

FLOAT TO SURVIVE

Float to Survive Evaluation Report

Results from an evaluation of the
Randwick City and Waverley Council
Summer 2022/2023
Float to Survive Campaign



**UNSW Beach Safety
Research Group**

Report prepared for Randwick City and Waverley Councils by the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group, May 2023. This project was jointly funded by Randwick City and Waverley Councils.

Principal Contributors:

Professor Robert Brander, William Koon, and Dr. Amy Peden.

Float to Survive Core Graphics:

Randwick City and Waverley Council

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Executive Summary

A beach safety campaign with the message Float to Survive was trialled in Sydney's Randwick City Council and Waverley Council Local Government Areas (LGA) in the summer of 2022/2023. The purpose of this campaign was to promote floating as a safety action to take for those who find themselves in distress when swimming or bathing in the ocean. The campaign was disseminated by the Councils using a variety of methods and an independent evaluation of the educational effort was conducted by researchers from the UNSW Sydney Beach Safety Research Group. The evaluation employed online surveys of Randwick and Waverley residents before and after the campaign and beachgoers at popular beaches within these LGAs to assess public response to the campaign and its' effectiveness.

In general, the majority of survey respondents reported that they were able to float in the ocean (90%), found the message easy to understand (90%) and supported promotion of the message throughout Australia (85%). These results were consistent between people with and without previous surf lifesaving experience. People were more likely to be supportive and enthusiastic about Float to Survive after they saw the campaign.

Float to Survive could be improved by incorporating additional text and information relating to what a person should do after floating, such as signaling for help, and why floating would result in a positive outcome. It should also be promoted in conjunction with the 'swim between the flags' message as it represents a follow-on safety message for when people do find themselves in distress in the water.

Some concerns were raised about the applicability of the message given that not all people can float, and that floating is not always possible or practical in all surf conditions. There were also concerns regarding difficulty in comprehending the message by those with a non-English speaking background. These concerns support increased efforts in teaching people of all ages and backgrounds, particularly at-risk groups, how to float and swim.



1. Introduction and Background

Coastal drowning continues to be a significant problem in Australia (Koon, 2023). Surf Life Saving Australia's (SLSA) most recent National Coastal Safety Report identified 141 unintentional drowning deaths along the Australian coast in the 2021/22 financial year, well above the 10-year average of 122 drowning deaths (SLSA, 2022). In New South Wales, 55 unintentional drowning deaths were recorded in the coastal environment, the largest number of any Australian state or territory (SLSA, 2022).

Swimming is the leading activity prior to coastal drowning in Australia, implicated in 29% of all drowning deaths in the 2021/22 financial year (n=41) (SLSA, 2022). On beaches, strong and narrow offshore flowing rip currents (Castelle et al., 2016) are a particularly significant risk factor for coastal drowning, as they have been involved in 22% of all unintentional fatal drownings in the Australian coastal environment over the last 10 years. This proportion is likely to be even higher with a further 33% of cases having unknown rip current involvement (SLSA, 2022).

Several key safety public messages have been promoted in Australia to motivate beachgoers to make safe decisions when they go to the beach. The primary message has been to 'swim between the flags' which encourages beachgoers to swim between the red and yellow flags on beaches patrolled by professional lifeguards or volunteer surf lifesavers, and in some cases, both. Studies have shown that the vast majority of Australians are aware of this message (Uebelhoer et al., 2022). However, it is estimated that less than 5% of Australian beaches are actively patrolled by lifeguards/lifesavers (SLSA, 2022) and of those that are patrolled, many are done so only seasonally and do not include popular swimming times in the early morning and late evening.

Many unpatrolled beaches are also easily accessible, close to holiday accommodation, and popular tourist destinations (McKay et al., 2014). Despite being well aware of the 'swim between the flags' message, many people actively choose to swim at unpatrolled beach

locations (Uebelhoer et al., 2022). SLSA recently released a Summer Coastal Drowning Report (SLSA, 2023) and reported 54 coastal drowning deaths over the 2022/23 summer, of which 100% occurred at unpatrolled beaches and 43% were related to rip currents.

Other safety messages have been promoted over the years in Australia that attempt to take into account the issue of swimming at unpatrolled beaches, outside of the red and yellow flags, and the rip current hazard. These include '*No flags, no swim*', '*If we can't see you, we can't save you*', '*To escape a rip, swim parallel to the beach*', '*If you get caught in a rip current, know your options*', and '*The Think Line: stop, look, plan*'. However, the effectiveness of these messages and associated education campaigns have yet to be fully assessed.

1.1 The Float to Survive program

One of the key messages promoted in Australia and globally in regards to the rip current hazard is that people should float if caught in a rip current as this action conserves energy and allows the person in trouble to assess their situation and signal for help. Floating and calling for help has traditionally been common safety advice provided to swimmers and bathers in a variety of waterway environments.

Organisations such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) in the United Kingdom have heavily promoted a 'Float to Live' campaign (Royal National Lifeboat Institution, 2023), as a drowning prevention measure that is based on research (Barwood et al., 2011; 2016; 2018).

In Australia, the not-for-profit organisation Surf Educators International (SEI) recently developed a Float to Survive education campaign that was adapted from the RNLI 'Float to Live' campaign. SEI is led by Bruce Hopkins, President of the Australian Professional Ocean Lifeguards Association (APOLA) and a high-profile Waverley Council Lifeguard thanks to the reality television show Bondi Rescue (Warton & Brander, 2017). The Float to Survive

campaign aims to align with the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030 aspirational goal of reducing drowning by 50% and aspires to be adopted for all waterways (Australian Water Safety Council, 2021).

On 23 August and 30 September 2022, a group of representatives from Randwick City Council, Waverley Council, SEI, SLSA, Surf Life Saving New South Wales (SLS NSW) and the UNSW Beach Safety Research Group (UNSW BSRG) convened with Federal MP for Kingsford-Smith, Matt Thistlethwaite, to discuss piloting and evaluating a dedicated Float to Survive water safety campaign in Australia. It was decided that in the first instance, the campaign would be trialled solely in the Randwick City and Waverley LGAs during the summer of 2022/2023. Based on the Australian Bureaus of Statistics 2016 census, these LGAs have resident populations of 141,000 and 67,000 respectively and have some of the most visited beaches in Australia, primarily Bondi Beach in Waverley and Coogee Beach and Maroubra Beach in Randwick.

1.2 The 2022-2023 Float to Survive campaign

The Float to Survive campaign was launched by Randwick City and Waverley City Councils on 1 December 2022 and was promoted alongside, and complementary with, the traditional beach

safety message ‘swim between the red and yellow flags’. The campaign developed core graphics that were utilised in promotional materials including a YouTube video hosted on the Randwick City Council channel. The message was communicated through outdoor advertising, including at bus stops and digital displays at beaches, Council eNewsletters and social media (Council websites, Facebook, Instagram), and cinema advertising at the Randwick Ritz theatre. An independent mural was also painted along the promenade at Bondi Beach during the summer (photo below). A full description of the promotional campaign is given in Table 1. In some mediums, such as the YouTube video, the Float to Survive message included the following text:

Five steps to float:

- Keep calm and control your breathing;
- Lean back;
- Extend your arms and legs;
- Gently rotate your arms and legs in a circular motion;
- Signal for help with your hand if you can.

Promotion of the campaign continued throughout the summer over various periods and in some cases, extended into autumn.



Mural along the Bondi Beach promenade (photo: R Brander).

1.3 Media coverage

A media release was sent out by Randwick City and Waverley Councils several days prior to the official campaign launch on 1 December 2022 and resulted in significant media coverage that continued throughout the summer. Overall, the Float to Survive campaign was covered in 115 separate media mentions including 98 online and print newspapers, 16 television items and 23 radio items. Some of the more notable media coverage included a Channel 9 News story on 30 November 2022 and a feature story in the Sydney Morning Herald on 1 December 2022.

1.4 Evaluation aims and objectives

The UNSW Beach Safety Research Group was asked to conduct an independent evaluation of the Float to Survive campaign. This involved conducting online surveys of residents within the Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs both before

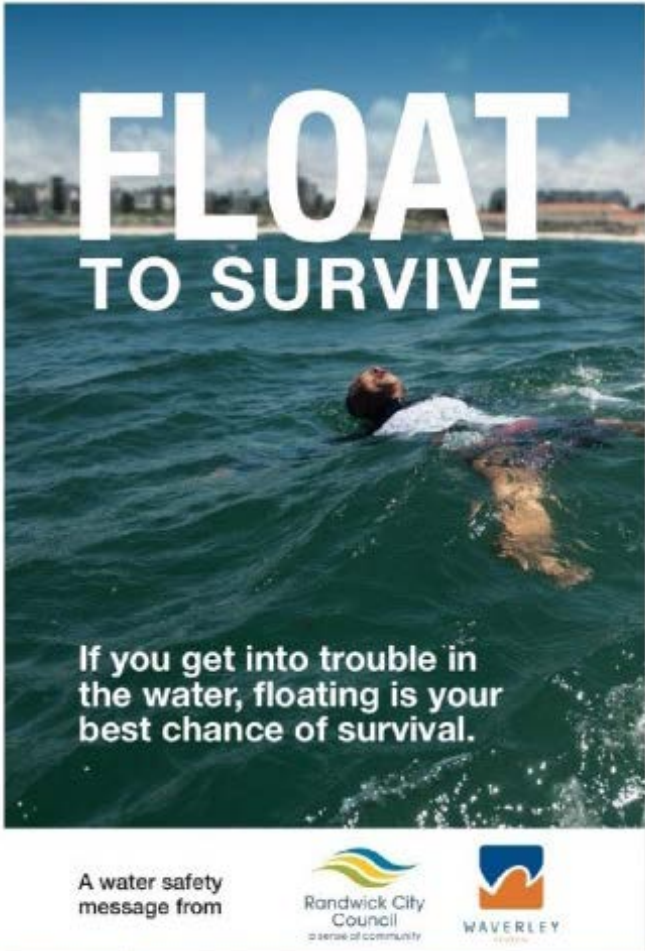
and after the campaign had run. Surveys were also conducted in-person during the campaign at popular beaches within both LGAs.

The primary aim of this evaluation was to assess whether the Float to Survive campaign was successful in improving recognition, understanding and recall of the message by the general public and beachgoers. Secondary aims included an evaluation of attitudes and opinions towards Float to Survive as a water safety message and to see if the campaign had altered public/beachgoer self-reported knowledge and behaviour in relation to how to react if they found themselves in trouble in the water.

The ultimate objective of the evaluation was to provide an evidence-based platform to assess whether the Float to Survive message should be promoted on a wider spatial scale in Australia.

Table 1. Promotional material and approaches used for the Float to Survive campaign by Randwick City Council (RCC) and Waverley Council (WC) from 1 December 2022.

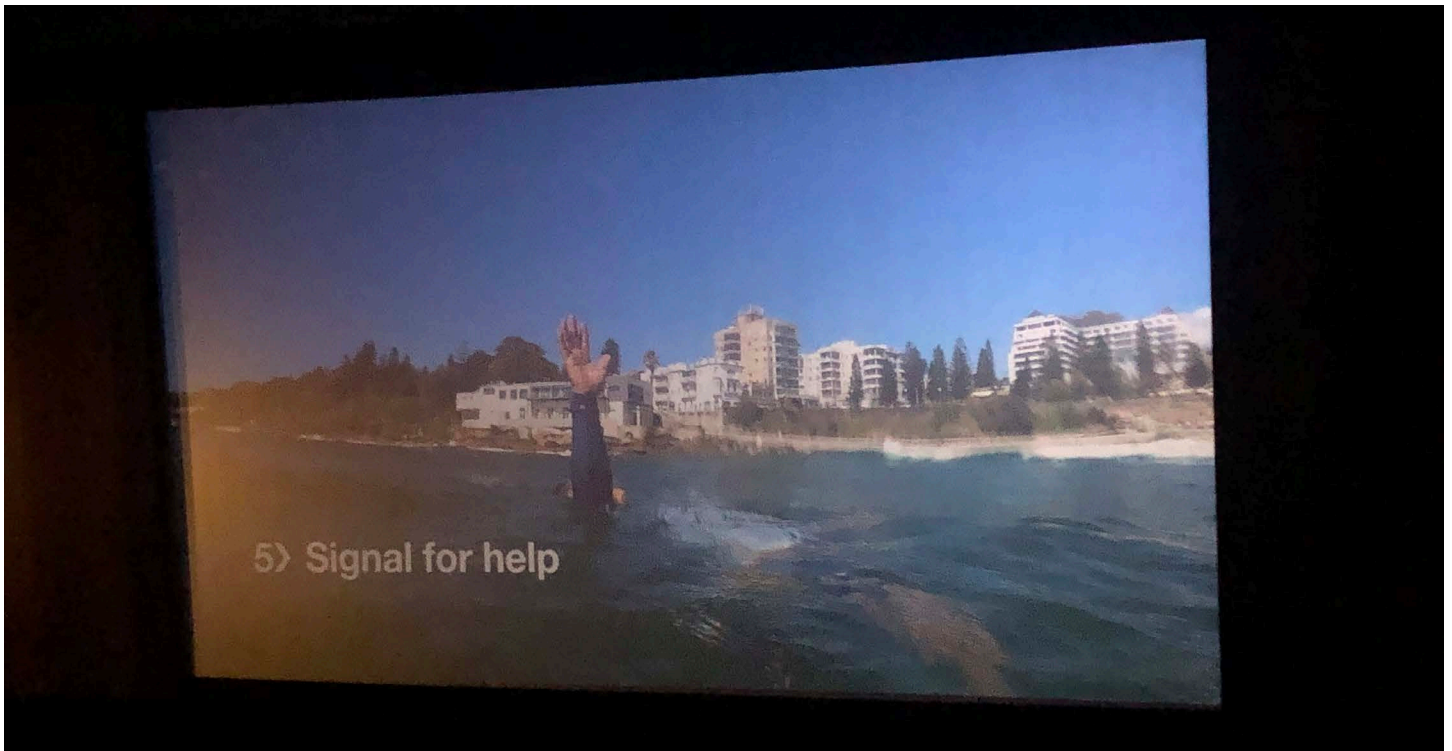
Activity	Council	Start Date(s)	End Date(s)	Description
30 second YouTube Video	RCC/WC	1/12/2022	Ongoing	2k views as of May 2023
Randwick eNews	RCC	1/12/2022	28/2/2023	eNewsletter
Waverley Weekly	WC	1/12/2022	23/2/2023	eNewsletter
Council Website	RCC	1/12/2022	28/2/2023	Web banners
Council Website	WC	1/12/2022	28/2/2023	Home carousel banner
Council social media	RCC	1/12/2022	28/2/2023	FB and Instagram posts
Council social media	WC	1/12/2022	23/2/2023	FB and Instagram posts
Bus stop posters	RCC	3/1/2023	7/2/2023	Core graphic
Cinema ad – Randwick Ritz	RCC	18/12/2022	31/1/2023	30 s video shown pre-movies
Digital display ad	RCC	1/12/2022	28/2/2023	Coogee and Maroubra Beach
Cinema ad - Flickerfest	WC	20 /1/2023	29/1/2023	30 s video shown pre-movies
Scene Magazine	RCC	13/3/2023	31/3/2023	Distributed to 60,000 homes
Mural – Bondi Beach	WC	6/2/2023	Ongoing	On Bondi esplanade wall



Core graphics for Float to Survive campaign, supplied by Randwick City and Waverley Councils.



Float to Survive display on digital sign at Coogee Beach (Photo: W Koon).



Float to Survive cinema ad shown at the Ritz Cinema in Randwick (Photo: W Koon).

2. Evaluation Methodology

This section describes the methods employed across the Float to Survive campaign evaluation. Data collection involved the creation and dissemination of Pre-Campaign (PRE) and Post-Campaign (POST) online surveys of residents of the Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs. Additionally, a short in-person survey (BEACH) was administered at Bondi, Coogee, and Maroubra Beaches during the Float to Survive campaign. Copies of these surveys are provided in Appendix A.

All surveys were limited to respondents aged 18 years or older and were approved by the UNSW Sydney Human Research Ethics Panel under Project #HC22776.

2.1 Survey development and recruitment

The PRE and POST surveys were distributed using Qualtrics online survey software. The PRE survey consisted of 9 primary questions (Appendix A) and took approximately 3-5 minutes to complete. The POST survey consisted of 11 primary questions and 19 questions in total if respondents answered ‘Yes’ to Q. 9 ‘*Did you see or hear about the Float to Survive beach safety message promoted this summer?*’ (Appendix B). Depending on the response to Q.9, the POST survey took approximately 3-10 minutes to complete.

Links to the online URLs for the PRE surveys were promoted by Randwick City and Waverley Councils via eNewsletters, news items on websites and social media posts between 15 – 29 November 2022. A

similar approach was taken for the POST surveys following the end of summer by Randwick City and Waverley Councils between 1 – 12 March 2023. The BEACH surveys intended to capture a large sample size in a short period of time and were designed to be short in length and consisted of 7 questions (Appendix C) and took approximately 1-2 minutes to complete. BEACH surveys were conducted at Maroubra Beach (Randwick City LGA) on February 11 2023, Coogee Beach (Randwick City LGA) on February 18th 2023, and Bondi Beach (Waverley LGA) on February 25th, 2023 using a paper-based survey.

To increase participation in the surveys, respondents were offered the chance to enter a draw to win one of five \$100 Coles/Myer gift vouchers.

2.2 Data analysis

Data were cleaned and analysed in SPSS V27 statistical software. Using postcode, the PRE and POST surveys were cleaned to ensure only respondents residing within the Waverley and Randwick LGAs were included. Postcodes used for each LGA are as depicted in Table 2. No postcode cleaning was required for the BEACH surveys as responses were included regardless of the respondents’ residential postcode. However, numerous respondents chose not to indicate their postcode.

Table 2. Postcodes used in the analysis by local government area (LGA).

Local Government Area	Postcodes
Randwick City Council	2021, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2052
Waverley Council	2022, 2024, 2026

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses results from the evaluation surveys. PRE and POST survey results are shown together for questions which appeared in both surveys, results of the BEACH survey are presented in a separate section owing to the different data collection methodology involved. Selected quotes by respondents in open answer questions are shown within the report proper and a full list of open answer responses is provided in Appendix D.

3.1 PRE and POST survey comparisons

A total of 719 people responded to the PRE survey across the Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs. Of these, 85.3% resided in the Randwick City Council LGA, a reflection of the greater population within the Randwick City Council.

A total of 242 people responded to the POST survey across the Randwick and Waverley LGAs. Of these, 73.6% resided in the Randwick LGA. Responses were likely lower in the POST survey across the Randwick and Waverley LGAs due to survey fatigue and potential confusion regarding the differences between the PRE and POST surveys.

3.1.1 Respondent demographics

Almost three quarters of the PRE and POST survey respondents were female (PRE: 70.5%; POST: 73.6%; Figure 1) and approximately a quarter were male (PRE: 28.8%; POST: 24.8%). Although survey responses show a bias towards females, this is typical of survey-based research which often sees a higher response rate among females compared to males.

Responses from the PRE and POST surveys were received across all age ranges, with the largest proportion of respondents to both being aged 36-45 years (25.6% and 25.2%, respectively; Figure 2).

As the Float to Survive campaign and message was presented only in English, which may pose problems for those with lower levels of English, both surveys asked respondents if they spoke a language other than English at home. Just 13.5% and 14.5% of the PRE and POST surveys indicated that they did.

Australia has significant volunteer surf lifesaving and professional lifeguard services, who are responsible for thousands of rescues at beaches every year. To understand the opinions about the Float to Survive message from those with surf lifesaving experience, respondents were asked if they had been, or were currently, a member of a Surf Life Saving Club. Approximately a quarter of respondents from both the PRE and POST surveys answered 'Yes' (24.8%; and 25.2%; respectively).

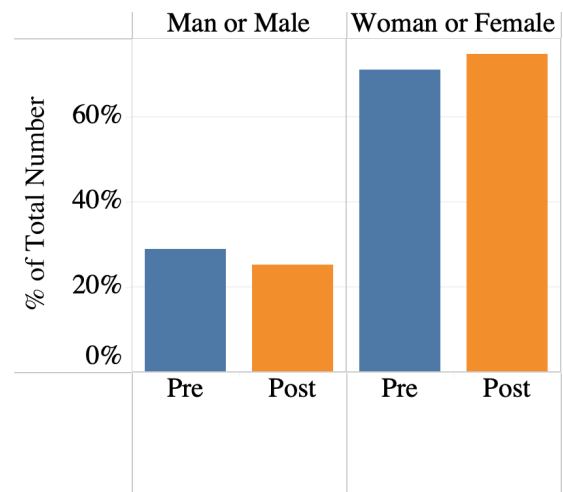


Figure 1: Gender comparison PRE and POST survey

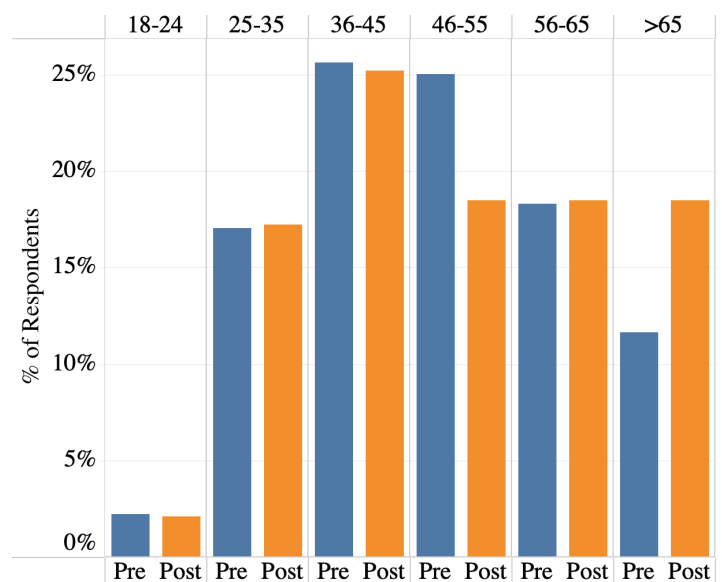


Figure 2: Age group comparison PRE and POST survey

3.1.2 Ability to float

To gauge the efficacy of the Float to Survive message, survey respondents were asked if they were able to float in the ocean. The majority of both PRE (94.0%) and POST (92.1%) surveys self-reported being able to float in the ocean (Figure 3A).

A lower proportion of respondents who indicated they spoke a language other than English at home indicated they could float in the PRE (88.7%) and, in particular, the POST survey (77.1%). Only eight respondents of the PRE survey indicated they did not know what the term ‘float’ meant, and all of these indicated they spoke English at home.

Respondents who indicated that they could float in the ocean were then asked how comfortable they felt floating in the ocean (Figures 3B). Both the

PRE and POST surveys yielded similar responses with over half of respondents indicating they were very comfortable and about a quarter of respondents indicating they were moderately comfortable with floating in the ocean.

Respondents who indicated they spoke a language other than English at home were less likely to report feeling either very (PRE 44.3%; POST 40.0%) or moderately comfortable (PRE: 27.8%; POST 11.4%) floating in the ocean compared to those who spoke English, although a higher proportion of those who spoke a language other than English reported feeling moderately comfortable floating in the ocean in the PRE survey (27.8%) compared to the POST.

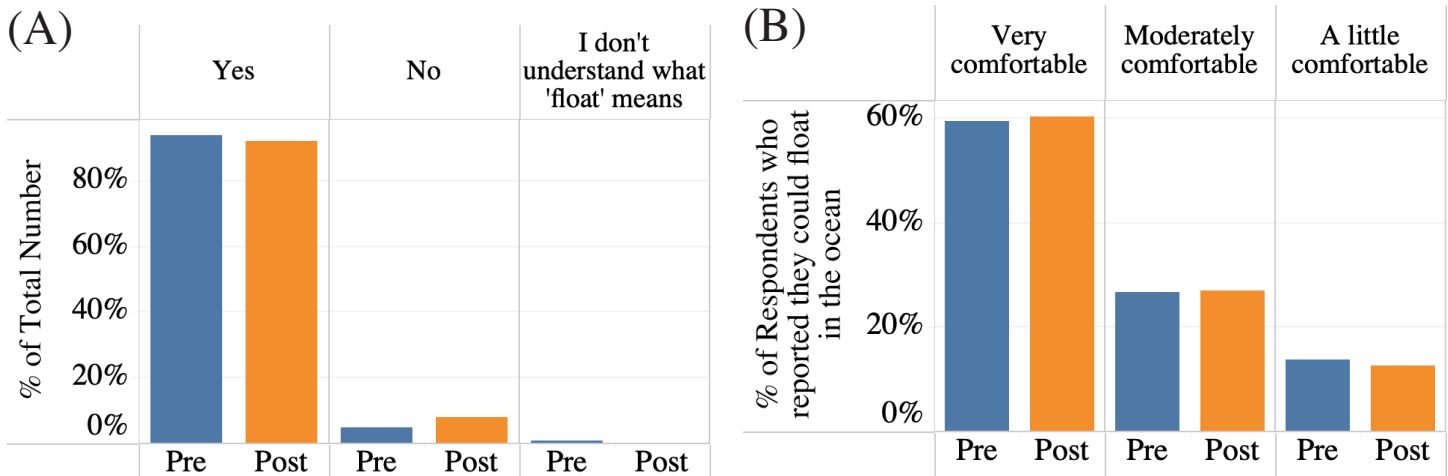


Figure 3: (A) % of total respondents that self-reported they could float in the ocean ; (B) Comfort level floating in the ocean among those who self-reported they could float.



3.1.3 Familiarity with beach safety messages

In order to gauge public familiarity with common beach safety messages, respondents of the PRE survey were presented with a list of common beach safety messages described in Section 1 and were asked which of the messages they were familiar with or had heard before (Figure 4). ‘Swim between the red and yellow flags’ was the most familiar beach safety message (99.3%), followed by ‘to escape a rip, swim parallel to the beach’ (75.7%) and ‘no flags, no swim’ (62%). Despite the survey being conducted prior to the launch of the Float to Survive campaign, 28.1% PRE respondents stated they had previously heard of the Float to Survive message. This is likely related to previous print, radio and television news media given to the Float to Survive message, in particular promotion carried out by Surf Educators International (SEI).

In order to directly assess the effectiveness of the promotion of the 2022/2023 Float to Survive campaign, respondents to the POST survey were given the same list of safety messages and were asked which one’s they had seen or heard about during the summer (Figure 4). While ‘Swim between

the red and yellow flags’ was still the most commonly reported beach safety message by respondents (85.1%), Float to Survive was the second most commonly recognised message, with 54.1% of respondents indicating they had seen or heard it over the summer period (Figure 4) – an increase of 26% from before the campaign had been launched.

Of interest to beach safety practitioners, neither of the recent rip current public messaging campaigns by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) - ‘If you get caught in a rip current, know your options’ and ‘The Think Line: Stop, Look, Plan’ - had a high degree of recall by either PRE or POST survey respondents (Figure 4).

The final question of the PRE survey asked respondents if they thought Float to Survive should be promoted as a beach safety message. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63.7%) indicated ‘Yes’ (Figure 5). There was no difference in the response to this question between respondents who indicated they were currently, or had previously been, a member of a Surf Life Saving Club (‘Yes’ = 64.6%) and respondents who were not (‘Yes’ = 63.4%).

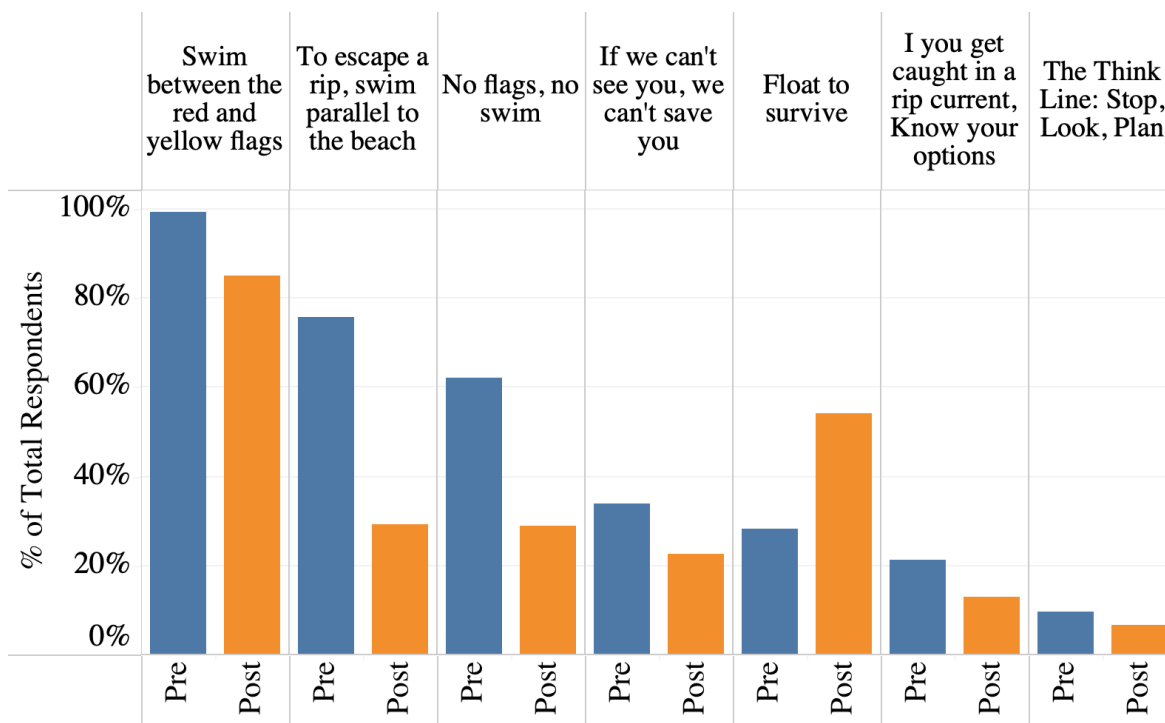


Figure 4: Familiarity of PRE and POST Float to Survive campaign survey respondents with common beach safety messages.

Respondents who indicated they spoke a language other than English at home were less likely to think Float to Survive should be promoted (59.8%) and more of this cohort were unsure (36.1%).

Respondents were then asked if they would like to comment further regarding their opinion about Float to Survive as a beach safety message. Selected responses are provided in Table 3 and are grouped thematically.

As evident by the majority of positive responses to the message, many respondents expressed enthusiasm about Float to Survive. Many others were supportive of the message, but felt that it should be promoted with additional information including how to signal for help and why floating helps for survival (Table 3). It should be noted that while ‘signal for help’ was promoted in the Float to Survive YouTube video, it did not appear in the core graphic which was promoted widely. Others suggested that it should be promoted alongside existing beach safety messages such as ‘swim between the flags’. Some respondents expressed concerns about the fact that

not everyone can float, that floating can be difficult in energetic surf conditions, and that the message should be translated into different languages with context (Table 3). Others expressed the opinion that there were already too many beach safety messages being promoted. A full list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

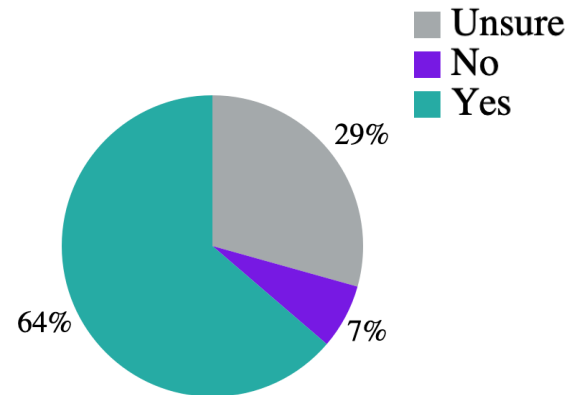


Figure 5: Responses to the question ‘Do you think Float to Survive should be promoted as a beach safety message?’ in the PRE survey.

Table 3: Selected free text responses about Float to Survive as a beach safety message. Responses are grouped thematically. All responses can be found in Appendix D.

Positive responses about Float to Survive:
<i>“Learning how to float is extremely important and requires very little energy so you don’t tire easily.”</i>
<i>“I think it’s a very simple message and lots of people would be able to float. Great idea.”</i>
<i>“I’ve never heard this saying before, but I like it. If people knew how to float were confident in their ability to do so, there would be so many fewer issues with people panicking and getting into trouble”</i>
Suggestions for improvements by providing additional information:
<i>“Floating sounds very passive and it’s not obvious to me how I make it back to shore safely if all I do is float. Is the idea that lifeguards will notice me?”</i>
<i>“It is a simple and clear phrase which should be easily understandable. Discussion around the benefits/logic of floating when in ‘trouble’ would give added understanding.”</i>
<i>“Should be paired with raise your hand for help. Otherwise surf lifesavers won’t know there is help required.”</i>

Table 3 continued...

<p>Concerns about ability to float and fear:</p> <p><i>“I think this message only really works for people who can already swim.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m all for it although I have friend who is not naturally buoyant”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m a weak swimmer and very uncomfortable floating in the ocean because I’m scared. I would be scared that if I floated, I wouldn’t be seen and could float further out into the ocean’.</i></p>
<p>Use with other beach safety messages and strategies:</p> <p><i>“Is floating enough? I think it’s part of the beach safety message, but should be used in combination with swimming between the flags and if we can’t see you we can’t save you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Much better to focus on swimming abilities. Floating can take you further away from shore very quickly, resulting in panic. Also you aren’t watching the ocean when you’re floating.”</i></p>
<p>Concern with regards to tourists, multicultural communities and children:</p> <p><i>“Just unsure how this would be understood by overseas visitors or people who don’t swim often. Panic as they floated might be a problem”</i></p> <p><i>“...For too long the assumption is everyone speaks English. There should be 1. Multilingual lifesavers who sue their languages 2. Multilingual announcements on the beach complemented by prominent multilingual signage 3. It should be compulsory for airlines to play a water safety video before landing to advise the rules (swim between flags, float to survive, or whatever.”</i></p> <p><i>“You would need images/clips to show what the slogan means. A lot of people that get into trouble are from overseas so you should consult those non-English and non-ocean knowledgeable groups on how best to get the message across”</i></p> <p><i>“Good campaign, but it should be explained in a way that kids and those who are learning English can understand.”</i></p>
<p>Negative responses about Float to Survive:</p> <p><i>“We’re talking about the ocean. The waves etc make that impossible. It doesn’t make sense.”</i></p> <p><i>“When out in the surf among breaking waves, floating is not really an option.”</i></p> <p><i>“Float to survive on its own feels a bit vague. Under what conditions would you float to survive? Is it specifically if caught in a rip? Floating is also not a way to attract a rescuer’s attention, so feels a bit counter-intuitive.”</i></p>

3.2 Exposure to the Float to Survive Campaign

Respondents to the POST survey were asked how often they went to an ocean beach in the Randwick City or Waverley Council areas over the 2022/2023 summer. In general, respondents were frequent beachgoers with 70.1% saying that they visited the beach 1-2 times per week or more frequently (Figure 6).

Respondents to the POST survey were asked if they had seen or heard the Float to Survive beach safety message being promoted over summer. Those who responded ‘No’ or ‘Unsure’ were then directed to the final question of the survey: ‘Do you think Float to Survive should be promoted as a beach safety message’, which is discussed later in Section 3.2.5.

In the POST survey, 60.3% of respondents indicated they had seen the message (Figure 7). When explored as a proportion of all respondents per LGA, a higher proportion of Randwick City Council LGA residents had seen or heard the Float to Survive message than Waverley Council LGA residents (Figure 7).

3.2.1 Where, how, and how often did they see the message?

All respondents who said they had seen or heard the Float to Survive message during the summer were then asked further questions relating to the Float to Survive campaign. First, respondents were asked how or where they saw it promoted. Respondents were given a list of dissemination methods (Table 1) and could choose any options that were relevant, as they may have seen or heard the message via multiple channels. As shown in Figure 8, respondents of the POST survey most commonly saw or heard the Float to Survive message via social media (39.3%), followed by newsletters/e-news (29.8%) and on-beach digital information screens, which were only available at Coogee Beach and Maroubra Beach in Randwick City Council.

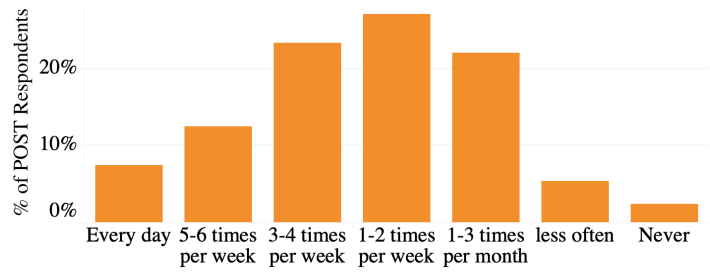


Figure 6. Frequency of ocean beach attendance in Randwick and/or Waverley LGAs over summer by respondents to the POST Float to Survive campaign survey.

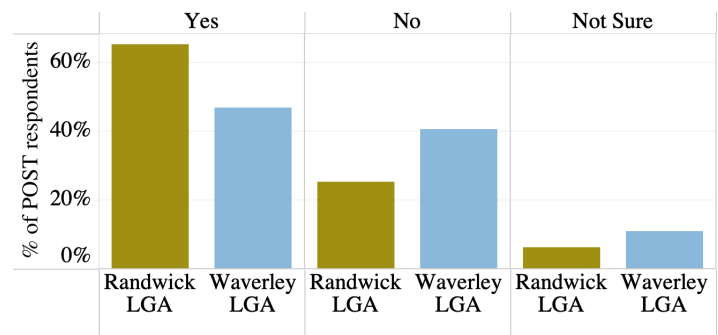


Figure 7. Responses to the POST survey question ‘Did you see or hear about the Float to Survive message promoted this summer.’

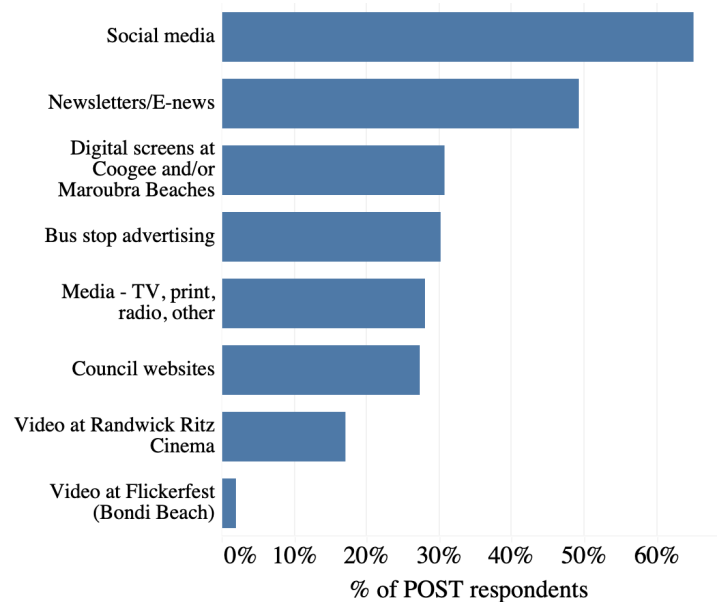


Figure 8. Promotional outlets where the Float to Survive message was seen and/or heard about during the summer by respondents of the POST survey.

Respondents who had seen the Float to Survive message were then asked how many times they saw the message during the summer. Approximately two-thirds (66.4%) recalled seeing the message between 1-9 times (Figure 9). By LGA, a larger proportion of Waverley residents indicated they saw or heard the Float to Survive message only once over the summer, when compared to the Randwick LGA. Randwick LGA residents were more likely than Waverley LGA residents to report having seen or heard the message a few times, many times and a lot (Figure 9).

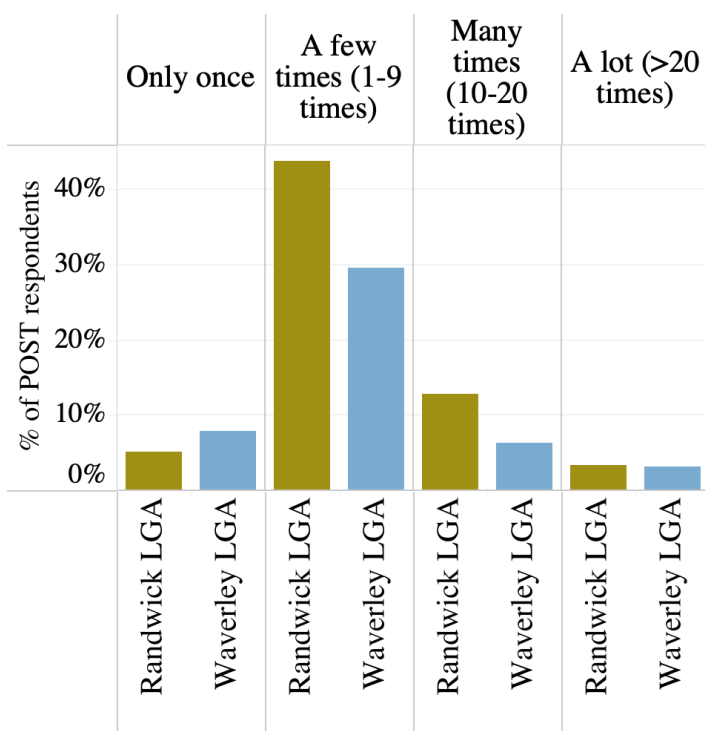


Figure 9. Number of times that respondents to the POST survey reported having seen or heard about the Float to Survive message during the summer.

3.2.2 Was Float to Survive ‘easy to understand’?

Respondents who recalled seeing the Float to Survive message were then asked if they thought the message was ‘easy to understand’ and the vast majority (90.4%) responded that it was. In general, those respondents with previous surf life saving experience were more likely to think that the message was easy to understand (62.3%) compared with those with no surf lifesaving experience (51.9%).

Respondents who indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home were less likely (45.7%) to think the message was easy to understand compared to English speakers (56.0%).

Those who answered this question were invited to provide further comment on their answer if they wanted to. Selected free text responses are thematically grouped and presented in Table 4. Not surprisingly, the majority of comments supported the notion that the message was easy to understand, but some responses provided valuable insights into how the message could be improved, particularly in terms of providing greater information about how to float and in a way that is clearer for inexperienced swimmers and non-English speakers (Table 4). Many of these themes build upon those from Table 3. Of note, one respondent suggested that the core graphic/video of the campaign could be improved by having the man shown floating rescued in order to show a positive outcome for floating to survive (Table 4). A full list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

Table 4. Selected responses regarding the ease of understanding of the Float to Survive campaign.

<p>Simple message and easy to understand:</p> <p><i>“It is a simple message that is easy to remember”</i></p> <p><i>“Saw it with a photo and was pretty clear”</i></p> <p><i>“Float to Survive is a clear message for all types of water”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes it was very simply and effectively presented”</i></p> <p><i>“It tells people what to do. Great message. Swim between the flags doesn’t help if you’re stuck in a rip.”</i></p>
<p>Easy to understand, but concern around clarity of how floating was communicated:</p> <p><i>“I thought the float message was very easy to understand however the directions on how to float (positioning of the body) was not as clear”</i></p> <p><i>“Should have basic tips on how to float, a lot of people find difficulty in being able to relax and float in moving water”</i></p>
<p>Concern about message recall, inexperienced swimmers and non-English speakers:</p> <p><i>“Issue is not if its easy to understand. Issue is will people think of it when panicking in water”</i></p> <p><i>“It is for me but less so for people who aren’t comfortable in the ocean and with swimming”</i></p> <p><i>“I understand it, but people with non-English backgrounds might not”</i></p>

3.2.3 Did you 'like' the Float to Survive message?

Respondents to the POST survey who recalled seeing the Float to Survive campaign were then asked if they 'liked' the Float to Survive message with 85.6% saying that they did. Respondents with previous surf lifesaving experience had a slightly higher proportion of respondents who liked the Float to Survive message (55.7%), as opposed to those without surf lifesaving experience (50.3% liked it).

People who spoke a language other than English were only slightly less likely to report liking the Float to Survive message (51.4%), than those who only spoke English (51.7%).

Those who answered this question were invited to provide further comment on their answer if they wanted to. Selected free text responses are thematically grouped and presented in Table 5. While most of the comments were positive and indicated a preference for floating rather than swimming as a survival strategy, some concerns were again raised in relation to the Float to Survive message over-simplifying real world scenarios and not being an option for those who can't float. A full list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

Table 5. Selected responses regarding whether the respondent 'liked' the campaign.

<p>Liked it for a variety of reasons:</p> <p><i>"It made me feel like I know what to do if I was in trouble in the water"</i></p> <p><i>"It cleared up what to do in a rip"</i></p> <p><i>"Good simple advice and easy to remember"</i></p> <p><i>"Great message!! It will save lives. No point telling people who are stuck in a rip and can't swim to swim between the flags or swim parallel to the beach. They're already in trouble. They need to float to survive."</i></p> <p><i>"It was reassuring to hear that floating is enough! If I were caught in a rip and thought I needed to swim out of it, I would be more likely to panic"</i></p> <p><i>"I teach kids to swim, and floating to survive is a message and action we practice. For example, swim and roll. If you are tired, out of breath, etc, roll on to your back."</i></p> <p><i>"It was a good discussion point with my 11 year old son, we practiced floating together a couple of times"</i></p>
<p>Concerns:</p> <p><i>"It oversimplifies by forgetting that people will try to self rescue, will then panic and will forget to float (despite floating being an excellent strategy)"</i></p> <p><i>"Panic can preclude the idea of floating and if a poor swimmer, floating isn't easy - and there are some people who find floating difficult"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel it's counter intuitive - if you're in trouble in the surf you wouldn't just want to 'float' away ...surely you'd want to wave your arms and attract attention...?"</i></p> <p><i>"Doesn't leave much hope for those who can't float. I know how I am meant to float but I have never been successful in actually floating so to keep seeing that apparently the only way to survive is by doing something I know I have never had success with doesn't help me to relax"</i></p> <p><i>"Too many different messages about beach safety - I would prefer a single minded focus on "swim between the flags" the message of beach safety gets ignored when lost in multiple messages transmitted"</i></p> <p><i>"It has a bit of ick factor that I'm not sure young people or young males would relate to."</i></p>

3.2.4 Should Float to Survive be promoted? Nationally?

Similar to the PRE survey (Figure 5), POST survey respondents were asked: ‘Do you think Float to Survive should be promoted as a beach safety message?’

87.1% of the POST survey respondents thought that Float to Survive should be promoted, an increase of 23.4% from the PRE survey.

These results were similar for respondents who had previous surf lifesaving experience (82%) and those that did not (84%). A high proportion of respondents who indicated they spoke a language other than English at home also supported promotion of the message (85.7%), an increase of 25.9% from the PRE campaign survey.

The POST survey respondents were told that the Float to Survive message was only promoted in the

Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs during the summer and were asked if they thought the message should be promoted more widely throughout Australia. The majority (86.3%) agreed that it should be promoted more widely.

Selected free text responses on wider promotion of Float to Survive as a safety message are presented in Table 6. While the majority of responses were supportive and no reasons were given specifically why Float to Survive should not be promoted nationally, similar thematic concerns emerged in relation to considering multiple audiences and providing more detail if the message was to be expanded (Table 6). Concerns about not everyone being able to float were also raised as was the potential for the new message to confuse people given that many other beach and water safety messages exist (Table 6). A full list of responses is provided in Appendix D.

Table 6. Selected responses regarding promotion of Float to Survive as a beach safety message.

<p>Support for promoting nationally:</p> <p><i>“Why not. Plain English, easy to remember. It’s a no-brainer.”</i></p> <p><i>“Easy to remember and very helpful”</i></p> <p><i>“This is so important because your first impulse is to fight the situation instead of floating”</i></p> <p><i>“Brilliant message and applicable to all water situations. Swim between the flags doesn’t save lives once people are in trouble in the water.”</i></p> <p><i>“If just one lost of life can be prevented, it would be worthwhile.”</i></p> <p><i>“If it is effective, it should be used everywhere”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes if it’s a proven strategy”</i></p>
<p>Concerns about promoting nationally:</p> <p><i>“When I see people get into trouble they are often not locals. I wonder how easily it is to get this message out broadly.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m not sure it’s the answer to safety in the water...personally I find it difficult to float in the ocean and it’s quite disorientating!”</i></p> <p><i>“Again - I feel like it needs some addition like “stop drop roll” where it encourages floating before exhaustion and cognitive decline in panic”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes if it’s a proven technique to survive, but can be confusing if other messages are also promoted (e.g. swim parallel)”</i></p> <p><i>“NOT EVERYONE CAN FLOAT ‘ – I even heard teens at the Ritz saying they would drown as they cannot float”</i></p>

Table 6 continued...

<p>Positive responses suggesting improvement to primary message:</p> <p><i>“Great initiative - more info to know what to do while floating would be good... Put arm up? How to relax body & stay calm? Calling out for help? How to navigate waves - holding breath, turning head away etc? Advice on not getting a big mouthful of seawater that causes coughing & spluttering - the ultimate panicker?”</i></p> <p><i>“Float to Survive is a terrific easy to understand message and it is the best safest thing to do if you are in difficulty in the water. However, I think a lot of people funnily enough don’t know how to actually float! Learning to swim is of course a necessity however floating should be taught too.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just needs a sub line after the main line (FTS) to be a bit more specific.”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe add ‘you will be rescued’, ‘wave your arms’, ‘keep your mouth closed’, ‘don’t try and swim back to beach.’”</i></p> <p><i>“I didn’t get the message about what to do after floating, so that could be communicated better.”</i></p>
<p>Float to Survive as part of a more wide-reaching campaign:</p> <p><i>“It’s not just beaches - the number of drownings is shocking this year. The float to survive should only be one aspect of a multicultural/lingual broadly disseminated messaging of a kind mentioned before.”</i></p> <p><i>“Great to see Councils putting out safety messages. All Councils should get behind this campaign.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s good but would make more sense to see it intertwined with other surf life saving messages about patrolled beaches, swimming between flags and maybe some common sense things that would prevent people from getting into a bad situation to begin with.”</i></p>
<p>Suggestions for further promotion:</p> <p><i>“I swim in a pool regularly including Speedo at Bondi 2xs per wk. The 333 bus should promote this message plus other clear picture signs on Campbell Pde.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’d take it a step further and run a campaign reminding everyone to take a floatation device e.g. life jacket, boogie boards etc. with them when they go swimming in the ocean or in bays.”</i></p> <p><i>“Needs more visibility. Especially for casual beach goers or tourists, the signage wasn’t adequate.”</i></p>
<p>Message effectiveness:</p> <p><i>“I have not swum at a Sydney beach this summer, but while snorkelling at Lord Howe Is December 5, 2022, I got caught in a rip. I remembered the advice, floated and was able to swim on my back across the rip to shore.”</i></p>
<p>Criticism of Float to Survive:</p> <p><i>“Panic can preclude the idea of floating and if a poor swimmer, floating isn’t easy – and there are some people who find floating difficult.”</i></p> <p><i>“NOT EVERYONE CAN FLOAT – I even heard teens at the Ritz saying they would drown as they cannot float.”</i></p>

3.2.5 Recall of the message in the water

The main aim of the Float to Survive campaign is to save lives for those who find themselves in distress in the water. While it is not possible over a short-time period to assess this aim, POST survey respondents were asked if they had found themselves in trouble in the water at the beach during the summer and if

they did, whether they recalled the Float to Survive message. Only 13 respondents (9.1%) who answered this question reported getting into trouble in the water. Eleven of the 13 (84.6%) indicated that they recalled the message when this happened. However, it was not clear if it actually helped them in that situation (Figure 14).

3.3 On beach survey

3.3.1 Respondent demographics

A total of 366 people participated in the face-to-face hard copy surveys conducted at beaches (BEACH) during the Float to Survive campaign. The majority were conducted at Maroubra Beach (37.7%) and Coogee Beach (29.8%) in the Randwick City Council area. A third (32.5%) were obtained from Bondi Beach in Waverley Council. Of the total respondents, 63.7% were female. As shown in Figure 10, the largest proportion of respondents were aged 25-34 years, accounting for nearly half (48.9%) of the total sample. Most respondents lived in Australia (89.1%); 4.3% were from the United Kingdom and 1.2% each were from Canada and the Netherlands.

The BEACH survey asked participants if they had heard of the Float to Survive message over the summer and most had not (Figure 11). By beach, a slightly larger proportion of respondents at Bondi reported seeing the Float to Survive message for the first time on the day of the survey (6.7%), as opposed to respondents at Coogee (4.6%) and Maroubra (3.6%). A slightly higher proportion of respondents at Maroubra Beach (15.2%) indicated they had seen or heard the message some other time compared to respondents at Coogee Beach (12.8%) and Bondi Beach (8.4%). The same proportion of respondents at Bondi and Coogee Beaches indicated they had not seen or heard of the message (80%), which was higher than Maroubra Beach respondents (75.4%).

The most common location to see the Float to Survive message was bus stop ads, followed by media and Randwick Council promotion (Figure 12). By beach, just 5.5% of respondents at Coogee Beach indicated they had seen the digital screens, while 4.3% of Maroubra Beach respondents reported seeing them.

BEACH survey respondents were asked if they liked the Float to Survive message and if they thought the Float to Survive message should be promoted. In both cases approximately four out of five people surveyed liked the message (80.9%) and thought it should be promoted (80.1%).

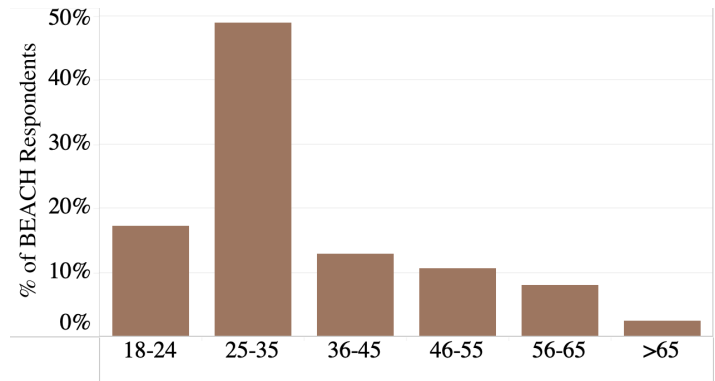


Figure 10. Age group of BEACH respondents

- No have not heard it this summer
- Seen or heard 'Float to Survive' some other time
- Seen or heard 'Float to Survive' today
- Not sure

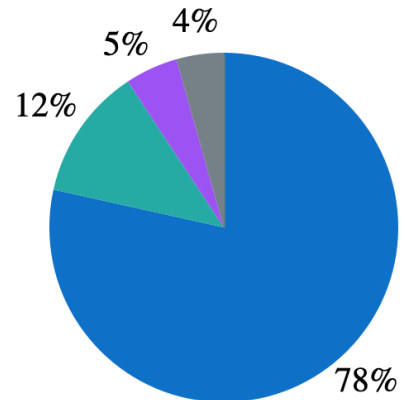


Figure 11. Awareness of the Float to Survive Campaign among BEACH survey respondents

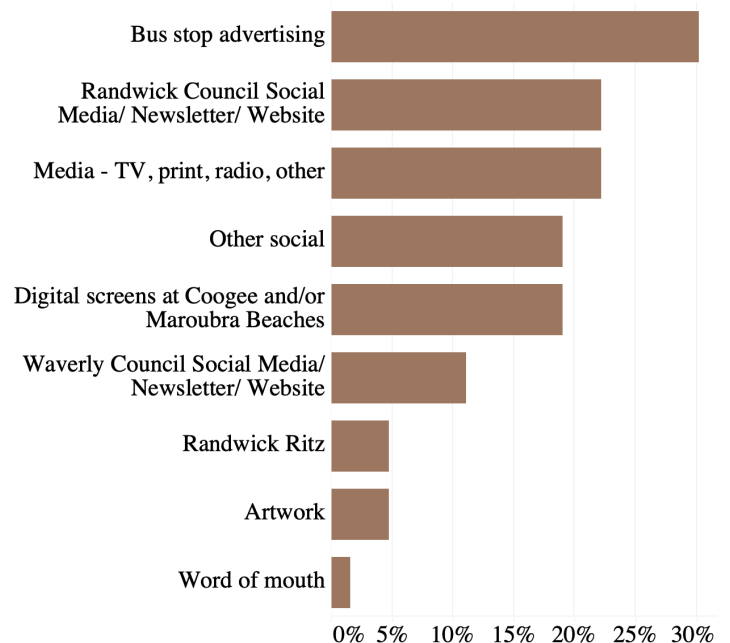


Figure 12. Mediums by which Float to Survive message was seen or heard – BEACH Survey

4. Summary and Recommendations

This study conducted an independent evaluation of the Float to Survive beach safety message and campaign that was developed and trialled in the Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs in the summer of 2022/2023. The primary aim of the evaluation was to assess whether the Float to Survive campaign was successful in improving recognition, understanding and recall of the message.

A secondary aim included an evaluation of attitudes and opinions towards Float to Survive as a water safety message and to see if the campaign had altered public/beachgoer self-reported knowledge and behaviour in relation to how to react if they found themselves in trouble in the water.

Results of this evaluation have shown that the Float to Survive message was received positively overall by the public and beachgoers, but there are areas where the message might be improved. The evaluation also yielded insights into the efficacy of the delivery of the Float to Survive campaign that will assist in the future promotion of this and other beach and water safety campaigns in general.

4.1 Acceptance of the Float to Survive message

The key tenet behind the Float to Survive message is an ability to float. This evaluation has shown that over 90% of surveyed Randwick City and Waverley Council residents are able to float with 80% feeling either very or moderately comfortable with floating in the ocean.

Prior to the campaign, approximately 65% of surveyed residents thought the message should be promoted and this increased to 87% for those who saw the campaign, suggesting that exposure to the campaign improved people's acceptance and enthusiasm for the message.

For those residents who reported seeing the campaign, 90% said they found the Float to Survive message easy to understand while approximately 85% liked it and thought it should be promoted throughout Australia. A positive response was also expressed by beachgoers surveyed in person with 80% liking the Float to Survive message and suggesting that it should be promoted. Importantly, the Float to Survive message was endorsed by the large cohort of respondents who had surf lifesaving experience.

4.2 Improvements and concerns

Based on feedback from surveyed Randwick City and Waverley Council residents this evaluation has also identified several ways that the Float to Survive message could be improved as well as some concerns.

A key suggestion was that the campaign is largely a standalone message that would benefit from additional information incorporated into the message and/or image graphic relating to what a person should do after they float, such as signalling for help and why floating would result in a positive outcome. It was also suggested that Float to Survive should be promoted in conjunction with the 'swim between the flags' message.



Some concerns were raised about the applicability of the message given that not all people can float and that floating is not always possible or practical in all surf conditions. There were also concerns regarding the potential confusion of having too many water safety messages as well as the difficulty in comprehending the message by those with a non-English speaking background.

4.3 Campaign promotion and effectiveness

The campaign run by Randwick City and Waverley Council was successful in promoting the Float to Survive message as evident by the significant increase in respondents who reported having seen the message compared to other safety messages. While the most common beach safety message before and after the campaign was ‘swim between the red and yellow flags’, Float to Survive increased from the fifth to the second most common beach safety message seen by respondents during the summer. Furthermore, 60% of Randwick City and Waverley Council respondents saw the campaign compared to only 3.8% of survey respondents in areas that did not have the campaign.

This evaluation has shown that most residents of Randwick City Council and Waverley Council who reported seeing the Float to Survive campaign did so through Council eNewsletters and social media suggesting that these might be the best media for future promotions in other LGAs and communities. Only 17% of beachgoers surveyed at beaches in the Randwick City Council and Waverley Council LGAs reported having seen the campaign. Those that did see the campaign reported having previously seen it mostly on bus stop advertising. However, the low number of beachgoers who had seen the campaign might have been related to the fact that the beach surveys were conducted after bus stop advertising promoting Float to Survive in the Randwick City Council LGA had finished and the fact that Waverley Council did not use bus stop advertising in their campaign. The low recall of having seen the Float to Survive message on digital sign displays at Maroubra

and Coogee beaches suggests that this method may not be as effective at communicating information as assumed. Waverley Council did not utilise digital sign displays at beaches to promote Float to Survive.

Although a small sample size, it is encouraging that 11 of the 13 survey respondents who indicated they had seen/heard the message during the summer and also found themselves in trouble in the water during the summer recalled the Float to Survive message in that situation.

4.4 Limitations of the evaluation

This evaluation had several limitations. Both the PRE and POST surveys were disseminated and promoted through Council eNewsletters and social media, potentially reaching a resident audience who regularly read this material as opposed to residents who do not. Residents who engage with this material were therefore more likely to see information about Float to Survive that was promoted on these channels during the summer, which may have biased the results of the POST survey. Results of the online surveys may therefore not be a completely accurate representation of the general Randwick City Council and Waverley population.

This is evident from the different results of the POST survey which showed that 60% had seen the campaign compared to the BEACH survey where only 17% had reported seeing it, although the latter represented a range of visitors from outside of the Randwick City Council and Waverley LGAs. Another limitation is that as the surveys were anonymous, it was not possible to match responses of people who may have done both the PRE and POST surveys.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that it is not possible in such a spatially and temporally limited campaign and the short evaluation period to quantify any impact of the Float to Survive message or campaign in terms of reducing the incidence of drowning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following major conclusions and recommendations regarding the Float to Survive message and campaign are presented in no particular order:

Float to Survive is an easy to understand and well received water safety message that has public support to be promoted nationally across Australia.

The Float to Survive message could be improved by incorporating a secondary message, or additional information, advising what to do after floating, such as signalling for help, and why floating will help result in a positive outcome.

Future Float to Survive graphics should incorporate an outcome to the floating action, such as a lifeguard, surf life saver or surfer coming to rescue.

More research, including focus group sessions with various communities and demographic groups, should be conducted to understand the best way to promote Float to Survive (and other safety messages) effectively.

The Float to Survive message should be translated with appropriate context into other languages.

The Float to Survive message, when used in the context of beaches, should be promoted in conjunction with 'swim between the red and yellow flags'.

Future promotion of the Float to Survive message should focus on social media platforms and on public transport visuals.

People of all ages and background should be encouraged to learn how to float and swim and be given greater opportunities to do so.

Appendices

Available for download by clicking on each link.

[Appendix A: Pre-Float to Survive Campaign Survey](#)

[Appendix B: Post-Float to Survive Campaign Survey](#)

[Appendix C: In-person BEACH Float to Survive Campaign Survey](#)

[Appendix D: Complete qualitative responses to open answer questions](#)

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