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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: Water Safety New Zealand & the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council



TAKE CARE AROUND RIVERS THIS SUMMER IS THE MESSAGE FROM WATER SAFETY NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND MOUNTAIN SAFETY COUNCIL

During the summer holidays the call to “head into the outdoors” is stronger than ever, and this provides a timely opportunity to remind those who are staying local, as well as backcountry users including trampers and hunters, to be aware of the hazards posed by New Zealand’s rivers.

Drowning in New Zealand’s rivers is an ever-present risk. This month we have already had two unfortunate incidents that resulted in three fatalities near Franz Josef and Mount Richmond. However, being aware of the dangers of crossing a river, learning the appropriate river safety skills plus planning and preparing well before your trip commences, can help you have a safe and enjoyable experience.

“Anyone going into the outdoors needs to plan well, be aware of the dangers and have the skills needed to make good decisions for a safe and enjoyable experience. When it comes to crossing rivers, extreme caution should be taken,” says New Zealand Mountain Safety Council CEO, Darryl Carpenter.

Water Safety New Zealand chief executive Matt Claridge says: “With 426,000km of rivers in New Zealand it is inevitable that people will encounter rivers. Whether you are an experienced trumper likely to cross a river, or a family heading down to the local swimming hole, make the safety of all involved the first priority, ensure the swimming area is hazard free and keep young children within sight and reach at all times.”

Both organisations recommend that when approaching any river crossing situation, that you ask yourself three questions:

1. Do we cross?

If you decide that you need to cross, assess whether the river is safe to cross, and if all group members are adequately equipped and capable of crossing safely. Careful observation of conditions can provide clues and warning signs to help assess the status of a river and anticipate any changes that will influence your

judgement on crossing. If in doubt stay out and be prepared to sit it out until the water level drops or conditions change.

2. Where do we cross?

Choosing the safest place to cross is vital. Try to view the river from a high bank. You may be able to see gravel spits or sandbanks just below the surface and get an idea of the depth and position of channels.

3. How do we cross and which method do we use?

The Mountain Safety Council recommends three methods of crossing rivers. For more than one person, the mutual support method or using a clothing grasp is recommended. If solo tramping, the individual method is recommended using a suitable support pole.

More information regarding the recommended river crossing methods can be found in the Mountain Safety Council's Bushcraft manual or by attending an MSC River Safety course which are held throughout the year in locations across New Zealand.

Being able to swim is a given when encountering rivers and Water Safety NZ promote many opportunities to learn this basic life-skill through approved courses and providers.

For information regarding river safety visit www.mountainsafety.org.nz For more information about water safety education please visit www.watersafety.org.nz For further tips and advice regarding safety for a variety of outdoors activities and to complete your Outdoors Intentions, please visit www.adventuresmart.org.nz

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NOTES TO EDITOR:

SIDEBAR INFORMATION RE: The Outdoor Safety Code (amended to include specific river crossing advice)

The Outdoor Safety Code is a helpful set of 5 simple rules to follow when planning any trip and is especially useful for trips that may include river crossings.

1. 'Plan your trip' - you can avoid many potential problems by simply 'planning' a route that uses bridges, wire cages, or cableways or use a recognised crossing place.
2. 'Tell someone' - where you are going and when you are due back, use the Outdoors Intentions process.
3. 'Be aware of the weather' – check forecasts before you go and expect weather changes.
4. 'Know your limits' and don't take on something outside of your skill set or if tired.
5. 'Take sufficient supplies' are also essential rules to help you stay safe.

For further information regarding this media release or to arrange an interview please contact:

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