

Speech of Minister of State, Department of Transport,

Ms Hildegard Naughton TD

At launch of Be Summer –Ready Campaign, NECC , Agriculture House

21 April, 2021

Good Morning

As we emerge from what has been a most challenging winter of restrictions, we are all looking forward to this summer with increased hope and anticipation. I think it is fair to say that our level of expectation and hope, far exceeds anything we experienced for some time. The decrease in travel restrictions will afford increased opportunities to participate in a variety of outdoor activities including coastal and water-based activities. A most welcome opportunity for everybody.

I welcome the collaboration between the Office of Emergency Planning, Coast Guard a division of my own Department, Met Eireann and Water Safety Ireland in bringing this project to fruition. Collaboration and coordination is an integral part of maritime Search and Rescue services as well as water safety promotion.

The launch of the *Be Summer Ready* campaign is a timely reminder on the need to attend to our own personal safety, to be aware of what to do in the event of an emergency, and to observe a few simple common-sense rules before engaging in any activity. Given the restrictions on international travel we are likely to see increased levels of activity on our coastline and on the water, this summer. Already it is apparent that there has been a significant increase in numbers participating in open water swimming, as an all year-round activity and certainly for longer than what we have regarded as the traditional outdoor swimming season.

As a general observation the Coast Guard has recorded a significant increase in the overall number of incidents being coordinated with activity levels for the year to date showing a noticeable increase in the corresponding periods in 2019 and 2020.

Last August in one of my first engagements as Minister I launched a newly updated *Safety on the Water* website. It provides a one stop shop, with links to all aspects of water safety information, including weather and tides. It marked a professional collaboration between key participants in water

safety promotion, training and Search and Rescue in Ireland involving the Coast Guard, RNLI, Water Safety Ireland, Irish Sailing and Bord Iascaigh Mhara, (BIM). Since then, I am pleased to note that both Met Eireann and Commissioners of Irish Lights have also joined the group. This group has an interesting work programme including ongoing consideration of water safety promotion measures, identification of safety risks and analysis of drowning trends.

In 2019 the National SAR Plan was published and last year I received the first annual report of the National SAR Committee from its Chair Yvonne Shields. We are fortunate in this country to have a first-class Search and Rescue service and it affords us a timely reminder to opportunity to remember that;

*If you see somebody in trouble on the water or along the coast use marine VHF radio channel 16 OR dial 112 and ask for the Coast Guard.*

The Coast Guard regularly highlight the need to *Stay Afloat and Stay in Contact*. The message underlines the need to ensure that regardless of your activity, to always ensure that you have a means of raising the alarm. Before you go on or near the water make a plan. Ensure that you let somebody know where you are going and what time to expect you back. Ensure that you have a means of communication be it a VHF radio, fully charged mobile phone, flares or an electronic locator Beacon. The *Stay Afloat* theme highlights the importance of wearing a Lifejacket or Personal Floatation Device (PFD) if engaging in any form of boat activity including kayaking and canoeing.

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the wearing of life jackets across all boating spectrums. Progress is being made but some commercial operators including inshore fishers and some recreational participants continue to ignore this most basic safety measure.

Lack of use of PFDs or Lifejackets by shore anglers including those fishing off coastal rocks is an area of particular concern. The campaign highlights the need for all anglers to be alert to the dangers posed by wind and changing tides. Areas that may appear familiar can be subject to sudden change. Always wear a PFD or Lifejacket and spend some time familiarising yourselves with the prevailing conditions and be alert to tide times and weather forecast.

In conclusion it would be remiss of me not to thank all of our SAR services, including Coast Guard staff at Malin Valentia and Dublin, Coast Guard volunteers, Helicopter crews, RNLI and Community inshore rescue crews for meeting the challenge posed by Covid ensuring uninterrupted delivery of SAR services as well as rendering support to the HSE.

On the launch of the *Be Summer Ready* campaign the water safety message is;

Please attend to your own personal safety, plan your activity, check weather forecast and times of tides. Always carry a means of communication and if you are going afloat or angling always wear a Lifejacket /PFD.

Be Alert To Water Safety