



water safety
Scotland

Two-Year Review

Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy

2018–2026



Prince Charlie's Bay (Coilleag a Phrionnsa) by Carlene McAvoy

Development of the strategy review

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Two-Year Review: Scotland's Drowning Prevention
Strategy 2018 - 2026

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Foreword



As Convenor of the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Accident Prevention and Safety Awareness, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with Water Safety Scotland.

Scotland is rightly renowned for its unparalleled scenery. Our rugged coastlines and majestic lochs have attracted global acclaim.

2020 marks the change to Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters; this is a wonderful way to celebrate these special landscapes, but it also makes this two-year review of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy a timely reminder that our waters can carry great risks.

The strategy works to ensure that people can enjoy Scotland's natural assets whilst understanding the dangers that are associated with water-based activities.

It represents another step forward in our aims to reduce accidental drowning deaths by 50 per cent by 2026 and to tackle water-related suicides.

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to the teams at RoSPA and Water Safety Scotland for the work that has gone into this strategy review and for their efforts year round in support of safety awareness.

I am delighted to commend the work of Water Safety Scotland to you and ask for your support.

Clare Adamson

MSP for Motherwell and Wishaw, and Convenor of the Cross-Party Group on Accident Prevention and Safety Awareness, Scottish Parliament.

Background

Water Safety Scotland is a voluntary association of organisations and individuals whose main purpose is to understand the risks around water in Scotland and engage with partners to develop a consistent approach to the prevention of water-related fatalities.

Water Safety Scotland launched Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy in January 2018 with two main targets:

- Reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

In order to achieve these targets, the strategy established six specific aims for relevant organisations and individuals to concentrate on:

- Improve fatality incident data and intelligence across Scotland by advocating WAID and sharing WAID reports with partner organisations and local authorities

- Promote and develop learning to swim, water safety education and initiatives within early years, primary and secondary schools
- Develop water safety across Scotland's 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies
- Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message across campaigns and communications
- Promote the safe participation of recreational activities across Scotland
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

This review highlights the progress made against each of these aims over the two-year period since the launch of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy (January 2018 – January 2020).

Progress made

Overall drowning figures

According to the Water Incident Database (WAID), the number of drowning fatalities is decreasing in Scotland.

Overall, water-related fatalities have decreased from an initial baseline of 96 (2013–2015) to 78 in 2018 (see Figure 1).

In addition, “not recorded” fatalities decreased from an initial baseline of 14 to seven in 2018.

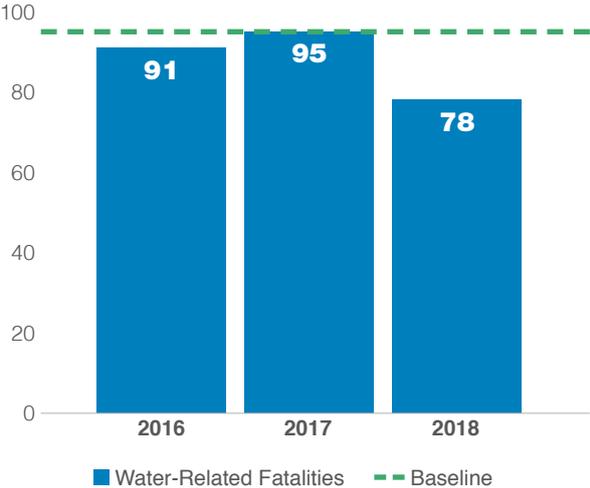


Figure 1: All water-related fatalities by year (2016–2018) vs Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy baseline (2013–2015)

Accidental drowning fatalities and suspected suicides

The number of accidental drowning fatalities and suspected suicides has also decreased.

In 2018, there were 46 accidental fatalities,¹ which is an 8 per cent decrease in comparison to Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy’s baseline.

There were also 25 ‘suicide suspected’ fatalities at or near water in Scotland. This represents a 14 per cent decrease against the three-year baseline.

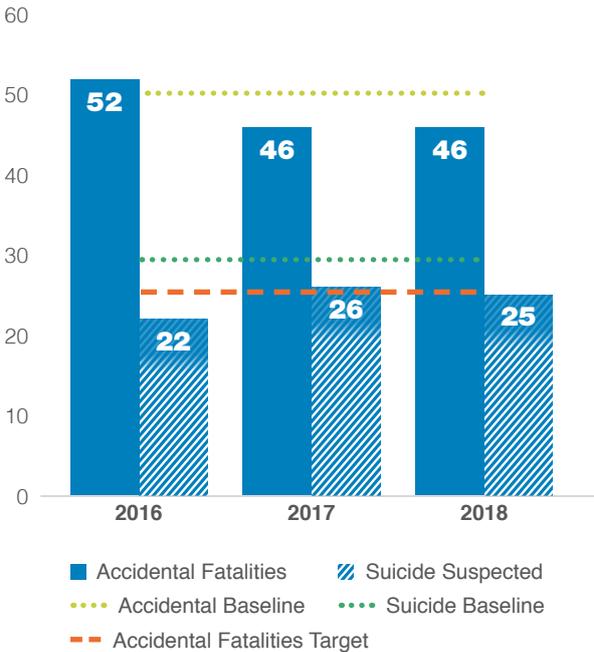


Figure 2: Accidental and suspected suicide fatalities by year (2016–2018) vs Scotland’s Drowning Prevention Strategy baseline (2013–2015)

¹ The term ‘accidental fatalities’ refers to fatalities due to accidental or natural causes. All data is taken from WAID.

Accidental fatality rates

The original baseline rate for accidental drownings in Scotland was 0.93.² This decreased to 0.85 in 2018. Scotland, however, still remains well above the UK average (see Figure 3).

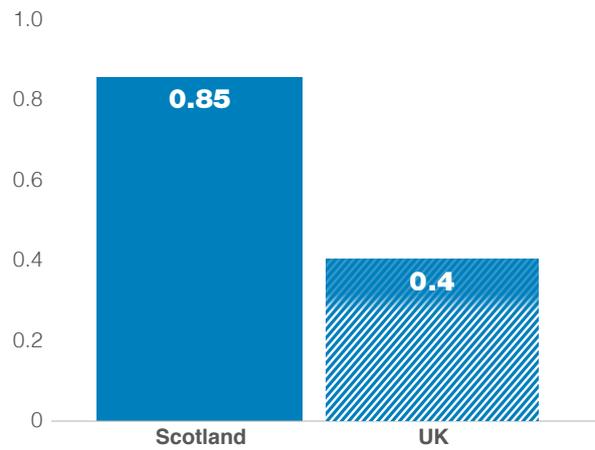


Figure 3: Rate of accidental drownings, based on WAID 2018 data and ONS 2018 mid-year population statistics



Threipmuir Reservoir, Edinburgh by Carlene McAvoy

² Per 100,000 capita.

Progress of aims



Key

- ✓ Activity complete
- ↑ Significant progress made
- Some progress made
- No change/no progress made

Improve fatality incident data and intelligence across Scotland by advocating WAID and sharing WAID reports with partner organisations and local authorities.

The Data Subgroup drives forward the activities and objectives regarding data and intelligence. The subgroup consists of the following:

- RoSPA (Chair)
- Scottish Canals
- Family Representative
- RNLI

Promote Scotland-specific WAID reports with partner organisations and local authorities

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Produce an annual press release | ✓ | Annual press reports released in 2018 and 2019 to cover the previous year's data |
| Create an annual summary and trend report | ✓ | Annual trend reports published using data for 2017 and 2018 |
| Communicate Scotland-specific WAID data with key individuals/organisations | ↑ | All local authorities and MSPs receive the annual trend report. Work is ongoing with other identified individuals/organisations |

Advocate WAID as the leading water fatality data collation system for Scotland

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|--|
| Receive annual update on WAID and future developments | ↑ | Official update received from the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) in 2019 |
| Encourage relevant members to sign up to WAID | → | Key stakeholders analysed. Seven local authorities and organisations signed up. There are six other organisations in the process or under discussion |
| Revise the MOU with the NWSF to ensure that yearly WAID reports include a “Scotland” tab | ✓ | MOU revised and signed by the NWSF |

Explore opportunities to work collaboratively following an incident to ensure all lessons are learned

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Investigate how incidents are currently reviewed and lessons learned | ↑ | <i>Preventing Future Fatalities – Improving Water-Related Fatality Data in Scotland</i> looks at the death review process in Scotland and its comparison with other countries |
| Scope potential locality to run pilot incident review process | — | This will focus on a voluntary death review process, which is one of three recommendations the subgroup is investigating (see ‘Case study’ below) |
| Publish findings | ↑ | Report published: <i>Preventing Future Fatalities – Improving Water-Related Fatality Data in Scotland</i> |

CASE STUDY

Improving water-related fatality data

Water Safety Scotland published *Preventing Future Fatalities – Improving Water-Related Fatality Data in Scotland* in the first quarter of 2020. Focusing on Fatal Accident Inquiries, the document compares the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016 with other laws applicable in the UK and in other countries – specifically the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, which applies in England and Wales. Water Safety Scotland makes three recommendations that could help improve data and post-fatality procedures in Scotland:

- An amendment to the current law in Scotland, specifically the Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Death etc (Scotland) Act 2016
- A statutory review process, such as the Child Death Review process, to be put in place
- The creation of a voluntary review process specific to water-related fatalities.

Promote and develop learning to swim, water safety education and initiatives within early years, primary and secondary schools.

The Education Subgroup drives forward the activities and objectives regarding education. The subgroup consists of representatives from the following organisations:

- RLSS UK (Chair)
- RoSPA
- Family Representative
- RNLI
- Sport Aberdeen
- Adventure Activities Licensing Service (AALS)
- SEPA
- Scottish Swimming
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)

Development and promotion of a “Water Safety Scotland Education Standard”

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|-----------------------------------|----------|---|
| Consult with appropriate experts | ↑ | Experts were consulted through the Education Subgroup. International research and policies were also considered |
| Create a benchmark standard | ➔ | Draft standard created and under review |
| Advocate adoption of the standard | — | Awaiting completion of above |

All children to participate in water safety education activities

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|---|----------|--|
| Conduct a situational analysis | ➔ | Experts were consulted. Situational analysis to be drafted |
| Promote best practice | — | Awaiting completion of above |
| Facilitate members to enhance and improve provision | — | Awaiting completion of above |

Ensure all children have the opportunity to learn to swim

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|--|
| Publish research into school children’s swimming ability and participation in Scotland | ➔ | Appropriate experts were consulted; research development is still ongoing |
| Promote the importance of school swimming | ➔ | Key relationships are under development |
| Encourage opportunities for children to experience open water in a safe and controlled environment | ➔ | Information gathered from expert organisations. Potential opportunities identified |

CASE STUDY

The Fife Project

The 'Fife Project' was initiated as a result of the tragic loss of two teenage boys at a quarry in Fife. It tackles a serious and important issue in a sensitive but interactive way. Key organisations, alongside a family member of one of the teenage boys, created a hard-hitting, fully inclusive resource targeted at young people in schools.

The project involves an engaging and emotive presentation that is delivered in local secondary school assembly halls and includes information from each of the key organisations on topics such as cold water shock and the role of the emergency services.

Initially piloted at five secondary schools in south west Fife, the project has since been delivered to the majority of high schools in Fife, with around 200 to 300 pupils, including teachers, at each session. Whole schools are covered at assembly sessions for each year group, then new first-year pupils are captured in subsequent years.

The next few years will be an exciting time for the project. The project is working closely with Water Safety Scotland and the Education Subgroup to create a standardised presentation for use across all areas of Scotland to help ensure consistent messages.



Forth and Clyde Canal by Elizabeth Lumsden

Develop water safety across Scotland’s 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies

There is no Policy Subgroup for this section of the strategy. Accountability lies with RoSPA, with input from members of the Steering Group and Main Group.

| Encourage all local authorities to develop a water safety policy | | |
|---|----------|--|
| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
| Identify areas of high risk | ↑ | Local authorities at high risk were identified by the Data Subgroup |
| Encourage prioritisation of drowning prevention in high-risk areas | ↑ | All areas identified were contacted by Water Safety Scotland and invited to a RoSPA/RNLI workshop, in collaboration with Water Safety Scotland |
| Continue to advocate for a water safety policy in all local authorities | ↑ | Members continue to contact and encourage local authorities to develop water safety policies |

| Support local authorities in the development of a water safety policy | | |
|---|----------|--|
| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
| Facilitate workshops on policy development | ↑ | Workshop hosted in 2019 by RoSPA/ RNLI. Fifteen local authorities attended – evaluation is available online. ⁱ Local workshops were also held with authorities in Orkney and Shetland |
| Share reports, research and current water safety policies | ↑ | The following have been shared: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safetyⁱⁱ • Managing Safety at Inland Watersⁱⁱⁱ • Managing Beach Safety^{iv} • Practical Guide to Setting up a Water Safety Action Group and Designing a Local Water Safety Plan^v • Water safety policies produced by Perth and Kinross Council and East Ayrshire Council |

CASE STUDY^{vi}

East Ayrshire

East Ayrshire is an inland area with many lochs, rivers, reservoirs and water-filled voids, such as old quarries and mines. Over the past five years, there have been five drowning fatalities in the area.

East Ayrshire Council developed a water safety policy in 2019. Prior to the policy being implemented, Service departments adopted a structured risk-based approach to identify hazards and implement practical and reasonable control measures for open water.

Partnership work with RoSPA on child safety led to further communication regarding RoSPA's commitment to Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy, which helped focus the need for a water safety policy. East Ayrshire Council recognised that there was a requirement to investigate all open water within its control, and to develop a policy to provide guidance to services that have responsibility for inland waters.

The policy aims to:

- Provide guidance and support to services that have responsibility for inland waters
- Provide practical and proportionate control measures in order to reduce the risk of drowning
- Promote and develop water safety education and water safety awareness initiatives within education establishments and local communities
- Highlight and raise awareness through national water safety campaigns, such as Drowning Prevention Week
- Provide suitable learning environments, such as swimming pools, and managed outdoor learning activities.

Developing the policy

The policy took four months to develop and utilised a number of resources, including Managing Safety at Inland Waters. A local water safety group was established, with representatives from Police Scotland, Fire and Rescue, Coastguard and Hillhouse Quarry, to help take forward water safety, including education in schools.

Practice

The policy was communicated and distributed to all Council departments that manage inland areas of water. The core of the policy is to ensure that risk assessments are carried out to identify hazards in and around water, and to implement appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate the risks. An example of the policy being put into practice was the development of a suite of risk assessments for the Leisure Trust for Dean Park, which has duck ponds, bogs and other water features. In addition, the local water safety group delivered water safety presentations to all secondary schools.

Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message across campaigns and communications

There is no Campaigns and Communications Subgroup. Accountability for this section of the strategy lies with the Steering Group, with input from all members of Water Safety Scotland.

A short-term subgroup was set up in response to Scotland’s Year of Coast and Waters (YCW2020) and chaired by AALS. The subgroup included membership from the following organisations:

- AALS (Chair)
- RoSPA
- RNLI
- SFRS
- RLSS UK
- Visit Scotland
- Trossachs Search and Rescue
- Glenmore Lodge
- Scottish Canoe Association
- Scottish Water

Raise awareness of drowning prevention campaigns in Scotland

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Create a campaign communications plan | ✓ | A plan was finalised in 2019 and can be accessed on the Water Safety Scotland website on the campaigns page: www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/campaigns |
| Encourage members to support these campaigns | ✓ | Members encouraged at Water Safety Scotland meetings |
| Support organisations that seek to raise awareness among parents through drowning prevention campaigns | ↑ | Members were encouraged in 2019 to support RoSPA’s Family Safety Week and Child Accident Prevention Trust’s Child Safety Week |

Respond proactively to any Scotland-specific needs that are not currently addressed by members’ campaigns

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Explore potential gaps in campaigns and awareness-raising activities | ↑ | Scotland’s YCW2020 was identified as an opportunity. A key concern around public rescue equipment has been identified for potential future work |
| Where appropriate, create and promote bespoke campaigns | ↑ | A kit bag pilot project ^{vii} was undertaken to help raise awareness of drowning among secondary school children. Scotland’s YCW2020 also provided an opportunity to create a consistent and generic water safety message for Scotland |

CASE STUDY

YCW2020

In anticipation of Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters, Water Safety Scotland formed a short-term subgroup to take forward the objective to respond proactively to any Scotland-specific needs that are not currently addressed by members' campaigns.

One of the issues addressed by the subgroup was the absence of a generic and consistent water safety message that was accepted by all member organisations of Water Safety Scotland. The subgroup collated advice and information from all member organisations, and proposed a generic safety message that has now been accepted by all the organisations.

The message will be used across Scotland as part of Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters 2020 and, in addition, has become Scotland's key water safety message.

The message can be accessed on the Water Safety Scotland website:
www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk/information.

Promote the safe participation of recreational activities across Scotland

There is currently no Recreational Subgroup. Accountability for this section of the strategy lies with RNLI, with input from all members of Water Safety Scotland.

Act in a supporting role to bring together all national governing bodies across Scotland

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|---|----------|--|
| Identify relevant national governing bodies and encourage membership of Water Safety Scotland | ↑ | Scottish Sports Association Outdoor Pursuits Group has been approached and relationship is currently being developed |
| If no group currently exists, create a Recreational Subgroup | — | Awaiting outcome of the above |

Promote the wider aspects of water among national governing bodies

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|---|----------|----------|
| Develop a Water Safety Scotland national governing body standard | — | |
| Develop a Water Safety Scotland brief for national governing bodies | — | |

Share the wider benefits of safe sport participation at national and local level

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|------------------------|----------|---|
| Identify the benefits | — | |
| Promote the benefits | — | |
| Engage with the public | ↑ | Through the YCW2020 Subgroup, a generic water safety message was agreed and is being shared with the general public |

CASE STUDY

Ministerial Roundtable

On 20 June 2018, the Scottish Government, in conjunction with Water Safety Scotland, held a round-table ministerial event to help meet the Scottish Drowning Prevention Strategy aim to “Promote the safe participation of recreational activities across Scotland”.

The event, which was attended by Annabelle Ewing, who was then the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, included representatives from numerous sports governing bodies, Scottish Government and Water Safety Scotland.

Presentations were made and discussions were held on the strategy, data, children’s swimming ability and local authority involvement in drowning prevention.

Minutes and action points were produced and many of them have been completed, however not all have been implemented or concluded due to other Water Safety Scotland commitments.

Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide

The Suicide Prevention Subgroup drives forward activities and objectives regarding suicide prevention. The subgroup is temporarily chaired by RNLI.

The subgroup consists of the following:

- RNLI (Acting chair)
- Samaritans Scotland
- East Ayrshire Council
- Angus Council
- Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN)
- Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG)
- Family Representative
- SFRS
- Support in Mind

Act in a supporting role to bring together agencies and organisations that work within water-related suicide

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Develop relationships with recognised mental health professionals | ↑ | Subgroup is linked with public sector and third sector professionals |
| Link into the Scottish Mental Health Strategy and Suicide Prevention Action Plan | ✓ | The subgroup has linked with suicide prevention professionals, and Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy has been recognised as a measure that will make a significant contribution to suicide prevention |
| Create a Suicide Prevention Subgroup | ✓ | Subgroup was created in 2018 |

Support the understanding that suicide is preventable and encourage discussion on further action

| ACTIVITY | PROGRESS | EVIDENCE |
|--|----------|---|
| Work with relevant suicide prevention organisations to understand common misconceptions | ↑ | Common misconceptions have been discussed and identified by the Suicide Prevention Subgroup |
| Share and promote relevant campaigns and activities to help reduce suicides around water | ↑ | A Water Safety Scotland webpage has been created to promote relevant campaigns. Some member organisations have created specific pages on suicide prevention |

CASE STUDY

Suicide Prevention Action Plan

Water Safety Scotland formed the Suicide Prevention Subgroup in March 2018. The group looked at the work being carried out by the Scottish Government using the 'Engagement Paper on Themes and Draft Actions' for possible inclusion in the Scottish Government's Suicide Prevention Action Plan feedback tool.

The subgroup collated their thoughts and drafted an engagement feedback form. The form was approved by the Steering Group and members of Water Safety Scotland, and the response sent to the Government.

Further to the consultation, the Scottish Government set out its strategy in 'Scotland's Suicide Prevention Action Plan' and funded a National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group (NSPLG). Following our response, Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy was identified by the Scottish Government as a key measure that would "make a significant contribution to the NSPLG's work".

Water Safety Scotland continues to collaborate with the NSPLG to identify and support recommendations.

Next steps

Water Safety Scotland believes that progress is being made in drowning prevention and water safety. We do recognise, however, that there is a long way to go to achieve the ambitious targets of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy.

Activities which have been identified as having no change/no progress made will take

precedence over the next two years in order to ensure an equal and impactful implementation of the strategy.

Water Safety Scotland is committed to reducing drowning fatalities and will continue to work to meet the targets in order to help make Scotland a safer place to live and visit.



Water Safety Scotland

Contributors and Thanks

Michelle Stokes, East Ayrshire Council

A special thanks to all members of Water Safety Scotland who have made all this work possible.

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www.watersafetyscotland.org.uk