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Are Children as Safe in Open Water as I Think They Are?

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In early summer 2017/18 almost 200 children participated in a program facilitated by Downs Little Lifeguards (<http://www.tr.qld.gov.au/facilities-recreation/sport-recreation/swimming-pools-gyms/13096-downs-little-lifeguards-program>) that was developed specifically to ensure that children in regional Australia were able to survive or save themselves in a range of aquatic environments. The presentation provided details on the assessment of the water competency of this cohort of swimmers from a pool environment through to open water aquatic environments with reference to the water competency framework (Stallman, Moran, Quan, & Langendorfer, 2017).

The study indicated that the participants' initial assessment of their swimming competence in a swimming pool was overestimated by 30% of the initial group and a further 33% were not able to tread water for two minutes (dressed in swimwear).

These numbers increased during transition to open water environments validating some of the research that highlighted that 74% of drowning deaths occurred within 100 kilometres of their home postcode (Stallman et al., 2017).

Smaller numbers were then introduced to open fresh water and surf conditions to determine how effective the skills learned and practiced in swimming pools were in other aquatic settings. The information obtained will be the basis of an ongoing study as part of a water safety strategy to develop water competence for children based in regional centres.

Stallman, R.K., Moran, K., Quan, L., & Langendorfer, S.J. (2017). From swimming skill to water competence: Towards a more inclusive drowning prevention future. *International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education*, 10(2) Art. 3.



Shayne Baker has enjoyed over three decades of involvement in lifesaving and the opportunity to participate at all levels in Australia and beyond has been extremely motivating and a lifelong passion. Over this time he has been a learner, a teacher, a national president, an active lifeguard on the beach, and an examiner of others wanting to become lifesavers in Australia and Asia. In his regional city of Toowoomba, Australia he leads a team of dedicated aquatic professionals to facilitate an annual summer lifesaving programme for young children and teenagers to prevent holiday drowning in a range of aquatic environs. Complementing his own initiatives he is also involved at the moment as the National Education & Training Advisor for the RLSSA, RLSS Commonwealth Portfolio Director and as member of the International Life Saving Federation's Rescue Commission. He is the 2017 recipient of the Ireland Medal.