

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Wednesday, 20 January 2021

VIGILANCE AROUND WATER URGED AS STATE HEATS UP

Victorians are being reminded of the importance of water safety this week as the state heads into more hot weather, following a terrible spate of drownings recently.

Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville joined Victoria's Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp and Life Saving Victoria's Dr Bernadette Matthews in Port Melbourne this morning to warn Victorians about the dangers of being complacent around water.

The warning comes after three devastating drownings occurred on Wednesday, 13 January in separate incidents at Bushrangers Bay and Rye on the Mornington Peninsula, and at Venus Bay in South Gippsland.

Tragically, a four-year old girl later died in hospital after an incident at Lysterfield Lake in Melbourne's south-east on 13 January, bringing the drowning death toll to four as a result from drowning incidents on one single day. That same day, seven people were taken to hospital after near-drowning incidents across the state.

A male has sadly drowned in waters off Woodside in South Gippsland overnight, bringing the total number of drownings to five in the space of a week.

With temperatures set to soar in the next few days and over the Australia Day holiday, authorities have stressed the need for extra vigilance when heading to Victoria's many and varied coastal beaches, rivers or inland waterways.

The warning is particularly important after many Victorians missed the opportunity for swimming lessons or improving their skills around water due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Victoria is experiencing one of its worst years for drownings, with 40 drowning deaths since 1 July 2020. This is 13 more drowning deaths than the 5-year average, 16 more than the 10-year average and the highest number of drowning incidents for the period 1 July 2020 – 13 January since 2004-05.

These tragic statistics are a stark reminder to take care around water this summer – follow the warnings, swim between the flags at patrolled times, supervise children, never swim alone and don't drink and swim.

Since 2015-16, the Andrews Labor Government has invested over \$71 million in lifesaving throughout Victoria. More than \$38 million has been provided to lifesaving clubs for facilities redevelopment and direct grants, and more \$33 million provided to Life Saving Victoria for a range of statewide water safety programs and services.

A further \$1.7 million funding boost for Life Saving Victoria was also announced late last year to ensure the safety of swimmers at Victoria's iconic beaches this summer. This latest funding has provided more lifeguards, more patrolled areas, increased aerial surveillance including drones and an additional helicopter for situational analysis.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville

"Last week was a horror one on our waters – it's more important than ever for Victorians to be vigilant and do the right thing when visiting our beaches, pools and waterways."

"Our thoughts remain with the family and friends of the three people who tragically lost their lives in separate drowning incidents last week, as well as the emergency services and members of the public who jumped in to help."

"We've given our emergency services additional tools and support to keep the public safe when by the water – but it's up to all of us to play our part by following the warnings, and being smart and safe around water."

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Quote attributable to Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp

“We know Victorians are keen to finally enjoy a late summer, but we’re all responsible when it comes to water safety. Our world class emergency services and lifesaving teams are the last frontier, so check the conditions, swim in patrolled areas, supervise others and know your limits.”