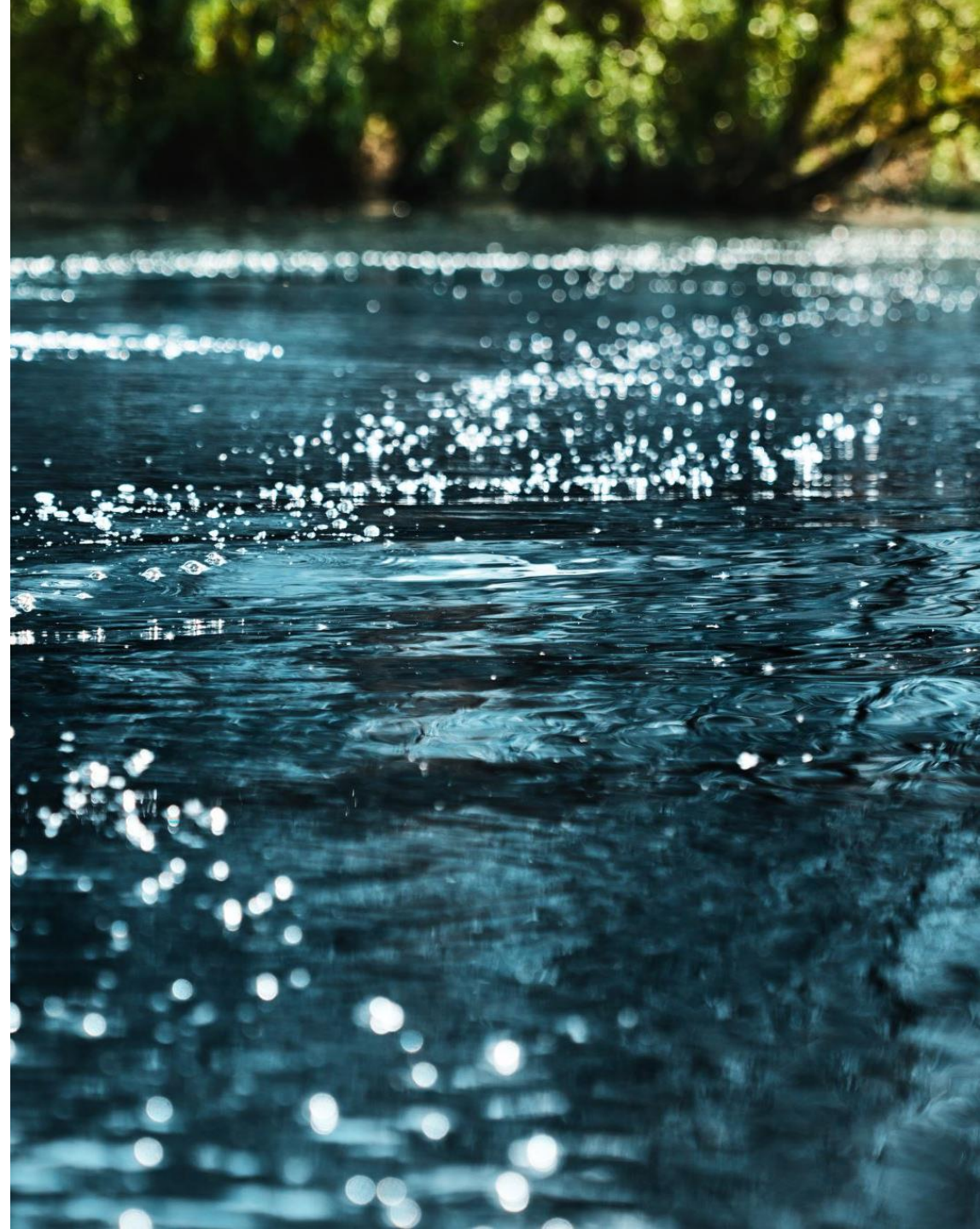




**UNSW**  
SYDNEY

# Diving into the unknown? Risk management considerations amid the revitalisation of inland waterways

Dr Amy Peden  
Senior Research Fellow, UNSW Sydney  
Honorary Senior Research Fellow, RLSSA  
[a.peden@unsw.edu.au](mailto:a.peden@unsw.edu.au)



# About me

- Born & raised in rural NSW
- Living in western Sydney, Australia
- Interest in rivers & rural communities
- 2 young children (4 and 8 years)
- Published widely on drowning prevention
- Work with a range of partners including:
  - World Health Organization
  - National Parks and Wildlife Service
  - NSW Office of Sport
  - NSW State Emergency Service
  - Royal Life Saving Society Australia
  - Surf Life Saving Australia





# About UNSW Sydney

- Teaching and research university
- Kensington in Eastern Suburbs of Sydney
- World Class drowning prevention researchers
- Assist with research, independent evaluation of any initiatives around water safety
- Advice on developing programs and campaigns
- UNSW Beach Safety Research Group ([beachsafetyresearch.com](http://beachsafetyresearch.com))



# Session outline

- Quick quiz while I take you through drowning and drowning risk in Australia
- Focus in on inland waterways, who drowns and why
- Hear about some examples of inland waterway revitalisation
- Think critically about the benefits but also the risks
- Look at some risk management considerations & resources
- What role can you play?
- Questions
- Dinner, drinks and dancing





# Drowning in Australia

- 323 drowning deaths FY 23/24
- 10 yr average 278
- 3 hospitalisations for every fatality
- 82% male
- Highest drowning risk in u/5s
- 33% swimming and recreating
- Significant economic cost
- \$1.24 billion annually
- Significant social, emotional trauma
- **PREVENTABLE!!!**

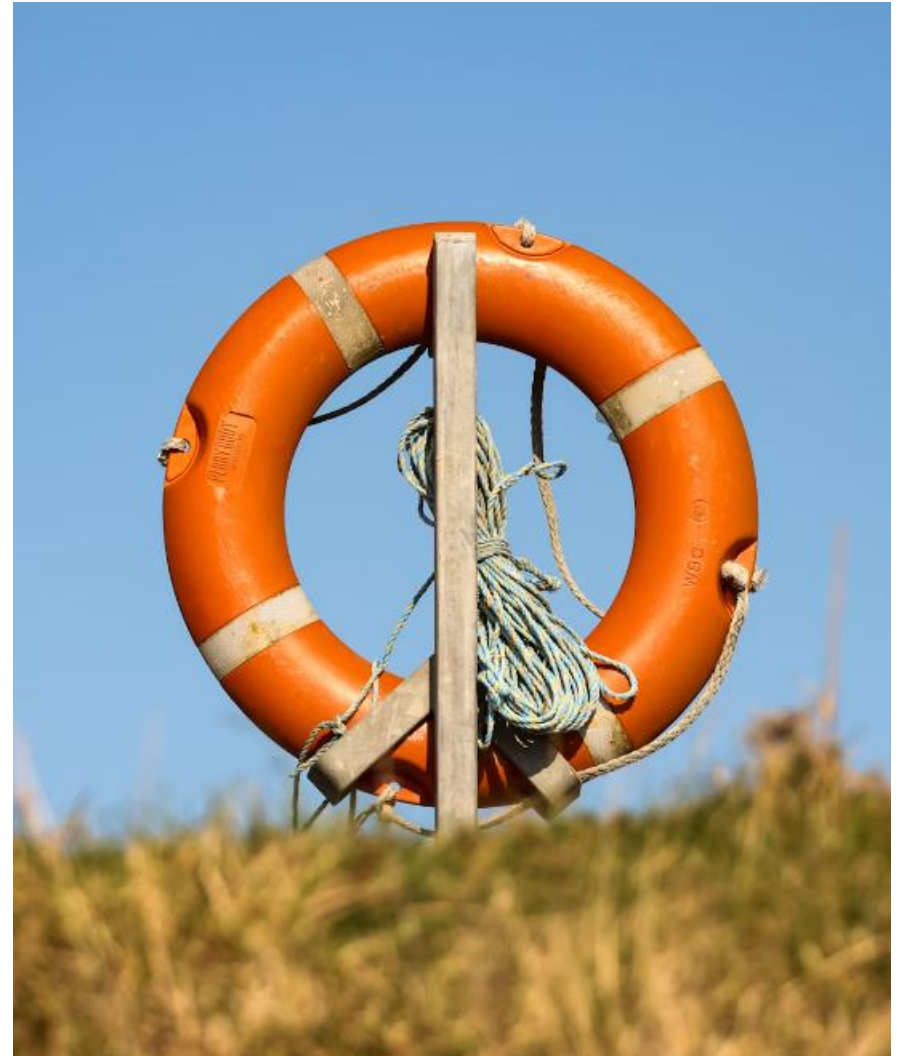


Image: Heather Wilde



# River drowning

- Consistently the leading location for drowning over the past decade in Australia
- 80% male
- Greater risk for adults and older adults than children
- Significant role of alcohol
  - Particularly during warmer weather & public holidays
- Higher risk in rural and remote areas
- Impact of flooding and extreme weather

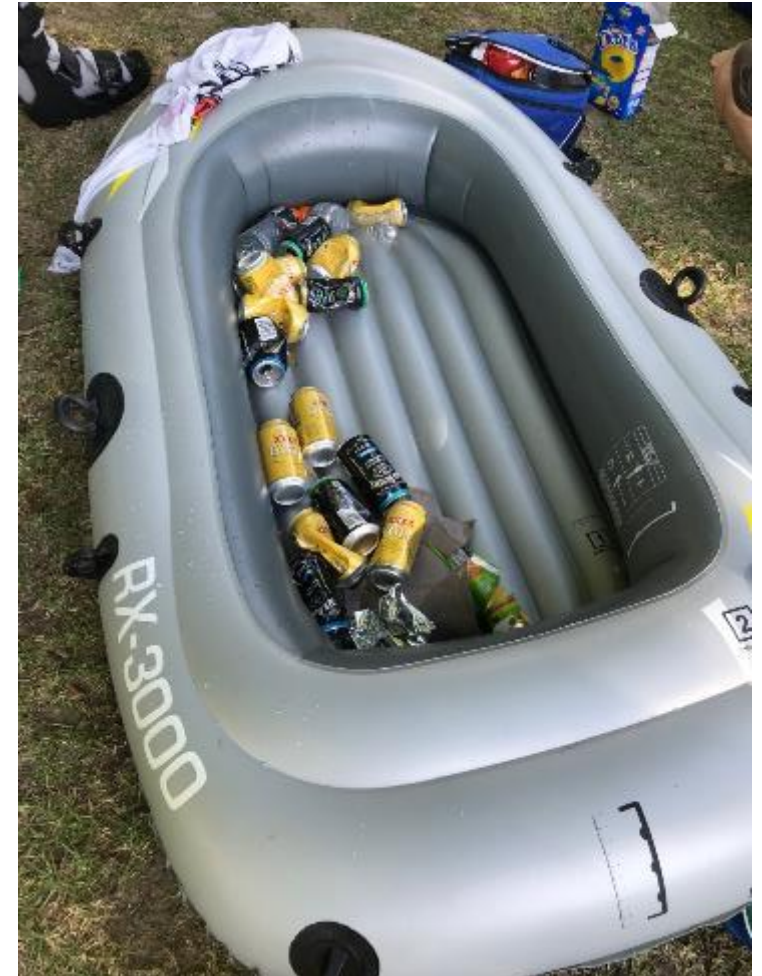


Image: Dr Amy Peden



# Our Masterplan sets out the steps needed to make the Parramatta River swimmable by 2025.

[Click here to find out more.](#)



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[Get involved](#)

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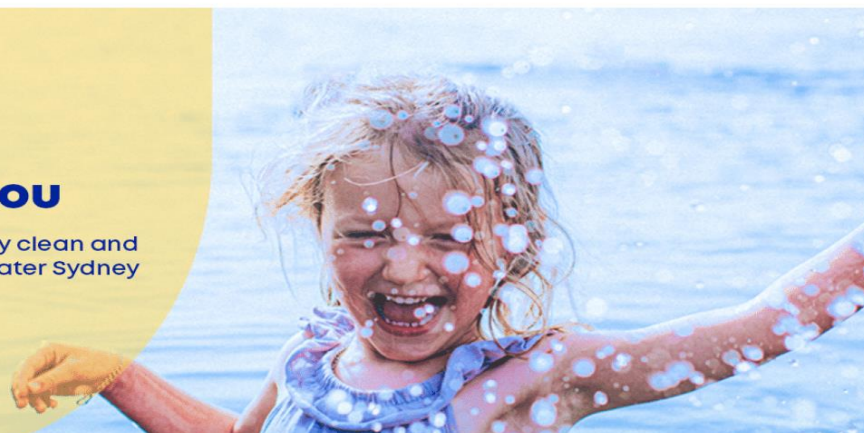
Sydney  
**WATER**

[Swim spots](#) 

## Bringing local swimming to you

Take the plunge at one of many clean and healthy waterways across Greater Sydney

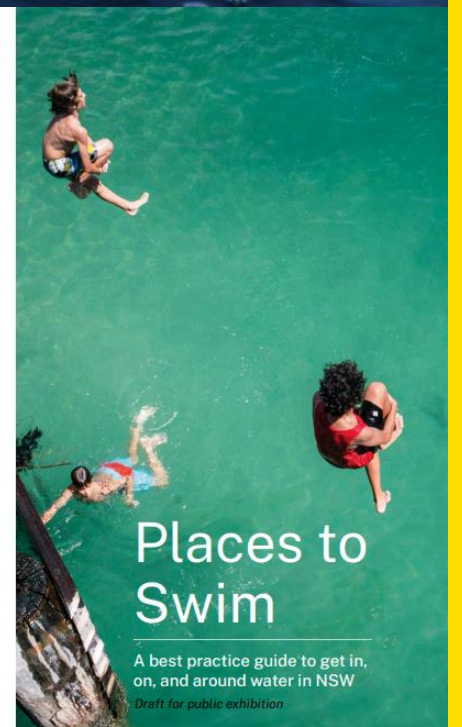
 [Find a swim spot](#)



Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

## Places to swim

Program guideline  
November 2021



## Places to Swim

A best practice guide to get in, on, and around water in NSW  
*Draft for public exhibition*





# Revitalisation of inland waterways

- Significant investment including through grant schemes
- Range of benefits
- Equity of access to water for communities far from the coast who experience high temperatures
- Cheaper than building a public pool
- Get us outdoors and recreating in nature
- Improves physical activity levels
- Boost mood
- Lowers stress and anxiety
- Tourism and employment benefits



Image: Ben White

# ...Revitalisation of inland waterways



Image: City of Parramatta Council



Image: NSW Government



# ...Revitalisation of inland waterways



Image: Paramatta River Catchment Group



Image: Inner West Council



# Penrith beach

## Western Sydney locals flock to newly opened Penrith beach dubbed 'Pondi'

ABC Radio Sydney / By Declan Bowring and Rosemary Bolger

Posted Tue 19 Dec 2023 at 3:21pm, updated Tue 19 Dec 2023 at 4:02pm



## Penrith beach death: acting NSW premier plays down safety fears

Lifeguards will take every possible precaution after man who came off a paddleboard failed to surface, Prue Car says

- [Seven dead in Australia's Christmas storms, with two still missing in Queensland](#)
- [Follow our Australia news live blog for latest updates](#)



# Risk Management Considerations

- Unique hazards and risks
- Environmental hazards
  - Flooding, rainfall and debris movement, heat
- Site selection
- Phone reception
- Emergency access/egress
- Infrastructure needed
- Playground location/barriers
- Licensed venues and alcohol sales
  - Designate alcohol free zones?



Image: Unsplash+

# Risk Mitigation Strategies

- Develop a Risk Management Framework
- Conduct risk assessments
- Local Water Safety Planning Committee
- Develop a Local Water Safety Plan
- Zoning aquatic activity
- Designated swimming and recreation areas
- Supervision
- Safety Signage
- Public Awareness and Community Education
- Public rescue equipment

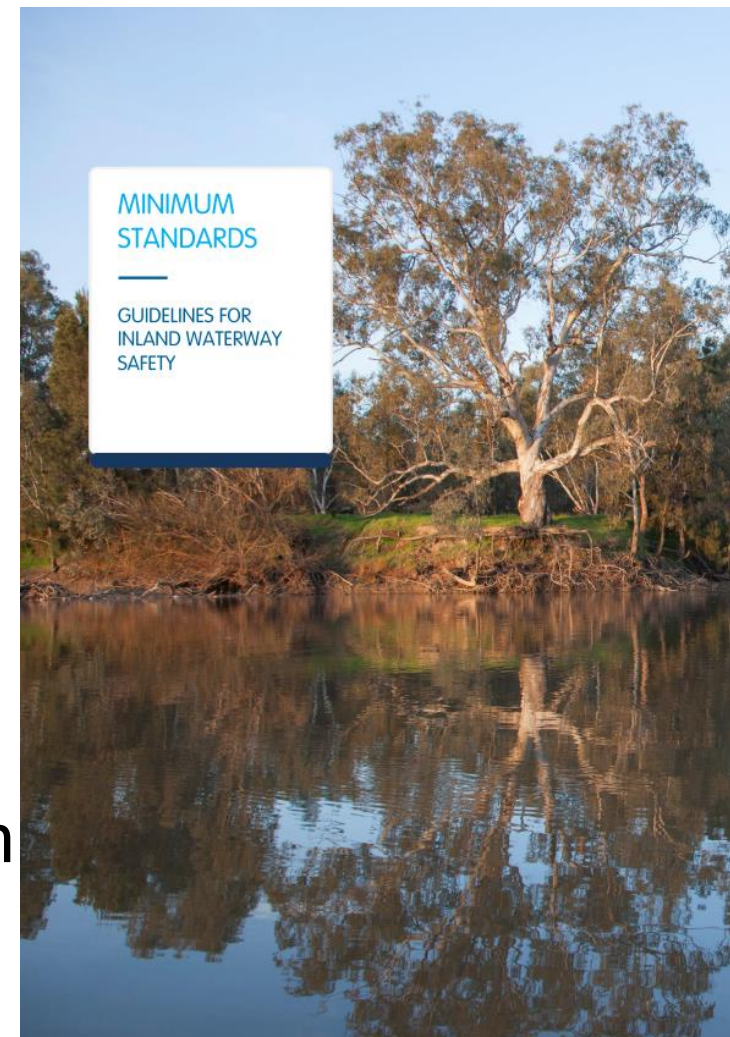


Image: Royal Life Saving Society - Australia



# A Researcher's Perspective

## Visitation

- Do we know who will be using these locations and for what purpose?
- Are they visitors or locals?
- Why are they choosing these locations?
- What is their swimming ability?
- Do they have experience swimming in these types of water bodies?



Image: Royal Life Saving Society - Australia



## Forget the gold medals – Australians aren't good swimmers

Tragically, almost 300 Australians drown every year and many of us say we can't swim at all. It's not good enough.

[www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au)



# ...A Researcher's Perspective

## Lifeguard supervision

- Based on visitor numbers, should you provide a lifeguard service?
- How well does this concept transfer from the beach to the river?
- Do the public want or expect lifeguards?
- How do we keep people safe if no lifeguards or outside of lifeguard times?
- Can we restrict access at night?
- Risk appetite for public rescue equipment?
- Does the public know what it is and how to use it?

## Communicating risks

- Signage is often ignored & doesn't impact behaviour
- Can be misinterpreted by non native English speakers
- Google Translate may not be our friend
- Are we discussing safety before people leave home?
- Where are they going to get information about these sites?



Image: Hawkesbury City Council

# How we promote these sites and (don't) communicate risk

- Water quality not water safety
- Promotion of secret spots away from crowds
  - #inspo and info from Insta not land managers
- Good spots to 'take the kids'
  - Little consideration of safety, mentions of supervision
- Many sites link direct to council websites

Adventure

## 18 secret swimming spots near Bathurst

Pack your inflatables and head to Bathurst this summer to cool off in some of the region's best secret swimming spots.

Central West Mums.com.au  
Connection, inspiration, conversation, collaboration

LIFESTYLE ▾ OUT & ABOUT ▾ EVENTS ▾ BUSINESS DIRECTORY ▾ JOBS READER TREAT

ATTRACTIONS STAYCATIONS

### Summer Swimming Spots In The Central West

By Kirsten Cunningham · Posted: 11 November 2023



#### It's Summer Time

Summer feels like it's here and it's time to get out the dusty cossies and get ready for the wonderful chaos that is taking the family for a cool dip at a waterhole or lake.

# Resources available

- Royal Life Saving Guidelines for Inland Water Safety
- Audit and Risk Assessment (RLS)
- Inland Waterway Training Courses
  - Inland Waterways Life Saving Certificate
- Public Education Programs
  - Respect the River
  - Make the Right Call

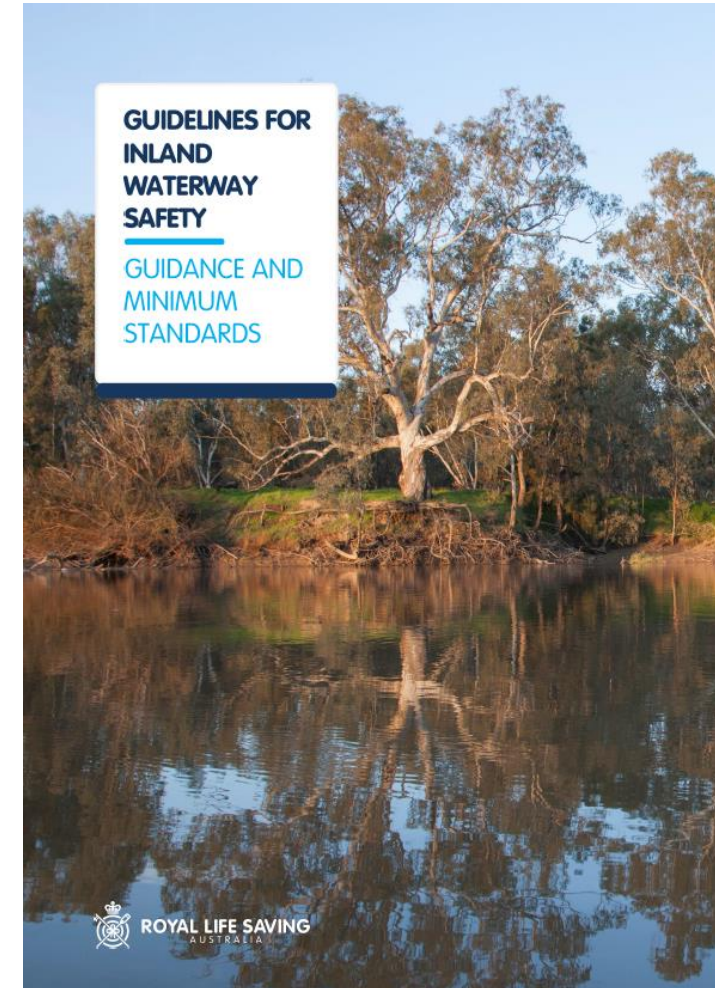


Image: Royal Life Saving Society - Australia





# Is this the new Bondi? The outback towns planning beaches of their own


AH

By Allison Hore  
January 27 2024 - 8:00am



📷 Concept art of the new town beach below the existing Jack Renshaw Bridge in Gilgandra. Picture supplied

ADVERTISEMENT



“Nooroo” Clearing Sale -  
Bingara/Warialda - 4th May, 2024 [Learn More](#)

# Questions and contact me

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School of Population Health website

<https://www.unsw.edu.au/medicine-health/our-schools/population-health>

UNSW Beach Safety Research Group

[www.beachsafetyresearch.com](http://www.beachsafetyresearch.com)



Image: Unplash+