



# **WAIKATO REGIONAL WATER SAFETY STRATEGY**

2023-2030

An aerial photograph of a suburban town in the Waikato region of New Zealand. The foreground is dominated by a wide, calm river reflecting the sky and surrounding greenery. The middle ground is filled with a dense residential area, with numerous houses and trees. Some trees show early autumn colors of yellow and orange. In the background, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a sky filled with soft, white clouds.

## **Ko te Whakakitenga – Our Vision**

By 2030, more people in the Waikato region respect the water and have the skills, knowledge and awareness to enjoy it safely

## **Ko te Whainga – Our Goal**

To lower the rate of preventable drownings in the Waikato to 0 by 2030

## **Ko te Kaupapa – Our Purpose**

To drive collaborative implementation of a strategic and community-focused plan for water safety and drowning prevention initiatives across the Waikato region

# GUIDED BY THREE PILLARS

## OUR PEOPLE

A focus on  
targeted groups  
who are most at  
risk

MORE PEOPLE &  
COMMUNITIES  
ENJOYING THE  
WATER SAFELY

## BUILDING COMMUNITIES

A focus on  
locally-led and  
locally-driven  
interventions

HELPING  
COMMUNITIES  
TO HELP  
THEMSELVES

## REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

A focus on  
regional, local and  
national partners  
working together

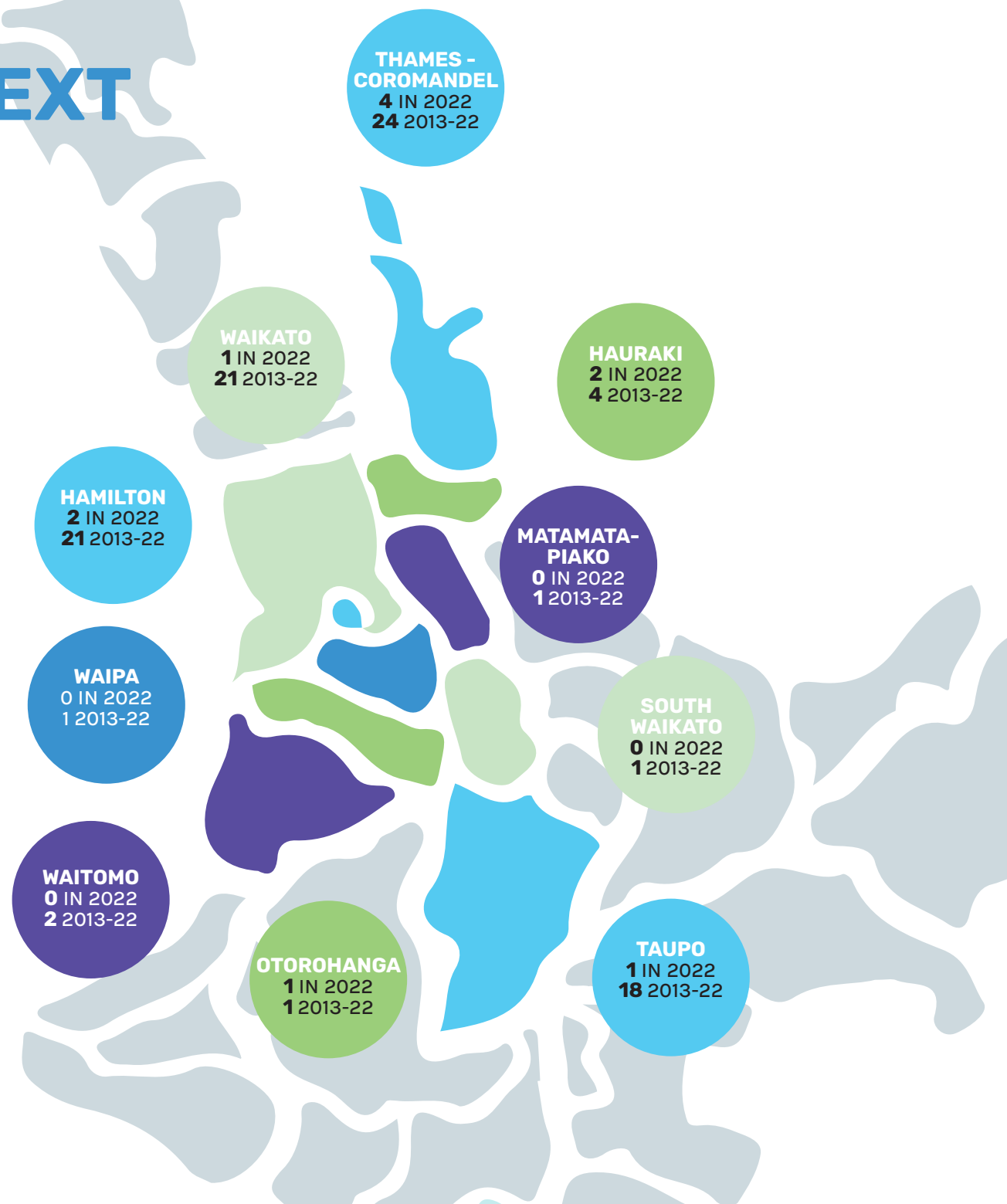
LEADING AND  
DELIVERING  
CHANGE

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

There have been 817 official preventable drowning deaths in Aotearoa/New Zealand for the ten-year period 2013-2022, with the ten-year total for the Waikato being 94 drowning deaths. In the 2022 calendar year, there were 94 preventable drownings nationally; this figure is up from 91 in 2021.

Of the drownings in 2022, 11 occurred in the Waikato region with all but four of the region's districts (Matamata-Piako, South Waikato, Waipā and Waitomo) experiencing at least one fatality. Across the period 2013-2022, all districts in the Waikato have suffered at least one drowning fatality, with Thames-Coromandel (24), Waikato District (21), Hamilton City (21) and Taupō (18) experiencing the highest number of deaths by preventable drowning.

There have been 1,877 water related hospitalisations in New Zealand in the ten year period 2013-2022; of these, 193 occurred in the greater Waikato area (including the Lakes DHB District). There have been 366,024 water related ACC claims in New Zealand in the ten year period 2013-2022. Of these, 47,934 occurred in the greater Waikato. Males and those aged 15-34 are significantly more likely to be hospitalised as a result of water-related incidents than females or other age groups with those of NZ European and Māori heritage being most represented in figures related to water related hospitalisations.



# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In the Waikato, males are up to 10x more likely to drown than females. In 2022, 10 males lost their lives to a preventable drowning, compared with only 1 female loss of life. From the period 2013-2022, 10 females and 84 males have drowned in the Waikato region.

Our regional statistics reveal that as well as being male, those who identify as NZ European, Maaori and Asian are overwhelming represented among drowning fatalities, with 42 people of NZ European descent, and 18 people of either Maaori or Asian heritage losing their lives in a drowning incident in the Waikato between 2013-2022.

Age is also most certainly a factor in Waikato drownings, with most fatalities occurring among the 35+ age group. In 2022, 8 out of the 11 deaths recorded in the Waikato were among those 35 years and older, and in the period 2013-22, 51 out of 94 deaths in the region were among this age demographic.

Although less salient, there is a trend in deaths over the ten-year period in the Waikato among those aged 15-24 years, which also points to this age group representing a drowning risk in the region. Equally, of those hospitalised in the broader Waikato region, the awa (rivers), beaches and coastlines, and lakes represent the biggest drowning risks for the Waikato region.

In 2022, there were 4 deaths in Waikato rivers, compared with 38 deaths in the period 2013-22. Beaches claimed 3 lives in 2022 and 25 lives from 2013-2022, 2 lives were lost offshore in 2022 (8 in total from 2013-22) while tidal waters claimed one life in 2022 and have been the catalyst for 9 drownings from 2013-22.

Lakes continue to present risk in our region also, with 1 life lost in 2022, but 9 overall from 2013-22. The most common causes of deaths by drowning in the Waikato region are swimming (4 deaths in 2022, 35 from 2013-22), land-based fishing (1 death in 2022, 12 from 2013-22), powered boating (2 deaths in 2022, 8 from 2013-22) and falls (12 deaths from 2013-22).

In 2021, the number of Maaori, Asian and NZ European drowning deaths of males aged 55+ were the highest numbers on record. Fatalities and incidents involving older males occur largely when boating. It is more likely to be powered boating than sail, oar or paddle craft. The people involved are more likely to be NZ European and live in the upper North Island.

Nationally, 25% of young New Zealanders think that rivers are “not very hazardous” or “not at all hazardous”, which are particularly concerning statements when thinking about the Waikato region, our communities and our affinity with the awa.

River fatalities are commonly among those 15-34 years of age, but incidents show a large amount between 9-14 years. Equally, kai gathering (particularly among Maaori males with an average age of around 40 years) and rock fishing (often among Asian men of an average age of 45) are among some of the many and varied ways members of our broader Waikato community are drowning.

**In short, we have a problem...**

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In 2019, a Waikato Regional Water Safety Strategy was developed to support water safety and drowning prevention in the region. The strategy, which was formed following community engagement, lays out the challenges and opportunities to water safety and drowning prevention in the Waikato.

Yet, despite providing a high-level overview of the issues as well as the potential opportunities, the strategy never included an implementation plan and therefore, very little has happened as a result of this work.

Importantly, the insights from those engaged in the plan's development remain relevant, some 4-5 years later. Particularly, the cultural considerations of wai (water) and the awa (river) to our region's Maaori people and communities as well as the importance of a holistic approach to water safety and drowning prevention where people are taught about respecting the importance of wai and Maaori connection to it.

The key findings from community engagement undertaken as part of the 2019 Plan included:

**Education** | the main theme/solution identified to increasing water safety in both school curriculums and community settings.

**A te aao Maaori Approach to the Awa** | education that incorporates the importance of the awa for Maaori but also teaches safety and respect for the water

**Communications and Media** | use of relevant messaging and platforms to reach 'at risk' groups

**Clear and Designated Responsibilities** | A need to clearly identify the authority responsible for water safety in any/all areas of risk and the appropriate delivery agents to support

**Funding Support** | Invest in key areas of opportunity to increase water safety education uptake and engage in drowning prevention initiatives

**Use of data** | continue to invest in and communicate data to develop the right approaches that support the right groups of people

**Locally-Led Solutions** | connect with locals and iwi, include local and cultural knowledge, and build local solutions from the bottom up

**Use of Technology** | explore the potential of technology to support understandings of water safety, risk and drowning prevention interventions

These findings have been used to support the areas of strategic focus in the 2023-30 plan with the view that although time has passed, the insights of the community remain relevant, particularly in light of the fact that the region has not yet managed to significantly reduce or eliminate its preventable drownings and many of these are occurring in the same waterways they have for the past ten years.

## Current Position: Existing Water Safety Programmes and Initiatives

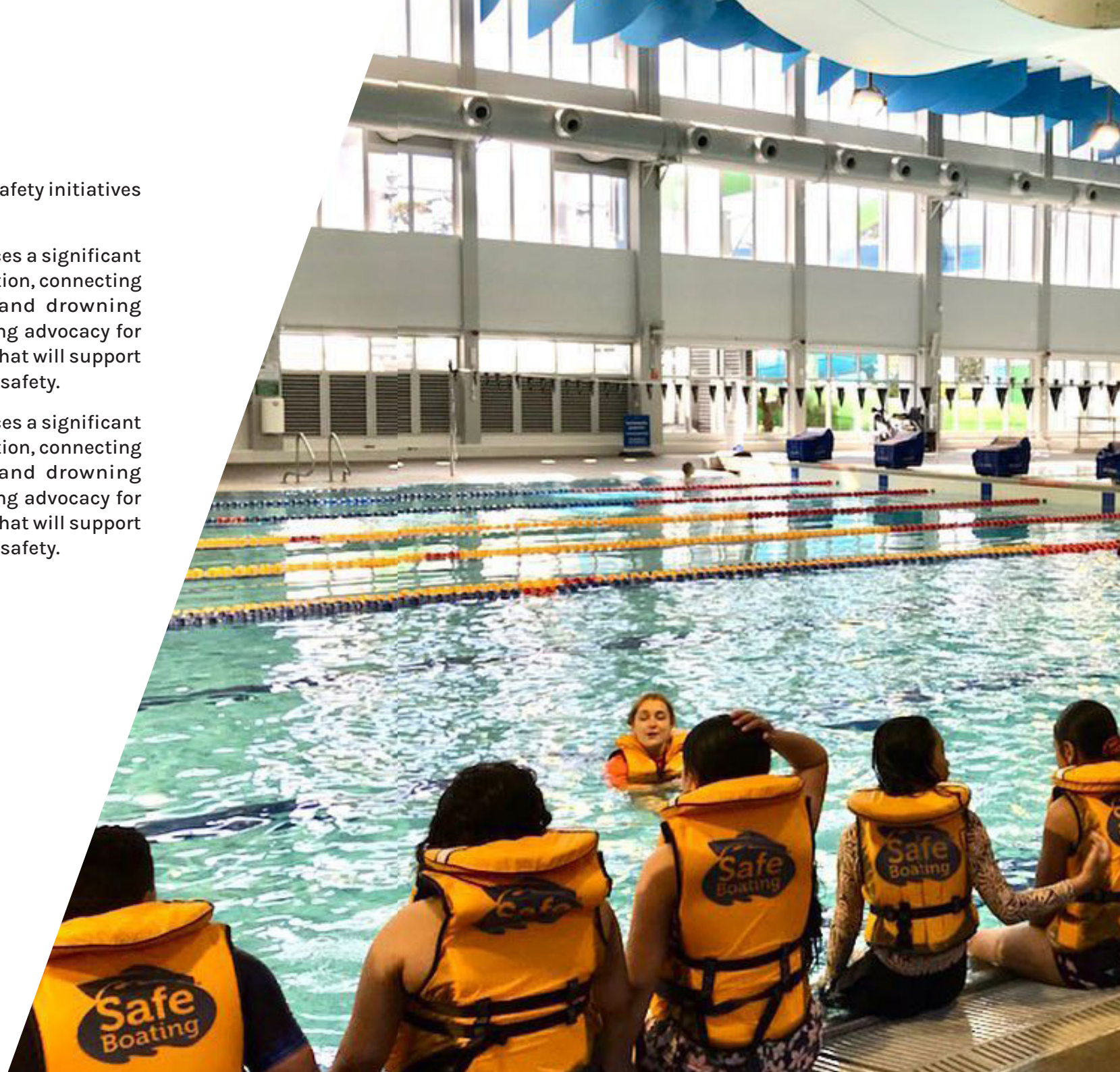
In writing this Plan, we recognise the ad hoc nature of water safety and drowning prevention intervention in the Waikato region, but also the need to operate using a strengths-based approach – that is, growing the initiatives that are already proving effective and leveraging the local and cultural knowledge and expertise specific to our region.

There already exist a number of geographic, culturally-specific and localised water safety and drowning prevention initiatives in the Waikato region. Our intent, therefore, is not to duplicate or minimise the impact of these efforts. Rather, it is to recognise opportunities to enact coordinated and collaborative approaches, to grow the focus and to fill gaps. In so doing, we will partner with iwi Maaori to deliver this

strategy, which will include water safety initiatives specific to them and their rohe.

With this in mind, the strategy places a significant focus on ensuring access to education, connecting communities to water safety and drowning prevention initiatives and providing advocacy for regulatory and legislative change that will support increased engagement with water safety.

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# HORIZON ONE

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND FOCUSES



### EDUCATION

Increasing the quality and quantity of water safety education and plans in schools and communities in the Waikato region



### COMMUNITY

Increasing community engagement with water safety by providing access to resources supported by effective regulation



### ADVOCACY

Consistent, targeted, regional messaging and advocacy that promotes water safety and drowning prevention across the Waikato in collaboration with key partners



**MALES 35+  
(ALSO AGED  
15-34)**



**MAAORI**



**ASIAN  
AND NEW  
MIGRANTS**



**RIVERS**



**OCEANS,  
BEACHES  
AND  
COASTLINES**



## EDUCATION | Focus Areas and Measures

Actions	Responsibility	Span	Measures
1.1 Review existing Water Safety teaching and learning resources, with a view to understanding the barriers for teachers to implement these in their classrooms	Sport Waikato, Swimming Waikato and Ministry of Education	YR 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review complete</li> <li>Information shared to resource developers</li> <li>If required, a localised resource is pulled together to support greater uptake among teachers</li> </ul>
1.2 Work alongside 2 Kaahui Ako to support water safety education delivery as part of a localised curriculum approach, including the pilot of tracking of water safety competencies using National Student Numbers from Year 1 through to Year 8.	Sport Waikato, Swimming Waikato	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Localised water safety education curriculum that is linked to the National curriculum is developed alongside Kaahui Ako/schools</li> <li>100% of teachers in engaged schools are teaching water safety knowledge and skills</li> <li>Competencies are being assessed and recorded</li> </ul>
1.3 Regional expansion of the Swimming Waikato-led water safety education capability building programme to support teacher capability and confidence to deliver water safety education across all primary and intermediate schools in the Waikato	Swimming Waikato (with support from Sport Waikato)	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Waikato districts have access to water safety education programming for teachers of Year 1-8 students by Year 2</li> <li>At least 70% of teachers feel more confident and capable of delivery by Year 3</li> <li>At least 70% of schools are delivering water safety education by Year 3</li> </ul>
1.4 Work alongside the University of Waikato to ensure water safety education is embedded in their teacher education curriculum	Sport Waikato, Swimming Waikato, WSNZ	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A water safety education component has been added to the University's teacher education curriculum</li> <li>At least 70% of teaching students feel capable of teaching water safety education as beginning teachers</li> </ul>
1.5 Form a Regional Water Safety Providers Collective (including Private Swimming Education Providers) for the purpose of increasing the quality and quantity of community water safety education in the Waikato	Swimming Waikato, WSNZ	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 'user pays' programs have increased their focus on water safety within the 1st year, 10 more in the 2nd year and a further 10 in the 3rd (30 in total in a 3-year period).</li> </ul>
1.6 Investigate opportunities to support community water safety education among new migrants, 35+ males and other at-risk groups in the region	Swimming Waikato, WSNZ	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 new research-based initiatives are developed and implemented that target at-risk groups</li> </ul>
1.7 Map existing boat education initiatives in the region and investigate opportunities, alongside NZ Coast Guard, to provide boat education where there are obvious gaps (e.g., bar crossing in Tairua/East Coast)	Waikato Regional Council, NZ Coast Guard	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 1 new and necessary boat education opportunity has been created</li> <li>Uptake of community boating education opportunities has increased by 20%</li> </ul>



## COMMUNITY | Focus Areas and Measures

Actions	Responsibility	Span	Measures
2.1 Continue to implement the Waikato region's existing life jacket by-law in partnership with the Waikato Regional Council - compulsory life jackets for vessels 6m and under while underway	Waikato Regional Council (advocacy by the WRWSAG)	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Increased compliance</li><li>Decrease in ticketing/fines</li></ul>
2.2 Implementation of a further 2 community life jacket hubs in the Waikato with a view to regional rollout by 2030	Swimming Waikato (with support from Territorial Local Authorities, Drowning Prevention Auckland, Maritime NZ and other community partners)	YR 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>3 hubs operational in the Waikato by 2025</li><li>Demand for additional hubs is evident</li><li>Engagement with life jacket hubs has increased by 20%</li><li>Addition of all Waikato Life Jacket Hubs to SafeSwim website by 2025</li></ul>
2.3 Completion of a mapping exercise regarding public rescue equipment at Waikato's swimming, recreational aquatic and boating hotspots, with a view to place equipment (and appropriate messaging) where there are visible and obvious gaps*  *This includes involvement with Surf Lifesaving NZ's planned coastal risk assessment work	Sport Waikato, Territorial Local Authorities, Surf Lifesaving NZ, Water Safety NZ	YR 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Increased signage to raise awareness of risks and hazards at coastal and popular inland waterways</li><li>Increased public rescue equipment in community spaces in the Waikato</li><li>Decreased vandalism of equipment</li></ul>
2.4 Investigate a unified and regional approach to increasing access to aquatic facilities in the Waikato to support schools and other community user groups to participate in water-related activity (e.g., recreational swimming, booking of facilities for school-led water safety education)	Territorial Local Authorities, Ministry of Education, WRWSAG	YR 1-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Subsidies are applied to community aquatic facilities across all 10 Territorial Local Authorities to support increased access</li><li>School and community access to aquatic facilities has increased by 10%</li></ul>



## ADVOCACY | Focus Areas and Measures

Actions	Responsibility	Span	Measures
3.1 Provide advocacy for school pools to be maintained and open for use as both educational tools and community assets, including, providing support for, where possible, school/community partnerships to maintain the existing aquatic facility network in the Waikato	WRWSAG	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence of advocacy for school pools to remain open, where applicable</li><li>• Evidence of advocacy for school/community partnerships, where possible</li><li>• Evidence of increased use of school pools by community</li></ul>
3.2 Provide advocacy for subsidised community pool use across the Waikato region for recreational swimming and school-led water safety education	WRWSAG	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence of submissions to Territorial Local Authorities/contribution to discussions about aquatic provision</li></ul>
3.3 Feed into national and regional conversations about water safety regulations, including the need for mandatory boating education and life jacket use (particularly in those areas bordering the Waikato where life jacket bylaws differ)	WRWSAG	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence of national and regional submissions to both Central and Local Government</li><li>• Evidence of legislative and by-law changes</li></ul>
3.4 Work alongside Water Safety NZ (and other relevant partners) to regionalise national messaging about water safety to ensure the Waikato and its people are visible in national drowning prevention campaigns	WRWSAG	YR 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Localised example/s are evident in national messaging</li><li>• High engagement (70%) with messaging from the region's public</li></ul>
3.5 Develop and implement a Waikato regional drowning prevention campaign and key messaging to support greater awareness of water safety, particularly among our region's at-risk groups	WRWSAG	YR 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At-risk groups engaged in the development of messaging</li><li>• All relevant partners involved in the dissemination of messaging via digital channels</li><li>• High engagement (70%) with messaging from the public</li></ul>



## Waikato Regional Water Safety Steering Group:

Chris Bredenbeck, Waikato Regional Council | Matthew Cooper, Sport Waikato  
Marcus Freke, Ministry of Education | Daniel Gerrard, Water Safety NZ  
Gavin Ion, Waikato District Council (TLA CE Forum Representative)  
Helen Paki, Hamilton City Council (TLA CE Forum Representative)  
Dr. Amy Marfell, Sport Waikato | Darren Ward, Swimming Waikato  
Tim Manukau (Iwi Representative)