

Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau

Blind Retailers Research

May 2024



Preface and Acknowledgements

This 'Blind Retailers' report is an evaluation of the data collected between 01/11/2023 and 08/12/2023 on behalf of the Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau (WOTM) Business Engagement workstream. Key stakeholders to the research design included Dr Teresa Stanley and Josh Carmine from Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA). Many individuals and organisations have been involved with keeping those recreating on the water safe.

We would like to thank the input of several individuals and their respective organisations for the collection of the data - including all staff members from Drowning Prevention Auckland and Bill Dawes – Paddleboard NZ.

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Carmine, J. & Stanley, T. (2024). *WOTM Blind Data Research Report, January 2024*.

Executive Summary

This study, commissioned by the WOTM Working Group, was aimed to evaluate the provision of water safety information provided at the point-of-sale for aquatic recreational equipment users in Auckland.

Data was collected from November 2023 to December 2023 by conducting 25 blind customer surveys across various retail stores, focusing on aquatic recreational equipment such as stand-up paddleboards, snorkelling gear, swimming gear, fishing gear, portable pools, paddling pools, or lifejackets.

Most of the blind surveys were conducted at either Torpedo 7 ($n = 11$, 44%) or Burnsco ($n = 9$, 36%). Stand-up paddleboards were the most item enquired about ($n = 17$, 68%). A key result from this study showed that more than one-half were not provided with safety information ($n = 15$, 60%), and only one in five ($n = 5$, 20%) provided with safety information unprompted from retailers.

If they did receive information, it was primarily provided verbally ($n = 10$, 91%) followed by information on packaging ($n = 2$, 18%) or printed materials ($n = 1$, 9%). Safety messaging delivered to consumers varied but largely revolved around lifejackets, detailed snorkelling instructions, and checking the forecast.

Another key finding from this piece of research revealed a general lack of consistent and correct safety information provision by sales staff at retail stores. Interviewers often needed to initiate discussions about safety. Those who were provided with safety information reported some correct and concise safety information, however, also reported inconsistencies and incorrect information portrayed to the interviewer during interactions.

Recommendations to improve customer safety knowledge include establishing guidelines for retailers with correct safety information, ensuring staff are well-versed in safety messaging and bylaws, and promoting a proactive safety culture are essential steps towards enhancing water safety awareness among sales staff. Training and standardised safety protocols for retailers and sales staff will address identified gaps and contribute to a safer customer experience.

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1. Introduction

Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland's Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Strategy, led by Strategy and Implementation Manager Bronwyn Coers, works together with Drowning Prevention Auckland, Water Safety New Zealand, sector partners, and the community to develop and implement a coordinated strategy for water safety and drowning prevention in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland.

The group hypothesised that insufficient safety advice and information was provided by retailers at point-of-sale of aquatic recreation equipment, offering an opportunity to improve safety knowledge with aquatic recreationalists.

The strategy group engage with the research team at Drowning Prevention Auckland to undertake some pilot research with retailers.

2. Methodology

Participating staff were asked to complete two blind customer surveys each. This involved selecting shops that were convenient to them to access and act as a 'blind customer' by expressing interest in purchasing one of the following items:

- Stand Up Paddleboard
- Lifejacket
- Fishing gear
- Snorkelling gear

Staff were instructed to engage and enquire naturally. Conversation prompts included:

- I'm interested in buying a What do you have any available?
- Can you tell me a little bit about it please?
- Is there anything else I need to know about using it?

The suggested shops included:

- The Warehouse
- Torpedo 7
- Burnsco Marine
- Hunting and Fishing

Once the interaction was complete staff were instructed to return to the carpark to complete the following survey: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7567313/WOTM-Blind-Retailers-YE24>

Some questions within this survey involved:

- Retailer and Suburb
- What the blind retailer was looking to purchase
- If the blind retailer was provided with any safety advice
- How any information was provided
- Any key message/s of the safety equipment
- Comments on the interaction

3. Results

3.1 Retailer

Of the 25 responses, just under half ($n = 11$, 48%) visited Torpedo 7 stores for the survey while Burnsco was the second most likely to be visited ($n = 8$, 33%). The remainder of the stores visited were the Warehouse ($n = 2$, 8%), Angler NZ Fishing Tackle ($n = 1$, 4%), Fishingfish ($n = 1$, 4%), and Real Surf ($n = 1$, 4%). Most of the purchasing experiences involved stand-up paddle board enquiries ($n = 17$, 68%), while the remainder enquired about snorkelling ($n = 3$, 12%), fishing gear ($n = 2$, 8%), and kayaks (8%, $n = 2$).

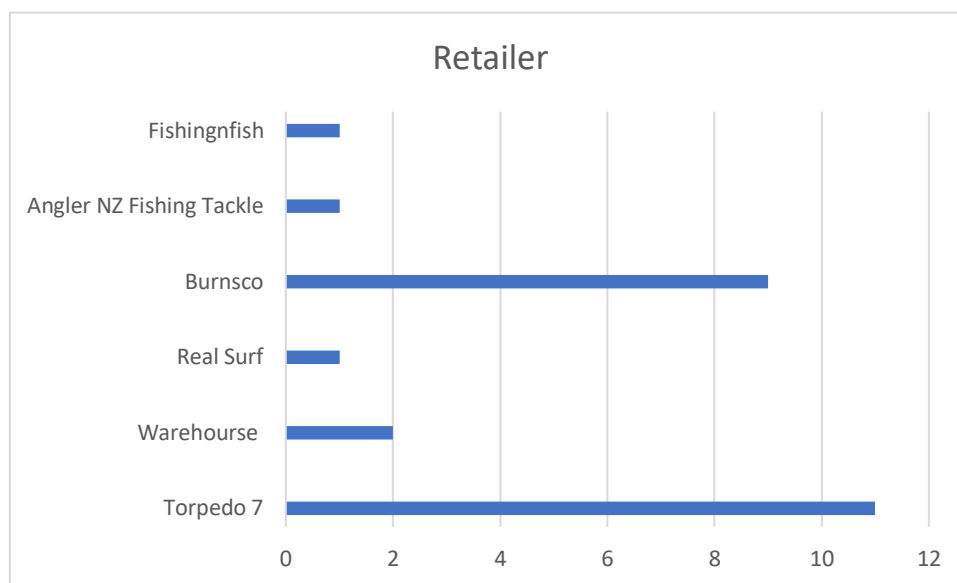


Figure 2 Retail Store

3.2 Suburb

Most of the surveys were conducted in Auckland ($n = 14$, 56%), Wellington ($n = 6$, 24%), Christchurch ($n = 4$, 16%), and Tauranga ($n = 1$, 4%).

3.3 Item Enquiry

The majority ($n = 17$, 68%) of enquiries made were in relation to stand up paddleboards. Snorkelling or dive gear accounted for three enquires (12%), fishing gear and kayaks had two enquires each (8%), and one enquiry for a surfboard ($n = 1$, 4%).

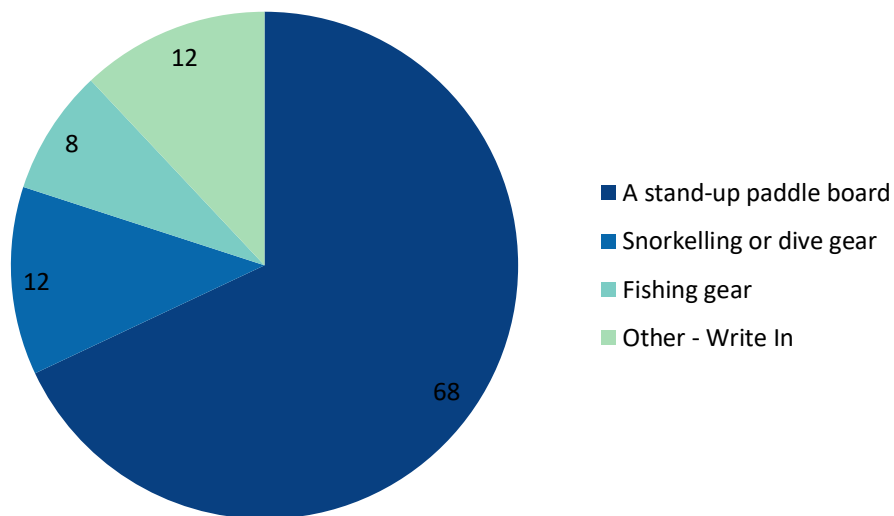


Figure 3 Item Enquiry

3.4 Safety Advice

Over one-half of blind data collectors ($n = 15$, 60%) were not provided with any water safety information or advice when enquiring about the product. Note that one of the positive responses was for product information and therefore not analysed as safety information. Although 10 (44%) enquiries were provided with safety information, only five were provided with safety information without a prompt. Only one in five ($n = 5$, 20%) of those who enquired about purchasing recreational equipment were provided with safety information unprompted.

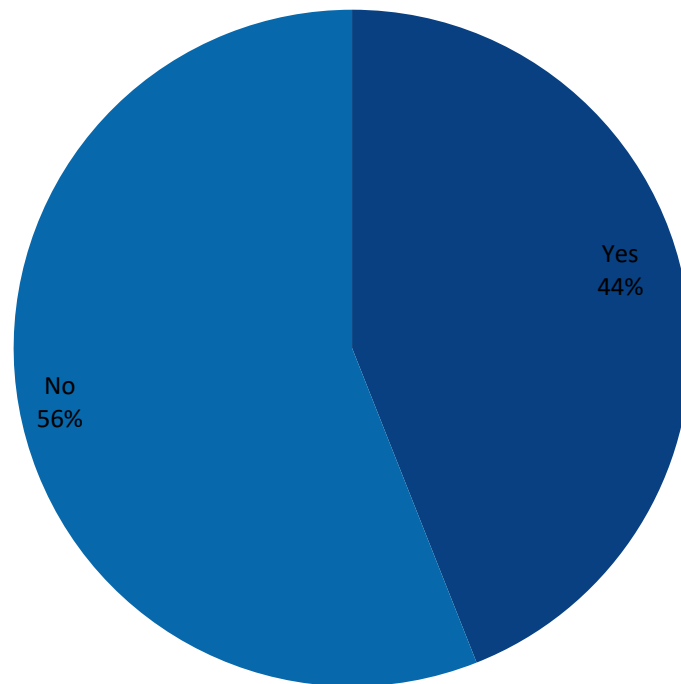


Figure 4 Provision of Safety Advice

3.5 Method of information provided

Of the 11 purchasing experiences where water safety information was provided, 13 points of information were provided, so in at least two instances more than one method was used to provide information. Most ($n = 10$, 91%) of information was provided verbally. One was provided with unspecified printed information.

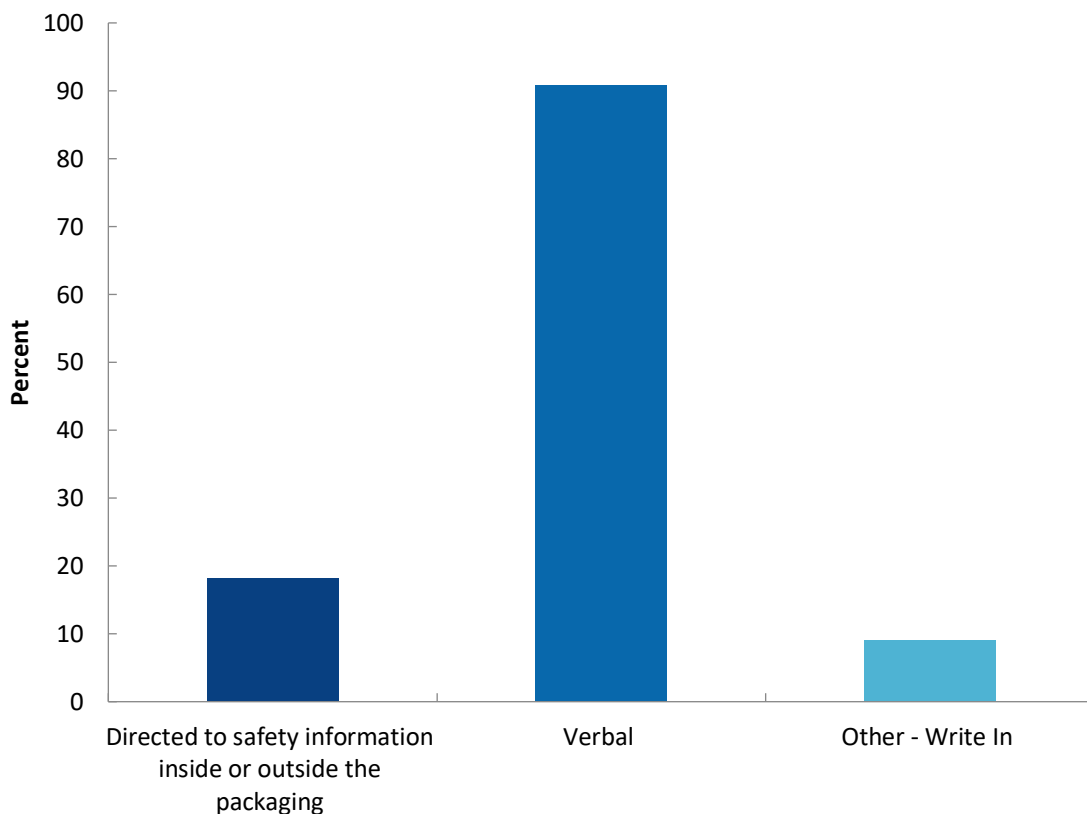


Figure 5 Method of Information Provided

3.6 Key safety message/s captured

For those who enquired about **stand-up paddle boards**:

Of the 17 enquiries made about stand-up paddleboards, two-thirds (n = 11, 65%) were not provided with any safety information. Of those provided with information, two were provided information recommending lifejackets and one about paddling in flat water. When prompted, a further two were given information about lifejackets, however two were incorrectly told that lifejackets were not required and in one instance, that a leash was not required.

The results discuss the importance of safety equipment, specifically life jackets, for water activities such as paddleboarding. However, there is conflicting advice regarding the necessity of wearing a life jacket. One source emphasises the mandatory use of a life jacket, one suggests only use in flat water conditions. However, another source suggests that wearing a life jacket is advised but may not be necessary for proficient swimmers. Additionally, it is mentioned that purchasing a paddleboard with a double skin and an attachable seat is recommended, possibly for added stability and comfort.

Insights:

1. **Conflicting Advice:** There are instances of conflicting advice regarding the necessity of wearing a life jacket. This suggests potential confusion or differing perspectives within the industry regarding safety standards and requirements.
2. **Product Recommendations:** There were instances with recommendations of specific types of paddleboards, such as those with double skins for added durability, and suggesting accessories like attachable seats. This reflects a focus on product features that enhance user experience and safety. In a similar number of cases it was noted the retailers had no idea about product or recommendations for paddleboards.
3. **Importance of Skill Level:** The differing opinions on life jacket usage based on swimming proficiency indicate a trend towards considering individual competence levels when assessing safety needs. This incorrectly suggests a

recognition that not all individuals may require the same level of safety equipment based on their swimming abilities.

For those who enquired about **diving and snorkelling equipment**:

Of the three enquiries about snorkel or dive equipment, two were provided with safety behaviours and competencies when snorkelling. The text describes a conversation with an assistant who provided guidance on snorkelling equipment and techniques. The assistant explained how to properly test a snorkel mask for fit and emphasised the importance of securing the snorkel to prevent water ingress. Additionally, they discussed techniques for clearing the snorkel after resurfacing and equalising ear pressure while underwater. When asked about diving to view underwater features, the assistant cautioned against overexertion and rapid breathing, which could lead to hyperventilation and potential loss of consciousness. They stressed the importance of staying relaxed, comfortable, and calm while snorkelling, rather than trying to keep pace with others.

Insights:

1. **Equipment Instruction:** The result of this interaction reflects a trend of providing detailed instructions on how to use snorkelling equipment effectively, ensuring a proper fit and understanding of key features to prevent water entry and maximise comfort.
2. **Safety Awareness:** There is a strong emphasis on safety competencies throughout the conversation, with the assistant providing advice on clearing snorkels, equalising ear pressure, and avoiding overexertion to mitigate risks associated with snorkelling activities.
3. **Individual Comfort:** The assistant highlights the importance of individual comfort and relaxation while snorkelling, suggesting that personal well-being and enjoyment should take precedence over keeping pace with others or pushing oneself too hard.

4. Education on Risks: By warning against overexertion and rapid breathing, the assistant educates on potential risks such as hyperventilation and loss of consciousness, demonstrating a proactive approach to safety education during water activities.

For those who enquired about **fishing equipment**:

The two instances of fishing equipment enquiries both resulted in safety information provided, one on tides, and the other added the suggestion of wearing a wetsuit and information about fishing limits.

The text outlines essential preparations and considerations for a fishing trip. It advises conducting research to determine the optimal tide conditions for fishing success and emphasises the importance of wearing appropriate safety gear, including a wetsuit and a life jacket. Additionally, it mentions legal regulations permitting the capture of 50 crabs per person per pot. The conversation suggested utilising online resources, such as Google, to find information on tides specific to the chosen fishing location.

Insights:

1. Pre-Trip Planning: Both enquiries emphasised the importance of pre-trip planning, including researching tide conditions and legal regulations. This proactive approach enhances the fishing experience while ensuring compliance with relevant laws.
2. Safety Awareness: The text highlights a strong awareness of safety considerations, such as wearing a wetsuit and a life jacket, to mitigate risks associated with water activities. This reflects a trend towards prioritizing safety measures to protect participants during fishing trips.
3. Legal Compliance: Mention of legal regulations regarding crab fishing indicates a trend towards ensuring compliance with fishing laws and regulations. This positive stance assists sustainable fishing practices and adherence to legal limits on catch quantities.

4. Utilisation of Online Resources: The recommendation of the use of *Google* to search for tide information is a positive example towards leveraging online resources for trip planning. This allows individuals to access up-to-date information and make informed decisions regarding fishing locations and conditions.

For those who enquired about **kayaks**:

There were two enquiries about kayaks. One resulted in no information provided, the other provided information on lifejackets as well as other safety accessories such as a fluorescent flag and navigation lights.

Kayaking provides an ideal opportunity to upsell with many safety accessories available.

For those who enquired about a **surfboard**:

The one enquiry about a surfboard resulted in positive information on the necessity of always wearing a surf leash.

3.7 Specific comments on interactions

Stand up paddleboard:

This open text segment highlighted mixed experiences regarding safety information and product knowledge. While some staff members were helpful in explaining paddleboard features and sizing, there was a significant lack of emphasis on safety. Safety-related topics such as the importance of wearing a life jacket, using a leash, and understanding paddleboard accessories were either not mentioned or only discussed when prompted by the customer. Additionally, some sales assistants admitted to lacking knowledge about paddleboards and related safety considerations, suggesting gaps in staff training and expertise.

Insights:

1. Inconsistent Safety Messaging: The interactions reveal inconsistency in safety messaging, with some staff members failing to mention safety equipment or guidelines unless specifically prompted by customers.

2. Customer-Initiated Safety Discussions: Safety information was often provided only after customers-initiated discussions about topics such as life jackets and leash usage, indicating a reactive approach to safety education rather than proactive dissemination of information.
3. Knowledge Gaps: Some sales assistants demonstrated a lack of knowledge about paddleboards and safety considerations, highlighting the importance of comprehensive staff training to ensure informed customer assistance.
4. Opportunity for Improvement: The experiences underscore the need for improved safety training and communication protocols within the retail establishment. Proactive safety education and comprehensive product knowledge can enhance customer satisfaction and promote safe participation in water activities.

Snorkelling and diving:

This open text segment highlighted an interaction with a knowledgeable and helpful assistant. The assistant freely shared their expertise and experience without prompting, providing valuable information on equipment options and purchasing considerations. Despite the lack of available sizes in the shop, the assistant offered alternative suggestions and recommended visiting specialist dive or boating retailers. However, there was no mention of safety considerations, such as snorkelling alone or standard diving signals, even though the individual expressed their intention to snorkel independently.

Insights:

Expert Guidance: The assistant's willingness to share knowledge and offer advice reflects a trend towards providing personalized customer service and expertise in specialty shops.

Product Recommendations: The assistant's recommendations on purchasing equipment packs and suggesting alternative retailers demonstrate a commitment to

helping customers find the best solutions for their needs, even if the shop's inventory is limited.

Missed Safety Opportunities: Despite the assistant's proficiency in snorkelling and willingness to assist, there was a missed opportunity to discuss safety considerations, particularly regarding snorkelling alone and understanding standard diving signals. This highlights the importance of comprehensive safety education in water-related activities.

3.8 Open text analysis – Key message/s of the safety equipment

Paddleboarding Recommendations (*n* = 3)

Key Points: Using the paddleboard in flat water and the recommendation to buy a paddleboard with a double skin for added durability. Emphasis on keeping the leg strap on at all times, considering the board as a safety measure, and encouraging surfers to seek help from others.

Lifejacket and Accessories for Water Activities (*n* = 5)

Key Points: Emphasising the need for a lifejacket, suggesting additional accessories like a fluorescent flag and navigation lights, and some highlighting the mandatory nature of life jackets in certain scenarios.

Snorkelling Safety Instructions (*n* = 2)

Key Points: Detailed guidance on testing the mask for fit, securing the snorkel to the mask, clearing the snorkel after being underwater, and equalising while submerged. General advice on not overexerting, breathing too quickly before diving, and the importance of staying relaxed and calm.

Fishing Safety Tips (*n* = 3)

Key Points: Advocacy for checking the tide, wearing a wetsuit and lifejacket 'when required', and legal regulations on crab fishing. Varying opinions on lifejacket necessity based on swimming ability which is not best practice recommendation.

4. Discussion

Less than one-half of the blind customers were provided safety information. When information was provided, in most cases it was verbal. Of the 10 interactions provided with safety information, only five were provided without a prompt, suggesting a one in five rate of those who purchased recreational equipment receiving safety information unprompted.

Stand-up paddleboards are the item where information was most often not provided. Positive messaging with regards to leg ropes were given, however, incorrect or inappropriate lifejacket information was also given. Some staff members were helpful in explaining the use and styles of paddleboards, sharing personal experiences, and assisting with equipment selection ($n = 2$) and one assistant provided information about purchasing options, sizes, and suggested visiting other retailers for specific needs. With all equipment, information on lifejackets seemed to vary depending on store, location and staff member. Two staff members mentioned the legal requirement of wearing a lifejacket and one suggested wearing a lifejacket when asked about it. Inconsistent recommendations about lifejacket use continued with two staff stating lifejackets were not necessary. Lack of safety information was noted in several instances, with customers having to specifically inquire about safety considerations ($n = 6$). The absence of safety advice, particularly about wearing a lifejacket, raises concerns about customer awareness of safety essentials. In some cases, sales assistants admitted to having limited knowledge about paddleboards, indicating potential gaps in training or expertise ($n = 2$). This could be a potential source of confusion for customers and underscores the importance of clear and consistent safety recommendations. It is important that all staff and should be aware of the rules and regulations regarding lifejackets.

Snorkelling retailers provided comprehensive safety instructions for snorkelling when prompted, covering equipment usage, underwater techniques, and awareness of potential risks. In addition, positive messages were communicated regarding personal well-being and avoiding potential risks associated with exertion and rapid breathing during water activities to avoid shallow water black out. However, safety considerations related to snorkelling, such as diving signals and the importance of not snorkelling

alone, were not discussed. Varying opinions on lifejacket necessity highlights the need for clear and consistent messaging.

Both fishing retailers and the one surfing enquiry relayed the importance of preparation, equipment use, and considerations for safe fishing or surfing. One of the two kayaking enquiries resulted in the sharing of information.

The need for general water safety was also noted. One shop owner expressed a commitment to promoting water safety, suggesting a positive attitude toward safety advocacy and another suggested the need for joint promotion of water safety, both indicating potential gaps in collective efforts to prioritise safety.

The data indicates a lack of proactive safety information provision by many sales assistants, especially in relation to stand-up paddle boards, with customers often needing to initiate discussions about safety. Inconsistent advice on safety essentials, such as wearing lifejackets, raises concerns about standardised safety practices across different water equipment retailers.

5. Conclusion

The relatively low percentage of the provision of safety information let alone, correct and accurate safety information raises concerns about the consistency and effectiveness of safety communication across stores. The reliance on verbal communication suggests an opportunity to explore more consistent methods, such as written materials or digital resources, to enhance safety awareness. The collective/collaborative efforts should be focussed on aligning the accurate and correct promotion of safety information when purchasing aquatic equipment.

The safety instructions provided exhibit a mix of specific guidelines, legal considerations, and differing perspectives on certain safety practices. Ensuring consistent, accurate and clear safety messaging across all water activities is crucial to promoting a culture of safety among participants. Additionally, highlighting legal requirements, providing detailed equipment instructions, and emphasising the importance of individual comfort and preparedness contribute to a comprehensive approach to water safety.

While some sales assistants demonstrated knowledge and willingness to assist, there are noticeable gaps in the consistent provision of safety information across various water activities.

Establishing clear guidelines, ensuring staff are well-versed in safety essentials, and promoting a proactive safety culture could contribute to a safer and more informed customer experience. Training programs and standardised safety protocols for sales staff may be beneficial to address the identified gaps.