

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



Wednesday, 25 January 2023

LIFESAVERS TO PATROL LAKES IN HOLIDAY WATER SAFETY PUSH

Lifesavers will patrol inland waterways to coincide with tomorrow's public holiday when thousands of Victorians will flock to their favourite swimming spots, following a spate of drownings in rivers, lakes and dams.

The likelihood of drowning in Victoria increases by more than two-thirds on a public holiday and Life Saving Victoria has identified Australia Day as a high-risk period.

Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes today joined Life Saving Victoria (LSV) leaders and lifesavers on the banks of the Yarra River to highlight the risks of being in or around inland waterways, and to deliver an urgent safety message to everyone looking to enjoy the water on Australia Day.

There have been 29 fatal drownings in Victoria since July 2022 – four more than the 10-year average – and 11 since 1 December. Almost half of the deaths occurred in inland waterways such as rivers, creeks, streams and lakes.

In addition to more than 60 patrolled coastal areas, LSV lifesavers will patrol swimming spots at Lysterfield Lake, Lake Nagambie, Lake Eildon and Lake Waranga between 10am and 6pm tomorrow. Support will also be provided by the LSV drone and Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter services.

ESTA emergency field staff will also be stationed at LSV's communications centre in Port Melbourne for the first time, providing additional information on emergency events to LSV patrol crews across the state.

This builds on the successful deployment of ESTA staff to Incident Control Centres during the floods to co-ordinate water rescues.

To make sure everyone gets home safely, swimmers should always check the conditions of the water including the depth and currents, swim at patrolled locations, wear a lifejacket when boating or fishing, avoid drinking alcohol and going out in the water, always supervise children and never swim alone.

Swimming isn't the only way people can get into trouble in the water – four in five boating or fishing-related drowning deaths in the past decade involved incorrect or no lifejacket use.

As part of the *Victorian Budget 2022/23*, the Andrews Labor Government is delivering \$11.9 million to help keep people safe around water, including funding for LSV to continue valuable water safety programs at public pools and helping more Victorians improve their swimming and water skills.

Through Jobs Victoria and in partnership with Aquatics and Recreation Victoria, the Government is also creating 300 jobs for the aquatics sector, including swimming teachers, lifeguards and customer service staff.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes

"Our lifesavers and lifeguards do an incredible job protecting people and saving lives – but it's vital that individuals play their part by doing the right thing and staying safe when around the water."

"Just because there are no waves at your favourite swimming spot doesn't mean it's without risk. We want everyone to enjoy our beautiful waterways, but we also want them all to come home at the end of the day."

Media contact: Shaun Phillips 0407 553 763 | shaun.phillips@minstaff.vic.gov.au

Quotes attributable to Life Saving Victoria General Manager of Lifesaving Services Liam Krige

“It’s a misconception that drowning mainly happens on the coast – people are almost three times more likely to drown at an inland waterway in Victoria.”

“We’re urging Victorians to remember that your safety is your responsibility. If we can’t see you, we can’t save you, so make sure you seek out one of our more than 65 patrolled locations across coastal and inland waters.”