

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1770](#)

Main Petitioner: Margaret Spiers

**Subject:**

Calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to work with all relevant bodies across Scotland to improve water safety by ensuring that:

- All waterways have life-saving equipment such as lifebelts and buoyancy Throw Bags, with ropes, to allow multiple attempts at rescue; and
- Tampering with water safety equipment is made a criminal offence of endangering public safety.

### Background

[Water Safety Scotland](#) is a voluntary association of organisations and individuals whose main purpose is to understand the risks around water in Scotland and engage with partners to develop a consistent approach to the prevention of water related fatalities – the partnership could be asked how their work links with, or could deliver, the specific twin aims of the petition. Water Safety Scotland state:

“Drowning is among the leading causes of accidental deaths in Scotland”

Water Safety Scotland supports the [National Water Safety Forum](#) (NWSF). The [NWSF](#) is a UK led group which aims to reduce water related fatalities across the UK. Water Safety Scotland is represented as a member of NWSF. The NWSF was established in 2004 following a UK Government review of water safety, with the ambition of “creating a ‘one-stop shop’ for the prevention of drowning and water safety harm in the UK, recognising the broad range of existing stakeholder groups, their respective contributions, and their own brands and values, often towards charitable objectives”.

The Water Incident Database (WAID) was created by the National Water Safety Forum in order to provide reliable water incident data. For each incident, data is collected from numerous sources and merged into a comprehensive single incident account. This allows drowning incidents and key risk factors to be analysed. WAID's key aims are to:

- Provide insights into levels of risk enabling meaningful comparisons with activities outside the water sector, and the determination of risk acceptability.
- Supersede the uncoordinated efforts of organisations trying to establish national trends based on limited data of uncertain quality.
- Produce much better quality evidence
- Maximise value and minimise aggregate cost of data collection

According to the Water Safety Scotland website:

“The data from WAID shows that there were 46 accidental fatalities in Scotland in 2015. There were a further 26 suicides in Scotland”.

There are a number of Water Safety Scotland partners including [RoSPA](#),

[Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) was launched in January 2018. The Strategy states: “In 4 in 10 accidental drownings, the person had no intention of entering the water”.

The Strategy has two main targets:

- Reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide

To achieve these targets Water Safety Scotland has developed the following aims:

- Improve fatality incident data and intelligence across Scotland by advocating WAID and sharing WAID reports with partner organisations and local authorities
- Promote and develop learning to swim, water safety education and initiatives within early years, primary and secondary schools
- Develop water safety across Scotland’s 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies
- Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message across campaigns and communications
- Promote the safe participation of recreational activities across Scotland
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

The Strategy sets out further detail on how the targets and aims will be met.

In 2018, RoSPA released [“Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safety – Scotland Five Years on”](#). This was a five-year follow-on study from similar 2013. Overall, as in 2013, a mixed picture was found - several local authorities were addressing water safety but there was still very little consistency or uniformity. In response, RoSPA and RNLI agreed to hold the very first policy orientated workshop with the aim to help local authorities understand water safety policy, the barriers to implementing a policy and to

share key information and advice. The workshop was held in April 2019 in Perth. The [RoSPA National Water Safety Conference 2019](#) was held in London in November. RoSPA is hosting a Water Safety Conference in collaboration with Water Safety Scotland on 26 March 2020.

Collated information on the law around tampering with water safety equipment is not readily available on the Water Safety Scotland website, however this is an area worthy of further exploration.

### **Scottish Government Action**

The Scottish Government is a key Water Safety Scotland partner. 2020 has been designated as the [Year of Coasts and Waters](#) – which gives an opportunity to highlight these issues.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

There is a [Cross Party Group on Accident Prevention and Safety Awareness](#) – Clare Adamson MSP is the Convenor, with RoSPA providing the secretariat.

Some relevant recent PQs are reproduced below:

#### **Question S5W-21888: Maurice Corry, West Scotland, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Date Lodged: 28/02/2019**

To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that local authorities adopt a water safety policy to help prevent accidents, including drowning.

#### **Answered by Ash Denham (13/03/2019):**

The Scottish Government takes the issue of water safety very seriously and is supportive of the work of Water Safety Scotland and their National Drowning Prevention Strategy which was published in January 2018. While it is for individual local authorities to agree and adopt their own policy on water safety, I am aware that Water Safety Scotland is working proactively to build links with both national and local partners to promote water safety and drowning prevention. In October last year I wrote to all Community Safety Partnerships to encourage them to engage with Water Safety Scotland, so that we can all work together to promote safe enjoyment in and around water. The Scottish Government provides annual grant funding to RoSPA, which includes undertaking work around water safety, and in October last year they published refreshed guidance on "Safety at Inland Waters". RoSPA are currently working with water safety partners and will be hosting a workshop for local authorities to outline the benefits of having a policy on water safety, and to provide support for these to be developed.

#### **Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Water Safety Scotland regarding its work with local authorities to promote water safety and drowning prevention. (S5O-03178)

#### **The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham):**

First, I would like to pass on my sincere condolences to the loved ones of the two women who, sadly, died in Aberdeen on Good Friday.

The Scottish Government has supported water safety Scotland since the launch of its drowning prevention strategy in January 2018. My officials are meeting water safety Scotland and the Royal Life Saving Society UK this week as part of our continuing engagement. Although it is for local authorities to agree their own policy on water safety, I wrote last October to all community safety partnerships to support their work to promote water safety.

**Maurice Corry:**

With the upcoming year of coasts and waters in 2020, does the minister agree that Scotland's waters must be promoted in the safest possible way, especially considering the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' research that shows that 60 per cent of Scottish local authorities do not have a water safety policy?

**Ash Denham:**

I do. Obviously, Scotland has 90 per cent of all the standing freshwater in the United Kingdom and we want people to be able to enjoy the amazing countryside of Scotland in as safe a way as possible. Over the past five years, the Scottish Government has provided ROSPA with more than £600,000 in funding to deliver its annual home and water safety programme. This year, we are providing funding of £112,000, which will support delivery of the commitments set out in the drowning prevention strategy. We have also proactively supported implementation of the strategy and funded and distributed water safety educational material to 2,500 schoolchildren before the summer break last year, in partnership with ROSPA and water safety Scotland. We hosted a ministerial round-table meeting with water safety Scotland and sports governing bodies in June last year. A range of actions was agreed around data sharing, local authority engagement and education and awareness raising, which are being progressed by water safety Scotland. Just to reiterate my earlier answer, I also wrote to all community safety partnerships to encourage them to do all that they can with water safety Scotland to support and implement the strategy.

And a relevant recent motion:

**Motion S5M-17744: Clare Adamson, Motherwell and Wishaw, Scottish National Party, Date Lodged: 13/06/2019 R**  
**Drowning Prevention Week 2019**

That the Parliament welcomes Drowning Prevention Week 2019, which runs from 14 to 24 June; notes that the campaign, which has been created by the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), aims to reduce the number of drowning and non-fatal drowning incidents that occur in the UK every year by showing people how to be safe, and have fun, near water; understands that over 700 people drown in the UK and Ireland every year and that many more experience injuries, sometimes life changing, when they survive drowning; recognises that the campaign encourages schools, clubs, leisure centres and communities to promote water safety education through events, lessons, games and activities in a bid to make people more aware of the dangers of water, and commends RLSS UK and its partner agencies, such as Water Safety Scotland, on these ongoing efforts to promote water safety.

## UK Parliament

The issue of Water Safety and Life-saving Equipment was the subject for a [UK Parliament debate](#) in July 2019. This included reference that:

“In England and Wales, under the Criminal Damage Act 1971 vandalising life-saving equipment may be an offence that carries a maximum penalty of 10 years’ imprisonment, and an aggravated offence of that nature, which includes an intention to endanger life, attracts a potential maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The legislation in England and Wales therefore has the capacity to address the problem”.

**Graeme Cook**

**SPICe**

19 November 2019

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