

# Winter Water Safety

Gidday.

Water Safety New Zealand has asked me to come up with a few tips and tricks for winter fishing, so I've said I'll give it a crack. Now many people ask me as I wander the length and breadth of this once proud land, 'Barry, what can I do to keep myself safer in the water?' This is a good question. 'Don't get into it in the first place,' is what I generally reply, and this is basically true. It's scientifically proven that if you don't get into the water your chances of drowning are vastly reduced, statistically, to slightly less than nil. However, it does happen from time to time. So this treatise is aimed at those unfortunate and challenged creatures, who for reasons known only to themselves, part company with the boat and/or the land and find themselves up to the eyebrows in the basic liquid element. In other words, smack in the proverbial oxidation pond without the inflatable.

Now with the likelihood of unsettled weather coming your way over the next few months it's a basic requirement for all fishos to ensure their own safety – rather than relying on the next door neighbour, the wife's uncle or the Green Party spokes-thing for weta farming. Many fishing related tragedies have a number of things in common. Just a few of these are: pulling nets into small, unstable boats without using proper safety equipment, or even having it on board. The old life-jacket is a good start, for example. Not being prepared for the conditions is another beauty – a bit like forgetting your wallet when you head down to the local.

Lack of supervision of youngsters on a trip is a big no-no, as is rock fishing in places where the conditions tell you not even a black back gull should rightly be. And another thing: don't be too greedy. Don't focus on the fishing to the exclusion of all else. OK it might be the biggest snapper you ever saw, but do you want it to be the *last* thing you ever saw as well? Think of your own and other people's safety.



Incidentally, if you're lucky enough to have a boat there's a bit of baggage that comes with it. You, as the skipper, are legally responsible for the safety of the boat and everyone on board. There are a few things you need to tick off in what you laughingly call your mind before you throw 'Reel Screamer', or 'The Other Woman', in the water and point the sharp end away from the land.

Your maintenance programme is a good start. How's the motor, electrics and safety equipment? Check it all before you unhook. I used to know a bloke who thought weather forecasts were for netballers. He's in a far happier place now watching all the netball he chooses, presumably, so don't be a wally. Checking the weather is one of the easiest things you can do. 53% of fatal

boating accidents occur in bad weather. Even a shag has a decent look around before he gets off his rock. And speaking of shags, tell someone trustworthy where you're going and when you think you might be due back. This will save the discomfort and embarrassment of a search starting off Raglan as you and your mates float past White Island.

Now I don't want to sound like a know-all, but it's one of life's fundamental truths that the water is colder in winter. What? You hadn't realised that? Look, why don't you stick to something you're more suited to, like macramé or needlepoint? Yes the water is colder, so should you take the big bath, the chances of hypothermia are greatly increased. You lose the most heat through your head, neck and the backs of your hands, so if it's cold a hat and gloves are not a silly idea. It's a good idea to put them on *before* you fall over the back though, rather than after.

If you're unlucky enough to end up in the drink there are a few things you should try to remember. Swimming or any exercise will make you feel warmer but it's doing the opposite. It's draining warmth from inside you and wasting it. Conserve your energy to keep warm. Try to keep as much of your body as possible *out* of the water. If anything's floating nearby use this to lift your upper body. This may feel colder because of the chill factor, but the air is actually warmer. And whatever you do – whatever happens – always, always stay with the boat, even if it's upturned or in pieces. Don't try to swim for land. In your cold and disoriented state you'll probably head out in the direction of Australia anyway, and who in their right mind would want to go there? Stay with the boat or wreckage. There's a much better chance of you being found.

Now this brings me to a rather delicate matter which I thought I could cover in the form of a 'quick quiz.' What does the following graphic depict, I ask you? Think about this carefully. Is it...

- a: Closing time in a Karangahape Rd gay bar?
- b: A DOC/Green Party bonding session to save kakapos?
- c: Manchester United learn of David Beckham's transfer?
- d: John Mitchell's idea of a forwards' training camp?
- e: The 'huddle', as recommended by Water Safety New Zealand?

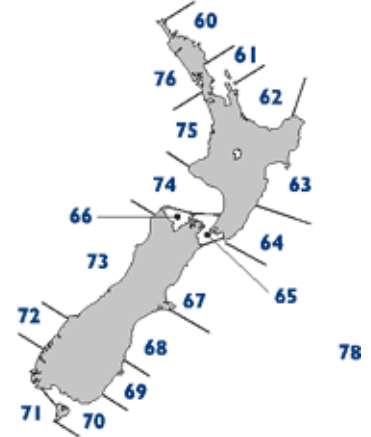


Alright, it's the 'huddle,' although those of you who picked 'b' were fairly close. This is a suggested option if a group of you find yourselves in the water and no floating objects are nearby. Life-jackets, you'll note, are a requirement for this. The huddle conserves maximum warmth and energy. Your heads, including the

backs of the heads should be out of the water. Arms should be hugging each other over the life-jackets. Try to make maximum body contact, especially at the chest. Legs should be intertwined.

Well I don't know about you, but it looks pretty suspect to me. Still, if it makes the difference between being around to watch the World Cup Final or becoming someone else's berley, I suppose I'd give it a whirl. Mind you, let's see who makes the final first. A quiet and peaceful end might yet be preferable.

Before going out check the weather forecast by phoning MetService, 0900 999 plus your map area or visit their website [www.metservice.co.nz](http://www.metservice.co.nz)



Good talking to you. And let's be very careful out there.

Hooray.

Barry Slack. (Signature)

