

RANKINGS & INDICES · SAMPLE

How a Canberra swim school entered Australia's drowning debate

Aquatots · report *Towards a Drowning-Free Nation: Australia 2025* · research concept, analysis and index delivered white-label through Otto Media Group · shared with permission

30%

of drowning deaths, 2005–06 to 2023–24, were people born overseas (1,627 of 5,380)

42%

of deaths in 2018–19, when overseas-born people were 29% of the population

8

states and territories ranked on one new index

0

rank changes when the index weights were made equal

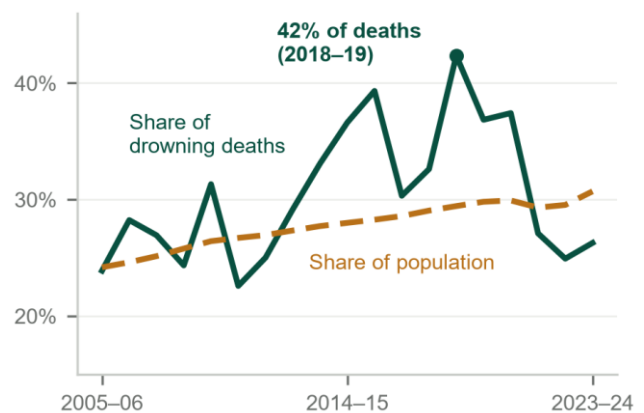
The central question

Aquatots teaches children to swim in Canberra. It had no national data of its own. The drowning conversation belongs to government bodies and lifesaving organisations. So the question had to be bigger than the business: **who drowns in Australia and where is the gap between drowning risk and access to swimming lessons widest?**

How I found the answer

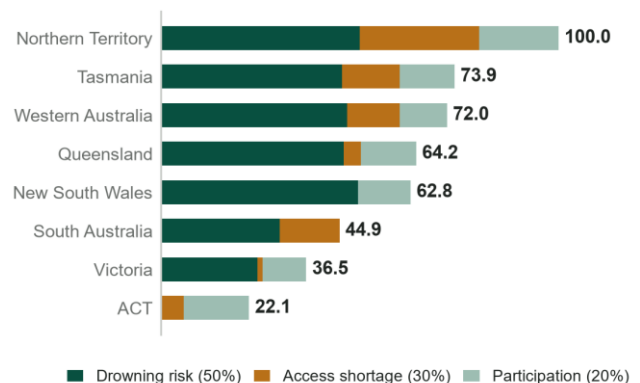
1. Rebuilt the national drowning series from 2005–06 to 2023–24 by place of birth, using Royal Life Saving data. Where de-identified records hid 1–4 cases, I filled them from the annual National Drowning Reports.
2. Turned counts into shares and rates using ABS population by country of birth.
3. Built the Swim Safety & Access Gap Index (SSAGI): a composite of drowning risk, a proxy for access shortage and swimming participation.
4. Scaled each measure 0–100 across the eight jurisdictions and weighted them 50 / 30 / 20.
5. Tested the weights. With equal weights, every state keeps its rank.

From 2012–13 to 2020–21, people born overseas made up more of drowning deaths than of the population



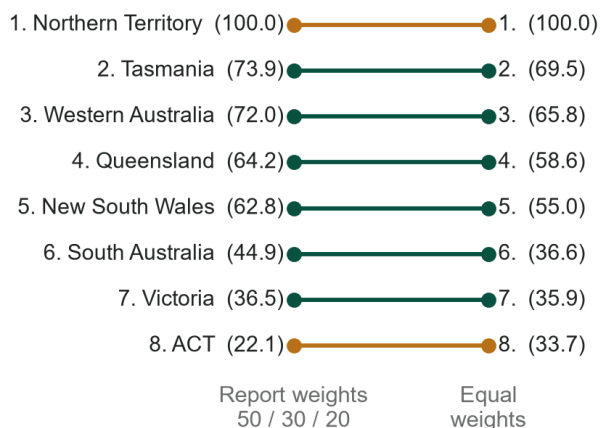
Share of all drowning deaths against share of the population, 2005–06 to 2023–24. The deaths share was above the population share every year from 2012–13 to 2020–21, then fell below it.

The index: Northern Territory has the widest gap, the ACT the narrowest



Score out of 100: a composite of drowning risk, a proxy for access shortage and swimming participation. Higher means a larger gap; bars show what each weighted measure adds. Limits: the access proxy counts sports-instruction businesses, not lesson places; participation is not unmet demand; scores compare states and are not a person's chance of drowning. Scores are the report's published values (Table 3.5).

Change the weights and the ranking holds



Left: rank and published score with the report's 50 / 30 / 20 weights. Right: rank and score with equal weights, recalculated from the report's rounded component values (Table 3.4). The order of all eight does not change. Recalculating the published scores from those rounded components matches every state to one decimal place except Western Australia (71.9 against the published 72.0).

Why the test matters

A weighted index is always open to one question: "did you choose the weights to get this answer?" I ran the test before anyone could ask. The ranking held under the one alternative I tested, equal weights. The team can say that in a pitch. A journalist can check it.

One study produced a national trend, a state ranking and a community-level finding. Each could be pitched as a separate story.

The outcome

November 2025 — published as the client's own national report. Aquatots released the report on its website on 7 November 2025, ahead of National Water Safety Day, with a press-enquiry button, charts to download and an open licence: anyone can reuse the work if they credit Aquatots.

28 December 2025 — ABC News. The ABC named Aquatots and reported its finding that people born overseas made up a bigger share of drowning deaths than of the population, "in some years accounting for up to 40 per cent" in the ABC's words. The project data puts the highest year, 2018–19, at 42%. The finding appears in the same passage as the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report. A privately owned swim school was cited next to the national lifesaving body, on the national broadcaster.

The index became a credential. On its homepage, Aquatots now displays the index among its credentials, alongside its ACT Gold Award. It describes the index as Australia's "only national index combining drowning risk, lesson access, and demand". That is the client's own claim.

The agency received a 35-page report, the state ranking, charts and a full method note. The same research also fed a contributed HerCanberra article and a sponsored Canberra Times feature.

Methodology

Sources. Royal Life Saving National Fatal Drowning Database and National Drowning Reports; ABS Estimated Resident Population and population by country of birth; AusPlay 2023–24; ABS Counts of Australian Businesses (CABEE, December 2024), ANZSIC 8211.

Index. $SSAGI = 0.5 \times \text{risk} + 0.3 \times \text{access shortage} + 0.2 \times \text{participation}$. Risk is the three-year mean drowning rate per 100,000 people. Access shortage is the inverse of ANZSIC 8211 businesses per 10,000 children (businesses with 200+ employees excluded). Participation is the average of adult and child swimming rates; the report treats it as demand for lessons, so higher participation raises the score. Each is min–max scaled to 0–100 across the eight jurisdictions.

Limits. ANZSIC 8211 covers sports instruction beyond swimming. It counts businesses, not lesson places, fees or travel time. Participation is not the same as unmet demand. Scores compare states; they are not a person's chance of drowning.

Place of birth. Deaths not recorded as overseas-born sit in the other group. Where country of birth was missing, a death falls there, so the overseas-born share is more likely too low than too high.

Coverage: [ABC News, 28 December 2025, Why getting more migrants to swim has benefits for all of Australian society](#). Client report page: [Aquatots, Towards a Drowning-Free Nation](#). Index scores from the Aquatots report, Tables 3.4 and 3.5 (printed pp. 21–22) and methodology (pp. 33–34). Place-of-birth figures recalculated from the saved project workbook on 26 September 2026.