

Grog adds to drowning tally

Alcohol consumption linked to water deaths

By ROXANNE MCCARTY-O'KANE

EXCESSIVE alcohol consumption is not only causing trouble on the roads, it is also causing unnecessary death in our waterways.

New research released by Royal Life Saving Society Australia shows Queensland rivers have claimed the lives of 285 people since July 1, 2002.

Rivers accounted for a third of all drownings in the state in that time and 33% of them were found to be alcohol-related.

Ithaca Caloundra City Life Saving Club captain Lynda Barry said it was a staggering statistic but one that did not at all surprise her.

"Of the 38 deaths that were known to have a positive reading from the report, 83% of them had a blood-alcohol reading higher than the legal limit and 26% were higher than four times the legal limit," Ms Barry said.

"When people go binge drinking and then head out on the water, it's a recipe for disaster," she said.

Royal Life Saving and the Federal Government yesterday launched Respect the River, a national drowning prevention and public awareness campaign, in a bid to address the statistics.

The Brisbane River, the nation's second highest river drowning blackspot, has claimed the lives of 40 people since July 1, 2002.

Royal Life Saving Queensland executive director Michael Darben said although no Sunshine Coast waterway was in the top 10 most dangerous rivers, residents needed to remain vigilant.

"The reality with the Sunshine Coast is you've got your beaches but also your inland waterways that reach those beaches such as the Maroochy River, Noosa River and Pumicestone Passage, and there are a lot of people doing recreational activities on those areas,"



BE AWARE: Henry Webb and Kate Bennett keep a watch over Bulcock Beach, Caloundra, while lifesavers warn swimmers to take care in all waterways. PHOTO: WARREN LYNAM

Mr Darben said.

"Be it paddle boarding, jet-skiing, recreational swimming and boating, when you combine all those things, you are increasing the risks purely from the number of users there," he said.

"I've been at Cotton Tree where there have been many watercraft and swimmers in one area in the absence of lifesavers and

lifeguards," he said.

Last season the Ithaca club, the smallest on the Coast, performed 93 rescues and 739 preventative actions.

Ms Barry said lifesavers had seen many kayakers fall out on the passage.

"One of the most common things is people not knowing their swimming ability and showing off to their friends and we need to

help them get back to shore because they get caught in that really strong current at Bulcock Beach," Ms Barry said.

"We do see accidents and possible spinal injuries with people on jet-skis and we don't know the outcome of those."

Ithaca club secretary Patricia Barry said there was a big spike from last year's drowning report in

QLD NUMBERS

- Rivers have claimed the lives of almost 300 people since July 1, 2002.
- Rivers account for 31% of all drownings over this period.
- Alcohol-related drownings account for 33% of all river drownings.
- Males account for 77% of all river drownings.
- 20% of drownings were the result of falls into water.
- Males accounted for 100% of fishing drownings and 93% of deaths as a result of a rescue attempt.

the 35-54-year age group, which went with an increase in baby boomers and empty-nesters with more disposable income choosing to buy watercraft to enjoy their leisure time.

The surf club offers grey medallion courses for over-55s, CPR courses and first aid courses.

Visit www.caloundra.city.asn.au to find out the details.

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