COMMUNIQUE

WATER SAFETY ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Water Safety Advisory Council (WSAC) met on 22 June 2012 and was well attended.

All WSAC members are contributing to the development of the NSW Water Safety Strategy, which is due for completion by October 2012.

The WSAC agreed that there will be a consultation process similar to that used for the development of the Australian Water Safety Strategy. It was also agreed that some non water safety organisations would be invited to comment once the draft strategy is finalised.

Members of the WSAC attend the Australian Water Safety Conference where a broad range of contemporary water safety issues were discussed, coinciding with the launch of the Australian Water Safety Strategy for 2012-2015.


The WSAC received an update on the Water Safety Black Spots Fund. Many of the projects funded for the 2011-12 year have commenced and will be reported upon regularly.

Applications for the 2012/2013 round closed on 30 June 2012.

The NSW Water Safety Awards hosted by AUSTSWIM will be held on 31 August 2012 at Lilyfield. The call for nominations opened the week starting 11 June 2012. Information is available on the NSW Water Safety and AUSTSWIM websites.

The WSAC received a presentation on the “Research Review of Rock Fishing Safety in NSW” by Anthony Bradstreet (Surf Live Saving Australia). A copy of the Executive Summary of the Research Review was provided to WSAC members.

Key findings were discussed and future actions to develop a Government response to the report. The report will be publicly available in the near future. Mr Bradstreet and his team were thanked for an excellent body of work.

The WSAC considered the Water Safety Advisory Council Membership Criteria. In 2011 the Minister for Police and Emergency Services requested there be a review of membership of the WSAC to ensure its appropriateness.

Membership criteria, including the terms of reference, and the responsibilities of the WSAC have been developed. All current non-government members would need to reapply for membership. Other organisations may be considered.

The WSAC agreed to emphasise the value of reference groups on certain areas of expertise rather than extending the membership to a large Council.
Such reference groups with areas of expertise, such as backyard pools may assist the WSAC in its work and ensure that other organisations have input. Both of these issues are to be further refined.

The Safer Coastal Waters Sub Committee will be requested to examine grounds for establishing a Sub Committee on Alcohol and Water Safety.

The WSAC noted that the Australian International Marine Conference will be held in Sydney on 28-30 April 2013. Lifejackets will be an agenda item at the Conference. In addition, the Sydney International Boat Show held on 2-6 August 2012 will feature a forum on lifejackets.

Surf Life Saving NSW thanked the NSW Government for providing $1.5 million for the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter.

**The Water Safety Advisory Council Position Statement on lifejackets.**

In relation to boating, lifejackets are perhaps the most important piece of safety equipment on any vessel. A lifejacket must be carried for each person on board all vessels, unless exempt. They must be the correct size for the wearer and in good working condition.

Penalties may be imposed on the owners and masters of vessels found not carrying them, or not carrying a sufficient number for the people on board the vessel, or occupants not wearing them as required.

More importantly, if you are not wearing your lifejacket, it cannot save your life. More information on lifejackets can be found on [www.watersafety.nsw.gov.au](http://www.watersafety.nsw.gov.au).

In relation to other recreational water activities, the wearing of lifejackets increases the chances of the wearer surviving a water related accident.

Education campaigns that highlight the importance of wearing life jackets, especially in higher risk activities such as rock fishing, are essential to the work of the WSAC and are a key focus of the water safety initiatives the WSAC supports.

The Safer Coastal Waters Sub Committee will be developing advice to the WSAC on lifejackets, specifically issues raised in the “Research Review of Rock Fishing Safety in NSW” by Surf Live Saving Australia on behalf of the Department of Primary Industries.

The WSAC will then provide recommendations to the Government on how best to ensure life jackets are a routine feature of water safety activity. These recommendations will include such matters as:

- Whether there should be voluntary or mandatory provisions, including legislation;
• The difficulties of lifejackets being targeted to geographical black spots which do not take into consideration the geospatial characteristics of rock platforms;
• The importance of using plain English, i.e. ‘lifejackets’ rather than ‘Personal Flotation Devices’;
• The anecdotal evidence that only a vocal minority of those engaged in rock fishing oppose the wearing of lifejackets; and
• The mechanics of the concept of voluntary versus compulsory wearing of lifejackets.

Until such time a more complete position is available, the WSAC encourages all persons undertaking water activities that increases their risk of ending up in the water to wear a lifejacket, use personal safety equipment, do not undertake activities alone and let people know where you are and when you are returning.