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Media release 17 June 2010

STATE ANNOUNCE BIGGEST SPONSORSHIP DEAL IN ONE HUNDRED YEAR HISTORY

Thousands of lives saved with two million dollars in critical funding for New Zealand's swim and swim safety sector

State Insurance announced today the biggest sponsorship deal in its one hundred year history of supporting New Zealand communities.

The sponsorship will provide critical resourcing for leading organisations in the swim and swim safety sector responsible for education, lifting swim and survival levels and promoting swimming as a recreational and sporting pursuit; Swimming New Zealand, Surf Life Saving New Zealand and the New Zealand Ocean Swim Series.

Ninety-five percent of New Zealand's population live within close proximity to the water, and swimming is rated as the third highest recreational pursuit, yet drowning is the third highest cause of accidental death in New Zealand.

The statistics are appalling:

- One in five 10 year olds cannot swim 200 metres and twenty-five percent of all children cannot swim twenty five metres, keep afloat or tread water.
- 108 people are rescued on New Zealand beaches every month; forty per cent of these are less than fifteen years old. Beaches are increasingly accessible and only 80 of more than 500 beaches are patrolled, placing continuous pressure on limited resources and funding.

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State's sponsorship of the swim and swim safety sector will help save lives by helping thousands of kiwis learn to swim, enjoy the water and survive; across all communities and all walks of life. It will also help provide resources to support those who go on to develop their swimming careers to compete on a national and international stage.

Risk prevention and the protection of New Zealand communities is the core of State's business strategy. State works with local councils and other bodies to help communities plan to minimise potential risks caused by crime, weather or other environmental conditions and it runs highly successful programmes such as State Driver Reviver; where State staff volunteer their own time to man rest stations for drivers travelling long distances on major holiday weekends, to help prevent road accidents caused by driver fatigue.

State's executive general manager, Mary-Jane Daly, said that State's sponsorship of the swim and swim safety sector was a natural extension to this strategy, expanding it from the land to the water.

"It's always better to put a fence at the top of a cliff, than station an ambulance at the bottom, and this is the heart of our strategy at State.

While it is easy to think about risk in the context of tangible assets, our biggest assets are human and it is our families we look to protect the most.

State's sponsorship of the swim and swim safety sector focuses on vital education and protection for communities, which is especially important when we all live near the water or enjoy the water in some way and we want to keep our kids safe," said Daly.

The two million dollar investment in vital services for the sector is the equivalent of a gold coin donation for each of the one million policies that State manages for nearly half a million New Zealanders.

In addition to the essential services each of the three leading organisations in the swim and swim safety sector already provide, State's sponsorship will mean a number of new initiatives.

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New initiatives include:

- Swimming New Zealand will substantially increase its limited resources from four staff around New Zealand to support all primary schools and commercial swim schools with its State Swimstart programme. In time, Swimming New Zealand will be able to provide every major community in New Zealand with dedicated learn to swim support.
- In addition to the 80 beaches it currently patrols, Surf Life Saving New Zealand will be able to conduct a beach safety audit of 500 beaches across New Zealand, providing essential information for the safety of users of beaches it does not patrol.
- The New Zealand Ocean Swim Series will further develop its series to grow the numbers of participants and spectators. The series currently takes place in six locations across the country and this will evolve further with more events that cater for all ages and abilities in a safe swimming environment.

“New Zealand has one of the worst annual drowning tolls in the developed world and State wants to change this by helping these organisations continue to teach swim and survival skills so that we can all enjoy the water, safely,” said Daly.

Grant Florence, chief executive of Surf Life Saving New Zealand, agreed, saying that the hundred people rescued on beaches every month in the country due to poor swim and survival skills was appalling.

“Learning to swim and survive in the water is also essential to enjoying so many other pursuits that we kiwis love such as surfing, fishing, kayaking etc.

Get your kids into any of the programmes each of our organisations provide or enrol yourself, because you are never too young, or too old, to learn and make the most of what this great island nation of ours offers,” said Florence.

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About State

State has been providing New Zealanders with an extensive range of personal and business insurance services for more than 100 years. State manages over a million policies on behalf of more than 460,000 New Zealanders. State is a business division of IAG New Zealand Limited, New Zealand's largest general insurer.

Swimming New Zealand

Swimming New Zealand is the national organisation that represents swimming – from paddling pool to podium. Swimming New Zealand's purpose is to develop, promote, govern and lead swimming in New Zealand. Swimming is New Zealand's third most popular recreational activity with 34.8 percent (1,139,812) of New Zealanders choosing swimming as their preferred activity (SPARC 2007/8 Active New Zealand Survey).

Surf Life Saving New Zealand

Surf Life Saving is the leading water safety organisation in New Zealand, providing education and surf life saving services to New Zealand communities for nearly 100 years. SLSNZ's drowning and injury prevention strategy is world class and its lifesaving strategy was adopted by the International Lifesaving Federation in 2008. SLSNZ represents 72 Surf Life Saving Clubs in New Zealand, trains and accredits 3500 lifeguards each year and patrols 80 beaches through New Zealand.

NZ Ocean Swim Series (Quantum Events)

The New Zealand Ocean Swim Series is a six-race ocean-swim series that takes place around the country with over 6,000 participants and 20,000 spectators supporting them all the way. There are four distances in each event and participants are matched with swimmers at the same level making the series achievable for people of all ages, with all fitness levels, from all walks of life.

