



Drowning  
Prevention  
Auckland

# WAI's history and impact

## 1994 – 2024

Celebrating 30 years of education, research  
and advocacy in drowning prevention

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# ***From the headwaters to the harbour***

## ***A brief history of where we began to where we are now***

Before the days of WaterSafe Auckland Incorporated (WAI), a group called the Auckland Aquatics Awareness Networking Group met several times a year to discuss drowning prevention education and water safety initiatives. With Dr Kevin Moran as Chair, and Dr Teresa Stanley as the Secretariat, together with Sandy Harrop, Evelyn White, and other representatives from various water safety organisations, the group facilitated this networking opportunity for the sector. They were looking to fill gaps in existing water safety education – often responding to drowning data and media coverage of water-related incidents.

Following the closure of Water Safety New Zealand's (WSNZ) regional offices, WAI, now widely known as Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA), was formed in 1994 to fill the void. The regional council – recognising the need for a formal coordinating organisation in Auckland – provided initial funding.

The founding group included Dr Kevin Moran as Chair, Sandy Harrop as Secretary, as well as board members, Dr Teresa Stanley, Evelyn White, Robin Bailey (Chief-Editor of Auckland Star), and Harbour Master James McPetrie. The organisation looked to continue the collaborative work of the Auckland Aquatics Awareness Networking Group and reduce Auckland's high drowning statistics.

### ***WAI begins***

Our early years saw us develop lifesaving research-led programmes and resources in partnership with others.

For example, in 2001, in response to the tragic drowning of an 18-month-old girl in a council drain outside a Waitākere property, the Council provided all the GPS locations of any water hazards including drains and home pools. This was the start of our hazard mapping programme which used advances in GPS technology to identify water hazards for early childhood centres and homes. This programme extended into Manukau and ran for a few years.



Keeping children under five safe has always been a key focus of ours. Collaborating with the Child Safety Foundation led us to create many preschool resources together.

In 2006, thanks to collaboration from other aquatic and safety organisations, and powerhouses in education like Siobhan Harrod, DPA introduced the Integrated Aquatic Programme (IAP) for schoolteachers, marking a significant milestone in water safety education.

From community education, our organisation's focus expanded to include research, water safety promotion, and advocacy as opportunities – and funding – arose.

Dr Kevin Moran's research and experience led to a major shift in how we, as a country, think about water safety. He challenged the common belief that swimming ability alone ensures water safety, pointing to the evidence that proves we must understand risk, environments, and decision making if we really want to tackle the tragedy of drowning.

While this perspective initially met with resistance, it's now gained widespread traction and acceptance. Kevin's work on water competence has had a global influence and been cited thousands of times in academic literature.

**Our evidence-based ethos – particularly Kevin's research – has had an impressive international impact. At recent global drowning prevention conferences, the concept of water competence was widely discussed and adopted. Kevin's papers have been cited over 6,500 times and downloaded 28,000 times globally. This recognition reflects the organisation's notable contribution to advancing water safety practices and understanding beyond Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and even beyond Aotearoa New Zealand's borders.**



## Funding fuels a greater impact

**2002–2004: We received ACC funding for home pool safety (Your Pool Your Responsibility national initiative) and New Settler initiatives. We also received ASB funding in this period.**

From 2002 to 2004, DPA secured ACC funding which enabled us to focus on home pool safety and reaching new-settler groups. This funding breakthrough allowed us to grow our impact and address diverse community needs.

Our success in securing funding, particularly through ARAFA in 2008, allowed us to continue recruiting top-tier professionals and expand our delivery of education, research and advocacy.

As the demographics and needs of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland have changed, so too have DPA's programmes. This is reflected in our initiatives for Pacific communities, tangata whenua, and in providing free lifejackets through 13 DPA Lifejacket Hubs. We continue to evolve our approach to cater to different cultural perspectives on water safety, particularly for at-risk communities.

Under Sandy's leadership as Chief Executive (from 1994 to 2013) DPA achieved significant milestones, including Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland becoming the lowest per capita city for drownings despite having high-risk groups.

Securing funding continues to be a major aim – especially to attract top professionals and experts with strong educational and research backgrounds.

## Making our messaging accessible and memorable

Our unique strengths lie in bridging the gap between research and practical education. Our organisation has consistently used research findings to inform and improve our educational programmes, as well as for data to advocate for legislative change. Key developments include the creation of the Water Safety Code in 2011-2012. We started the eLearning journey five years later, where the 15 water competencies for drowning preventions feature strongly.

Embracing technology means we can make our lifesaving messaging as accessible, memorable and culturally appropriate as possible. In 2015, we adopted new systems and technology for our internal records including a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) and Sharepoint. In the same year, we

moved offices to Westhaven Drive at the stunning St Mary's Bay – this has given us even more visibility in the community, particularly with boaties.

What's more, following COVID, we've moved to online tools – so staff can work remotely or follow a hybrid model – and for safe and secure storing of information and policies.

## Tackling challenges with collaboration and tenacity

As an organisation, we've always been willing and able to bring diverse groups together around the same table. Throughout our history, we've maintained strong relationships within the aquatic and injury prevention sectors, including Harbour Master, Coastguard Tautiaki Moana, Surf Life Saving Northern Region and Surf Life Saving New Zealand, and educational institutions – from ECE to tertiary. A complex challenge that's never static – drowning cannot be solved in isolation. It's not about being siloed heroes but working together in lasting partnerships. Our longstanding relationships have been vital in developing and actioning impactful water safety initiatives.

Our approach of “teaching the teachers” makes us stand out too, promoting sustainability and self-sufficiency in water safety education. We also offer teachers the opportunity to work for DPA without losing their seniority in the education system. Sandy explains, “We applied to the Ministry of Education to get approved setting status so that when teachers left teaching to come and work for us, they didn't lose their seniority. They could leave teaching for five years, pick up whatever aquatic skills they wanted from us, and then go back into teaching again.”

Without doubt, we've faced significant hurdles along the way, including funding constraints and leadership changes. However, thanks to our tenacity, expertise and our ability to attract top people, we've remained a respected leader in water safety and drowning prevention regionally, nationally and globally.

## Thanks for picking up this book!

Inside you'll find a celebration of our history, values, kaupapa and impact, and the incredible people who have made us who we are today. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we've loved putting it together!





## **Let's hear from some of our founding members**

***We asked them what WAI  
means to them and to share  
their milestone moments  
over the last three decades***

# Dr Kevin Moran ONZM

**Our founding chair, Dr Kevin Moran ONZM has had an exceptional career. He is a retired Principal Lecturer and honorary academic in Physical Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. Kevin has had a lifelong commitment to drowning prevention as a lifeguard, researcher, and educator. He has been a frontline surf lifeguard for over 60 years, still currently patrolling one of New Zealand's rugged west coast beaches at Muriwai, near Auckland, where he has been awarded Life Membership. He is also the author of two books on water safety and drowning prevention, has published more than 80 papers in international journals, and presented more than 70 papers at more than 20 international conferences in the last decade.**

Below are some of his many achievements. As someone who is incredibly accomplished, it's not an exhaustive list!

## 2002

Awarded Winston Churchill Fellowship to study swimming and water safety programmes in the UK and Ireland.

## 2004 and 2025

Service Awards for Services to Surf Life Saving.

## 2006

Awarded PhD.

## 2007

Awarded ACC/Safe Communities Foundation Injury Prevention and Safety award.

## 2008-2012

A member of the Drowning Prevention Council, which was established in 2008 to implement New Zealand's Drowning Prevention Strategy and "to strengthen leadership and collaboration in the water-safety sector." (Quote from *Surf Life Saving New Zealand's 2008 annual report*.)

## 2010

Awarded a Distinguished Service Award by Surf Life Saving New Zealand and Surf Life Saving Northern Region.

## 2015

Made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) in the New Year's Honours' list for "services to water safety".

## 2023

To recognise Dr Kevin Moran's long-standing contribution to our organisation, we created an emeritus board member role at DPA's 2023 AGM. In the same year, he was awarded Life Membership and a 50-year Service Badge by Surf Life Saving Northern Region and Surf Life Saving New Zealand.

### Here's WAI's story as told by Kevin:

The Auckland Aquatics Awareness Networking Group included organisations and groups like Safekids, the School of Population Health, the Harbour Master, Surf Life Saving Northern Region, Coastguard Tautiaki Moana, all the groups you'd instantly recognise sent reps and we networked.

This is the days before laptops and video conferencing. It was a hands-on opportunity to meet once every two or three months. It was driven by the agendas of summertime drowning, major aquatic events, and educational initiatives. The aim was to ensure everybody was aware of what everyone was doing.

Most people around the table were associated with education promotion through wet sector organisations like Surf Life Saving New Zealand. SLSNZ were starting to run nippers' programmes. I'd initiated the surf survival programme in secondary schools which was being widely accepted around the country.

Schools were seen as the only place where you can reach a target population. It's very difficult with an adult population to reach a lot of people. So public education programmes were focused on schools.

We looked at what was currently out there and noticed it was a colander type of situation – there were a lot of gaps. But as situations arose, and new information came to light, often driven by drowning data and the

media, we could identify where the needs were and who were the most at-risk, as well as see the riskiest times and environments.

For example, in January and February the incidence of drownings would increase so we'd focus on aquatic recreation during holiday times. We also knew youth – and vulnerable people at home like children, toddlers and babies – were high-risk. So, we'd encourage the development of programmes to fill the gap in situations where there was little or no education or promotion of water safety.

While we were doing this regionally, a lot of the national initiatives, which had originally been provided in the Auckland region for the Auckland population, just suddenly stopped with the demise of the WSNZ regional field offices in Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington. WSNZ became centralised with a much lesser emphasis on delivery.

### This problem started us thinking: What's the evidence base for the education programmes?

The common wisdom that pervaded New Zealand then, and still does to some extent now, is that if you teach people to swim, they'll be safe around water.

That's simply not true. In over five decades of frontline lifeguarding, I've rescued dozens of people. I've witnessed, and been part of rescues to save people, from drowning and dying because of their actions. Being able to swim is not enough.

The challenge I placed in my PhD research, which I finished in 2006, was: What is the knowledge, safety and attitudes of young New Zealanders? At that point the most at-risk group was male teens. What it triggered for me was that a lot of what we were doing wasn't evidence based.

All of medicine is driven by evidence. You'd never go to a doctor or have an operation unless the process and the procedures weren't grounded in hard evidence. But we didn't have any of that in the water safety sector. A lot of the things that were thought – about the delivery of water safety programmes – were based on sedimented practice, in other words, what we always did.

When I was at school, we didn't really do much water safety, we just did swimming. There's nothing wrong with that – I'm a committed, international swimmer and swam in three Commonwealth Games. I still swim every day. **But simply being able to swim is not enough.**

**“I've witnessed, and been part of rescues to save people, from drowning and dying because of their actions. Being able to swim is not enough.”**





Once you've been in a drowning prevention role, like lifeguarding, you realise there's much more behind the drowning risks.

**What we've tried to do, especially in recent years, is go beyond teaching the physical skills of swimming to teaching risk assessment.**

A lot of people, particularly in the swimming instruction school world, think I'm anti swimming. Nothing could be further from the truth. I've been a swimmer since I was five. Still am at 75. I'd encourage every child and every parent to learn to swim. But not necessarily for safety. You can teach a kid to learn to ride a bike, and if you buy your kid a bike, do you not teach them road safety? So, there's a critical component of aquatics, which is about safety, because it's an incredibly unforgiving environment.

**Most people assume that the non-swimmers are the ones at greatest risk.**

80% of our drowning fatalities worldwide are males. This is the combination of underestimation of risk and overestimation of ability.

The critical thing you've got to get across is the risk. Questions like: Do you think you can cope with that risk? That's why swimming is not the critical issue here. The critical issue is: Have you made the right decision before you even go in the water?

Over the years, we've moved away from simply teaching swimming skills to the whole notion of water competency as a much more inclusive construct.

Now that I'm starting to enter my retirement twilight years, I've got more time to reflect. I was so busy "doing" over the last 20 years, I didn't really have much time for thinking about it. I take a great deal of pride in the fact that we – as an organisation and as a country – and people like Sandy, Evelyn and myself started something which has become an attractive magnet, not just for Auckland, not just for New Zealand, but for the world.

I've been very lucky to have had a very supportive group around me. While I may have pioneered lots of initiatives, I was fortunate in that I had a lot of very good colleagues pushing me in the right direction. And I used my inquiring mind to ask the hard questions, which I'm not afraid to do.

One of the challenges with the wet sector is that funding for individual member organisations has always been discretionary and competitive. Because

the funds are limited, you're competing against your fellow organisations.

Getting funding from ARAFA has been a blessing. DPA has always collaborated. We work very closely with SLSNZ. I do a lot of research work for them to provide them with an evidence base. So we always promote collaboration because one size is not going to fit all. But the problem is that the funding mechanism is contestable and that brings out siloing.

What's exciting is there's a wonderful commitment from the staff and the board and our supporters, people who have been members in the past. That's a great motivator for me and why I still try, whenever I can, to touch base with the people doing the frontline work.

I try and do it with encouragement and by pointing out how they're using our work and how it's evidence based.

Most of the people I met at the 2023 World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Perth, people from all over the world, knew about DPA. And that is a lovely feeling. It's an immense pride that we punch well above our weight in the world of drowning prevention.

Virtually every presentation in the conference on water safety education was about water competence. Every presentation had a slide with a quote, or one of DPA's logos showing what this thing called water competence is all about.

When I came away from that conference, I thought: that's real recognition for our work. It was a real buzz.

## Former CE Sandy Harrop

**As Chief Executive from 1994 to 2013, Sandy navigated our organisation through its establishment, and 20 years of many changes, challenges and successes. Sandy is incredible at building and maintaining relationships. She worked tirelessly to get people around the table to collaborate towards a shared vision – an Auckland free of drowning.**

### Here's WAI's story as told by Sandy:

In my early years I was a swimmer at national level. I was in the first New Zealand synchronised swimming team that went to Australia to compete in their state championships.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I was keen to continue my close relationship with water and so I asked at the local school, "Would you like me to help with teaching to swim?"

Around the same time, the Professional Swim Coaches and Teachers Association was established. Well-known Auckland coaches Jack Lyons and Morrie Doig heard I wanted to teach swimming, and said, "you better get qualified".

For several years I went to the annual Professional Swim Coaches and Teachers Association's conference. It was my time out from the kids – I'm a mother of five. I then taught swimming at every school pool in Mount Albert. I did this for 10 years.

### Early Auckland water safety

I'd like to give you a bit of background on the history of water safety in Auckland. During the 70s and 80s there was the Auckland Water Safety Association – which mainly focused on boating safety. I had a great part-time job with them taking a small dinghy and lifejackets into the school pools

and providing an experience and education around water and boating safety.

It was a great success; this type of experience continues today in various water safety programmes. Water Safety New Zealand took over this initiative and established their Northern Regional Office. I continued to work for WSNZ. The Auckland office had an amazing CE, Evelyn White. She was a master at networking and partnership.

Evelyn was the key person who got Paul Holmes involved in our cause after he nearly drowned. Subsequently, this relationship led to a week of free water safety messages on TV – in a great spot just before the evening news. Each day had a different focus from one of the various Auckland water safety organisations at the time.





When WSNZ shut their offices in 1994, the many organisations and educationalists who had seen the benefit of working in partnership – together with the Auckland Regional Council under Chairman Phil Warren and the then Harbour Master, James McPetrie – realised they couldn't function without a coordinating organisation for Auckland.

### WAI begins

Jen Silver and Dr Kevin Moran from the NZ College of Education, Teresa McKenzie (now Teresa Stanley) – a school teacher and national Surf Life Saving rep, and myself in adult education were all included in the early team. There was a huge education focus from the founding members of the organisation together with the other Auckland aquatic bodies.

The regional council could see that this collaborative approach from the aquatic organisations was a good way to ensure Auckland dropped their drowning stats which were fairly high. They put in the money – around \$50,000 – and we formed WAI.

At this point we said: “Where do we go from here?” Evelyn was asked to be the Chief Executive, but she needed a full-time job. She was also a nurse and left Auckland to take a job in Taupō.

As I was part-time with WSNZ, I agreed I would continue to work part-time as CE of WAI.

We approached John Thomas (JT) who was – and still is – very involved with Surf Life Saving Northern Region and at the time was CEO of Sport Auckland. He gave us a very affordable rent on two of their offices in Khyber Pass.

### Safe Summer Campaign

During Safe Summer 2000, Bronwyn Coers – another teacher – joined the team. We also had high-profile transatlantic rower, Rob Hamill, as our key promotions person, and Coastguard Boating Education – with Geoff West as manager – as our partner organisation in this regional project.

“The campaign, with the slogan “Don't go overboard with the booze,” brings the Alcohol Advisory Council, Auckland City Council and Regional Council, Coastguard, Department of Conservation, Land Transport Safety Authority, the police, St John Ambulance and WaterSafe Auckland together to educate the huge influx of spectators expected for the cup.”

The Safe Summer campaign continued successfully for many years and involved events, radio, and print media targeting our at-risk communities. In the 2004/2005

**“The campaign, with the slogan ‘Don't go overboard with the booze,’ brings the Alcohol Advisory Council, Auckland City Council and Regional Council, Coastguard, Department of Conservation, Land Transport Safety Authority, the police, St John Ambulance and WaterSafe Auckland together to educate the huge influx of spectators expected for the cup.”**

– NZ Herald article: ‘Regatta push for safe drinking’ by Terry Maddaford

campaign, Young & Rubicam helped us develop a striking visual campaign on billboards, buses, and street banners. The campaign depicted white crosses in the water to represent the tragedy of 21 lives lost from drowning that January. Billboards were placed at key sites beside the southern and northern motorways. We also had two targeted radio campaigns, the second of which was launched prior to Christmas 2004 and included celebrities Dame Susan Devoy and Sir Paul Holmes sharing water safety messages.

### Research focus

Over the next 10 years we looked to ensure that evidence drove our policy and practice. Research and prevention became an increasing focus for the organisation. We had five trained teachers on staff and most of them presented papers internationally at water safety and injury prevention conferences.

DPA has given me something to look back on that's worthwhile. I've met amazing people. Kevin is an unbelievable powerhouse. And Dr Carolyn Coggan, who ended up on the board of ARAFA, was brilliant. She understood the whole ethos of prevention.

Aquatics is for everyone in varying degrees. Some people want to be in the water, some on the water, some under the water. Other people just want to look at it – like watching the yachting.

I think the programmes DPA has in place now are really exciting. The more people who realise, if they're going to be involved in the water, they need education, awareness of their practical skill level, and knowledge, along with good decision making, the better.



## Dr Teresa Stanley

**A highly-regarded researcher both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, Dr Teresa Stanley has been involved with WAI in various roles including inaugural board member, programme development and delivery, research, and measuring impact in preventing drowning. In 2016, she was awarded a Swimming New Zealand Service Award, and in 2021 she completed her PhD. Together with Dr Kevin Moran, Teresa has had many research articles published in international journals. Teresa is an aquatic practitioner, a NZ Swimming representative and is a NZ Surf titleholder, and has life guarded at many beaches around New Zealand. She is an experienced and qualified teacher and swim teacher and was previously employed with Surf Life Saving Northern Region and New Zealand, and Harbour Sport.**

### Here's WAI's story as told by Teresa:

Once WSNZ wasn't going to be in Auckland as a regional organisation, we needed something more formal in place.

Education in our community was always going to be the key goal. And then with Kevin's input, we had a robust research side that could provide evidence-based direction.

In 2001, we developed a hazard mapping programme, following the tragic drowning of a young 18-month-old girl in a council drain outside her property in Waitākere. And that was an innovative programme in that council provided maps with GPS locations for all home pools, drains, the coastline, all sorts of water hazards. And we highlighted those risks.

We developed an extensive map for every ECE centre and then all the parents had printed maps which they took home and marked out water hazards around their home. Then we extended that to Manukau. So that was a project that covered two or three years. That was our first venture into new technology.



In those early days, we worked closely with the then Child Safety Foundation and we developed preschool resources for ECEs. In 2006, we launched the Integrated Aquatic Programme (IAP) for schools. All these initiatives were really collaborative – we were working alongside other aquatic organisations or other safety organisations.

When I say we launched the IAP, we had the likes of Siobhan Harrod, who was an experienced and capable secondary teacher. We couldn't have created these huge resources and achieved these milestones without her and other key people.

In 2002 to 2004 we received ACC funding. That was a big breakthrough because the funding was significant. There were two key projects: one for home pool safety and the other one for new settlers. The new-settler projects have become a core focus of our education programmes. We were the first to start projects with new-settler groups and Māori and have a Pacific people's water safety strategy in Auckland. We led the Auckland water safety strategy.

The home pool safety legislation at the beginning was quite challenging to enforce because at that stage we had seven district councils and a regional council, and each were interpreting the legislation differently. We all met monthly and worked through the issues, including how to train staff, and how to ensure interpreting legislation on the ground would be consistent across councils.

Although the funding stopped in 2004/2005, the project itself continued through until the amalgamation of councils in 2010. Once the councils amalgamated, there was more consistency.

We had some opportunities with lifejacket legislation in 2007. One of our earlier board members, James McPetrie who was a Harbour Master, secured funding from Auckland Regional Council to run the Safe Summer campaign. So that provided another strand in terms of promotion and advocacy.

Between 2008 to 2011, Kevin was co-chair of an international open water task force. I also sat on that task force, and we developed international open water safety messaging we had already looked at with WSNZ. There was an education working group, and we'd looked at some framework messaging. Kevin, Brett Sullivan and I helped to develop the New Zealand Water Safety Code. That came about in 2011/2012, and it has stayed in place until 2024.

In 2024 we looked at changing the sector messaging for water safety codes. We've had a key input to developing the sector messaging across the board, whether it was for schools or out in the community, including developing resources and the messaging since.

Research has provided direction for our education from the outset. When the research came out about the 15 water competencies recommended for drowning prevention, our education development and delivery has been updated to reflect that and to ensure we are teaching those 15 water competencies.

**Kevin has always encouraged me to continue learning.** A PhD probably wasn't something I expected to do early on, but it was something I was very interested in achieving. I worked part-time at DPA while I completed my PhD on perceived and real water competency and drowning risk among adults in open water.

DPA's been on the eLearning journey for over seven years now. This has provided our diverse and hard-to-reach communities with a new and easily accessible method of education. We're starting to put things in place to have the eLearning as a prerequisite for various initiatives. I think that is an opportunity to support learning in some instances.

Internationally, we're a unique organisation in that we have a practical education component and a research side. We're one of the few organisations that can include and collect research within our education delivery.

It hasn't been plain sailing. But we've had some powerful allies all the way through. We need to keep employing really strong, capable people who can keep innovating and keep making those leapfrog projects and initiatives that keep DPA out in front.

The challenges are funding to keep this calibre of people attracted to the organisation and to be able to employ them, because if we don't have the funding to pay the salaries, we can't keep those people. You are only as good as your team.

**DPA has been an amazing organisation to be involved with. Not many people can stay involved in an organisation professionally for 30 years and be supported to have the level of professional development that I've had.**



▶ **1998/99**  
**"In at the Deep End"**

A teaching resource for intermediate-aged pupils, focusing on deep water confidence and safety skills

▶ **late 90s – early 2000s**  
**Hazard mapping**  
Hazard maps for early childhood centres, identifying local water hazards within a 2km radius of each early childhood centre.

▶ **2004**  
**New Migrant Project**  
Increased water safety awareness among new migrants, particularly Chinese and Korean communities.

▶ **2004 – 2014**  
**"Your Pool, Your Responsibility"**  
Significantly reduced preschool home pool drownings and contributed to improved pool safety awareness and compliance across the region.

▶ **2003/04**  
**Bath Time Safety Project**  
Water safety messaging to North Shore and Waitakere parents at 9-month Well Child Plunket Check

▶ **2000**  
**Safe Summer campaign**  
The campaign incorporated various water safety messages and partnered with maritime authorities to distribute chocolate fish as rewards for life jacket compliance.

▶ **2005/06**  
**West Coast Rock Fishing Project**  
Four multilingual rock fishing advisors were employed over the summer to conduct surveys and offer safety advice.

**Integrated Aquatic Programme**  
A tool for teachers to develop sequential pathways of aquatic teaching and learning.

**Women Only Swim Lessons**  
Held at Mt Roskill pool, weekly swim sessions for Muslim women.

▶ **2005**  
**Whānau Nui Pilot**  
A programme that addressed the overrepresentation of Māori and Pacific Island peoples in drowning statistics.

**2008 – 2011**  
**Auckland Regional Water Safety Education Strategy**  
Included short-term targeted initiatives and events, regionwide promotions, seminars and professional development opportunities, and building partnerships across the region.

▶ **2008**  
**Water Safety Code and International Collaboration**  
Creation of a New Zealand Water Safety Code, similar to existing codes for boating and land safety.

▶ **2009/10**  
**Wai Wise**  
Water safety and swimming messaging for Māori, Pacific, and Asian youth based in Waitākere City.

▶ **2014**  
**DPA Lifejacket Hubs**  
Overcoming barriers for Pacific men of cost and accessibility of wearing lifejackets while fishing and boating.

▶ **2016/17**  
**Name change**  
Changed our trading name to Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA) to better reflect what we do.  
  
**Bystander Rescue**  
Developed the 'Four Rs' for bystander rescue: Recognise, Respond, Rescue, Revive.

▶ **2009**  
**Pools2Schools™**  
Addressed the challenges of school pool closures and the associated access for students.

**2018 – 19**  
**15 water competencies**  
For the first time in our Annual Report, we included the internationally recognised 15 water competencies which inform our practice in educating to prevent drowning  
  
**eLearning**  
New Zealand's first eLearning platform for water safety.

▶ **2020/21**  
**Asian Drowning Prevention Advisor**  
Appointment of Madison Chang as our Asian Drowning Prevention Advisor.  
  
**Safety & Drowning Prevention Strategy**  
Development of Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland's Water Safety and Drowning Prevention strategy.

▶ **2023**  
**Float First**  
A multi-year flagship programme with floating at its heart, including educational content for online learning, as well as group and classroom settings.

▶ **2023/24**  
**Recent years**  
Council partnerships and Hazard Assessments, allowing us to extend our reach and impact.



# A look back at some of our key milestone projects and initiatives

## 1998/1999

“In at the Deep End” was a teaching resource for intermediate-aged pupils, piloted by Auckland, North Shore, Manukau and Waitākere councils. Focusing on deep water confidence and safety skills, the programme was designed to complement the health and physical education curriculum and work alongside existing aquatics education. The programme could be adapted to meet needs of different groups and could be integrated into outdoor education and programmes for students with disabilities. It assists students unfamiliar with recreational aquatic environment and aims to build self-awareness and a safety attitude.

## Hazard mapping – late 90s to early 2000s

Thanks to support from the Health Funding Authority and the involvement of Waitākere City and Manukau City in World Health Organisation’s “safer communities” initiative, we launched the Hazard Mapping pilot. This was a key safety initiative with the focus of alerting parents and caregivers to water hazards around their home and enhancing their awareness of water safety. We supplied maps to all ECEs and delivered an interactive exercise for children and families at centres. Waitākere City staff were excited about using the latest in GIS mapping technology for community benefit as it is a valuable resource for identifying hazards.

## Safe Summer 2000 campaign report

The Safe Summer campaign ran for multiple summers. Funded by the Auckland Regional Council, it initially focused on promoting lifejacket use during the America’s Cup. The campaign incorporated various water safety messages and partnering with maritime authorities to distribute chocolate fish as rewards for life jacket compliance.

In the summer of 1999/2000, in response to water safety concerns surrounding the America’s Cup and Millenium celebrations, we collaborated with multiple organisations – including Alcohol Advisory Council, Auckland Regional Council, and Coastguard Boating Education (as it was known then) – in the Safe Summer Campaign. The campaign targeted various groups: small boat users, the general public, ECEs and primary and intermediate principals. We used a multi-faceted approach with various media and collateral including radio, pamphlets, TV, and static displays. We implemented promotional strategies across diverse media platforms, focusing on increasing life jacket use and reducing alcohol consumption in boating. Below are some of the outcomes from the 2000 campaign.

- Campaign reached 53% of Greater Auckland population via radio
- Distributed 250,000 pamphlets
- 1.5 million visitors at the Viaduct NZ Expo
- Lifejacket usage increased significantly
- Campaign was successful in promoting water safety messages across all prevention levels



## Bath Time Safety Project 2003/2004

In 2003/4 we developed the Bath Time Safety Project, based on an idea developed by the Northland Community Injury Prevention Group. The project targeted an at-risk group: data on pre-school drownings shows one-year-olds are most at risk of drowning in the bath. It began in North Shore in collaboration with ShoreSafe Children, WaterSafe Auckland and Plunket, with assistance from ACC, and was extended into Waitākere.

Every parent/caregiver at their child’s 9-month Well Child Check at Plunket or WAI Health was given some bath toys and stickers with water safety messages. The messages were around supervision, “Always stay with us at bath time”; safe water temperatures, “run cold water first”; and setting up a safe bath environment to avoid harm, “Always use a non-slip bath mat” and “Always put the plug up high.” We also gave parents a brochure with suggestions for age-appropriate water play and water safety to introduce water to young children in an enjoyable and safe environment.

## New Migrant Project 2004

Beginning in the financial year 2003/2004, this initiative aimed to address drowning incidents and increase water safety awareness among new migrants, particularly Chinese and Korean communities. We collaborated with organisations including ACC, Waitematā DHB, Asian Health Support Services, and Chinese New Settlers Trust. We were grateful for the significant media exposure - both TV1 and TV3 featured the initiative on their 6 o’clock news, Sky TV Asian also provided coverage, and there were write-ups in the New Zealand Herald and suburban newspapers. The Asian drowning toll decreased from fourteen in 2002 to seven in 2003 (five of the seven drownings in 2003 occurred in the Auckland region).

Twelve new migrant aquatic organisations participated in the New Migrant Water Safety Reference Group. This group oversaw the project, distributed resources, conducted workshops and offered cultural advice for the resources where appropriate.

The project launch event attracted 70 attendees and was covered by three TV stations and Mayor George Wood was a guest speaker.

In 2003, ACC and WaterSafe Auckland developed and distributed brochures (BeWaterSafe) in Chinese, Mandarin, and Korean for new migrant communities. The brochures shared how to stay safe in, on, or around water at home or around the community, at the beach, while rock fishing and while boating.





### **“Your Pool Your Responsibility” 2004-2014**

“Your Pool, Your Responsibility,” significantly reduced preschool home pool drownings and contributed to improved pool safety awareness and compliance across the region. In partnership with ACC and staff from all seven of the local body compliance organisations, key achievements include the national training course for Council Pool Compliance staff developed by the Standards NZ Safety of Swimming Pools and Building Industry Officials New Zealand (BOINZ). These national outcomes greatly improved consistency in implementing legislation. Preschool drownings in the Auckland region decreasing from six

in 2002 to one in 2004. Partnerships in the region were strengthened including with city and district councils, ACC Thinksafe, the pool industry, risk analysis experts, and home pool owners. As part of the initiative, an Auckland Regional Pool Fencing and Safety brochure and posters were produced to ensure consistent messaging to pool owners. Brochures and posters were distributed through all councils to child education facilities, council facilities, libraries, and community houses. The project led to increased pool fencing officer inspections and community liaison hours and a rise in pool registrations.

**“This has been a hugely successful campaign that has seen the seven Auckland Territorial Authorities and Water Safety Groups design, develop and distribute a common brochure which has given a consistent approach in providing information to pool owners.”**

- An anonymous comment from a staff member of the territorial authorities.

### **“Your Pool Your Responsibility” 2005/2006**

The development of the new standard NZS 8500:2006: *Safety barriers and fences around swimming pools, spas and hot tubs* was one of the highlights of the Your Pool Your Responsibility Campaign in 2005/2006. The new standard was launched in the final quarter of 2006 and the Auckland region comprised over 50% of the Standards NZ Committee. In the same year, the Building Industry Officials New Zealand (BOINZ) ran national training courses for Council Pool Compliance staff. In 2005/2006 this campaign saw a marked uptake in home pool registrations, as well as an increase in the number of inspection and community liaison hours clocked by local body pool fencing officers. Tens of thousands of brochures to home pool owners were distributed to the community, and an additional 1,000 brochures were handed out at the Auckland Home Show, focusing on staying safe around home swimming pools, spas and hot tubs.

### **West Coast Rock-Based Fishing Project began in 2005/2006**

Following the tragic deaths of five Asian rock fishers on Auckland’s west coast beaches in 2005, this project was developed in collaboration with Surf Life Saving Northern Region and the Auckland Regional Council. We surveyed rock fishers at Muriwai, Piha, Karekare, and Whatipū to gather data on demographics, water safety skills, at-risk behaviours, and attitudes towards risk. Four multilingual rock fishing advisors were employed over the summer to conduct surveys and offer safety advice. They had visual and written resources, with surveys available in English and Mandarin. A total of 250 rock fishers were surveyed across four high-risk locations. The results revealed a significant discrepancy between awareness and practice: while 71% of fishers agreed that wearing a life jacket increased safety, 72% admitted to never wearing one. We aimed to shift the behaviour towards wearing inflatable lifejackets and were supported by three major distributors: RFD, Safety at Sea, and Hutchwilco.

### **Integrated Aquatic Programme Launch 2005/2006**

The 2005-2006 year saw the launch of the Integrated Aquatic Programme (IAP), providing teachers with a tool to develop sequential pathways of aquatic teaching and learning. The IAP was the only NZ based resource providing teachers with a comprehensive overview of aquatic education material. Linking to relevant resources and aquatic agencies, it delivers a scaffolding of learning for safe, meaningful and purposeful learning experiences, and an increased understanding of what it means to be an “aquatically educated student”. Well-received by primary and intermediate teachers, it was promoted widely in collaboration with school support services and Regional Sports Trusts across various regions in New Zealand. It began with classroom work for younger students, progressing to pool activities and eventually incorporating open water settings.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education published two important documents: the condensed but holistic New Zealand Curriculum Draft for Consultation, and the detailed *Physical Activity for Healthy, Confident Kids: Guidelines for Sustainable Physical Activity in School Communities*. The latter document acknowledged the importance of aquatic education and highlighted the IAP as best practice within the sector.

The IAP brought together various aquatic partners, including Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Swimming New Zealand, Yachting New Zealand, Royal Life Saving Society New Zealand, and the Ministry of Education to create a holistic, lifelong approach to drowning prevention and water safety education. This marked the first time New Zealand’s aquatic sector had collaborated on such a comprehensive programme.



### **Weekly Women Only Swim Lessons 2005/2006**

Held at Mt Roskill pool, the weekly swim sessions for Muslim women were impactful. Surveys showed the health gains and a steadily building water safety culture. The women who attended transferred the value of swimming lessons and their water safety awareness to their families and communities. Thanks to cross-sector collaboration including Roskill Aquasport, ProCare Health, Auckland Regional Public Health, the Refugee and Migrant Sector, and Auckland Somali Community Association. This programme was primarily for new settler women who faced cultural barriers to swimming in mixed-gender settings and therefore required facilities that could be completely private, with blacked-out windows. While the programme was motivated by cultural considerations, it was open to any woman who felt more comfortable in a female-only environment. The initiative has evolved over time and continues to run – now referred to as ‘gender-specific water safety’

### **Whānau Nui – pilot in 2005**

A pilot Whānau Nui Swim Lesson Programme was developed by WAI and Injury Free Counties Manukau (IFCM) in January 2005. This programme continued for a decade.

The Counties Manukau’s Whānau Nui programme addressed the overrepresentation of Māori and Pacific Island peoples in drowning statistics. Delivered across five free 30-minute family swimming lessons over five days, the programme aimed to improve water safety skills and reduce drowning incidents in the community. Thanks to the Injury Free Programme Advisory Group who funded the 2007 programme.

In the 2007/2008 summer holidays, for example, it operated across nine pools in eight suburbs and attracted over 650 participants. A collaborative effort, it was coordinated by IFCM in partnership with various local organisations, including Manukau Leisure Services, Swimsation Swim School, SwimGym, Sandra Blewett Swim School, and Water Safety New Zealand. Len Brown, the Mayor of Manukau City, officially opened the 2007/2008 programme at the Manurewa Aquatic Centre.

Following the success of the pilot Whānau Nui Swim programme in 2008, the programme was extended to the Mt Roskill, Onehunga, and Panmure Pools in the April 2009 school holidays. It was attended by 95

children and their parents – the majority of whom were new settlers to Auckland.

DPA subsidised lessons but required the schools to teach specific content in a prescribed manner. The programme ran for one week during the holidays, encouraging families to participate together.

The focus was on teaching parents to instruct their children, aiming to build confidence for continued learning beyond the programme. DPA provided training to swim schools to ensure consistency in teaching methods. It ran successfully for several years before winding down due to staffing changes and funding challenges.

### **2008 – 2011 Auckland Regional Water Safety Education Strategy**

From 2008, our regional coordination increased as we provided opportunities for local body and community groups to set region-wide priorities. This involved working strategically with our partners and communities who had a stake in drowning prevention. Our areas of focus included building a solid base of research, evidence and statistics; to foster and extend collaboration across the sector; to promote community education, and to advocate for improved policy and legislation through submission and best practice.

To this end, we led the development of the Regional Water Safety Education Strategy and Action Plan which included short-term targeted initiatives and events, regionwide promotions, seminars and professional development opportunities, and building partnerships across the region.

### **Water Safety Code and International Collaboration**

In 2008, Water Safety New Zealand developed an education framework with sector employees. Between 2010 and 2011, the International Open Water Task Force worked on developing recreational water safety messages. Teresa and Kevin were involved in this taskforce, with Kevin serving as co-chair. In response to a need identified through data, New Zealand decided to create a Water Safety Code, similar to existing codes for boating and land safety. Teresa, Kevin, and Brett Sullivan (from Surf Life Saving New Zealand) were tasked with developing this code, which incorporated evidence and was tailored for the New Zealand setting. The code remained in place until 2024 when the messaging was updated.

### **Financial Year Ending 2010**

Our annual report is noticeably “chunkier” this year. This is in large part to it being the first year of reporting on delivery of our water safety education services under the Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Act (2008). In this year’s annual report we also looked ahead to the challenges and opportunities that awaited under the new “supercity” tag for Auckland.

### **Wai Wise 2009/2010**

Wai Wise began as a three-year collaborative initiative involving WaterSafe Auckland, Sport Waitakere, Safe Waitakere, and Surf Life Saving Northern Region, with funding support from SPARC. The project initially focused on water safety and swimming for Māori, Pacific, and Asian youth based in Waitākere City. Its aims include enhancing water safety skills and confidence among young people and their whānau, developing community leaders to educate their own communities, increasing participation in water-based sports, and strengthening connections between aquatic sporting clubs and the community. It combines theory and practical sessions, with activities conducted in pools and later in beach and outdoor environments. Throughout the course, participants are introduced to various aquatic-based sport and recreation activities available in Waitākere City. The programme is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of water safety while encouraging active participation in aquatic sports. New Lynn’s Village Sports Academy was the first group to undertake the Wai Wise programme. The programme also included components on alcohol and drug education and team building to suit each group’s requirements. This programme is still being delivered today.

### **Pools2Schools™ 2009**

One man’s dream, Pools2Schools™ was pioneered by Dr Ian Calhaem, an advisory board member, to address the challenges of school pool closures and the associated costs of transport and pool access for students. The programme began with a borrowed pool from Premier Exhibitions, housed in a marquee at Red Hill School, a decile 1 school in Papakura. This pilot project, which celebrated its first anniversary in 2009-2010, fully complied with the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act 1987, with support from the Papakura District Council to ensure it met all necessary water quality, safety, and building standards. The pilot programme proved highly successful, offering students at least three swimming lessons each week. The Auckland Regional Council’s Coastal Enhancement Fund provided life jackets to enhance the teaching experience. The school embraced the pool – there were queues at lunchtime to use it – and integrated water safety education across various subjects, including literacy, numeracy, design, with health and physical education.

### **DPA Lifejacket Hubs launched 2014**

In April 2014, we launched five Lifejacket Hubs in collaboration with the Free Church of Tonga (Māngere) and East Tāmaki Healthcare, with funding support from the Working Together More Fund and the Southern Trust for programme costs. The aim was to begin with church-managed Lifejacket Hubs for Pacific men to overcome the barriers of cost and accessibility of wearing lifejackets while fishing and boating. In subsequent years, we’ve continued to launch more and more free Lifejacket Hubs around Auckland. Thanks to wonderful support from churches, the community and the aquatic sector, we now have 13 hubs spread across Auckland.

### **2016 to 2017**

We changed our trading name to Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA) to better reflect what we do.



### **Bystander Rescue and the Four Rs 2016/2017**

In this year's annual report (2016/2017) we included the graphic "Is someone in trouble in the water? Do the 4Rs".

In response to bystander fatalities during rescue attempts, DPA developed the 'Four Rs' for bystander rescue: Recognise, Respond, Rescue, Revive. This initiative came after research conducted in 2013 and aims to educate the public on safe rescue techniques.

Since 1980, bystander rescue accounts for 2.3% of all fatalities, and remains unchanged from 2020-2024 (Data from WSNZ DrownBase). Notably, there have been no fatalities when rescuers use flotation devices. This work ties into broader efforts involving public rescue equipment, signage, and community education.

### **eLearning launched 2018/2019**

DPA produced New Zealand's first eLearning platform for water safety. The online platform is free to access and began with the mission to educate diverse audiences on the 15 water competencies to stay safe and prevent drowning. The platform was quickly recognised both in New Zealand and internationally for its functionality and the need for its lessons. DPA presented the eLearning platform at the 2019 World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Durban, South Africa. The online platform – which includes educational videos, interactive learning modules and a selection of short quizzes – continues to grow and now includes modules translated into te reo Māori, Mandarin and Korean.

### **The internationally recognised 15 water competencies 2018/2019 annual report**

In this year's annual report, for the first time, we included the internationally recognised 15 water competencies which inform our practice in educating to prevent drowning. These were developed as a result of evidence-based research by Dr Kevin Moran and other international colleagues, which guides all our delivery in community and school (ECE to tertiary) and other wet sector activities.

### **Asian Drowning Prevention Advisor 2020/2021**

To further the delivery and impact of our culturally appropriate education, DPA appointed Madison Chang as our Asian Drowning Prevention Advisor in 2020/2021. Multilingual and passionate about his work, he has created many strong relationships with community groups and their leaders who want to ensure families are informed about water safety. Since having Madison on our team, we've delivered Wai Wise Asian programme to many Asian community groups, noticed a significant uptake and inquiries for our lifejacket loans from people of Asian ethnicities, and we've shared thousands of culturally appropriate water safety messages in Mandarin through the platform WeChat. Madison has also educated land-based fishers on how to identify changes in currents and rips, talk to a lifeguard, and understand the importance of wearing a lifejacket, and telling family where they're heading.

### **Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland's Water Safety & Drowning Prevention Strategy 2021/2022**

A key highlight of the 2021/2022 year was our continued contribution to the wider sector goals of reducing drowning. DPA led a group of more than 30 sector stakeholders to achieve the ongoing development of Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau – Auckland's Water Safety and Drowning Prevention strategy. Joanne Macmillan, DPA's Strategy and Implementation Manager at that time, said: "The overwhelming level of engagement in the development of this strategy is testament to the willingness to work together to keep Aucklanders safe in, on and around the water."

### **Recent years: Council Partnerships and Hazard Assessments 2023/2024**

We have had great success partnering with councils outside of Auckland too, which has allowed us to extend our reach and impact. Our various projects include gap analysis, and recommendations for updating signage and public rescue equipment where appropriate. This initiative has been commercially successful and allowed us to fund other projects.

**Float, Breathe, Signal, Survive.**

Give yourself the best chance of survival if you're in trouble in the water – Float first.

**1 Float first**

- Lie back with your ears underwater, chin up
- Move your hands to help you float
- It's okay if your feet sink
- Ignore your instinct to swim

**2 Breathe normally**

- Relax
- Slow your breathing to help calm down
- Breathing will get easier

**3 Signal for help**

- Raise your arm
- Shout for help

**4 Survive by swimming or floating**

- Swim to safety if you can
- Float when it's not safe to swim
- Hold onto anything that helps you float
- Keep clothes on to stay warmer

**Float first launched in July 2023**

Float first is a multi-year flagship programme with floating at its heart. It first launched in July 2023 as part of DPA's World Drowning Prevention Day campaign, in response to WHO's message to: "Do one thing, improve one thing, add one thing" to prevent drowning. Following other international floating campaigns, such as the RNLi's 'Float to Live' in the UK and Australia's 'Float to Survive', the concept is backed by years of research to prove its lifesaving impact.

'Float first' messaging speaks to audiences of different ages and backgrounds. DPA has provided educational content for online learning, as well as group and classroom settings. The messages were also popular on social media during July 2023 with several public figures including campaign materials and hashtags in their posts. In March 2024, we saw another milestone with the establishment of the 'Float first' Advisory Group. This group is full of expertise thanks to representatives from our sector partners – Surf Life Saving New Zealand, Maritime NZ, Coastguard Tautiaki Moana, New Zealand Search and Rescue, and Water Safety New Zealand.



***“You look at the website, the annual report, there it all is. This organisation’s really gone ahead in leaps and bounds.”***

## John “JT” Thomas MNZM

**John Thomas, affectionately known as “JT”, is a long-time surfer, water safety advocate, and former CEO at Sport Auckland and Surf Life Saving New Zealand.**

John has supported us and our mission since the very beginning. When Sport Auckland was expanding their offices, they offered WaterSafe Auckland Inc. (then known as WAI) a space at a heart-warmingly reasonable rent. This initial support has grown into a long-standing relationship between John and the water safety community.

Nothing short of a local legend in the surf lifesaving community, John joined Muriwai Surf Club after being invited to go fishing, which was part of the club’s fundraising activities at the time. This introduction sparked a lifelong commitment to surf lifesaving, where he has held various roles – including competing, running operations, and fundraising.

“I’ve been in surf lifesaving for a long time. Kevin [Moran] and I knew each other... because of that relationship, we developed a surf safety programme, survival programme, and then out of that [programmes for] the primary schools.”

He has since become a SLSNZ life member and continues to patrol.

In 1968, John travelled to the US for a water safety educational trip. What he learnt there was eye-opening. And on his return to Aotearoa New Zealand,

he imported valuable knowledge which allowed him to write a manual incorporating new rescue techniques and equipment, such as the rescue tube. This pivotal trip was the catalyst for an exchange programme between Aotearoa New Zealand and American lifeguards, which has continued for 50 years.

His international experiences highlighted the need to shift from reactive to proactive approaches in surf lifesaving – which has been instrumental in reducing water-related incidents. He says, “It taught us to be preventive rather than just wait for the rescue to happen.”

John’s fundraising work has been crucial for surf lifesaving operations. As he candidly puts it, “If you’ve got no money, you can’t do anything, so you gotta have the bucks rolling.”

During his career, he developed a funding proposal template that he’s used for applications to councils, sponsors, and supporters. To secure continued support, he emphasises how crucial it is to be on good terms with funders, and to perform well.

When it comes to keeping people safe around water, he sees one of the biggest risks as people ignoring safety messages. Some individuals – particularly young males – unfortunately have a cavalier attitude around water and often disregard warnings and engage in risky behaviour. He compares this to reckless drivers, saying they present a persistent challenge for water safety efforts.



Another significant issue is the lack of safety measures on non-patrolled beaches. John would like to see a wider variety of safety devices used in New Zealand, such as throw ropes or wristband-style devices like those used in Germany, which could provide immediate flotation in emergency situations in remote or dangerous areas.

John also suggests that DPA could explore developing safety measures for non-patrolled beaches, streams, and rivers. He sees this as an opportunity for the organisation to further expand its reach and impact on water safety in Aotearoa New Zealand.

He has witnessed Drowning Prevention Auckland bloom over the years, coming along in “leaps and

bounds”. This growth is clear across many areas: in our community outreach, access to funding, and our higher profile which has allowed us to deliver more comprehensive programmes and initiatives. “It’s really bloomed.”

John applauds DPA’s “Float first” campaign and our focus on teaching flotation techniques. He sees us as well-positioned to continue making hefty contributions to water safety in Aotearoa New Zealand, with strong leadership and a wide range of targeted programmes.

In 2012, John received a Queens Honour (MNZM) for services to lifesaving and water safety.





# Jan Taylor

**Another former competitive swimmer, Jan Taylor, another former competitive swimmer, has made an indelible mark on water safety education.**

Jan's mother had quite severe spina bifida and difficulty walking. But something she loved doing was swimming. She passed this love on to her family; and first Jan – then her siblings – went on to participate in competitive swimming.

Jan's competitive swimming took her across the UK, where she competed at county level as an individual medley (IM) athlete.

With a passion for health and physical education, Jan has a Master's degree from Salford University. Her thesis focused on obesity and weight-height tables.

In 1977, Jan moved to Aotearoa New Zealand with her husband, Philip. Having studied at the same university as Dr Kevin Moran (another competitive swimmer!) they went on to build a great professional relationship and friendship. Jan says she's "known Kev for ages" and is visibly proud of the numerous awards he's received throughout his career.

It was while teaching health and physical education at Diocesan School for Girls, that Jan first connected with WaterSafe Auckland (WAI) to do some water safety work.

As a Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland water safety educator, Jan taught at all levels – from university right down to pre-school age, with organisations like Plunket. She describes it as rewarding educating both teachers and parents on how to keep under-fives – a high-risk group especially around pools – safe near water. She describes this partnership with Plunket as very successful and rewarding.

She's also proud of the practical impact she has made across the sector and the positive response she's witnessed from teachers. Jan adds "They changed their teaching habits... they didn't know very much about it at all initially, so they had to learn and then modify their way of looking after the kids in the water."

Jan's groundbreaking work with Plunket spotlighted the dangers posed by seemingly innocuous water environments for young children. She says this underscores the need for targeted education and

vigilance in these settings. A nice little pool or local river, she says, can be fraught with danger.

Another passion of Jan's is making sure remote or rural communities don't miss out on receiving life saving education. That's why she's made several trips to Great Barrier Island – they kept inviting her back – to conduct water safety activities and train local teachers. She says, "They were very keen to have me do all the water safe activities... because then I could teach their teachers whilst I was doing it."

This "train the trainer" model, where we support hard to reach communities like Great Barrier, makes sure the knowledge, resources, habits and confidence stays local – and doesn't get lost once our educators leave.

Recognising her outstanding commitment to water safety education, Jan received a lifetime membership with WaterSafe Auckland, which we presented at an AGM shortly after her retirement. Humble as ever, this came as a surprise to Jan, but we couldn't let her 10-year tenure with us go unnoticed.

Throughout her career, Jan's found great satisfaction in meeting and teaching people from all walks of life. "I met loads of different types of people. And it was very satisfying from that point of view and hopefully making a difference in their lives." She particularly valued staying in touch with many of her Unitec students and seeing them go on to apply their water safety knowledge in their own teaching careers.

Undoubtedly, Jan's work has significantly shaped water safety education in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, reaching a wide range of communities and age groups. She sees the need for education as constant – and as important as ever. When asked about the future of drowning prevention she replies: "It's education, getting to the high-risk categories of people and getting the message through."

***"Working with Plunket was very, very good. We did so much together, and we were breaking new ground a lot of the time."***





***“It’s an ever-evolving challenge given the diversity of our population and access to such a wide range of water bodies. Be it the sea, lakes or rivers, each holds its unique risks. Both education and targeted prevention is required for various water activities.”***

## Ian Godfrey MNZM

**A builder by trade – and accomplished surfer, soccer player, and basketballer – Ian Godfrey has over 47 years’ construction industry experience, mainly in fire safety and pool fencing projects.**

Ian’s love for water began early. His grandmother, who had a boating background, used to take him out to Kohimarama Beach. Right outside the bathing sheds is where Ian learnt to swim. This later guided him into competitive swimming, canoeing, and sailing.

Looking back, he fondly remembers a TV programme he’d watch as a kid about surfers in America, getting up to all kinds of mischief. Ian, “conned” his old man to take him out to Piha. And the rest is history!

Joining the Waipu Cove Surf Club in the early 70s, Ian made some lifelong friends. “It allowed me to go surfing and [participate in] the competitive side of it too – for quite a number of years – and I’ve learnt a whole bunch of new skills.”

As a teenager, Ian was hardly at home at the weekends. When he wasn’t surfing, he also played representative basketball.

Ian has witnessed and contributed to the significant evolution of surf lifesaving, particularly in terms of engaging locals and passing on water safety knowledge to the next generation. He highlights the shift from a majority Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland-based membership to a more localised, community-driven approach.

“In 2000, I was vice president. The president and I moved the management structure from Auckland to Waipu and basically drew the community into the running of the club. The patrolling part of the club is probably about 80% local and 20% Auckland or elsewhere.”

Ian marked the auspicious occasion of Waipu Cove Surf Club’s 90th anniversary by writing a book, “History of Waipū Cove Surf Life Saving Club 1928-2018”. With over 200 pages, the book details the incredible beginnings of the area, the club, the camp, and the people, and is a very inspiring read. The club will celebrate their centennial in 2028. Ian is currently on their Honours and Awards Committee and is a lifetime member along with Surf Life Saving Northern Region.

It was in the late 80s when the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act came into force. While Ian wasn’t involved in the initial stages, an opportunity at Manukau City Council came up which led him on a journey that lasted about 25 years.

At Manukau City Council, Ian was tasked with implementing the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act. He already knew WaterSafe Auckland’s (WAI) CEO at the time, Sandy Harrop – she was a family friend. But it was only through Ian’s role at Manukau City Council that they connected on a professional level.

His involvement with WAI began in the early 2000s, driven by his expertise and connections in the field.

Back then, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland consisted of several (seven) Territorial Authorities (TA), and the

### ***Ian’s expertise in fire safety and pool fencing led to his involvement in several initiatives:***

chairing territorial authority groups for pool fencing consistency

developing educational literature on pool safety

championing the NZ Standard NZS:8500 for pool fencing

lobbying for Auckland Regional Amenities Funding (ARAFA).

challenge around pool regulations was when you walked across the boundary, the same rules could be interpreted – or even applied, in some cases – differently. That was the catalyst behind the territorial authority group which Ian chaired, and WAI and Teresa Stanley had a significant input.

Ian got the representatives of the seven TAs around the table where they talked about ways to develop and embed consistent pool regulations to prevent drowning and improve understanding and awareness.

Following that initiative, Ian was involved in producing some education literature, “Your Pool. Your Responsibility” which clearly laid out the expectations





of TAs and the responsibility of pool owners. This was consistently handed out by the Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland TAs and distributed across several TAs throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Around that period, in 2008, Sandy approached Ian about joining WAI and the board. Ian accepted and remained on the board for eight years.

WAI and the various TA groups in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland championed an Aotearoa New Zealand standard on fencing swimming pools known as NZS: 8500:2006 *Safety barriers and fences around swimming pools, spas and hot tubs*, which Ian chaired. This was the first Aotearoa New Zealand standard on pool fencing. While the Fencing of Swimming Pools Act existed, it was the standards which laid out what TAs and pool owners needed to do to be compliant.

Ian travelled the country promoting this new standard.

He was also involved in lobbying for “Pools2Schools”. This initiative meant organising “some fairly large portable pools which could be taken down, packed up, and moved to various schools”.

Despite massive leaps in drowning prevention and water safety awareness, Ian recognises the ever-evolving challenge of keeping people safe, given the diversity of our population and their access to such a wide range of water bodies. The sea, lakes, rivers, and waterfalls each hold unique risks where both education and targeted prevention is required for the various water-based activities.

Ian has held governance positions in several water safety organisations, including chairing the Surf Life Saving Northern Region board. He emphasises how much more can be achieved when the aquatic sector

gets together to share knowledge and collaborate – and deliver consistent messaging.

In the June 2024 King’s Birthday Honours list, Ian was awarded a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to surf lifesaving and water safety education.

#### **Thanks to ARAFA funding**

WAI could lead the way in drowning prevention with education and water safety initiatives that included:

Your Pool. Your Responsibility – being rolled out to councils throughout NZ

Pools2Schools

Swim to Survive

Angel (life) ring project

Rock fishing safety project

Crab fishing beach education and seminars

Temporary pool fencing and gate design for low-cost (portable) pools

Lifejackets Keep Water Safety Education Afloat in conjunction with Maritime NZ

Training material for pool fencing inspectors.



**“The milestone has to be the Integrated Aquatic Pathway (IAP). That was the first time all organisations were around the same table with a focus on children of school age.”**

## **Siobhan Harrod**

**As deputy principal of Northern Health School – a school which supports students who are unable to attend regular school due to high or complex health needs – and former deputy principal of Carmel College, Siobhan Harrod’s involvement in physical and water safety education is impressive.**

Into dragon boating and serving on the Auckland Dragon Boat Association committee, Siobhan’s always been connected with water sports. Throughout her teaching career – in both UK and Aotearoa New Zealand – she’s maintained a strong focus on outdoor education and water safety, encouraging youth from all backgrounds to experience and enjoy water-based activities, providing hands-on opportunities to learn outside the classroom, and promoting accessibility and equity in education.

While teaching health and PE at Carmel College, she enjoyed easy access to Lake Pupuke, providing opportunities for students to experience windsurfing, kayaking, dragon boating, and hiking.

In 2002 while on maternity leave, WaterSafe Auckland (WAI) offered Siobhan a part-time contract. When she started working with us, the aquatic sector’s approach to water safety education was generally narrow and isolated; many organisations were competing for the same space.

Siobhan describes Sandy Harrop as “a very visionary CEO... she gave people the ability to see projects and seize them and see where they went”.

Thanks to Sandy’s support, Siobhan and Bronwyn Coers were tasked with building relationships and collaboration in the sector.





As a result of asking strategic questions like, “Who’s your target market? What’s the age range? What are you trying to teach them? What are your key messages?” Siobhan worked alongside others to develop the Integrated Aquatic Programme.

Siobhan also helped raise awareness of the water activities and water safety education which could support Aotearoa New Zealand’s health and PE curriculum. Siobhan notes, the Integrated Aquatic programme “was incorporated into the first edition of the Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) guidelines as good practice around water safety.”

Siobhan highlights the challenges most NGOs face – vying for the same funding. This can seriously dampen collaboration efforts, spark unhelpful politics, and potentially lead to conflict.

Like others featured in this book, Siobhan says the ARAFA funding was a turning point. “Before that,” she says, “Sandy was busy finding funding left, right and centre to pay overheads, salaries – everything – whereas ARAFA gave us an amount we knew we could work on for the year.”

The Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Act provides a more stable revenue stream for some organisations, including WAI, which allows for greater independence and growth, and more openness to working together.

It’s also allowed us to target at-risk communities – such as Pacific and Asian communities – who are overrepresented in drowning statistics.

When asked to identify some of the opportunities and challenges in DPA’s future, Siobhan speaks of the importance of research-led approaches, how uncertain or inadequate funding can impact the ability to deliver water safety education and campaigns, and the constant need for clear, consistent, and compelling messaging.

Funding enables campaigns on buses, bus stops, beaches, wharves, and prominent signs throughout the city, which go a long way in spreading these key messages – as we’ve seen from the “Float first” campaign.

Siobhan sees DPA’s strong research focus as a standout in the sector. She acknowledges Dr Kevin Moran’s research on parental supervision and Dr Teresa Stanley’s work on water competencies as making a massive impact.

Looking ahead, Siobhan says the need for ongoing educational awareness in drowning prevention continues. Many people are still unaware of basic water safety practices – such as wearing life jackets, using radios when boating, and adequately supervising children around water. Siobhan suggests catchphrases – which are easily remembered – could be effective in promoting water safety awareness, especially given Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland’s unique geography and the popularity of activities on, in and around the water.

#### **Siobhan’s standout drowning prevention moments include:**

Creating the Integrated Aquatic Pathway (IAP) – encouraging many water safety organisations to work together towards a shared vision of drowning prevention.

Developing water safety resources for schools and early childhood education.

Incorporating water safety into the EOTC guidelines.

Creating a series of water safety articles which were published in the Physical Education New Zealand magazine.

Her part in providing teacher resources to enhance the “Pools2Schools” programme – providing portable pools to schools without permanent facilities.

Being involved in the education committee of the Drowning Prevention Council, established by ACC. This group worked on developing shared understandings of water safety skills and identifying the contributions of different organisations in the sector. The initiative raised awareness of drowning as a significant injury and economic loss, providing a financial perspective that helped promote and prioritise water safety education.

## **Dr Jonathon Webber**

**“When you look at the resources DPA produces, whether they are lesson plans, brochures, eLearning packages, they are all about supporting others to deliver the education.”**



**In the middle of our kōrero – at a café close to The University of Auckland, where Dr Jonathon Webber is director of the Simulation Centre for Patient Safety (SCPS) and senior lecturer in the Department of Anaesthesiology – a helicopter lands.**

Registered nurse, medic, and now Surf Life Saving New Zealand Life Member, Jonathon recognises the aircraft as an Airbus, recalling how he's always had an affiliation with rescue helicopters.

"Dad was on the world's first civilian rescue helicopter and one of his colleagues, Rodger Curtice – who I mentioned in my thesis – was one of the instigators of the Auckland rescue helicopter. To this day, if a helicopter lands at the hospital, I can probably tell you what it is just by its sound."

Since the 1940s, Jonathon's family have been active members of Piha Surf Club. "My grandfather held roles like 'patron'. My dad was very strong in lifesaving competitions and went on to be club chairman and a life member. It was a natural progression for me to be involved."

Initially reluctant as a child, Jonathon's interest in surf lifesaving grew as a teenager. His association with the rescue helicopter, ambulance service and several water safety organisations played a pivotal role in shaping his drowning prevention career.

Thanks to his reputation, WaterSafe Auckland invited Jonathon to our board as Surf Life Saving Northern Region's representative in 2007. He gladly accepted and continued until 2016. After that, he became our chief executive for a year before leaving to pursue a professional doctorate. Not wanting to follow the traditional PhD route, a Doctorate of Professional Studies provided formal recognition for Jonathon's work in the public domain – which includes developing national guidelines for drowning resuscitation and standard operating procedures for surf lifeguards.

He is now on our advisory board, mainly consulting in the areas of research.

Dr Kevin Moran, ONZM has been a significant influence and partner in Jonathon's research. Together, they have been proactive in providing expert commentary to the media on water-related incidents and correct drowning terminology. Jonathon explains why we should avoid the misleading term "near-drowning" as it downplays the severity of what the person has experienced. He's emphatic about the media

describing these emergencies as "non-fatal drowning" instead – because anything less can be harmful to survivors, their whānau, and society at large, as it neglects the long-term impact including serious disabilities and healthcare costs.

With an impressive contribution to research in the areas of drowning detection, resuscitation, lifeguarding and bystander-rescue, Jonathon says research needs to be outwardly focused and practical to capture his interest, "If I can't see the practical application, whether that's for a member of the public, a lifeguard, a paramedic, a doctor or a nurse, then I'm normally not that enthused."

Continuing this theme, Jonathon became one of the founding members of the International Drowning Researchers' Alliance (IDRA) in 2015. IDRA is a network for researchers to openly collaborate without official organisational affiliations. One of their core objectives is to share the burden of drowning research and deliver a "vital link between drowning researchers and those involved in the practical management of prevention, rescue and drowning". In an area where withholding information can be life-threatening, Jonathon is a strong believer in integrating the various disciplines and organisations to address drowning prevention. He sees the benefit in sharing information and resources between agencies and sectors to promote a collaborative, evidence-based and relevant approach – effectively making sure the right messages reach the right people at the right time. This ethos, he says, aligns strongly with the manner in which Drowning Prevention Auckland has always "done business".

When asked to comment on opportunities and challenges facing Drowning Prevention Auckland today and into the future, Jonathon covers how we connect with our migrant communities who are at high-risk of drowning. A key response is to provide culturally-sensitive water safety education, while understanding the factors behind lack of water competency. He states that water safety education should begin as soon as possible, and resources should be available as part of a welcome pack for new arrivals to Aotearoa New Zealand.

He also mentions the challenges of recognition and awareness of Drowning Prevention Auckland. "Our work is much less visible than other providers in the sector – maybe because we don't have a big red helicopter or bright yellow ambulance – but it's just as important."



Like many people in this book, Jonathon mentions funding as an ongoing opportunity and challenge. He is grateful for ARAFA for providing stability. Recognising DPA as a key amenity, alongside other rescue services, was a significant milestone in our recent history.

"When the ARAFA funding came in, it gave a degree of security – they still wanted us to fundraise – but at least we could focus on the primary focus of the job – engaging with Aucklanders to prevent them from drowning".

Jonathon says one of DPA's key strengths is building and maintaining community connections and delivering practical solutions. His example of this is our work with schools and employing registered teachers to "train the trainer".

He says teaching our teachers empowers communities to find and maintain their own solutions and to adapt classroom activities to their unique learning environment – which is great for self-sufficiency and sustainability.

### ***In a nutshell. Our future plans***

Continue to engage with media to promote accurate drowning terminology and understanding of what constitutes a drowning event.

Continue working with migrant communities and schools.

Make the most of DPA's registered teachers to deliver water safety education in schools – using the "train the trainer" approach to empower the community to engage with and sustain the programmes.

Pursue ongoing collaboration with other water safety organisations and emergency services.



# Dr Denise Atkins

A tireless promoter of water safety education, Dr Denise Atkins has taught at secondary school level and always ensured aquatics education was a regular fixture in her lesson programmes. Denise is an academic manager and senior lecturer at AUT University in the School of Sport and Recreation. In 2016, she was the recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Excellence in Teaching award.

She also has years of governance experience, serving on boards including Aktive, Basketball Auckland, and DPA.

Denise's PhD research was titled: "Body pedagogies: how children come to understand their bodies and their selves during and following a health intervention in a New Zealand primary school." Her more recent studies investigated how undergraduate students coped during the disruptive Covid-19 pandemic – particularly how it impacted their lives, livelihoods, and opportunities for physical activity – when pools, gyms, and recreational facilities were closed.

As a child, Denise has fond memories of swimming in river holes. For her, it was more about playing in the water than competing. Now she mostly "plays" on top of the water. "I love fishing. That's my hobby. I fish for trout – in Lake Taupō – and water ski."

Between 2012 to 2021, Denise served on DPA's board. Initially, her then colleague, Dr Kevin Moran, invited her to join the board as a secondment saying "Denise, we could really use your skills on the board, if you're available."

At the time, the board was relatively small and consisted of people with an interest in education, drowning prevention, and aquatics. Denise brought to the board an aquatics education background, having worked in the Ministry of Education (MoE) for several years on aquatics education related programmes and resources.

Back then, the MoE had several curriculum and action books around aquatics education and Denise was an active promoter of these resources. She also worked as a senior advisor, where she had a close relationship

## ***During her time as chair Denise's priorities included:***

tightening up all our governance processes "to ensure we were following the Institute of Directors best practice"

introducing board internships, "We needed a youth voice, so the internship was really important"

and improving representation "looking for the cultural makeup that represented the people of Auckland".

with Water Safety New Zealand as they each would try and get their resources into schools.

At that time, the Ministry only endorsed its own resources. It was a delicate relationship for Denise in the ministry, as many different organisations wanted to promote their own material. Denise could see the value of the resources WaterSafe Auckland (WAI) had built up over the years – they were a standout in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time.

Denise says DPA has always had a very strong objective. When she joined the board, Sandy Harrop was chief executive and had been for a long time – along with Kevin as board chair. Together they were determined to spread the water safety message across Auckland.

Denise says DPA was a hit for Aucklanders, backed by the fact we were third on a list of 10 amenities supported by Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Act (ARAFA) – as voted by the public.

As a result, WAI had "a really strong presence and strong kaupapa for being something Auckland citizens wanted to keep going because they saw the value of it. In the early days, there was a lot of development in schools with water safety education in Auckland. So, we were like a mini-Water Safety New Zealand, but in the Auckland region."



**“What we don’t want is to hear only the negatives. We need to really promote the positive experiences of getting in, on and around the water.”**

When Kevin became unwell, he stepped down temporarily as board chair and Denise was asked to step into the role. This ended up being a seven-year post for Denise.

Expanding the board’s skillset was also a priority for Denise, “We specifically targeted people with the skillsets we thought the organisation would need, like finance and marketing, and an interest in human resources... so we had a better mix on the board in terms of governance skills.”

Recruiting the right chief executive was also vital. Denise says, “In terms of our recruitment, we were really looking for visionary chief executives that could fulfil our strategy. We’ve hit the jackpot with Nicola.”

When it comes to water safety, Denise explains, it’s not about engaging one group to the detriment of another. “It’s a whole-of-community approach,” she says. “The responsibility doesn’t just lie with the schools, and it doesn’t just lie with parents; it’s schools, parents, communities.”

For a sector that is chronically underfunded, Denise sees the challenges of keeping our ever growing and changing migrant communities safe, “I see that as a real challenge to be able to educate and support their understanding in keeping themselves safe in and around water.”

She also believes it’s important the messaging of drowning prevention is not all negative. It’s vital we hear positive stories of children, rangatahi and adults engaging in recreational water activities, “I’d really like to see more opportunity in schooling for aquatics education. I say aquatics because it’s wider than just water safety.” She wants to make it easier for “all young people to experience a range of different activities in and on the water”. That’s why new initiatives – like AUT’s Waka Ama Programme – excite Denise. The first cohort of this programme will be in 2025. Students will use the culturally significant approach of waka ama as a vehicle to explore the waterways of Tāmaki Makaurau.

Media can also show their support of our kaupapa by sharing more positive stories of Aucklanders getting in

and around the water and doing so safely. Coverage – especially prime time TV and radio – can go a long way in boosting the profile of water safety education.

Much to her delight, Denise has recently become a grandmother which means that water safety for babies and toddlers is front of mind for her again. “I’m really conscious about being one arm’s length away at any time around any water environment.”

#### **Denise’s 10 key challenges – and opportunities – for DPA:**

Educating and supporting new arrivals to Aotearoa New Zealand in water safety.

Maintaining a high profile for water safety education in the media.

Expanding aquatic education opportunities in schools.

Addressing high-risk groups who overestimate their water competency.

Securing adequate – and predictable – funding for water safety initiatives.

Using Auckland’s successful water safety model as a blueprint for other Aotearoa New Zealand regions.

Securing high-profile ambassadors/ influencers to promote the drowning prevention cause and kaupapa.

Expanding the reach of water safety messages through a variety of channels.

Nurture a whole-of-community approach to water safety education.

Continue to remain visionary and strategic.

# Richard Pamatatau



**“Our te ao Māori strategy is actually a magnificent piece of work.”**



**A tenured academic at AUT (Auckland University of Technology), a member of the New Zealand Media Council, a poet and creative non-fiction writer, and a former competitive swimmer, you'd want Richard Pamatatau on your team if you're after a high-performing leader and prolific communicator. And if you want tips on how to ride a wave, too – he has several surfboards and a boogie board at home.**

Outside aquatics, Richard loves literature. His research interests include poetry and identity, Pacific literature, and social media and place.

Growing up in Milford, the beach was his playground, and Richard enjoyed a childhood with “lots of outdoorsy water-related activities”. Belonging to a swim squad, he also enjoyed sailing, trout fishing and river crossings. These experiences taught him how to stay safe and revealed both the beauty and dangers of being in, on and around water.

In the early 2000s, Richard moved to Muriwai. As a Muriwai lifeguard, he has been involved in many rescue operations and knows just how quickly water-related incidents can turn to tragedy, and the devastating and lasting impact drowning has on whānau and communities.

In recognition of his aquatic background, and track record in effective governance, Kevin Moran and Denise Atkins invited Richard to DPA's board in 2016. He became DPA's chair at our 2020 AGM – in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic – and served for two years in this role, steering us through one of our most demanding periods in recent history.

One of his standout moments at DPA was the development of a te ao Māori strategy, admitting that

while it took a long time to get off the ground it's: “A magnificent piece of work.”

Like many featured in this book, Richard shares concerns around the future of our funding – critical to the sustainability of DPA and our impact in harder to reach communities – saying, “I see challenges, particularly around funding, that is not new and it's not unusual. But I think there will be extra pressure on funding in the next few years.”

From a board perspective, Richard emphasises the importance of balancing efficiency and delivering evidence-based services, while meeting the needs of diverse communities. He explains you've got to be responsible with funding saying, “It's really important that any organisation using public money uses it in the best way possible.”

He credits Nicola Keen-Biggelaar's work as chief executive, describing her concerted effort to streamline programmes as “courageous”. It's never easy – or popular – to put a dollar value to a public service, nor reduce the number of programmes to focus on doing fewer things better, or shift priorities and resources to support these changes, but they're all necessary if you want to make the most impact.

Richard says the board continues to support DPA to advocate at a local and central government level on water safety policies. While DPA has undoubtedly made a mark on the world stage, particularly recognising research around the 15 water competencies; at home our visibility and profile can be more complex. He says things can get political when the not-for-profit sector is vying for the same pool of money.

Having said that, he is optimistic and can see the need for DPA to remain flexible and open to change. Intriguingly, he wonders if the public are going to increasingly turn to ChatGPT for their water safety



education. While this can't replace real-life experiences of water-based education, he says it is something worth considering as another channel of spreading key messages.

Richard says we should be proud of our evidence-based approach, and a team that includes PhD-level water safety expertise. He says this depth of knowledge helps the public, and our supporters, feel confident our programmes do save lives – as they are well thought out and backed by years of peer-reviewed studies.

When talking about DPA's staff and board, he says their dedication and impact are palpable. “We need to value the work of Drowning Prevention Auckland because everybody who works there goes above and beyond all the time. It's not the place where you'll find nine to five workers.”

#### **Richard's standout DPA moments include:**

The development of the te ao Māori strategy.

Our leadership at World Drowning Prevention Day.

Our extended outreach to diverse communities, including Asian and Islamic populations.

Kai gathering workshops with Māori communities.

Our commitment to measure impact in drowning prevention.

The creation of DPA Lifejacket Hubs.



# Looking ahead: What key opportunities and challenges lie on our horizon?

From Chief Executive Nicola Keen-Biggelaar

## It's my pleasure to write the closing chapter of this book.

As Drowning Prevention Auckland celebrates 30 years of making an impact, I reflect on my five years as Chief Executive with gratitude. As an organisation we look forward to the next 30 years (and beyond) with optimism.

So, what's next? I see 10 standout areas or principles we must prioritise to remain relevant, sustainable – and most of all – impactful. Our work depends on our longevity, effectiveness and strength as an organisation and our ability to collaborate and unify as a sector.

## 1. To continue making drowning prevention messaging and campaigns accessible and engaging for the community

Over the last 30 years, we've benefited from world-class researchers. I feel deeply proud our work is evidence based – this sets us apart in the sector.

We must balance our academic rigour with accessible messaging. A key focus of mine as CE has been how do we make our decades worth of research and deep knowledge in this area accessible for the community? How do we get – and keep – our diverse Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland communities as engaged as possible in our mahi?

By applying a marketing and behavioural science lens, we can gauge what our messaging needs to sound and look like for our diverse communities to pick up the information and change their behaviour for the better.

If we want to change behaviours, people need to understand what we're saying. They simply can't change their behaviour if they don't understand what this means to them.

Let me illustrate this with an example. When you look at how multicultural Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland is, and how many new settlers come from landlocked countries, many of them simply don't know how to keep themselves and their whānau safe around water.

We know many ask Google: What shall I do in Auckland this weekend? Thanks to its popularity, Google will suggest you visit Muriwai or Piha with no thought that Piha is one of our most dangerous beaches for the unprepared.

On the back of funding, Madison Chang was employed as our Asian Community Advisor. This is because we'd identified that Asian communities were at risk of drowning, including from rock-based fishing, and for us to be effective, we needed to have people who could relate to and look like the people we were trying to connect with.

Madison is now into his fourth year with us and has earned his recent promotion to Team Leader Community – leading and overseeing our diverse team of community-based educators.

Moving forward, there's more that we can and should do in terms of building and nurturing multicultural relationships in an authentic way. We have Madison leading the charge in the Asian community, but even then, we know that Filipinos are drowning in rock-based fishing situations.

We don't have a very strong connection with the Filipino community currently – there's still a lot of work to do.



The DPA team, and other water safety professionals from Aotearoa New Zealand, at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention.

Just before my time, DPA won the Recreation Aotearoa Innovation Award for our eLearning platform. Our eLearning platform continues to grow, and we have translated messages and campaigns into various languages, including using the wildly popular WeChat platform.

We've translated some of the modules – for example rock-based fishing into Korean and Mandarin. We've also translated many of our campaigns into various languages, including our "Float first" campaign into te reo Māori, Hindi, Tongan, Mandarin and Korean.

We must continue focusing on making our lifesaving messages and campaigns as accessible and meaningful as possible to our diverse communities.

## 2. To remain relevant and sustainable we must continue to demonstrate our impact

Throughout this book, we've discussed the transformative impact of ARAFA funding and being recognised as a Specified Amenity.

We're forever grateful our charity was selected after Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland ratepayers were surveyed. From the survey, there was an overwhelming response saying Tāmaki Makaurau Aucklanders saw water safety as a pressing issue.

Like the other interviewees, this has always struck me too, that this was a need identified by our community.

Ultimately, we weren't out there lobbying, we were chosen.

It's an incredible privilege to have legislative funding in the charitable sector. ARAFA funding set us firmly on a path of not needing to worry about where the next funding cheque was coming from, or about the business model itself. Instead, we could concentrate on the services we can provide and identify what's needed for drowning prevention across Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Now, we are entering an era of uncertainty as we're faced with the very real threat this legislation will be reviewed – and potentially repealed.

Therefore, we have started to diversify our income streams. We will focus more time and resources on



demonstrating our return on investment and really dig into what makes us different and illustrate the impact we're making. This is difficult work. Drowning prevention is a long-term journey in building lifelong water safety skills, which can mean the return on investment in education may not always be immediately quantifiable – there may be five, 10 or even 20 years between someone learning water safety skills, and actually being in a situation where they need to use them.

**This is work we need to do if we want to attract more – and alternative – financial backing.**

### 3. To be strong within – who we need to be

We need to continue the “internal” mahi so we can be as effective and relevant as possible.

During my tenure as CE, we've prioritised reviewing and refining our health and safety policies, our processes, and our culture. Yes, it does mean more forms need to be filled out, but now our team has crystal clarity around responsibility and duty of care. For example, when we have kids in our programmes, our educators know at what point their responsibility starts and stops.

This foundational work puts us in good stead for the future. I was delighted when we applied for a particular type of funding this year and to even qualify you needed to have an independent health and safety audit. And because of all our groundwork in this area, we could qualify.

Our chair John Holley has a real passion for health and safety, so he's been another big driver of this.

### 4. Recognise Aucklanders love to travel

**A regional strategy with porous boundaries.**

In 2023 we branched further out of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland under Drowning Prevention Aotearoa. This is part of our commitment to acknowledging that Aucklanders travel and drown outside of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. We have a responsibility beyond the Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland boundary.

The regional strategy was a significant moment in the history of DPA and Water Safety New Zealand to be collaborating on something strategic.

2022 saw greater collaboration across the region, so DPA trialled three of our Lifejacket Hubs with Coastguard and their units. An incredibly successful

initiative, we now have 13 **DPA Lifejacket Hubs across various locations including one in Waikato and two on Aotea Great Barrier Island.**

### 5. New opportunities and groups to serve

As an organisation, we've always been in the education sector and in the latter years we moved into community-based work.

Now, we've very successfully added a workplace stream to our mahi. In 2021, we trialled, what does it look like if we are accessing workplaces? And not only employees or contractors that work in, on and around the water, like Downer and Auckland Council and Department of Conservation rangers, but bigger organisations where we can deliver 'lunch and learn' sessions. We recognise there are parents in these workplaces who want to keep their children safe. There's also a growing interest from businesses and corporates to engage with us and provide additional wellbeing education to their staff.

The trial was a huge success, and it gave us paid work. Our work before then had been 'in kind' because we were funded to do it. Here the workplace essentially paid for our consultancy.

We started doing hazard assessments with local councils. At the moment, we're in twelve councils around Aotearoa New Zealand providing hazard

assessments on their inland waterways (the coastal work is done by Surf Life Saving New Zealand). We're providing assessments on lakes, rivers, waterfalls, estuaries, wharfs and harbours.

While most of the work starts as a hazard assessment, some of it grows into further research.

### 6. Continuing our te ao Māori journey

Aotearoa New Zealand commemorated World Drowning Prevention Day for the first time in 2022. It was here that we showcased Rihari Wilson – who's now our Pou Ārahi.

Rihari tragically lost his father and brother to drowning. He was the face of World Drowning Prevention Day. The events of the day showed the humanity, the family impact that never goes away, and the long-term implications of drowning on whānau and communities.

It was this connection with Rihari which turned into a commitment to our te ao Māori journey. We're committed to embed seamlessly and apply our new learning of tikanga Māori into all our programmes and sector engagements – kaupapa Māori or not – and I'm confident we've come a long way in recent years.

Our second World Drowning Prevention Day, in 2023, was co-led and co-designed with iwi on the edges of the Manukau Harbour – it was absolutely amazing.



*DPA and Te Ahiwaru Trust, along with attendees of He Taonga te Wai gathered at Oruarangi Esplanade Reserve, Ihumātao on World Drowning Prevention Day 2023.*



I care about our te ao Māori journey very much personally. It's been fascinating to me, learning how to lead a diverse team. Beyond a legal responsibility to be bicultural, we have a moral responsibility to be multicultural.

Our first Noho Marae was in 2023 and was held at Makaurau Marae. We enjoyed the opportunity to hīkoi on the whenua and to learn the stories of Hape (the stingray rider from Hawaiki whom the iwi members of Te Ahiwaru Te Waiohū look towards as their tekoteko). At the beginning of 2024, we had another Noho Marae and hīkoi, this time to Waitangi.

It's been a timely journey, but one that's not been necessarily straightforward or linear. It's really about encouraging and empowering everyone to engage, be brave, walk along that journey at the pace they feel comfortable, but with an expectation that they take steps forward.

We're into our third year – it shows how long it takes to build meaningful, two-way relationships with community in a trusted way. Ultimately, it means that we can work together more effectively.

A recent example of our genuine partnership is the RUKU programme. Ants Lowe has co-designed this influential programme that integrates water safety skills with traditional Māori kōhi kaimoana practices. Co-developed with Te Ahiwaru Trust and in close partnership with Rihari Wilson, RUKU incorporates the 15 water competencies, empowering rangatahi with water confidence, kaitiaki of the ocean, and a deeper connection to their culture through mātauranga Māori.

I'm also proud of the redevelopment of our organisational values which are steeped within our growth in te ao Māori. My thanks to Rihari Wilson for bringing this vision to life so beautifully.

## 7. Continue to be a positive, unifying force in the aquatic and drowning prevention sectors

**"We simply have to do our mahi in unity with other sector organisations."**

If you asked people across the sector about us and who we are, I would be surprised if you didn't hear that we are relational in the way we work – we are active, positive collaborators across the sector.

**"Drowning prevention needs community. It's a really complex issue. The solutions are really complex."**

Looking at the rock-based fishing project, next year will be our 20th year of collaboration with Surf Life Saving Northern Region and Auckland Council. These are long periods of time we've committed to really good work – making a difference – and I'm very proud of what we've achieved.

It takes time to build relationships, embed the messaging, collaborate and make sure you are on the same page. It's not a quick process, and it's ongoing. Collaboration done well is difficult. Collaboration done well is deeply rewarding.

We had 27 drownings in 2023, an increase of 10 from 2022. Despite this rise, the drowning rate remains the lowest in the country.

This shows what council-legislated water safety funding, as a model of support, enables us to achieve. We have been able to retain the right people, build and grow and develop our work and not worry about whether we're going to be here tomorrow.

## 8. To be a tireless advocate

It's important to us to always be around the table for national discussions. Our research has been influential, and our Intellectual Property, long-term knowledge and background has helped shape a lot of the sector.

2021 marked an exciting step forward. In partnership, DPA and Water Safety New Zealand launched Wai Ora Tāmaki Makaurau, which is Auckland's water safety and drowning prevention strategy. It was the first time the sector had seen something come out of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland that had both our logos side by side and paved the way for improved collaboration for our two organisations in the future.

Pool fencing made a huge impact reducing drowning fatalities in the 80s. The work we're doing regionally around lifejacket use – and the navigational bylaw – has the potential to be the next thing to significantly lower rates. Looking at the large percentage of drownings from boats – where people had access to lifejackets but weren't wearing them – this just shouldn't happen.

**We continue to advocate in the background, to make systemic impact.** It can be a thankless task. People don't often see us doing this work. For us, it's not only about frontline services in education, it's the advocacy as well.

We must continue to use our knowledge, our research, and the longevity of our IP to really make a difference.

## 9. "Sometimes leadership is planting trees under whose shade you'll never sit. It may not happen fully till after I'm gone. But I know that the steps we're taking are the right steps."

I saw a portion of the above quote on a sign outside the Kumeū Arts Centre. It resonated with me and how I approach leading DPA. I take responsibility for planning beyond immediate success and focusing on long-term goals.

How do we need to evolve? Who do we need to be? How do we need to serve to create a legacy worth leaving?

I think 30 years in, we certainly haven't solved or achieved our vision of no drowning across Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, but we've done a lot to make a difference.

We're deeply committed to keeping people safe and willing to do what it takes to achieve that – and some of that work is behind the scenes.

I recognise how much we are shaped by the governance we have, the leadership that we have in our CEs, and the sector in which we're trying to make a difference.

## 10. Staying positive and relatable

We recognise the sense of wellbeing that comes from being connected with water. And the cultural and spiritual connections – particularly for Māori and Pacific communities. We're invested in making sure everyone can do that safely, get the enjoyment and the health benefits, and ultimately come home.

**We need to continue to focus on what draws people to the water** – is it a spiritual or cultural connection? Is it for fitness? Is it for gathering kai? Is it for recreation and relaxation? Is it for work? Maybe for some it's all of the above.

**It's important to understand people's motivation and desires so that our programmes remain relevant and exciting.** We want people to feel enthusiastic about engaging with us and our initiatives. We want them to feel like DPA is a positive organisation who understands our country's deep and enduring connection to wai.

## As well as being effective, our messaging needs to resonate. It needs to tap into our nation's heart

A final thanks to our funders:

I reflect with gratitude on all the grants and funding we have received over the years that have enabled us to do this work. DPA only exists because of the investment of funders. In particular, we would like to thank Auckland Council and the Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Board for their continued support.

I'd like to close with a whakataukī:

Ko te pai tawhiti, whāia kia tata, ko te pae tata, whakamaia kia tina.

Seek to bring distant horizons closer and hold fast to those already attained.

### Drowning Prevention Auckland's organisational values



**Aroha**



**Mana**



**Whakawhanaunga**













[dpanz.org.nz](http://dpanz.org.nz)