

The difficulty in policing an alcohol ban policy was highlighted. For example, some participants felt that responsible drinkers would be more likely to adhere to the policy, whereas those who were problematic drinkers would not:

*The people that are actually going to listen to the rules are the people who are being sensible, like maybe only having one or two on the beach anyway? But the people who are going to be not so sensible probably won't be the rule won't affect them, they'll still drink.*

*If you let drinking on beaches it would be like pretty hard to control? Like because you would have to have a ridiculous amount of people down there to like try and stop people drinking.*

*I don't know how that would be policed.*