



# Parliamentary Briefing: Beach & Water Safety

Wednesday 14th June 2023 - 10:00-11:00

Online

Chair: Sally-Ann Hart MP

### Speakers:

Ross MacLeod – Public Affairs Manager (Water Safety) Royal National Lifeboat Institution

Lee Heard – Charity Director, Royal Life Saving Society

Danielle Obe – Chair, Black Swimming Association

Samantha Ward - British Canoeing, Safety Lead

Sarah Nightingale - Strategy Development and Partnership Manager, Royal National Lifeboat Institution

### HEADLINES & ACTIONS

- MPs to raise the profile of Drowning Prevention across their work areas wherever appropriate
- Further consideration is needed around the inclusion of water safety within the national curriculum
- Resources on Drowning Prevention Week and Drowning Prevention Day to be made available to MPs (see Resources for details)

### Background

The deep connection between the people of the UK and our coastal areas runs across generations and cultures, however the level of knowledge of the potential risks of our coastal fringe is little understood by the public. Through this session we will be considering the importance of inclusion and equity in accessing these spaces, the growing potential for mitigating incidents through education, emerging recreational activities, and food for thought around the future offer of lifesaving services across the UK.

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Sally-Ann Hart MP (Chair)

Ross MacLeod

Samantha Ward

Samantha Richardson

Danielle Obe

Lee Heard

Sharon Bleese

Sarah Nightingale

Ashley Jones

Jade Hall

Officers obo Margaret Greenwood MP,

Neale Harvey MP, Anne Marie Morris MP,

Grahame Morris MP

#### APOLOGIES

Apologies sent were noted

SECRETARIAT

Beccy MacDonald-Lofts - LGA Coastal SIG  
Nicola Radford – Coastal Communities Alliance

Bethany Handson - LGA Coastal SIG  
Alice Watts – Coastal Partnership Network

## INTRODUCTION TO BEACH & WATER SAFETY – Ross MacLeod - RNLI

- 30-35 million visitors to the coast in 2022
- There were 226 fatalities last year with 105 of those being June -August
- Statistics on these fatalities show that 60% were inland, 30% were coastal with 83% being male and, 20-29 and 50-59 age ranges being the most common
- Drowning is preventable and the “Drowning Chain” is used to consider how to reduce this preventable cause of death
- Education and training is essential to save lives
- Beach and water safety needs to be covered in depth on the national curriculum
- 39,690 people were aided by RNLI crews in 2022 with 506 lives saved
- Many people who require assistance come from inland
- Example given where prevention has found to be very successful as an individual who had seen the #FloatToLive video was able to remember and apply the knowledge when swept out to sea in a rip current, this saved his life.

## WHY INCLUSION AND EQUITY MATTER FOR WATER SAFETY – Danielle Obe – Black Swimming Association

- The Black Swimming Association (BSA) was formed after a series of preventable tragedies involving persons from diverse backgrounds
- Britain is a diverse nation but it struggles to reach all communities
- To prevent drownings, everyone must be reached and provided with the life skills needed to stay safe in, and around, water
- Black and Asian communities make up 80% of the world’s population and 90% of the world’s global drowning burden with around 236,000 unintentional deaths
- Across England, 95% of adults and 80% of children from black ethnic groups do not swim
- From November 2021-22, in Britain, only 3.5% of black adults and 4.2% of Asian adults participated in swimming activities compared to 8.9% white adults
- The BSA is the first organisation of its kind in the UK, positioned to ensure that people of African, Caribbean and Asian heritage have equitable access to vital water safety and drowning prevention training and all the benefits of engaging in aquatics
- The BSA works with other organisations to facilitate this
- The BSA Community Journey is a long-term commitment to change which needs to build trust to win hearts and minds
- Through research, the BSA has found that many are not aware of what they need to know, are unable to access water safety education or lack confidence to overcome aquaphobia alongside cultural and social barriers
- There must be an emphasis on ensuring voices are heard and communities are reached so that there is equal access to ensure that there is an impact within our communities.

- Through the Water Safety Skills programmes it only takes 1 hour to learn life-saving skills
- The BSA's ambition is to challenge negative stigmas, narratives and relationships that people from African, Caribbean and Asian communities have with water

#### IMPORTANCE OF WATER SAFETY EDUCATION – Lee Heard – Royal Life Saving Society

- The Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) look to provide education and training to help people enjoy water safely and prevent drowning
- Children from low affluence families are half as likely to be able to swim up to 25m unaided in comparison to those from high income families
- Swimming skills are part of the PE curriculum but it is not mandatory even though it can save lives
- It is a challenge to access all audiences and so the RLSS work in partnership
- There is no clear coverage of responsibility for swimming as it can be considered a health issue or a wellbeing issue or a life skill
- In 2022 there was 46% increase in the number of accidental fatalities amongst children in the UK, with death by drowning being the second highest trauma related cause of deaths
- There needs to be a differentiation between swimming and water competency as the later requires full water safety education including ability to apply swimming skills in a range of aquatic environments
- Speaker sits on the Data & Insight Group for the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) and the Education Group
- Research is showing that classroom taught skills are recalled by school children
- Education helps to save lives and helps children to enjoy the water safely
- The NSW Education Group has developed a water competency framework which they would like to see being included within the curriculum and includes skills that can be all taught in class-based scenarios to encourage activity participation
- There are challenges around changing the curriculum, but supplementing swimming with water safety education in the classroom would help to target those harder to reach communities.

#### HOW COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS CAN IMPROVE STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING (SUP) SAFETY – Sam Ward – British Canoeing

- British Canoeing (BC) are taking a collaborative approach to Stand-Up Paddleboarding (SUP) safety
- BC are one of the two national governing bodies covering in SUPs England
- There has been a significant increase in SUP participation alongside an steady increase in purchases
- This has led to a rise in the number of incidents involving SUPs
- Messaging is being delivered through SUP leashes, QR codes and website links
- The range of retailers are now delivering consistent sharing advice.
- BC are supporting Decathlon with their SUP Rental process which has been rolled out across 45 stores. This provides a different way to access SUPs and users are provided with in-store

- safety messaging before they complete the process
- Active prevention is being undertaken through the addition of point-of-sale messaging
- BC are working with non-specialist retailers and online retailers to make safety guidance accessible to the public when purchasing SUPs
- Consistent messaging around buoyancy aids, carrying a charged phone in a waterproof pouch, wearing the correct leash and avoiding offshore winds is all based on the trend data from recent incidents

## SHAPING TOMORROW TODAY: FUTURE FACTORS INFLUENCING UK LIFESAVING - Sarah Nightingale – Royal National Lifeboat Institution

- There is a need to look ahead and consider how we make sure that we are fit for the future and understand the challenges that will affect future water safety and lifesaving
- We owe it to the next generation to always be looking forwards
- The future of lifesaving needs to consider more frequent and extreme heatwaves, increasingly busy locations, increasing size of the population to whom safety messaging must be relayed.
- Changes to the climate is causing dryer, warmer summers which attract people into the water
- Trends and data show the UK population is becoming more diverse and it is going to become more challenging to reach all those who need water safety messaging
- Different generations need to be reached in different ways, with altering messaging and changes will occur around at-risk audiences
- Coastal communities are changing in significant ways socially and physically with an aging population, increasing second-home ownership impacting residents and therefore impacting the ability to train and recruit local life-saving volunteers.
- Physical changes including increases in coastal flooding, coastal erosion and accelerated coastal processes. RNLI stations must be located close to the water however this makes them vulnerable to this changing environment.
- In the future, risks will change and could increase meaning that there will be an increase in life-saving demand whilst charities are subjected to heightened scrutiny and financially impacted by social financial pressures

## DISCUSSION

Clear that disadvantaged and ethnic communities are heavily impacted. The national curriculum does include the need for schools to provide water safety at key stages 1 and 2 however it is understood that swimming lessons alone are not enough and life saving skills must be practised in a variety of environments. Question asked on how MPs can support change in this area and how can it be delivered with support from partnership organisations. Response that one of the major challenges is that many visitors to waterfronts are not from the area and are travelling from areas that don't have strong education on water safety, mainly as they are inland, and the danger is not seen as important as it is across coastal communities. The 17 June is Drowning Prevention Week where schools are encouraged to engage with water safety. Action: Information on Drowning Prevention Week and Day to be made available for MPs alongside an invite to the in-parliament event on the 11 July.

MPs need to be aware, when interacting with communities, that many of the children have never been to the beach especially for deprived communities. The assumption is that all children are receiving water safety lessons in school however many are not, and this is relevant to all communities. Action: Clear that education is vital and there needs to be an increase in messaging around water safety and drowning prevention. MPs attending need to focus on this as a take-away to integrate into their current work.

## RESOURCES

RLSS National Drowning Prevention Week:

<https://www.rlss.org.uk/Pages/Category/drowning-prevention-week-campaign>

RNLI Float to Live Campaign <https://rnli.org/safety/float>

Black Swimming Association <https://thebsa.co.uk/>

Presentations from the session are available for MPs and their staff. Please contact the Secretariat on [coastalcommunitiesappg@gmail.com](mailto:coastalcommunitiesappg@gmail.com) for copies.