



# *Policy and Strategic Plan on Suicide Prevention*



Irish Water Safety is the statutory, voluntary body and registered charity established to promote water safety in Ireland.

Tá Sábháilteacht Uisce na hÉireann in bhord deonach reachtiúil a bunaíodh le sábháilteacht uisce a chothú in Éireann.



## Foreword by Chairman



- Death by suicide is a tragedy that affects not just the immediate family but also the wider community. There are a range of social, economic and personal relationships that compel a person to self-harm or suicide and these, unfortunately, are exacerbated by the current economic climate in Ireland. No community has been spared and the topic, when related, evokes strong emotions – everybody has firsthand knowledge of a family member, relative, neighbour or friend taking their own life.

Too many people have chosen drowning to end their lives and Irish Water Safety, because of its national mandate, wants to respond and contribute within its remit to suicide and self harm prevention. I believe that **a direct preventative approach is required** by IWS in achieving its goal in this sensitive area.

I have established a small working group comprising of Christy McDonagh, Council member and Chair, Donal O'Sullivan, Life Governor, Valerie Stundon, Limerick Water Safety Development Officer and Helen O'Hara, Water Safety Area Committee Cavan to report with findings, recommendations and strategy that will assist Irish Water Safety in fulfilling its remit and thereby contribute to suicide prevention.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Breda Collins". The script is cursive and fluid.

Breda Collins

Chairman

## Executive Summary

Irish Water Safety is the statutory body established to promote drowning prevention initiatives in Ireland. It is also a registered charity with thousands of volunteers who teach swimming and lifesaving skills nationwide and work with many organisations on projects aimed at changing skills, attitudes and behaviours in aquatic environments.

The Policy Statement outlined in this document includes details of initiatives within Irish Water Safety that are supported by the objectives set out within the IWS Strategic Development Plan 2012-2017.

In the period to 2017, IWS will:

- Continue to compile and disseminate statistics on all drownings, be they “accident”, “suicide” or “undetermined” and endeavour to identify and report on “at-risk” groups.
- Continue to highlight the rise in drownings classified as “undetermined” which may mask correct figures on suicides by drowning.
- Promote the attendance of all IWS volunteers at HSE delivered “safeTALK” and ASIST courses, thereby creating a greater alertness – through safeTALK – and a capacity to effectively intervene – through ASIST.
- Further progress initiatives with The Samaritans whose helpline number appears on ringbuoys at certain locations throughout the country.
- Continue to deliver programmes that give members of the public the skills necessary to stay safe from harm in emergency scenarios, namely
  - Primary Aquatics Water Safety (PAWS) in primary schools;
  - A nationwide programme of “summer weeks” that teach swimming and lifesaving skills to children and adults;
  - A range of year-round water safety classes expedited by thirty “IWS Water Safety Area Committees” nationwide.
- Identify and progress joint ventures with other national organisations and community groups.
- Continue to build the momentum that supports suicide prevention strategies within IWS.

## Context

SI 389 of 2006, Article 4, mandates Irish Water Safety with the following:

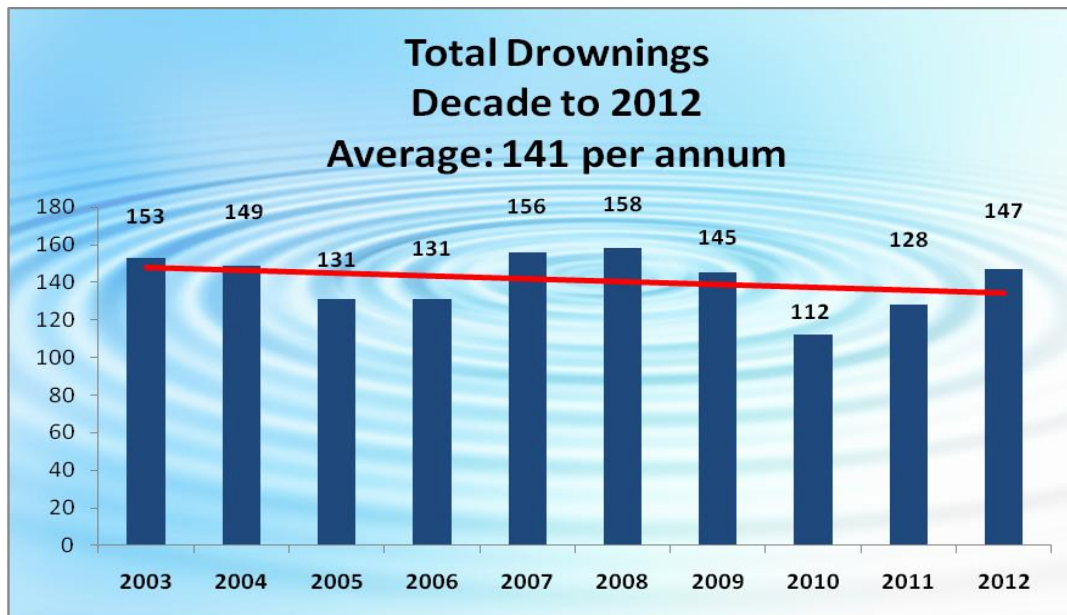
- (1) The Body shall provide the following services—
- (a) the promotion of public awareness of water safety,
  - (b) the promotion of measures, including the advancement of education, related to the prevention of accidents in water,
  - (c) the provision of instruction in water safety, rescue, swimming, resuscitation and recovery drills,
  - (d) the promotion of efficiency and standardisation of the lifeguard service,
  - (e) the establishment of national standards for lifeguards, lifesaving and water safety, and
  - (f) such other services relating to water safety as the Minister may from time to time require, direct or determine.

We are an Island nation with ready access to the sea and with numerous inland bodies of water. It is therefore essential that, if we are to enjoy this natural asset, we learn to respect it.

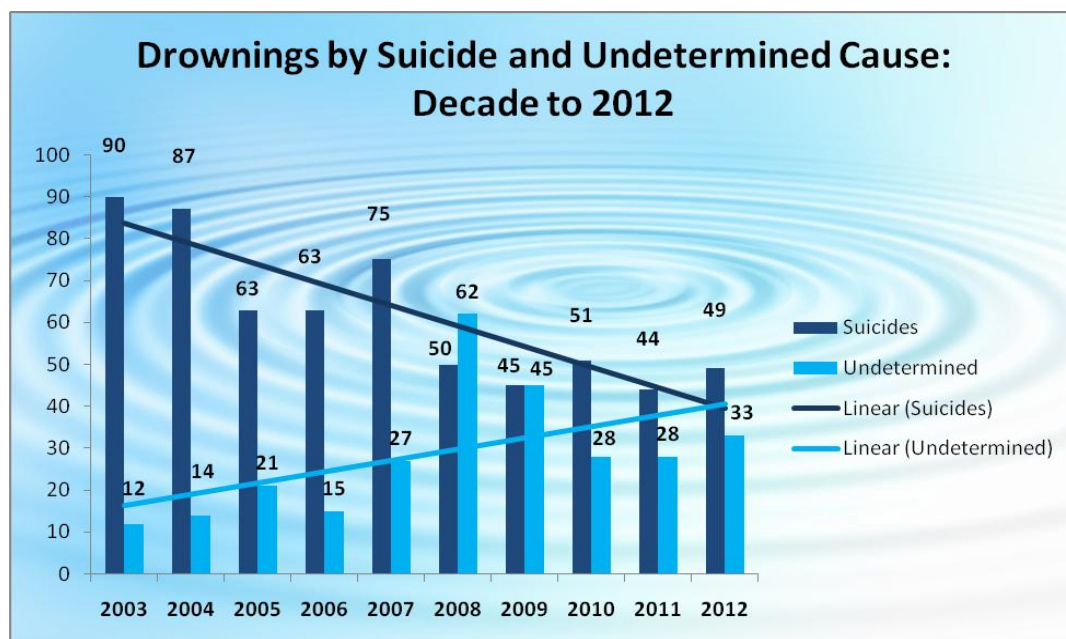
In exercising its mandate Irish Water Safety (IWS) has engaged in a wide range of initiatives to promote water safety and general caution when in or close to water.



IWS recorded a decrease in the number of drownings in the decade to 2012, however while this was a welcome trend, there has been a significant increase in drownings since 2010.



The increase in drownings due to undetermined cause is also of concern as it is suspected that a high percentage of the undetermined drownings were as a result of suicide.



See Appendix 1 for statistics. Additional statistics are available at [www.iws.ie](http://www.iws.ie).

***The statistics on drowning and the wider national concern at the levels of suicide in the community, compels IWS to join with other stakeholders to address these tragedies.***

## Policy Statement

Irish Water Safety acknowledges that suicidal ideation and the action of suicide and the desire to self harm are issues which affect many people. These are issues that the service can respond to in a way which is direct, supportive and informed by good practice. The prevention of deliberate self harm is part of IWS policy on suicide prevention.

The purpose of this policy is to outline how IWS and its members should respond to;

- someone who they suspect may be contemplating suicide;
- someone who has expressed an intention to complete suicide;
- an individual who has attempted suicide;
- a person who is considering or engaging in self harming behaviours;
- the general population in making them more aware of the dangers of water and how to act when in or on water.

While self harm and suicide are not mutually inclusive behaviours, responses to both these behaviours are contained within this policy.

It is clearly recognised that IWS, as an organisation, is not expert in all aspects of suicide awareness, intervention or prevention. There are a number of statutory, national voluntary and local organisations that are more specifically focused on suicide awareness and more knowledgeable in intervention techniques than most IWS members.

IWS must enter into joint ventures with both statutory and voluntary organisations to promote initiatives.

## Strategic Goals

The IWS Strategic Development Plan 2012 – 2017 contains five Strategic Goals to be achieved in the lifetime of the Plan.

These are:

1. To promote the public awareness of water safety.
2. The promotion of measures, including the advancement of education, related to the prevention of accidents in water,
3. The provision of instruction in water safety, rescue, swimming, resuscitation and recovery drills,
4. The promotion of efficiency and standardisation of the lifeguard service and the establishment of national standards for lifeguards, lifesaving and water safety,
5. Conduct our business in accordance with codes of practice and guidelines for statutory bodies.

In the implementation of these strategic goals the objective of this document is to:

- Outline what has and is being done by IWS,
- Outline actions that can be implemented.



## Objectives of Suicide Prevention Strategy

The very first objective in the IWS Strategic Development Plan is to: 'Develop further Strategies to help reduce suicide through drowning' so it is appropriate that the objectives of the Suicide Prevention Plan be aligned to the Strategic Goals of the Organisation's Development Plan.

### ***1 - To promote the public awareness of water safety.***

IWS compiles and disseminates statistics (See Appendix 1) relating to all drowning, whether by 'accident', 'suicide' or 'undetermined'. The statistics contain a range of relevant data e.g. age and gender, feed in to national data and inform public awareness on the cause of deaths in Irish society. IWS will continue to compile and disseminate these statistics. It will endeavour to identify 'at risk' groups through statistical analysis and create relevant reports.

IWS will continue to highlight the level of 'undetermined' causes of drowning which may mask correct figure on suicides by drowning. It will continue to express concerns at the delay in providing official statistics and at the high level of 'Undetermined' causes or "Open Verdicts" made by Coroners

IWS currently interacts with the following Organisations:

- Health Service Executive (HSE);
- National Office for Suicide Prevention;
- HSE Regions Suicide Resource Officers;
- The National Suicide Research Foundation organises and facilitates Suicide Prevention Projects such as Optimising Suicide Prevention Implementation, Limerick;
- Console;
- The Samaritans;
- Irish Association of Suicidology – brings together Statutory Bodies, Government Departments, Medical and Voluntary Bodies involved in the prevention/treatment of suicide;
- Pieta House;
- End of Life Forum (organised by Irish Hospice Foundation).

IWS will continue to interact with these Organisations and will explore additional opportunities for partnerships. The purpose of the interaction is fourfold:

- Continue to provide data on the instances of suicide by drowning – drowning is not the main form of suicide yet it is significant and therefore important that it receives due attention,
- Examine the possibilities of joint initiatives in awareness, prevention and intervention,

- Through its contributions all bodies become aware of IWS role in the prevention of suicide by drowning and
- In the event of IWS personnel requiring assistance in dealing with a situation we will ensure that protocols are in place to facilitate that assistance. We will continue to direct persons affected by a suicide to Console or other organisations for their bereavement services.

IWS will liaise with HSE Suicide Resource Officers to promote the establishment of County/City Development Board "action plans" for suicide prevention using access to funding from Pobal – work by Waterford City & County Development Board's Action plan should be further examined in this regard.

The Suicide Prevention Group will continue to exist with the remit of promoting the recommendations of the report throughout the Organisation and monitoring progress in implementing the specific strategies contained in this document. It will also liaise with outside Organisations on opportunities for further initiatives on suicide prevention.

## ***2 - The promotion of measures, including the advancement of education, related to the prevention of accidents in water.***

The mandate of IWS is, inter alia, to promote awareness of water safety and the prevention of accidents in water. The mandate is exercised nationally by trained volunteers and there may be occasions where these volunteers encounter situations that give rise to concern of self-harm or suicide.

The HSE delivers two courses on suicide prevention - safeTALK and ASIST. Both courses are delivered locally through HSE Suicide Resource Officers.

safeTALK is a half day course on 'Alertness',

ASIST is a two day course on 'Intervention'

Both courses are confined to people over 18 years of age

It is recommended that all active IWS volunteers - Instructors, Examiners, Lifeguards, members of Water Safety Area Committees, Water Safety Development Officers and any IWS personnel involved in Search and Rescue- should initially participate in the safeTALK course.

*It is recommended that, having completed the 'SAFE' talk, all Search and Rescue personnel do the ASIST course and that all other personnel be encouraged to do so.*

Community Rescue Boats Ireland (CRBI) is a voluntary service provided within a number of communities throughout the country. CRBI volunteers are trained and CRBIs are audited by IWS. The benefit of extending this service to a suicide preventative role should be examined. Such a service is currently being provided by

volunteers at some locations with high incidents of suicide. A comprehensive training programme would be required with very strict protocols applying to all volunteers involved in delivering this service.

Historically IWS has cooperated with The Samaritans in incorporating a Helpline number on IWS ringbuoys where suicides have occurred. Some work has been done in extending this Helpline number to further ringbuoys.

It is recommended that this Helpline number appear on all ringbuoys.

It is further recommended that the feasibility of erecting large signs with appropriate wording and Helpline numbers at known locations of multiple drowning by suicide be examined.

### ***3 - The provision of instruction in water safety, rescue, swimming, resuscitation and recovery drills.***

IWS, through its various programmes, teaches people safety in or near water. Ideally every person in the State should know how to swim or at least save themselves from danger when in or near water. Every effort should be made to progress towards this goal.

'Aquatics' are a component part of the Physical Education Strand of the Primary School Curriculum. The Primary Aquatics Water Safety (PAWS) programme was developed to facilitate the delivery of aquatics at Primary level. A similar JAWS programme was developed for delivery in second level schools.

The current student level in Ireland is:

First Level     516,460

Second Level 359,047

There are 3,300 Primary and 723 Secondary Schools delivering education.

(Source – Department of Education and Skills)

An annual target of new schools participating in PAWS and JAWS should be agreed and delivered during the term of the current Strategic Development Plan.

Summer Swim Safety Week courses are delivered each year in some locations throughout the country and have proven to be very popular. An annual increase in the number and participation in Summer Swim Safety weeks should be agreed and delivered by Water Safety Area Committees.

Water Safety Area Committees should examine ways of further promoting greater access to water safety courses among adults.

***4 - The promotion of efficiency and standardisation of the lifeguard service and the establishment of national standards for lifeguards, lifesaving and water safety.***

IWS is affiliated to and actively participates in programmes to standardise lifeguard services and achieve best international standards for lifeguards, life saving and general water safety.

***5 - Conduct our business in accordance with codes of practice and guidelines for statutory bodies.***

IWS, as the Statutory Body with responsibility for promoting awareness of water safety, does not have the expertise in the range of mental, social, financial or interpersonal issues that compel a person to suicide or self-harm and must therefore work in partnership with both statutory bodies and voluntary organisations who do have the necessary skills to intervene and help avoid tragedy.

The Working Group established by IWS will continue to interact with these groups with a view to promoting joint initiatives.

# APPENDIX 1

## STATISTICS

