



Transport
for NSW

Boating incidents in NSW

Statistical Statement 2014-15



February 2016

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Author: Jack Hannan
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1 Introduction

This statement summarises boating incidents recorded within the State of New South Wales for the Financial Year ended 30 June 2015, with an emphasis on recreational boating incidents.

It provides an update on boating safety statistics since the publication of the Transport for NSW reports [Boating Incidents in NSW – Statistical report for the 10-year period ended 30 June 2012](#) and [Boating incidents in NSW – Statistical Statement 2013-14](#).

For this statement, data from 2014-15 is compared with that from the previous 10-year period (2004-05 to 2013-14).



2 Key points in 2014-15

- The total number of recreational and commercial boating fatalities (16) was very close to the long-term annual average (16.9). Fifteen of these fatalities were on recreational vessels.
- A long-term downward trend remains evident for both recreational and commercial fatal incident rates, taking into account vessel numbers.
- The total number of incidents was significantly below the long-term average, suggesting a continuing gradual improvement in overall boating safety.
- Total incident rates, both for recreational vessels and commercial vessels, continue to fall.
- Serious injury incident rates were close to the long-term average for both recreational and commercial vessels.
- Nine out of the 11 people who were presumed to have drowned in recreational boating incidents were not wearing a lifejacket at the time of the incident. The long-term rate of non-lifejacket wear among drowning victims remains at approximately nine out of ten.
- The long-term data also suggests that more than 60% of recreational boating fatalities could have been prevented if all people presumed to have drowned wore a lifejacket regardless of requirements.

- The circumstances surrounding recreational boating fatalities remain similar when compared with recent years – particularly in terms of ‘men in small boats’. Nine of the fatal incidents (64.3%) involved a vessel less than six metres in length, and all 15 victims (100%) were male.
- Being forced into the water, through capsizing, swamping or falling overboard, is believed to have accounted for 12 out of the 14 fatality incidents (i.e. 85.7% of the total).
- There were fewer serious injury incidents related to vessels conducting towing sports such as water-skiing or wakeboarding in 2014–15.
- Collisions with a vessel, capsizing, collisions with a fixed object and grounding together accounted for more than 60% of all recreational vessel incidents.
- There were relatively high numbers of collisions with another vessel and incidents caused by not keeping a proper lookout.
- Collisions (mainly those involving another vessel or a fixed object) accounted for a large portion (more than 45%) of recreational serious injury incidents.
- There was a relatively high prevalence of recreational vessel incidents involving moored vessels, reflecting major storms that hit the east coast washing many vessels from their moorings.

3 Key numbers in 2014–15

There were 16 fatalities, 82 serious injuries and 281 incidents related to boating recorded in the 12-month period to 30 June 2015 (Table 1).

The number of fatalities for 2014–15, while much higher than in 2013–14 (a record low year), was very close to the long-term average (Table 2). In addition, the recreational vessel fatality rate (per 100,000 vessel registrations) is continuing to show a long-term decline (Section 4).

Compared with the previous year, serious injuries and total incidents were down by nearly 12% and by more than 13% respectively.

Table 1: Fatalities, serious injuries and related incident numbers for the 2014–15 financial year.

Vessel category	Incident category				Total incidents
	Fatalities	Fatal incidents	Serious injuries	Serious injury incidents	
Recreational	15	14	69	44	171
Commercial	1	1	12	11	83
Commercial/ recreational	0	0	1	1	27
TOTAL	16	15	82	56	281
Change on last year*	+100%	+87.5%	-11.8%	-22.2%	-13.3%

* The % changes do not exactly correspond to the incident data presented in the 2013–14 Statistical Statement, due to a small number of non-fatal incidents from 2014–15 being added to RMS records subsequent to that earlier statement being prepared.

In 2014-15, there were 15 incidents involving one or more fatalities (5.3% of total) – a similar proportion to the long-term figure (2004-05 to 2013-14) of 3.8%. There were 56 incidents involving serious injury but no fatalities (19.9% of total) – a proportion that is significantly higher than the corresponding long-term figure of 14.6%.

Most of the incidents (171 or 60.9%) involved only recreational vessels. This proportion is significantly less than the long-term figure of 70.1%.

In relation to the 14 recreational vessel fatality incidents during the year:

- Nine of the incidents (64.3%) are believed to have involved a vessel less than six metres in length.
- Of those nine incidents, five (35.7%) are known to have involved vessels less than 4.8 metres long.
- Eleven out of the 15 victims (73.3%) were not wearing a lifejacket and a further person was wearing an inflatable lifejacket that was not deployed.
- All 15 of the victims (100%) were male.
- Open runabouts accounted for six of the incidents (42.9%). Small unpowered boats accounted for a further three incidents – two involving canoes or kayaks, and one involving a sailing dinghy. Yachts accounted for two incidents and a cabin runabout, houseboat and a high-performance racing/skiing boat accounted for one each.
- Twelve of the incidents (85.7%) involved circumstances where the victim was likely to have been suddenly forced into the water – i.e. a person falling overboard, or a vessel capsize/swamping. While in one of these cases the incident type was recorded as ‘unknown’, circumstances of the incident suggest that the victim fell overboard or was knocked off their vessel.
- Two of the incidents involved propeller injury.
- Twelve of the incidents (85.7%) are known to have occurred between the late morning and late evening (between 10am and midnight).
- There were no bar crossing incidents.
- Of the 15 fatalities in total, 11 were presumed to have drowned – three of whom should have been wearing a lifejacket under current laws. However, only two of the three were wearing one – meaning a further life could have been saved if they had all been wearing a lifejacket.
- Of the four victims presumed not to have drowned, two were hit by a propeller, one suffered an impact injury in a high speed race and the fourth struck their head when jumping from a vessel.
- The overall lifejacket wear rate among drowning victims since 2004-05 is now 12.6%. This means that, on average, nearly nine out of 10 people who drowned over this 11-year period weren’t wearing a lifejacket.

In relation to the 44 recreational vessel serious injury incidents recorded during 2014- 15:

- 22.7% involved a collision with another vessel, which is slightly greater statistically than the corresponding long-term figure of 10.9%. A further 15.9% involved a collision with a fixed object, a statistically similar percentage to the corresponding long-term figure of 10.7%.
- 22.7% were attributed to not keeping a proper lookout, which is slightly greater statistically than the long-term figure of 11.6%.

- 18.2% were determined to have involved a lack of judgement, a similar percentage to the long-term figure of 16.6%.
- 61.4% involved a vessel underway, which is similar to the long-term figure of 56.5%.
- Open runabouts are known to have accounted for 29.5% of the incidents. PWC accounted for a further 20.5%.
- Vessels less than six metres in length accounted for 60% of the incidents for which the vessel length was recorded, which is a statistically similar result to the long-term percentage of 69.8%.
- The distribution of serious injury incidents through the day broadly reflected past patterns, with most of the incidents occurring in the late morning to late afternoon period.
- More than three-quarters of the incidents occurred in the warmer half of the year (October to March), a similar result to that of past years.
- Enclosed waters accounted for 81.8% of the incidents, which is very similar to the long-term figure of 84.1%.

Facts box – Personal Watercraft (PWC) Update for 2014-15:

Detailed long-term statistics on recreational PWC incidents are provided in the report [Personal Watercraft Incidents, Compliance and Feedback in New South Wales – Statistical report for the 10-year period ended 30 June 2012.](#)

In 2014-15 there were (involving a recreational PWC):

- 17 incidents in total
- 10 serious injury incidents
- 0 fatality incidents.

In addition:

- The overall incident rate for recreational PWC (151.3 per 100,000) was significantly below the long term average of 218.7 per 100,000.
- The serious injury incident rate for recreational PWC (89.0 per 100,000) was similar to the long-term average of 69.6 per 100,000.



Table 2: Incident Barometer – comparison of 2014–15 against previous 10 years (2004–05 to 2013–14) and summary of long-term trends.

Indicator	2014–15	Average previous 10 years (10yr av.)	2014–15 statistical relationship to 10yr av.	Graph* showing 2014–15 vs 10yr av.	Long-term trend
Total incidents	281	369.0	Lower		Initial increase, now decreasing
Total fatalities	16	16.9	Similar		Fluctuating
Total serious injuries	82	65.0	Higher		Increasing in line with vessel numbers*
Fatal incidents (recreational) per 100,000 vessels	6.0	5.5	Similar		Decreasing
Fatal incidents (commercial) per 10,000 vessels	1.1	2.0	Lower		Underlying decline
Serious injury incidents (recreational) per 100,000 vessels	18.9	19.1	Similar		Fluctuating*
Serious injury incidents (commercial) per 10,000 vessels	11.6	11.4	Similar		Increasing, partly in line with vessel numbers

Key:

- 2014–15 value
- 10-year average
- Statistical range of 10-year average

*Trends may have been affected by changes in reporting protocols and/or data capture over time.

4 Latest incident trends

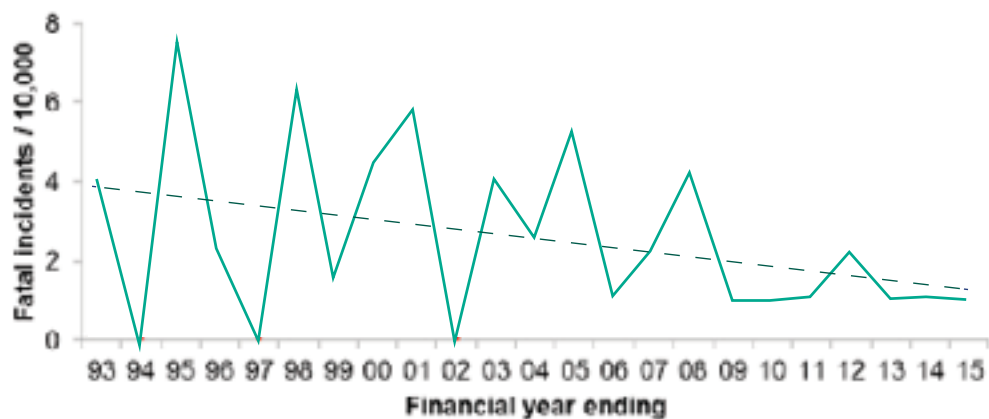
There were six fatal incidents per 100,000 recreational vessels in 2014-15. The recreational vessel fatality rate continues to show a long-term downward trend (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fatal incidents per 100,000 registered recreational vessels.



In addition, the commercial vessel fatality incident rate remains relatively low (1.1 incidents per 10,000 vessels in 2014-15) and is continuing to display an underlying downward trend (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Fatal incidents per 10,000 commercial vessels.*



*Trend line fitted to non-overlapping three-year averages of the data (i.e. '93-'95, '96-'98, etc.), but with latest point based on two-year average.





Overall incident rates for both recreational vessels (Figure 3) and commercial vessels (Figure 4) have maintained long-term downward trends.

Figure 3: Total incidents per 100,000 registered recreational vessels.

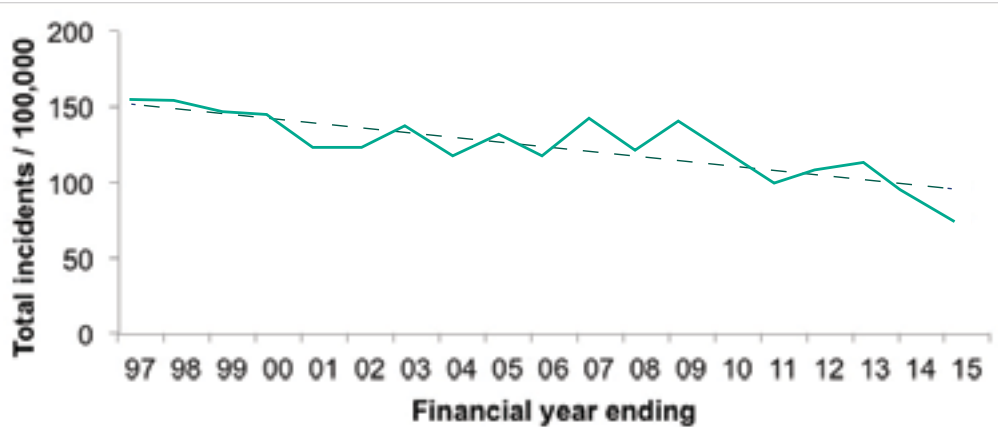
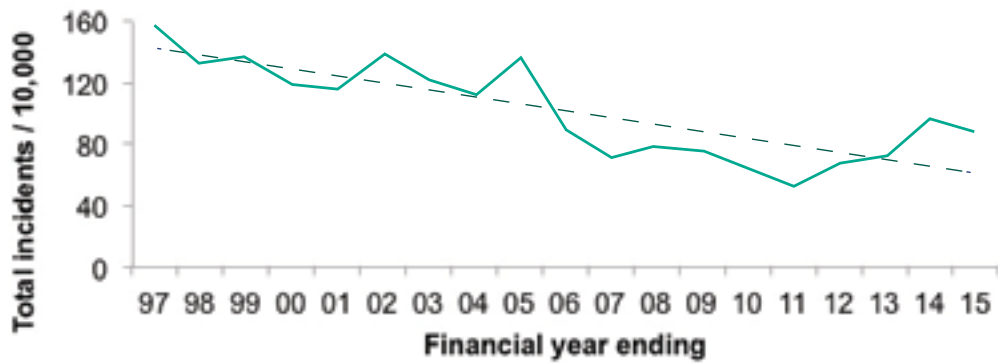


Figure 4: Total incidents per 10,000 commercial vessels.



5 Recreational incident patterns

There were 15 recreational vessel fatalities in 2014-15, arising from 14 incidents. Table 3 summarises the circumstances surrounding each of these incidents. Ten of the incidents occurred in the warmer months (November to March), while four occurred in the cooler months of April to September. The incidents occurred at a variety of times but particularly in the afternoon and evening. Seven of the incidents (half) occurred between 2.00 pm and midnight, and a further five incidents occurred around the middle of the day (i.e. between 10.00am and 2.00pm). Only one incident was known to have occurred in the early morning.

The incidents also occurred on a variety of waterway types – including seven on rivers and dams and four on coastal waters. Nine of the fatal incidents are known or believed to have involved a vessel less than six metres in length and in five cases the vessel was known to have been less than 4.8 metres. At least 11 of the 14 incidents (nearly 80%) involved a person falling overboard or a vessel capsize, and a twelfth incident, officially recorded as type ‘unknown’ is also likely to have involved a person being forced into the water.

Two of these cases involved a sole vessel operator falling overboard and being injured by the vessel’s propeller. Six of the incidents (more than 40%) involved rough seas, strong currents or adverse weather. It is likely that almost all of the fatal incidents recorded in 2014-15 could have been prevented by better planning and/or greater care.

Eleven out of the 15 victims (nearly 75%) were not wearing a lifejacket. In five of the fatal incidents, the victim was alone – and in all of these cases a lifejacket was either not being worn or was not deployed. Further information related to lifejacket wear is provided in Section 6.



Table 3: Summary of circumstances surrounding the 14 recreational vessel fatality incidents recorded in 2014–15.

Month	Time band	Waterway type	Vessel type	Vessel length	Incident type	Cause	Person alone?	Lifejacket worn?
Sep	10am–2pm	River	Canoe or kayak	<4.8 m	Fall overboard*	Strong currents	No	Yes
Oct	6pm–midnight	River	Open runabout	unknown	Fall overboard/ prop strike	Unknown	Yes	Yes
Nov	10am–2pm	Bay	Open runabout	<4.8 m	Fall overboard/ prop strike	Weather conditions	Yes	No
Nov	10am–2pm	River	High-performance racing/skiing	6 to <7.5 m	capsizing	High speed (in part)	No	Yes
Nov	6pm–midnight	Dam	Canoe or kayak	<4.8 m	Fall overboard*	Improper loading	Yes	No
Dec	2–6pm	River	Open runabout	<4.8 m	Capsizing*	Strong currents	No	No
Dec [^]	10am–2pm	Coastal	Cabin runabout	4.8 to <6 m	Capsizing*	Sea conditions	No	No
Dec	6pm–midnight	River	Houseboat	>7.5 m	Injury onboard	Excess alcohol	No	No
Jan	6pm - midnight	Coastal	Open runabout	unknown	Capsizing*	Sea conditions	No	No
Jan	10am–2pm	Bay	Yacht	>7.5 m	Fall overboard*	Unknown	Yes	No
Feb	2–6pm	Bay	Sailing dinghy	<4.8 m	Capsizing*	Entrapment	No	Yes
Mar	2–6pm	River	Open runabout	6 to <7.5 m	Towing incident*	Floating or submerged object	No	No
Apr	unknown	Coastal	Yacht	>7.5 m	Unknown*	Unknown	Yes	No
Jun	6–10am	Coastal	Open runabout	4.8 to <6 m	Capsizing*	Sea conditions	No	No

*Victims presumed to have drowned. [^]Double fatality.

Analysis of the key variables – incident type and incident cause – suggests that 2014–15 was similar to the previous 10 years¹ in terms of mix of the circumstances surrounding these incidents.

The fatalities in 2014–15 were spread across a wide range of ages – from 0–19 years through to 80–plus years. However, the vast majority (13 or 86.7%) were between 30 and 69 years of age. All 15 (100%) of the victims were male, a statistically higher proportion than the long-term (2004–05 to 2013–14) value of 85.7%.

Table 4 lists the incident profile descriptors that applied to recreational boating serious injury incidents for the year. While most of the incident descriptors listed had a similar prevalence compared with the previous 10 years, two descriptors (collision with vessel and no proper lookout) stood out in terms of relatively high percentages in 2014–15. Conversely, injuries related to towing incidents accounted for a relatively small percentage of serious injury incidents in 2014–15.

¹Both these key variables were analysed separately by Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), with the point for 2014–15 plotted along with points for each of the preceding 10 years in each case. Variables for which 2014–15 was an outlier (i.e. reflected an unusual pattern) were identified by use of 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of the final axes scores superimposed on each of the MDS plots.

Collisions with a vessel and with a fixed object together accounted for 17 recreational vessel serious injury incidents in 2014-15, representing 38.6% of all such incidents (Table 4). This is a significantly greater proportion than the long-term figure of 21.6%. Collisions of all types considered together showed a similar pattern - accounting for 45.5% of serious injury incidents in 2014-15 versus 26.1% over the previous 10 years.



Table 4: Recreational boating serious injury incident numbers and percentages by incident profile descriptors for 2014-15, with long-term percentages provided on the right for comparison. Instances where the percentage in 2014-15 is relatively high or low are denoted by upward or downward-pointing triangle symbols respectively. Grey symbols are used where the corresponding statistical confidence (2-tailed test of two proportions) is 80% or more; black symbols are used where the confidence is at least 95%.

Incident profile descriptors*	2014-15 Number	2014-15 % of total (N=44)	2005-14 % of total (N=421)
Incident type			
Collision with vessel	10	22.7 ▲	10.9
Collision with fixed object	7	15.9	10.7
Injury - towing incident	5	11.4 ▼	18.8
Capsizing	3	6.8	6.2
Fire or explosion (fuel)	3	6.8	5.2
Incident cause			
No proper lookout	10	22.7 ▲	11.6
Lack of judgement	8	18.2	16.6
Excessive speed	4	9.1	6.7
Wash	3	6.8	4.5
Vessel operation			
Underway	27	61.4	56.5
Towing	9	20.5	21.1
Vessel type***			
Open runabout	13	29.5	49.2
PWC**	9	20.5	14.3
Vessel length (where known: N=5 & 288)***			
<6 metres	3	60.0	69.8
Time of day			
10.00am to 1.59pm	16	36.4	31.1
2.00pm to 5.59pm	15	34.1	38.5
6.00am to 9.59am	7	15.9	12.6
6.00pm to 11.59pm	5	11.4	13.3
Month			
October-March	34	77.3	70.8
April-September	10	22.7	29.2
Waterway type			
Enclosed waters (including alpine)	36	81.8	84.1
Open (ocean) waters	8	18.2	15.9

* Not all descriptors recorded are shown, only those which accounted for at least three incidents in 2014-15. Descriptors are listed in the order they are discussed in the long-term incident report, Boating Incidents in NSW - Statistical report for the 10-year period ended 30 June 2012.

** There is one less PWC serious injury incident shown here than in the Facts box (Section 3), as there was an incident involving a recreational PWC and a commercial houseboat during 2014-15 which does not qualify as a 'recreational boating incident'.

*** Data for vessel type and vessel length does not lend itself to statistical analysis.

In addition to the information shown in Table 4, there was only one recreational vessel serious injury incident caused by excess alcohol.

Table 5 lists the incident profile descriptors that applied to recreational boating incidents overall for the year. While most of the incident descriptors listed had a similar prevalence compared with the previous 10 years, the vessel operation descriptor 'moored' stood out with a relatively high percentage in 2014-15, accounting for 18.1% of incidents versus 10.5% over the previous 10 years. This can be attributed to the major storms that hit the east coast in 2015 washing many vessels from their moorings.

Conversely, incidents attributed to the skipper's lack of judgement were proportionately less prevalent than previously (Table 5). A similar finding applied to the vessel operation 'underway'.

Collision with a vessel or a fixed object, capsizing, and grounding together accounted for 103 recreational vessel incidents, representing 60.2% of all such incidents (Table 5) - the same percentage as that for the previous 10 years. On its own, collision with a vessel accounted for 63 recreational vessel incidents, representing more than a third of all such incidents during the year.

In addition to the information shown in Table 5, there were eight recreational vessel incidents in total caused by excess speed and only four due to excess alcohol. The prevalence of incidents attributed to these causes over the year was similar to that recorded over the previous 10 years.

Also, there were only four incidents in the early morning (12.00am to 5.59am), which represented 2.3% of the total incidents - a significantly lower proportion than that for the previous 10 years (9.3%).



Table 5: Recreational boating total incident numbers and percentages by incident profile descriptors for 2014-15, with long-term percentages provided on the right for comparison. Symbols used as per Table 4.

Incident profile descriptors*	2014-15 Number	2014-15 % of total (N=171)	2005-14 % of total (N=2594)
Incident type			
Collision with vessel	63	36.8	33.6
Capsizing	20	11.7	13.4
Collision with fixed object	10	5.8	6.1
Grounding	10	5.8	7.1
Incident cause			
Lack of judgement	22	12.9 ▼	17.3
Weather conditions	22	12.9	12.9
No proper lookout	19	11.1	11.0
Vessel operation			
Underway	76	44.4 ▼	54.4
Moored	31	18.1 ▲	10.5
Towing	13	7.6	6.6
Vessel type***			
Open runabout	40	23.4	32.4
Sailing vessel (yacht)	16	9.4	20.6
PWC**	16	9.4	6.4
Motor cruiser	11	6.4	11.6
Vessel length (where known: N=19 & 1995)***			
<6 metres	10	52.6	48.4
Time of day			
10.00am to 1.59pm	56	32.7	30.0
2.00pm to 5.59pm	56	32.7	32.0
6.00am to 9.59am	29	17.0	15.3
6.00pm to 11.59pm	26	15.2	13.3
Month			
October-March	116	67.8	67.0
April-September	55	32.2	33.0
Waterway type			
Enclosed waters (including alpine)	134	78.4	80.5
Open (ocean) waters	37	21.6	19.5

* Not all descriptors recorded are shown, only those which accounted for at least 10 incidents in 2014-15. Descriptors are listed in the order they are discussed in the long-term incident report, Boating Incidents in NSW – Statistical report for the 10-year period ended 30 June 2012.

** There is one less PWC incident shown here than in the Facts box (Section 3), as there was an incident involving a recreational PWC and a commercial houseboat during 2014-15 which does not qualify as a 'recreational boating incident'.

*** Data for vessel type and vessel length does not lend itself to statistical analysis.

6 Lifejacket wear

While a variety of factors (Section 5) are involved in the development and unfolding of a vessel incident, lifejacket wear is an overarching factor in determining the outcome of a vessel incident, especially where persons end up in the water.

Of the 15 recreational boating fatalities recorded for the year, 13 were related to person(s) being forced into the water, essentially due to either capsize or falling overboard. Ten of these people are presumed to have drowned. In addition a further person involved in a towing incident was presumed to have drowned (they were not wearing a lifejacket). This means that 11 out of the 15 fatalities (73.3%) are presumed to have drowned, a statistically similar proportion to that of the previous 10 years (71.4%).

Two of the other three victims forced into the water were killed by injuries from a propeller, while the remaining victim was killed in a high speed water-skiing race.



Table 6: Summary of recreational drowning and lifejacket wear statistics for 2013-14, with long-term statistics provided for comparison.

Period	Total recreational boating fatalities	Fatalities presumed due to drowning		Drowning victims who were wearing a lifejacket	
		Number	%	Number	%
2014-15	15	11	73.3	2	18.2*
Previous 10 years (2004-05 to 2013-14)	140	100	71.4	12	12.0

* It is not possible to make any statistical conclusion about the 2014-15 wear rate in comparison to that of previous years. The overall lifejacket wear rate among drowning victims since 2004-05 is 12.6%.

Of the 11 people believed to have drowned over the year, three were boating in circumstances where a lifejacket should have been worn under current laws. Of the 111 people presumed drowned since 2004–05, 50 were boating in circumstances where a lifejacket should have been worn under current laws. However, only 10 of these people were actually wearing a lifejacket, meaning 40 lives could have been saved over this period if all had been wearing a lifejacket in accordance with current laws. This represents 25.8% of all recreational boating fatalities since 2004–05. If all people presumed drowned over this period had been wearing a lifejacket (regardless of requirements), the number of lives that could have been saved would have been even higher – 97 in all, as only 14 of these people were actually wearing a lifejacket. This represents 62.6% of all recreational boating fatalities since 2004–05.

There were no bar crossing fatalities in 2014–15, continuing the trend towards reduced bar crossing fatalities since the compulsory wearing of lifejackets (when crossing ocean bars) was introduced in October 2003. Since that time (until 30 June 2015), the annual number of bar crossing fatal incidents among both recreational and commercial vessels has declined significantly – falling by 64% – from an average of more than one per year to less than 0.5 per year. At the same time, the overall number of bar crossing incidents has remained about the same (17.4 per year before compulsory wear and 16.6 per year since – a decrease of less than 5%).

7 Commercial vessels

Commercial vessels in NSW are now regulated by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) acts as delegate of AMSA for commercial vessels within NSW and is responsible for waterway management.

There was a total of 110 incidents recorded in 2014–15 involving a commercial vessel (Table 1). The vast majority of these incidents were relatively minor: 97 of the incidents (88.2%) resulted in either no injuries or just minor injuries. This proportion of minor incidents involving a commercial vessel is significantly greater than the corresponding proportion for incidents involving only recreational vessels (66.1%).

There were no fatalities aboard passenger vessels. Twelve of the incidents (10.9%) resulted in serious injury, while a single incident (0.9%) resulted in a fatality, which involved a commercial fishing vessel. The proportion of incidents resulting in a serious injury or a fatality was significantly less for incidents involving a commercial vessel (11.8%) than for those involving only recreational vessels (33.9%).

The larger passenger and charter vessels ('Class 1' vessels, surveyed to carry more than 12 passengers) accounted for five out of the 11 commercial vessel serious injury incidents recorded in 2014–15 (45.5%). This is similar to the corresponding proportion for 2004–05 to 2013–14 (48.0%).

There were three commercial vessel serious injury incidents involving Class 2 vessels and a further two incidents for which it is unclear whether the vessel was a Class 1 or Class 2 vessel. In two of these five incidents, the primary vessel was clearly in a charter or passenger-carrying role. In one case the vessel was in a 'work boat' role, and in the remaining two accidents the vessel's role was unclear.

There was also one incident involving a surveyed Hire and Drive (Class 4) vessel and one involving a small 'off-the-beach' hire vessel.



8 Discussion and conclusions

Despite the higher number of recreational boating fatalities in 2014-15 compared with the previous year, the long-term fatal incident rate continues to trend downwards. Similar downward trends are evident with the commercial vessel fatal incident rate as well as for the total incident rate for both recreational and commercial vessels. These trends suggest that progress continues to be made in improving boating safety, although clearly work still needs to be done in certain areas.

While the overall lifejacket wear rate among recreational boaters has improved to approximately 41%², up from just 7% less than 10 years ago³, there remains much work to be done in minimising drowning-related boating fatalities. Although the proportion of 'preventable' fatalities for the year was relatively low - in terms of people who drowned while not wearing a lifejacket when they should have been wearing one under current laws - the long-term picture shows that more than a quarter of all recreational boating fatalities since 2004-05 could have been prevented had all the deceased been wearing a lifejacket in accordance with current laws. Furthermore, if all the victims had been wearing a lifejacket (regardless of requirements), the proportion of fatalities that could have been prevented is even higher (at more than 62%).

Transport for NSW is now into its fourth boating season of a major lifejacket awareness program - including a comprehensive advertising campaign, a New4Old mobile lifejacket promotional vehicle visiting popular boat ramps throughout the state, stakeholder engagement programs, additional education resources and a zero tolerance approach to on-water compliance. However, it will most likely take several years before the full benefit of this campaign work can be demonstrated statistically. This is because of the high degree of short-term variability shown in the long-term recreational boating fatal incident data (Figure 1).

² Transport for NSW - lifejacket wear rate observational study, 2014-15.

³ Former National Marine Safety Committee - Personal Flotation Devices Wear Rate Study 2007.



The importance of lifejacket wear is underscored by the high proportion of fatal incidents in 2014-15 related to smaller boats (64% less than six metres) and people being forced into the water (86%). Small boats, particularly those less than 4.8 metres in length, are inherently less stable and more susceptible to capsize, swamping and falls overboard than larger craft. Other important factors associated with recreational boating fatalities in 2014-15 include gender (100% were male), adverse water or weather conditions (43%) and boating alone (36%). These findings highlight the long-running safety concerns around 'men in small boats', boating alone and going out in - or being caught in - unsuitable weather or sea conditions. These issues remain a key focus of the evidence-based safety campaigns developed by Transport for NSW and delivered by RMS.

In terms of serious injury incidents and incidents generally, collisions are clearly a major factor - this is especially evident with serious injury incidents, for which collisions of all types, collisions with another vessel and incidents attributed to no proper lookout were relatively numerous in 2014-15. The lack of a proper lookout is often associated with collision incidents, and should remain a key focus of boating education aimed at minimising collisions - along with education around related areas such as maintaining appropriate distances-off, keeping to a safe speed, correct navigation in channels and avoiding navigation hazards.

With the increasing popularity of towing activities, the relatively low number of towing-related serious injury incidents for the year is a positive outcome - and one that possibly reflects the recent 'Tow-Safe' campaign work. While this result is a major turnaround on the previous year, it is too early to say that a downward trend in towing-related injuries has been established, and continued efforts to address tow-sport safety are required.

The relatively high proportion of incidents associated with moored vessels was associated with a particularly severe weather event in April 2015. A large 'East Coast Low' caused gale to storm force winds along much of the NSW coast over a number of days, causing many vessels to drag their moorings or break free completely. This highlights the need for mooring licence holders to regularly inspect and maintain their moorings, and to make sure that their apparatus is suitable for their vessel and the mooring location.

The overall PWC incident rate was significantly down on previous years. However, these vessels were still involved in approximately 9% of recreational boating incidents overall, and more than 20% of the corresponding serious injury incidents in 2014-15. Both of these percentages are well above the proportion of recreational vessel registrations accounted for by PWC (4.8%). Anecdotal information suggests that while the vast majority of PWC riders are safe and responsible on the water, a minority continue to exhibit unsafe behaviours on certain waterways – highlighting the need for a continued focus on targeted education and compliance work in relation to these vessels.

Longer-term incident statistics for PWC are examined in detail in a separate report, [Personal Watercraft Incidents, Compliance and Feedback in New South Wales – Statistical report for the 10-year period ended 30 June 2012.](#)

The incident statistics for 2014-15 continue to show that commercial vessels, particularly the larger passenger vessels, are relatively safe. Commercial vessels typically carry large numbers of people and are likely to spend more hours on the water than most recreational vessels. Most commercial vessel incidents are relatively minor, such as low-speed collisions and trips and falls among passengers. It remains important that commercial vessel Safety Management Systems are properly implemented to minimise the risk of both minor and more serious incidents.

In summary, the 2014-15 boating incident data suggests progress continues to be made in addressing boating safety. The results point to a few areas, such as collisions, men boating alone and boating in adverse weather or sea conditions, that require closer attention and consideration by Transport for NSW for any appropriate strategic response.



maritimemanagement.transport.nsw.gov.au

PO Box K659, Haymarket NSW 1240

T 8265 6815 **F** 8202 3891

E maritime@transport.nsw.gov.au

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